

## REFORMED CHURCH CLANWILLIAM : SUNDAY 25 NOVEMBER 2012 MORNING SERVICE

**Sing before:** Psalm 130:2

*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 103:2, 6

**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 19:6*

Law

Psalm: 19:6

**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 25:3, 5

**Scripture reading:** Zechariah 5

**Scripture text :** Zechariah 5:8

**This is Sin!**

(Zechariah 5:8)

God takes the wickedness to where it should be. He does it at his appointed time and in his power. The Lord will not only do it during his Second Coming or during the hereafter. He is already doing it.

In this night vision Zechariah witnessed how God made his church holy.

- In the church there are sins and conflict and many things that are wrong.
- These often discourage us, but you must remember that the Lord is not powerless against them.
- The Lord allows it up to a certain point. Then the Lord takes action in his church and He cleanses his church by removing all the evil from her.

In this sermon we focus on the following issues:

- 1. The church at that time**
- 2. The ephah and the woman**
- 3. God sanctifies His church.**

### **1. The church at that time**

The people living with Zechariah among the ruins of Jerusalem were just like us. They also committed the same sins. Although many centuries have passed, we do not commit “new” sins or other sins than those people.

We read about crime we know very well:

- There were many thieves
- False swearing was the order of the day – this means that the Name of God was misused when they committed perjury.

We would expect that a nation tried as much as they had been would not defy the Lord by committing such sins. Hence the Lord showed two visions to Zechariah:

- First he saw the vision of a flying scroll. This preached the curse on the sinners in this land.
- The next vision, the woman inside the ephah, preached that the Lord Himself would remove all the wickedness.

But please note carefully:

- He Himself removes the sin.
- The Lord does not remove the faithful who fight against sin – although they also sin.

- He condemns and removes those who persist in committing sins – the wicked people.

Look at the image of the church as depicted by the Lord:

- From this passage in the Scriptures it is clear that the faithful do not live as people who know the Lord and truthfully worship Him.
- Furthermore we read that the people are powerless. They can't even help themselves.
- Hence they appear very weak against their enemies and sins. If we were in the same position, we would probably have become so discouraged that we would have given in.

When we read this passage in Zechariah, we immediately notice how urgent it is to make ourselves holy.

- Hence these night visions: The Lord preached to them and to us that He passes judgment on sinners and then removes the sins among his people.

## 2. The ephah and the woman

Zechariah had just seen the flying scroll when he noticed the woman in the basket (ephah). This is a remarkable vision.

- An ephah was a measure of capacity used to measure wheat in those days.
- Its capacity was about 20 to 30 liters. This was the largest measurement they used.

The basket (ephah) Zechariah saw in this vision was probably much bigger than the ephah as it was big enough for a woman to fit into it.

- In this basket was a woman and it was covered with a very heavy lid.
- What is the meaning of it? This is exactly what the prophet asked the angel. The angel promptly replied:
  - It is an ephah.
  - This is what they look like throughout the land.

This means that this was the situation in the entire land.

- Or put differently: This is what our view should be of all the people living in the land.
- The woman in the basket – in her sinfulness – resembles the people.
- This is a reflection of the church at that time.

What is so strange about this woman with whom the Lord compares his people?

- This woman personifies the wickedness of the people - Sins in the flesh! The angel doesn't hesitate, because he frankly replies in verse 8:  
**This is the wickedness!**

Maybe you find it strange that the Bible uses a woman to represent sins. The image corresponds with other images we find in the Old Testament.

- For instance, the Lord refers to sins as prostituting away from the Lord.
- Sins are also called treachery.
- Often the sins of a nation are described as a woman who has left her husband -think of Hosea who had to marry a prostitute in order to make him understand these things.

*NB: Just keep in mind that the Lord depicts the perfect glory of the church by a woman! The Church is eventually the bride of Christ.*

When we read about this vision, we find the picture of the woman in the basket quite innocent at first. But in actual fact this is a very serious matter, because the Lord urgently wants to bring something to his people's attention:

- Sins are as general as women are, in other words sins are becoming so ordinary that people hardly notice them.
- The ephah corresponds with this. They used the ephah every day. And because they used it every day, nobody detected any evil inside it.
- This is how wickedness gets hold of you! The devil makes you so used to sin that eventually you commit sin without realizing it's wrong!

Hence the result of sin is prominent here: corruption, fraud, perjury and theft. And then also the consequence of it all: The anger of the Lord. This is the scroll flying across the land.

Something amazing happened while the angel was with Zechariah.

- The lid on the basket was lifted.
  - This gave the prophet the opportunity to see what was inside.
  - The woman tries to escape.
  - The symbolism of this is the sins trying to free themselves from the restrictions God placed on them.
- The angel did not allow her to escape. With great power he grabbed her and thrust her back into the basket.
  - No time for pardoning.
  - By the same force he also closed the lid again.

Consider the image again. It must have been a very petite woman that could fit into the basket.

- She was literally tossed around by the angel.
- As a woman with her fragile body she was helpless against the power of the angel who was strong and masculine.

NB: What God wants us to know, is the following:

- Such is the way in which God looks upon sin.
- Sins have always been too weak and powerless to resist God. The power of the Lord is simply too great.
- BUT: The image also warns us that often sin appears tender and attractive to us. We must have a sober and firm judgement.

Can you see the grace this passage reveals to us?

- God controls our lives. He also drives sins away from us.
- He easily restricts sins, because He is so much greater than sins.
- Eventually He also determines that sins will never become free again, and hence will not be able to harm the church again.

### 3. God sanctifies His church.

These two visions also teach us that God Himself will make his church holy.

