

REFORMED CHURCH CLANWILLIAM : SUNDAY 27 OCTOBER 2013

MORNING SERVICE

Sing before: Psalm 89:3

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 102:1

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 38:1, 17

Law

Psalm: 38:1, 17

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 84:3

Scripture reading: Jonah 1

Scripture text: Jonah 1:12c

...for I know that this great tempest is because of me."

(Jonah 1:12c)

'Do not be afraid, Paul; you must be brought before Caesar; and indeed God has granted you all those who sail with you.'

(Acts 27:24)

We consider two men who have both been called by the Lord and both of whom find themselves in a storm at sea.

- We shall look at the reasons mentioned in the Bible in each case for the outbreak of the storm.
- We shall also consider what each of these two men did under the circumstances, and the consequences of their actions.
- We shall consider these two men as examples of two extremes:
 - They lived different lives, yet the Lord called both.
 - In the execution (or non-execution) of their calling we shall also see how the consequences differ when you do (or do not do) as the Lord requires.

This morning's sermon deals with Jonah and his position in this situation. The sermon of next week will deal with Paul.

The theme of our sermon this morning is: *An unrighteous man endangers all that are with him.*

We shall consider the following matters this morning:

1. **Jonah flees from God.**
2. **Jonah's rude awakening.**
3. **The moment of truth.**

1. **Jonah flees from God.**

Note the course of events:

- The Lord calls Jonah. He receives a clear mission:
 - He was to go to the city of Nineveh and announce to them the displeasure of the Lord at their transgressions.
 - Even though the people who lived there were heathen, their iniquities had become so great that the Lord would tolerate the situation no longer.
- Jonah was unwilling to go. According to expositors of the Bible he had his own reasons for not wanting to go.

- However, the crucial fact is that he was unwilling to carry out the calling entrusted to him by the Lord.
- The sad thing about this situation is that Jonah was unable to realize that he had now become as wicked as the people of Nineveh.
- He was blind to the principle of sin:
 - disobedience is simply disobedience - it does not matter who commits it!
 - The Ninevites did not serve the Lord, and Jonah was also unwilling to serve the Lord by carrying out his calling - the principle is exactly the same!

Then he fled away.

- His destination for the implementation of his mission lay to the east of his present situation.
- He fled westwards - in the opposite direction.
 - He went to the harbour and bought a passage on a Phoenician ship bound for Tarshish.

The Lord does not permit anyone to treat Him in this way.

- The Lord therefore delayed His judgement over Jonah.
- The unfortunate aspect of the matter was that those who accompanied him on board the ship also landed in trouble because of his disobedience.

This event made one thing very clear:

- The impiety of one can bring misfortune upon others.
- If one tries to evade a command from God, the Lord Himself will bring him to heel - as with Jonah.

2. Jonah's rude awakening.

While the storm was raging, Jonah was fast asleep.

- The sailors struggled against the sea, and they each prayed to their gods.
- It is clear that there was panic on board the ship.
- But Jonah slept.

This is precisely how one acts who is disobedient to the Lord.

- He sleeps on in a state of false security.
- Perhaps we should attach some significance to the fact that Jonah did nothing to help the sailors to save the ship.
 - They had to do the work alone while he did nothing.

The captain awakened Jonah.

- This was a terrified awakening, because it was not merely an awakening from sleep.
- It was a fear-filled awakening in the realization that he had not succeeded in evading God, and that the Lord had now cornered him.
- He now had to face the consequences of his actions.

The sailors then cast lots to determine who the cause of the storm was.

- To them this was, already at that point, an act of faith, although they did not yet know the Lord.
- The writer of this passage in the Bible probably had in mind the principle mentioned in Proverbs 16:33:
The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the Lord.

They then realized that they were confronted by the wrath of a Power far greater than they were.

- Inevitably a lot determined by the Lord could point to none other than Jonah as the sinner - and that is just what happened.
- When they confronted Jonah, he responded in all honesty.
 - In any case, no one can lie to the Lord when one stands before Him.
 - Jonah therefore told the whole truth of the matter.

Jonah began with the Lord, the God who was at that stage still unknown to the sailors.

- "I fear the Lord God of heaven who made the sea and the dry land."
- Then the men became extremely frightened!
 - Why?
 - Because at that very moment they felt the might of God all around them in the sea.
 - They immediately realized the violent power of the wrath of the true God.

They also understood that no one could flee from this God, because Jonah had only just told them that he had used them in attempting to flee from this God, who now had them cornered.

Jonah confessed this as well:

"...for I know that on account of me this great storm has come upon you."

Their fear was undoubtedly the greater because they realized their complicity in the matter.

Yet - as people are - they had tried for a while to resist the Lord, because they tried to row back to the land. But the sea became stormier. They could realize quite clearly that they were doing wrong.

3. The moment of truth.

Then their decisive conversion took place.

