

REFORMED CHURCH CLANWILLIAM : SUNDAY 9 SEPTEMBER 2012 MORNING SERVICE

Sing before: Scripture Versification 5-3:1, 2

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 145:1, 3, 4

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 128:1, 4

Law

Psalm: 128:1, 4

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 103:1

Scripture reading: Zechariah 3 and Revelation 7:13-17

Scripture text: Zechariah 3:4

Then He answered and spoke to those who stood before Him, saying, "Take away the filthy garments from him." And to him He said, "See, I have removed your iniquity from you, and I will clothe you with rich robes."

Zechariah 3:4

We face the Lord dirty and defiled by sin, but He, in His mercy seemingly judges us unconditionally free.

The crux of this sermon is the tension between our damning guilt of sin when facing God and God's unmotivated forgiveness of our guilt.

Together with Zechariah we attend a court hearing. Yes, how incredible it might sound, here, in a vision a court hearing takes place in heaven at the judgement chair of the Lord.

- ◆ Joshua, the high priest is the accused.
- ◆ He faces the Angel of the Lord. The Angel of the Lord is the Judge.
- ◆ The Satan stands at the right side of Joshua and accused him to God. He is the prosecutor.

Let us examine the parties of this court hearing. What parties do we have in this hearing? Zechariah starts with Joshua the high priest,

- ◆ He is the accused
 - Joshua comes from the tribe of Aaron. That is the tribe of the high priests.
 - Here Joshua is not just a person in the night-vision of Zechariah.
 - He was really the high priest of Israel after their return from exile.
- ◆ He was Joshua, the son of Jehozadak.
 - When Joshua faced God's judgement chair he stood as an official – he stood as a high priest.

His means that he did not only appear representing himself.

- ◆ He faced God as an ambassador of his people Israel and all the priests in service to the Lord.
- ◆ He appeared as a representative of the church of the Lord.

But Joshua was dressed in dirty clothes. The image of the sins clinging to him.

- ◆ He is thus guilty – completely guilty.
 - Even his clothes bear witness against him!
 - Israel has definitely no case facing God!

A second person in this court hearing is the satan.

- ◆ He is the prosecutor.

- ◆ He accuses the children of Israel to God – because he believed that he has the right to accuse mankind to God.
 - The name satan also means adversary.
 - On earth the satan is normally careful. He always appears indirect. By example during his visit to Eve he hid in the snake.

But when satan comes into heaven, facing God, he appears in his true image. God knows him as the adversary of the Light.

But the devil is also cunning.

- ◆ When he faces the Angel of the Lord in accusing Israel, he tries fooling Him.
- ◆ He pretends to be defending the side of God.
- ◆ He accuses Israel as disloyal to God.

This is so. All the children were disloyal to God.

The backdrop to this accusation by satan is the entire matter of the Babylonian exile.

- ◆ It is a matter already ninety years old.
- ◆ Ninety years ago, all the children, their leaders and priesthood included, took leave of God.

The prophets ministered against this leaving abandoning of God but the children did not want to convert themselves.

- ◆ God punished them and they were exiled to Babel.
 - There they remained in exile for seventy years.
 - They were now back for twenty years in Palestine.
- ◆ They had still not completed the temple of God.

In Babel matters were not to well with the children of Israel.

- ◆ One part of the people was completely assimilated by the Babylonian people.
- ◆ That group fell into heathen ideology and also accepted the culture of Babylon.

But there was a small group who worshipped God. Only they returned to Palestine.

- ◆ It was for the sake of these people who trespassed against God and who had to go into exile, that Joshua had to face God.
- ◆ This is the disloyalty satan is accusing them to God.
 - He does it in such a way as if he wants to convince God that His children are unfit for Him to any longer live with them.

That brings us to the Judge of this court hearing. He is the Angel of the Lord.

- ◆ It is difficult to tell only by the Old Testament who the Angel of the Lord is, because the darkish dispensation of the Old Testament does not allow us to fully know him.
- ◆ But together with the New Testament we know enough about Him to realize His meaning here.
 - The Angel of the Lord is the commander of all the angels facing God's throne. Jesus Christ is that as well!

- The Angel of the Lord is one of the Throne-spirits – but He is the non-created Angel.
 - This angel is associated with God Himself because only God is non-created!
- So we read in our text of satan bringing a complaint to the Angel of the Lord, but it is the Lord, the God of the covenant who answers. It is God working grace and salvation!
- The Angel of the Lord is also always an Intercessor – *Jesus Christ is also the Intercessor!*

The Angel of the Lord is thus one and the same as the Son of God.

