

## REFORMED CHURCH CLANWILLIAM : SUNDAY 27 JULY 2014 MORNING SERVICE

**Sing before:** Psalm 144:1

*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 of praise: Psalm 98:1

**Confession of faith:** Nicene

We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible.

And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all ages; God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God; begotten, not made, being of one substance with the father, by whom all things were made. Who, for us men and for our salvation, came down from heaven and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the virgin Mary, and was made man; and was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate; He suffered and was buried; and the third day He rose again, according to the Scriptures; and ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of the Father, and He shall come again, with glory, to judge the living and the dead; whose kingdom shall have no end.

And we believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and Giver of life; who proceeds from the Father and the Son; who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified, who spoke by the prophets.

And we believe in one holy universal and apostolic Church. We acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sins; and we look for the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come.

**Amen.**

*After the reading of the Law we confess our guilt and pray for forgiveness and a new life before God with Psalm 65:3*

Law

Psalm: 65:3

**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 9:10

**Scripture reading:** Ezekiel 17

**Scripture text:** Ezekiel 17:9

**Say, 'Thus says the Lord God: "Will it thrive? Will he not pull up its roots, Cut off its fruit, And leave it to wither? All of its spring leaves will wither, And no great power or many people will be needed to pluck it up by its roots.**

(Ezekiel 17:9)

How often has anyone of us broken an oath made to God? Do we always realise that God heavily punishes such a deed by total annihilation?

- We made a baptism promise. This promise was not made to the minister or to the church. When we made this promise, we promised to God that we would teach and bring up these children, given to us by God, in the fear of the Lord. Do we realize what the Lord will do to us should we neglect that oath?
- In the same way we confessed our faith and promised to God to persevere in the teachings of the Word as taught by this church. Here the church teaches that, according to the Word of God, there are two gatherings with God – every Sunday. Should we not comply with it, then we must expect reaction from the Lord towards us.

Sacraments are offered and during visitation at home it is pointed out to you that you have to attend the Holy Communion. It then happens that some of us attend with great candour whilst some of us know that we are petulant towards the Lord because some:

- do not regularly attend church;
- do not conduct home-worshipping and improperly worship God;
- do not properly instruct our children from the Bible.;
- purposely curse and use foul language when angry.

Come, let us together learn from the Word of God what happens when such a breach of oath takes place.

Ezekiel is of priestly derivation. He stays in Babel.

- He was amongst the Jews who, together with Jehoiachin, were banished to Babel and he lives at the Chebar River.
- But although he lives in Babel he had close contact with Palestine, the land of his fathers.

In Palestine king Zedekiah was not living according to the will of God.

- He commits disloyalty and breaking of the oath towards the Lord.
- As punishment the Lord will destroy Jerusalem.

This destruction of Jerusalem will not only be a fulfillment of punishment because of the sins committed long ago by the children, but a punishment because Zedekiah transgressed against the Lord.

The background to this history is recorded in 2 Kings 24.

- Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon invaded Jerusalem, and the city was taken.
- He carried away to Babel all the important people – including the house of the kings.
- Nebuchadnezzar took a man from the tribe of David and crowned him king of Israel.
  - His name was Mattaniah but Nebuchadnezzar changed it to Zedekiah.

2 Kings 24 is concluded with the words that Zedekiah did what were evil in the sight of the Lord and that therefore the wrath of the Lord come over Jerusalem.

Ezekiel now wished to bring this bitter fact to the attention of the Israelites of Babel.

- Because he wanted their full attention to this matter, he spoke in the form of a riddle.
- During those days this method was very popular amongst the people of the East.

He started depicting an eagle swooping down from the heights on its prey, but it was not an ordinary eagle.

- This eagle Ezekiel was telling about had large wings – long wings covered in multicoloured feathers.
- The Israelites understood this very well.
  - This was a powerful king with a large kingdom.
  - That was depicted in this riddle-like parable by the big and long wings.
  - This king ruled over many nations. These are the numerous multicoloured feathers covering the eagles' wings.

