

REFORMED CHURCH CLANWILLIAM : SUNDAY 19 MAY 2013 HOLY COMMUNION

Sing before: Psalm 105:1

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 103:11

Confession of faith: Apostolic

I believe in God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth.
And in Jesus Christ, His only begotten Son, our Lord who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead and buried. He descended into Hell, the third day He rose again from the dead, He ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty, from there He shall come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, a holy universal Church, the communion of saints; the forgiveness of sins; the resurrection of the body; and the life everlasting

Amen.

After the reading of the Law we confess our guilt and pray for forgiveness and a new life before God with Psalm 25:2

Law

Psalm: 25:2

Prayer:

- **Doxology**
- **Worship**
- **Confession of sins**
- **Forgiveness**
- **Gratitude**
- **Prayer for the need of the congregation of the church, the authorities and the sinful world and appeal to God's promises**
- **General prayer**
- **Enlightenment from the Holy Spirit for the sake of the ministry of the Word.**

Amen

Psalm 149:1

Scripture reading: Zephaniah 3

Scripture text: Zephaniah 3:8

"Therefore wait for Me," says the Lord, "Until the day I rise up for plunder; My determination is to gather the nations To My assembly of kingdoms, To pour on them My indignation, All my fierce anger; All the earth shall be devoured With the fire of My jealousy.

(Zephaniah 3:8)

The end of times- the final days - is nowadays often in our minds.

- The approaching final end is nowadays preached sharper and sharper from numerous pulpits.
- These sermons are not devoid of truth because even to the non-believers the signs are upsettingly clear.

Still there are matters we do not comprehend.

- What has the nearing end got to do with my people and me?
- Who is this LORD we must expect?

In order of well understanding these matters we must firstly consider the prophet Zephaniah and his sermons.

- We must properly consider the conditions of his times and carefully listen to what he says and then see how those matters fit into our times.
- So that we may understand what God wants to tell us by this passage of today.

Zephaniah lived during the times of king Josiah.

- This young king brought about two radical reforms in Israel by exterminating the heathen idolatries and leading the people back to the Lord.
- This sermon by Zephaniah fits in somewhere between these two reformations.

The social conditions inside Israel were not good at all.

- There were many bad things.
- Examining it closely you will find that these matters are very similar to the bad things of our times.

Israel was in a time distinguished by wars and unrest between the nations.

- Outside their boundaries everything was also disorganized.
- Inside and outside of the land matters were not good at all.
 - The leaders distorted all forms of justice to fit the disposition of the world.
 - Shamelessly injustices were exercised.
 - Verse 4 puts it very sharply: Her prophets are insolent, treacherous people; Her priests have polluted the sanctuary, They have done violence to the law.

But not only the civil leaders of the world were bad.

- The spiritual leaders amongst the people were just as inept.
- Zephaniah writes that the prophets of the Lord were insolent – they are untrustworthy.
- The priests polluted the sanctuary.

Let us put this matter modernly:

- The men who must interpret the case and council of God did not have the eye or the heart for the matter.
- The ministers no longer had the understanding for the violence of the sin or of the wrong.
- They no longer preached – and also did not understand – that they and their people would be judged for their evil by the rule of the Lord.

Zephaniah writes that these leaders amongst Israel think and believe that the rule of God is meant over other people – they themselves are above this rule.

- They preach peace – peace only.
- About the preaching of judgement, wrath and punishment by God nothing is heard by the people who should hear about it.

Then the prophet writes that they are untrustworthy.

- You cannot depend upon the preaching by these people because they are not preaching the full truth.
 - They only preach the half of God's council.
 - They proclaim their own ideologies.
- The priests bothered themselves more with politics and the world than with proclaiming the Word.

Therefore the bitter words against these ministers: the priests polluted the sanctuary.

- They distorted the Law of the Lord so horribly that they no longer exercised any justice therewith.
- They distorted the true law in their attempts of gaining the favour of the people.
- These people exchanged God for what people in their sin think or say.

That is not all, says the Lord. The matter is more serious!

- He lived in Jerusalem and He Himself chastised His people so that they should listen to Him.
- In the Bible it is told that He corrupted all their acts with zeal.

But it was useless. The people did not want to listen to God.

- By words and deeds the Lord spoke to the inhabitants of Jerusalem.
- All this was done in an effort to try and bring this disobedient nation to fearing Him and accepting His admonishments.
- They were to keep in mind the justice of the Lord and take to heart the proper exercise of their worship.

These people did not convert themselves.

- Now the Lord again approaches them – differently than the previous time.
- Now the Lord does not come to move them by admonishments to conversion.
- No, the time for that has passed.
- **“Therefore wait for Me,” says the Lord, “Until the day I rise up for plunder; My determination is to gather the nations To My assembly of kingdoms,**

God prepared Himself to judge the world!

- The people must carefully listen:
 - He is not going to only judge the other people.
 - He is also not only going to judge Jerusalem.
 - Nobody would be excluded. The judgement will come over all the nations. Over the entire earth!

Now carefully read verse 8. There it is clearly recorded that the coming judgement will have a dual effect.

- Firstly the shadowy side: It will serve the wrath of God over the nations that were disobedient to the Lord. Over those who did not properly call to the Lord.
- It also is a purifying rule.
 - Salvation will take place.
 - We can already hear the sounds of salvation in the words:
“Therefore wait for Me,” says the LORD...