- ◆ We can put it simply by saying that the Angel of the Lord is the Old Testamental Image of Jesus Christ.
- ◆ However, one thing is sure: In the Angel of the Lord we are dealing with the Image of the Intercessor – as such God reveals Himself in the previously read part.
- ◆ The Angel of the Lord acts as Intercessor, but He remains indivisibly one with God.

In this court hearing there are also spirits. The heavenly spirits – the angels - are also present.

- ◆ Indeed, the Angel of the Lord is their Commander and therefore they are with Him to execute His commands.
- ◆ We read that under command of the Angel of the Lord they clothed Joshua with rich robes.

The running of this Court hearing bothers because something in this hearing is not right.

There is tension between the charge and the acquittal.

- ◆ What is meant by tension is the following: Satan has a serious charge and he does not suck it from his thumb.
- ◆ He can, on grounds of the events of the exile, properly motivate the matter – just as we also saw.
- ◆ What also makes his case stronger is the fact of Joshua appearing in court already guilty. He is standing there in dirty attire. He is completely tainted.

Joshua's case – on the other hand – is very weak.

- ◆ He does not even once attempt defending himself.
- ◆ The logical feeling you have after reading the Bible up to this point is that satan definitely will win his case because nothing can be said against him.

Then comes the unexpected, the surprise:

- ◆ Satan is punished and Joshua acquitted.
- ◆ Twice in the same sentence satan is punished
 - And the Lord said to Satan, "The Lord rebuke you, Satan! The Lord who has chosen Jerusalem rebuke you!
(Zechariah 3:2)
- ◆ Joshua – the guilty – is acquitted.

- ◆ If that was all, but now it appears as if he will be receiving compensation together with his acquittal from sins.

Joshua gets a suit of rich clothing and a clean turban on his head.

- ◆ He receives it without any motivation.
- ◆ From his side he has no earnings he could call on.
- ◆ He exits pure as if he never sinned.
- ◆ The taint of his dirty attire is removed from him by the grace of God and he is clothed like somebody free of sin.

When satan accused Israel there was one matter only the Lord kept in mind and it is on grounds of this that He could absolve Joshua. It is also this factor that causes the tension when Joshua is acquitted.

- ◆ That is the grace of God – the satan did not keep in mind the grace of God.
- ◆ He hears God answering:
- ◆ **The Lord rebuke you, Satan! The Lord who has chosen Jerusalem rebuke you!**
(Zechariah 3:2)

...who has chosen Jerusalem. In this single sentence the grace of God is so great that it could only be Godly grace, so amazing is it.

- ◆ In this sentence God tells that He wants Israel as His children.
- ◆ It does not matter whether these children broke the relationship with God from their side.
- ◆ The fact is that from His side God continues with the relationship. Therefore Israel remained to be His children!
- ◆ The Lord Himself tells how great His grace is, He asks:
 - **Is this not a brand plucked from the fire?**
(Zechariah 3:2)

By this God joins into Satan's accusation. Now it again deals with the exile.

- ◆ In Babel Israel was exposed to total obliteration. They were being assimilated into the Babylonians.
- ◆ But it pleased God to keep a small group of His children pure and in His time return them to their land.
- ◆ Like a piece of wood He plucked His children from the fire before they went up in smoke.
- ◆ Because God chose Jerusalem He did this.

These words of God have relevance to you and me personally.

- ◆ We are not mere spectators in this court hearing.
- ◆ We do not attend this hearing due to plain interest in hearing the of the Judge.

No, brothers and sisters, it is our case that is being heard. Joshua represents every believer, every member of the Church of God on earth.

God has chosen Jerusalem. As written here this sentence has a twofold meaning.

- ◆ In the Old Testamental disposition Jerusalem and Israel is indivisible. The city represents the children.
 - It is one of the names in referring to God's people of the covenant on earth.
 - To the Jews Jerusalem was the place of God's throne here on earth. (Isaiah 17:12) Therefore they also called it the city of the Great King.
 - The name Jerusalem thus tells that it is the place where God lives amongst His children of the covenant.

This brings us to the deeper meaning of the name of the city.