- All of them joined in prayer to the Lord.
- It was a prayer that said a great deal,
 - because they complained that they had landed in danger because of the storm which the Lord had brought about,
 - and they pleaded that the Lord preserve them from death.
 - They also acknowledged that they knew that Jonah had to be thrown overboard - indeed, Jonah himself had said so (v.12).

- That is why they prayed: "...do not let us perish on account of this man's life and do not put innocent blood on us..." before throwing Jonah overboard.

Then they threw him overboard, and the sea subsided.

- The silence increased their fear.
- Elijah, too, had heard the Lord in the silence.
- They then immediately, where they were on the ship, offered a sacrifice to the Lord.

The grace of the Lord was there!

- The entire crew of the ship prayed together on board the ship - except one. The irresponsible one.
- He also prayed, but not with the survivors on the ship. He prayed alone in the dark depths of the sea, because the very next chapter describes how Jonah prayed in the stomach of the great fish.

That is the sad part of this history.

- It would have been a better situation if Jonah prayed together with the crew, and if they could have shared their joy in the grace of God.
- Jonah's disobedience and his distress originally caused all their problems, and now also brought about the unsatisfactory situation that people who belonged together, prayed at the same time, but far from one another.

Much the same kind of distress was also found in Jesus Christ's situation.

- In a sense it was then exactly the opposite of Jonah's situation.
- Jonah landed in trouble because of his own sins.
- He had to be removed from the ship as a sinner to enable the rest to be saved.
- He had to bear the punishment for his own sins, and for the sake of the lives of the others who had then begun to believe, he had to be removed from among them.

Jesus' situation was different.

- The entire reason for His crucifixion was because of sin, but with this difference that it was not His sin, but the sins of those whom He wished to redeem.
- As with Jonah, there was peace afterwards.
 - But not because Jesus had to be removed from society like Jonah.
 - The peace of God came upon us because Jesus had to appear in God's judgement chamber to bear the full judgement and punishment for the sins of each and every one of us.
 - In 2 Corinthians 5:21 Paul states: "He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him."

If we read chapter 1 of the Book of Jonah, we should be very clearly warned against emulating Jonah in respect of disobedience.

- We would be much more severely punished than he was. Our circumstances are more serious than his, because we are already justified in Christ.
- Disobedience will, in our case, mean that we rebel directly against the atonement accomplished by Jesus Christ.

- Furthermore every true believer should consider his fellow-believers, because, by recklessly turning his back on his calling, he inevitably causes other believers to be involved in the punishment to be visited upon him - as happened to the crew of the ship during the storm as a result of Jonah's attempt to evade his duty.

Statistics show clearly that the Christian churches are shrinking by large numbers every year - while the mystical religions grow! Where does the fault lie?

- The problem is that it is extremely difficult to speak to young people and to adults and to undertake any evangelization with them, if they know very little or nothing of the Bible. That is precisely where the problem lies!
- A fairly large number of the young people who leave the church think that they know everything about the Christian faith. The problem is that they know practically nothing of it.
- Damage is done by those who have broken with the church because they think that they know everything about the faith and then as "experts" tell :
 - Why the church is unacceptable to them
 - and how hypocritical church people are and even call themselves Christians.
 - how unreliable the Bible is etc, etc.

The fact is: Many people like talking about God but do not truly believe in Him. Certain theologians whose ideas often receive good coverage in the secular press in fact easily lead people with poor knowledge of the Scriptures astray. It seems as if there are more and more theologians suffering from Esau's "lentil soup syndrome"

- As parents we shall have to keep a sharp eye on our covenant education, otherwise our children will necessarily have no or very little knowledge of God.
- We must not think of leaving it until they are in their teens - then it will be too late.
- We must teach them all about the Lord from their earliest years!
- When the Lord's punishment falls on us when our children desert the church, we shall have to think deeply of what the Lord said in His Law when He declared that He would visit the iniquity of the fathers on the children, on the third and fourth generations of those that hate Him.

The same applies in probably greater measure to all of us who are called and inducted as office-bearers in the church.

- Do you realize that, if we are dilatory or negligent in carrying out our duties, we will be harming the congregation of the Lord.
- It will be a very sad state of affairs if, on judgement day, an entire congregation is called to account because the members of the church council led them into sin.

In every sermon the Lord affirms His grace to you very clearly.

- He died so that your debt of sin could be redeemed, and so that you could be included wholly in the atonement before God.
- Now we are truly entrusted with the responsibility of proclaiming God's kingship to all around us.
- If we evade this responsibility we will be like Jonah, bringing the storm upon all who are with us and then dragging them into the devouring fire of God's judgement.

- Go, then, and carry out your duties to which you have been called, with the greatest meticulousness, as befits those who have been regenerated by Jesus Christ.

Amen.

Closing prayer.

Closing Psalm: 62:1

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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