Lord, in capitals, as written here, means “Lord of the Covenant”

- The name means that it is God, who according to His promise is a God to those who are His children, saving.
- You thus realize that the words “wait for me” have a dual meaning.
 - The disobedient must expect God to their judgement.
 - The children of God expect the Lord to their salvation.

To us, as believers, the proclamation of glory is the most important.

- To the pious in Jerusalem it is told that the Lord will change Jerusalem.
- The Lord will also change the neighboring nations – He will give a pious heart to them.
- Peace is thus guaranteed for Jerusalem. Internally and outside it’s boundaries.

The rule of the Lord thus brings renewal.

- The Lord rises up as a **Witness** against the people.
- The flame of His zeal consumes the entire earth.
- In this way the evil is destroyed and only the children of God remain.
- Alone in their relationship with God.

This is the point of light in the sermon of Zephaniah:

- A new future awaits the chosen.

- To the people He saves, the Lord will give pure lips, so that the people and nations living in Jerusalem will call in unity upon the Lord.
- Or as Zephaniah puts it: **That they all may call on the name of the Lord, To serve Him with one accord.**

In the first instance this prophecy of course was relevant to Israel.

- To them it meant that the Lord, in their history, would bring a rule over them that will cure them of their idolatry.
- That would move them to serve the Lord only.

To us it means that the Lord will also purify us.

- It means that His final judgement, when He will remove all evil elements so that only the pure children of God would remain to live in the New Jerusalem, is very close by.
- Then the prophecy is true: In the New Jerusalem it cannot be otherwise. Everybody who will be there will serve God with one accord.

Further it is written that those people will have pure lips.

- It means that all their guilt would be forgiven.
- The sin and impurity of their lips would be forgiven.

But it also means that their attitude would be renewed.

- Idolatry or wrong worshipping will no longer be practiced
- Against the customs mentioned by Zephaniah we would be able to say that politics will no longer be religion.
- Only the matters of God will be purely exercised.

But it sounds so easy speaking about salvation and the time hereafter – as if it would just arrive by itself.

- Zephaniah underlines the terrible difficult times of God's judgement.
 - It is fear inspiring. It is so much different that what we would have liked it.
 - The Lord is going to hit earth with a terrible violence,

Find yourself a proper view on this image.

- Here it is written that the larger majority of the world's nations are to be destroyed by the wrath of the Lord.
- Because the Lord teaches that His people, living on earth, are poor and insignificant.

This passage of prophecy from the Old Testament is heavily loaded with meaning for our times.

- When you attentively read this passage you will notice this prophecy dealing with two times at once.
 - The first is the bearing exile of the Jews.
 - The entire nation will be moved away because they are disobedient to the Lord.
 - Then a small group will return – the rest of the people will be lost amongst the heathens.
- Exactly that then happened.

But should you properly read verse 8 you will see that the prophet, through the power of the Holy Spirit, sees so far into the future that, by this prophecy, he also sees the final judgement.

- That is the rule that will come over the entire earth.
- And then the condition of perfection that will arrive with that rule.

Now test our times to the background of Zephaniah 3.

- The attitude of the world coincides very well with what is written here.
- We are experiencing times of justice-distortion like never before – amongst the nations, but also amongst us ourselves.
- Observe the worldly view on salvation – it does not have the Kingdom of God as a base!

On the other hand there are other religious groups growing and flourishing.

- Religious groups preaching peace. False peace.
- Some churches only preach the love of God and pacify the children of God to sleep in their sins.

And it is not so that we do not know better.

- Zephaniah says that the Lord lived amongst the people of Jerusalem, and that He powerfully spoke by word and deed to them, but they did not want to listen.
- We are living in the times where Christ has already atoned our sins and has returned to heaven.
- In these times He continually prays to the Father. He is busy preparing a place for us.

And we have even more. Meanwhile we have received the Spirit of God living inside of us.

- The Spirit of God brings us so close to the Lord Himself. He prompts us with Godly wisdom how to live in truth facing Him.
- It is the Spirit of God that teaches us to truly serve Him.

The Lord has already taken us to task about our religious decay and disobedience.

- In His wrath about all our sins He came down on the Lord Jesus Christ. He bore in our place the judgement of God – and in this way worked our redemption.
- Therefore He commands us to attend the Holy Communion so that He can confirm our salvation and atonement.
- Of course the unsaid part of the Holy Communion is that those who did not truly want to know God will be destroyed by His wrath.

We are here because we are the remainder of those who will be gathered in glory by God.

- Expect the Lord. Expect Him amidst all these matters growing worse as the end draws near.
- Should we persevere in our faith and worshipping God promises us the glory of the New Earth.

We can only expect salvation from the stranglehold of the world through the power of the Lord Jesus Christ.

- True believers will continue existing should we stand steady in the truth of Jesus Christ.
- We must also have an expectation rising above the world because the Bible teaches that this world will come to an end and that to us who are saved a New Heaven and a New Earth will be created.

Thus expect the Lord.

- Believe the promises He confirms to you at His table.
- Expect Him as the God who will destroy all evil.
- Expect the glory of God that renders goodness to those who hold onto His truth and promises.

Amen.

Prayer

Psalm 138:4

Formulary

Psalm 23:3

To the table:

During Holy Communion: Psalm 116

Psalm 118

Closing prayer.

Closing Psalm: 145:1, 12

The Lord bless and keep you, the Lord make his face shine on you, the Lord turn His countenance to you and give peace.

Amen

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