This eagle swooped down from the heights onto the mighty Lebanon Mountain.

- In those times the Jews regarded the Lebanon as the king of all mountains.
- Here the best cedar wood grew. - Cedar wood, according to 1Kings 7, was used as building material for the palace.
- The cedars referred to by Ezekiel were thus the symbol of David's house of kings.

This eagle plucked and removed the top of the cedar tree on the Lebanon.

- This means that he removed the house of kings into banishment.
- This cut off Israel's hope and future expectations.

But in this riddle the eagle did differently than what a bird would normally do.

- The top of the tree was not discarded or used as nesting material.
- The top of the cedar was deposited in a city of merchants.

The eagle also worked roughly with the land.

- He did not only remove the top of the cedar. He also took other seeds and planted it in a fruitful field. Also he took some vines.
- The Israelites listening to this part knew it very well.
  - They personally experienced it.
  - Not only did Nebuchadnezzar take the house of kings into banishment, he also took all royal and important people to Babel.

But Nebuchadnezzar did not only destroy Palestine.

- By great waters he planted a riverbank plant –
- A grapevine, which indeed with the abundance of water, grew until it became a spreading low vine that had to turn its boughs towards the eagle.

This means that in Palestine Zedekiah was made king.

- He received all necessities for prosperity and growth from Nebuchadnezzar, but had to turn his boughs towards the eagle.
- This means that he had to relinquish his profits to Babel.

Zedekiah was placed on the throne in Jerusalem on condition that he had to serve the king of Babel.

- He also had to serve a bufferzone between Babel and Egypt.

Therefore the king of Babel chose an incompetent man to be king.

- He is not a tree; he had to become a vine.
- The king of Babel had to hand train him so that Babel could pluck all the fruit borne by Palestine. At the onset it worked because this bough became a vine shooting out many boughs.

Then verse 7 starts telling where the sin in the conduct of Zedekiah was.

- There was another eagle with large wings and lots of feathers – Egypt.
- But it was a worldpower of the second order. It did not have such large wings like Babel nor did it have as many nations under its rule like Babel had.

In order to be freed from Babel Zedekiah approached him.

- Will it be successful?
- Will the Lord bless this conduct?

The day he was sworn in as king by the king of Babel, Zedekiah had to swear an oath to God that he would be faithful to the king of Babel and would not betray him.

- This treason of approaching the king of Egypt is now a contravention of the oath of allegiance to Babel.

Therefore from verse 9 onwards nothing further is said about the eagle, but the vine itself is addressed.

- His roots will be pulled up and his fruit will be cut off. This vine will be totally destroyed.

- The loosening and pulling up of the roots depicts the unavailability of the matter. Final.

Will it be profitable breaking an oath to God? No.

- This oath was taken against his enemy, but the Lord was called in as witness to the truth of the matter.
- If you man not even break an oath against your enemy, how more serious is our case, where only God and us are involved in the matter?!

Verse 10 also asks: Shall it prosper?

- The east wind will touch it in the bed it sprouted.
  - The Israelites feared this east wind.
  - It came from the desert with a terrible heat and just scorched everything in its path.
- Because they believed that Jerusalem could not go under, this sermon of Ezekiel must have been a terrible shock to the Israelites.
  - They also believed that the house of David would never lose the throne.
  - Now they were told that both Jerusalem as well as the royal house of David would be completely destroyed.

Although the exiles were now in Babel and Zedekiah in Jerusalem, the exiles will suffer. In verse 12 the Lord says:

**Say now to the rebellious house: 'Do you not know what these things mean?'**  
(Ezekiel 17:12a)

The exiles are not exonerated.

- They have always denied seeing the history in the light of Gods' demands.- That is exactly why they were here in exile.
- They did not want to listen and believe that they were sinning against God. Therefore the Lord punished them and had the Babylonians take them in exile.

