

REFORMED CHURCH BELLVILLE: THURSDAY 17 MAY 2007: ASCENSION DAY SERVICE

Sing before: Psalm 47:1+4

Let us commence this meeting with God by declaring openly to one another and to God:

Our help is in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth. Beloved grace and peace be to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, through the mighty working of God the Holy Spirit.

Amen

Psalm of praise: Hymn 15-7:1+5+6

Prayer

Amen

Psalm: 119:46

Scripture: Acts 1 and Revelation 22

Text: Acts 1:11; Revelation 22:12

"Men of Galilee," they said, "why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven."

"Behold, I am coming soon! My reward is with me and I will give to everyone according to what he has done."

The ascension brought about a change in the perspective of the believers.

- The disciples and all the people of the Old Testament were tied to all that was important on earth.
- That is why the laws of the Pharisees were "do not touch or taste" laws.
- That is why the disciples were gazing up to the sky so intently. What are we to do now? The Lord
- has left us!

The angels then came to show them a new perspective – Jesus will come back!

- Live in expectation of His return.
- Build your life towards the hereafter.
- The ascension runs into His return!

The last chapter in the Bible deals with this. The last chapter in the Bible differs from the rest of the Bible

Both the Old and the New Testament preach of the Lord's grace.

- How often do we not read in the Old Testament: Repent, says the Lord.
- The New Testament starts with the preaching of John the Baptist: **"Repent for the kingdom of heaven is near"**. (Matthew 3:2)
- There is a time for repentance and all who live are called upon to repent.

The last chapter is completely different. The call to repentance is not mentioned.

- It is written there **"Yes, I am coming soon"**.
- The time for repentance is past.

All the revelations to John are past.

- The last part of the Bible now assures the believers that the Bible is trustworthy and true.
- God Himself let this Book be written.

Thereafter there is the refrain in the last verses – "**Behold, I am coming soon! The time is near!**"

In verse 10 we read that John wanted to seal up the words of this book as the prophet Daniel was told to do in the Old Testament. But he is prohibited.

- Nothing is to be sealed up because the time is near.
- It means that nothing written in this book is to remain secret.
- Everything written down is to be made known because the fulfillment of what is written is near.

The fulfillment of the ministry of Christ started immediately but all of it was not completed.

- Even our time is used by the Lord to bring everything to perfect fulfillment.
- When all is fulfilled the Day of the Lord shall arrive.

Verse 11 tells us that certain things must first come to completion.

"Let him who does wrong continue to do wrong; let him who is vile continue to be vile; let him who does right continue to do right; and him who is holy continue to be holy."

In the time we are living in – the period between the ascension and the Second Coming – the two poles move further apart.

- The evil people must become perfectly evil.
- The holy people must become perfectly holy.
- Everybody must know what lies ahead and he must continue to do what he is doing – right or wrong – perfectly.

To the prophets of the Old Testament the Day of the Lord was some vague event far into the future.

- But in this last chapter the Day of the Lord is drawn clearly and in bold lines.
- The darkness of world history is lit up. The glory of God shines forth and enlightens everything so that we can see every event and issue in true perspective.

We are unable to determine that day, we are unable to put a date to the Second Coming.

- Jesus says so in Mark 13:32: "**No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.**"
- That is sufficient to put us on our guard. We must be ready.
- The particular date when the Day comes is not important – what is important that you must be ready on that day!
- That is why we still preach every day – repent!

That sermon has two sides to it.

- The true believer will be spurred by it to live a more perfect life.
- At the same time the unbelievers will be hardened by that word. In their opposition to the Lord they will become more evil.

Then the time will come when the Lord's patience is done. He will then come and judge everyone according to his works.

We learn that at His first coming Jesus took the illnesses of the world onto Him.

- He came for the miserable ones, the sick and the sinful. He came to heal them.
- But at ascension this changed to the opposite.

That is why the angels spoke to the disciples standing there in amazement.

- Do not stand there.
- Go to work.
- For this Jesus shall come back in the same way you saw Him depart.

Now He comes to judge.

- To reward people according to what they have done.
- He comes to repay.
- All patience is done.
- Those who persisted in their evil shall receive the wages of sin – death.
- Those who did right shall be rewarded with godly holiness.

We must now reflect. What do we think of when we remember the ascension? We who are so tolerant of what is evil? Some of us even want to justify the wrong!

The time in which we live is one of absolute decisions.

- You must choose absolutely for evil or absolutely against evil.
- We must live a life in which all evil is cut out absolutely – whatever the cost may be!

The Lord Jesus is coming soon. This last chapter tells us what shall happen so that we who do right may be encouraged to persevere.

- Then all the troubles that befall us are not new to us and are they powerless to bend or break our faith.
- But the wrongdoers learn from it that their false belief that they rule over history and are able to determine their destiny themselves will perish with them.

This chapter speaks of reward.

- The one reward is mercy.
- The other is punishment.
- There is nothing in between – only death or life.

Then there will be no more time to repent.

- In fact, this last chapter tells us that time is so short that there is hardly any time left for repentance.
- The time is near that the Lord is coming!

In three statements the Lord tells us how mighty He is and how surely the end is in His hands.

- He is the "**Alpha and the Omega**".
- These are the first and the last letters of the Greek alphabet.
- Of everything that is written God is the First and the Last.
- Then He says I am the First and the Last.
- God was first before everything.
- Before the angels or the earth was created.
- But He is also the Last – because He exists eternally.
- Nothing can terminate His existence.

And He says I am the Beginning and the End.

- Of course God is the Beginning and the End – He was there before creation.
- Then He created Heaven and Earth and time.
- Now He shall execute His judgment that will end this earth and time.

The beginning and the end are here, joined together.

In verse 16 Jesus says that He is the bright Morning Star.

- He is the change from darkness to light.
- The Lord Jesus saves the chosen from the night of sin and misery.
- He takes us up into His glory where we shall live in the glory of God.

The image here becomes reality. In the hereafter the light of God's glory shines as daylight over us. Now we are living in the time of the dawn of the hereafter.

Before His ascension the disciples asked Jesus when He was going to establish His kingdom.

- His reply was that they need not know the time but that with the guidance of the Holy Spirit they must continue to work until then.
- There is little time left.
- Let us not be found idle.

Amen

Closing prayer

Closing Hymn: 7-2:1+2

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

Amen

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