- ◆ The children of the covenant amongst whom God lives in the Old Testamental disposition becomes in the New Testamental disposition the people worshipping Christ.
- ◆ It becomes the church of God on earth with Christ as its Head.
- ◆ The church of God on earth becomes after the Second Coming of Christ the population of the city – surrounding the throne of God – the New Jerusalem.

Now you understand that in this night-vision we are not spectators, because it is our case that is being put to God.

- ◆ Should we as church have to face God we have as hopeless of a case as Israel had.
- ◆ It is nearly unnecessary to say, but the church is not so devoid of sin as it would like to be.
- ◆ Should we have to face the Judge we really have a very poor case.

Joshua is a style-type of Christ in the way that he as high priest had to atone for his people.

- ◆ In that sense Joshua was true to his name because in Greek his name means *Jesus*.

But there is also a big difference. Our High Priest suffered more than Joshua did.

- ◆ In the conviction of Jesus Christ the Lord He appears in dirty clothing to God – our dirty clothes. He had to bear the wrath of God for our sins.
- ◆ God absolves Joshua. Immediately the tension for him is broken.
 - But the misery of Christ only started on the point where Joshua's was relieved.

Again consider everything that took place, then you will understand why it is as such:

- ◆ When the time arrived for Christ to receive our punishment he pleaded with God in Gethsemane for the cup to pass Him by.
- ◆ But to Him there was no acquittal like for Joshua, He had to enter hell to be victorious.
- ◆ Our sins are so large that God's wrath is ignited against it. To punish it He had Christ die the shameful cross-death.

The Lord Jesus Christ was devoid of sin, but none of us can lay claim to that.

- ◆ Even by our best deeds we transgress the commandments of God so badly that we stand guilty to death facing Him.

- ◆ Our formulary for Holy Communion names a long list of sin we daily commit to the face of God.
 - The most important sin is that we – involuntary - hate God by our doubt, disbelief and smallness of faith.
 - Thereafter it describes our transgressions against our neighbour and ourselves. It is all our sins from adultery and drunkenness to moodiness and greed.

Christ faces God for all these sins of us.

- ◆ He took our damnation onto Himself.
- ◆ He literally had to pay with His blood and life for our sins.
- ◆ That is the only way we can face God – when our clothes are washed clean by the blood of the Lamb, as it is written in Revelation 7:14.
And I said to him, "Sir, you know." So he said to me, "These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.
 (Revelation 7:14)

In this way Christ becomes the motivation for our salvation. His offer becomes the grounds of our acquittal.

The Lord Jesus Christ is everything to the believer.

- ◆ Through Him we become the children living in Jerusalem.
- ◆ On those inside Jerusalem the Satan cannot lay his hands because God chose them.

But the Lord Jesus Christ is definitely not that for everybody. He demands the people to believe in Him.

- ◆ We must realize that the grace of God to Jerusalem was only limited to the nucleus of the children He had returning from Babel.
- ◆ He plucked only one piece of wood from the fire – the flames of His wrath incinerated the rest.

We are different from the people going up in the flames of sin. The Lord Jesus Himself speaks about His people as “those who believe in Me”

- ◆ The Lord Jesus Christ is our salvation and exactly that does not give us free reins to intentional disobedience!
- ◆ The apostle Paul says that the Spirit testifies together with our spirit that we are children of God.
 - The Holy Spirit guides our lives by accusing us to ourselves.
 - The Holy Spirit accuses us of our sins because we are children of God.
 - The Holy Spirit discovers us by our sins. Therefore it is a deed of grace should the Holy Spirit direct an appeal to us to persevere in a beautiful and good life as demanded by the Lord.

The Lord Jesus Christ for those who believe in Him removes the tension facing God, between burden of sin and forgiveness, but then it is only by the solving the “why” for us.

- ◆ He solves it in as far as taking the punishment due to us onto Him. God had justice done because punishment was metered out for the dirty clothing.
- ◆ But a condition remains. That is the faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. He has only paid for those who believe in Him. The grace of God only goes to the children of Jerusalem. Because God chose Jerusalem.
- ◆ Let us thus live to believe, serve and worship God.

Amen.

Closing prayer.

We thank You for the advantage of being allowed to be Your chosen children. Please let your Spirit guide us on Your way. Please reveal Your ways, be close to us o Lord, and let Your Word be the Lamp on our road of life. Please forgive us our sins – because Christ has paid our debt.

Amen

Closing Psalm: 146:1, 8

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

Dr MJ Du Plessis
 Helping Reverend
 Reformed Church Clanwilliam
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