Now the Lord wants them to properly realise that, because Zedekiah broke an oath he swore to God, He would further destroy Jerusalem.

And about this the children need not doubt.

- In the year 597 bC they were all present when Zedekiah was sworn in by oath as the new king of the portion of people who were to stay behind.
- Although Nebuchadnezzar was a heathen they still had the habit in matters like this to have the new king swear allegiance to them by his own gods because they believed that by this way the relevant kings would nor easily stab them in the back.

Therefore Zedekiah in fact took an oath he had to stay true to and obey at all costs. Verse 13 describes this event:

**And he took the king's offspring, made a covenant with him, and put him under oath. He also took away the mighty of the land**

(Ezekiel 17:13)

Verse 15 tells about the breaking of this oath:

**But he rebelled against him by sending his ambassadors to Egypt, that they might give him horses and many people. Will he prosper?**

(Ezekiel 17:15)

Again the question whether the blessing of God can rest on such a breaking of a covenant in the Name of the Lord?

- And immediately after these words the prophet asks: Will he who does such things escape? Can he break a covenant and still be delivered?

This is the decisive point the prophet wanted to bring home.

- Should you break a covenant, then you damage the holiness of God and belittle the Name of God. This God does not just ignore.
- The Lord is thus, for the sake of His own glory, compelled to be more than just a spectator at this breaking of the oath.
  - Not only to punish Israel and Zedekiah.
  - No, God also has to prove to the heathens that he does not tolerate, even against them, a breaking of His honour.
- The Lord is just and holy and therefore He, without fail, punishes breaking of a covenant.

We are busy preparing for Holy Communion. Where does the death of Christ fit into this passage?

- As such: since creation and like during these times of exile Israel is experiencing, the people always rejected the mercy of God.
- In the paradise it happened because we exchanged our king. Obedience to God was exchanged for obedience to Satan. This is the reason for Israel abandoning God.

Kingless we became exiles in our own abode. But God sent our King back to us.

- Jesus Christ became a human and lived amongst us.
- But we treated Him like a covenant-breaker and totally got rid of Him.
  - When He taught us, we despised Him.
  - Like a murderer, because He said that He came to repair our covenant with God, we crucified Him instead of a gang leader.

But although blood-sweat of fear dripped from His forehead when in Gethsemane He implored for the cup to pass Him, He did not break His covenant with God.

- He did not break the oath that He would flatten the head of the snake and come as the promised Messiah and would lay down His life for those holding onto the promises of God.
- He died so that God could punish Him in our place for breaking the covenant.
- We are going to celebrate Holy Communion as commemoration and confirmation that, through His crucifixion, salvation arrived for us.

This is what the Lord referred to when He said in Ezekiel 17:22 that He Himself will plant a tender twig .- *A tender plant that will grow and bring forth boughs, and bear fruit, and be a majestic cedar. Under it will dwell birds of every sort; in the shadow of its branches they will dwell.*

*Like this promise to the Israelites did excuse them, so it also does not excuse anyone of us. We must in every way maintain every oath and allegiance we swore to God.*

We must prepare ourselves to attend Holy Communion to receive grace and strengthening to fight the battle. of living with honesty.

- We must not be hypocrites and be sworn in like Zedekiah to rule (to rule over sin), but meanwhile have treason in our hearts because God will not leave us unpunished.
- His holiness is set against such matters.

We must attend the Holy Communion to receive the power of the promises by God.

We thus only have the right of admission to the table of Holy Communion should we have the solid intention to daily better ourselves and receive the strengthening thereto from God.

The Lord Jesus Christ died on the cross for the grace of those who truly fight to retain the faith.

- For those who broke the oath towards God in weakness whilst truly fighting against it.
- Our Formulary for Holy Communion puts it as: sins remaining in me against my will.
- For those the grace of the Lord will be prosperous.

**Amen.**

Closing prayer.

Closing Psalm: 107:10

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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