How is this going to happen? Look at the vision again. Suddenly the scene has changed. There are two women with wings like those of a stork.

- This shows that God has equipped them to definitely complete their journey with power.
- The Lord helps them even more – their wings glide on the wind and it helps them to complete their journey.
- They pick up the basket and flew with it into the sky. Their destination is the land Shinar (Babylonia).

We know this place very well, because it is often mentioned in the Bible.

- Shinar is die land of Nimrod.
  - In Shinar Nimrod was a very great hunter.
  - Nimrod was the first dictator on earth.
  - The Bible tells about him as being the man who first started to be a tyrant.

**8 And Cush was the father of Nimrod, who was the first of the great men of the earth.**  
**9 He was a very great bowman, so that there is a saying, Like Nimrod, a very great bowman**  
 (Genesis 10:8-9)

The man must have been very bad because in Chronicles 1 the Lord repeats the matter:

**10 And Cush was the father of Nimrod: he was the first to be a great man in the earth.** (! Chronicles 1:10)

- Shinar is also the land where the builders of the tower were trying to make a name for themselves.
  - This name had to be forever.
  - Those people wanted to defeat God's plan, and then God scattered them all over the earth.

**2 And it came about that in their wandering from the east, they came to a stretch of flat country in the land of Shinar, and there they made their living-place.**  
**9 So it was named Babel, because there the Lord took away the sense of all languages and from there the Lord sent them away over all the face of the earth.**  
 (Genesis 11:2, 9)

- Nebuchadnezzar robbed the temple of the Lord, and took the treasures of the temple to the pagan temples of Shinar.  
**2 And the Lord gave into his hands Jehoiakim, king of Judah, with some of the vessels of the house of God; and he took them away into the land of Shinar to the house of his god; and he put the vessels into the store-house of his god.**  
(Daniel 1:2)
- Shinar is also the land that Isaiah said in which God would ransom a remnant of his people.
  - It is Babylonia, the land from which the people had just returned from exile.
  - In the Bible it resembles the place of the world powers – God’s enemies.

And now the sins among God’s people are banished to this land. This land resembles the home of the antichrist –hell.

What happens to the woman once she arrives in Shinar? In Revelation 17 we read about her again.

- Here she is the great prostitute – mother of all prostitutes and obscenities in the world.
- It says that she is drunk with the blood of the holy people who were witnesses for the Lord Jesus Christ.
- Verse 14 says that she and her people wage war against the Lamb.  
**14 These will make war against the Lamb, and the Lamb will overcome them, because he is the Lord of lords and King of kings; and those who are with him are named, marked out, and true.** (Revelation 17:14)

All these things beautifully correspond with our text and its preaching. God takes wickedness to where it belongs – in a place outside his church.

This vision carries a very clear promise of the Lord Jesus Christ and his redemptive ministry.

- This revelation prophesies that Jesus Christ will make his church holy. At his Second Coming the sanctification of the church will be complete, and then God will live in his church.
- At that time the church will be so perfect forever that no sin will be found inside it because Jesus conquered sins and the power of sins, together with the devil and death.
- Through his victory all these things are sealed off in a place outside the church.

This is told by the vision of the woman sealed in the basket and taken to a place where the devil belongs.

But you must remember one very important issue:

- Although the work of the Lord Jesus Christ was decisive, it has not been completed totally.

- On the cross the Lord Jesus Christ definitely conquered the devil, but He did not want to destroy Him then. He will do that only at his Second Coming.

We are now living between these two events in history. The Lord Jesus defeated the power of sins, but there are still sins on earth. Now where do you and I fit in?

- During this time the Holy Spirit is our Guide. Through his Word God makes us realize how urgent it is that sins and iniquity in the church are wiped out.
- We should know:
  - that we can only hear and understand the voice of God's Spirit if we regularly read and study our Bible!
  - Hence we should know the contents of the Bible, because only then we will experience that the Holy Spirit encourages us to fight against sin.

Have you heard the Holy Spirit reprimanding and warning you against evil? He makes us understand what the Lord teaches in his Word.

- Amongst others He teaches us that the end of times will be so evil as a result of the sins that the Lord will shorten the days for the sake of those who still believe.
- This is the present time, and we are the ones being reprimanded! We must not take part in evil actions, because the Lord is going to remove all evil from his church, and if we continue to do wrong we will be removed from the church.
- If we stubbornly continue to sin, we might perhaps not be banned from the church in this life, but God will do it on Judgment Day when the Lord Jesus comes again.

This night vision strongly preaches the final judgment and all the negative matters accompanying it.

- It's not just a matter of all sins being removed and then everything is over and done with.
- The sins will first try to defeat God's plan.
  - In order to do this people in the church are targeted! – The woman in the basket. You and me!
- What do we do about all these things?
  - We realize that we could be destroyed if we are not alert in our faith. Currently sins are so commonplace that we easily commit them without thinking.
  - Is it not perhaps true that in many instances we have grown so used to it and now partake in it?
- Are we sure we always understand the Bible correctly? Do we understand life? Why are then some of us doing our shopping at the supermarket on a Sunday? You know yourself that thereby you are directly transgressing the Lord's commandments!

In Afrikaans we sing:

Wie ver van U sy weg gaan, /stap op 'n donker afgrond aan.  
 U roei hul uit wat U gesmaad het,/in troueloosheid U verlaat het.  
 Maar dis my goed, my saalge lot,/as ek naby is by my God.  
 Ek het my hoop op God gestel,/om al sy werke te vertel.

A comparable English Psalm would be Psalm 73:8  
All who from thee have gone astray  
Shall perish in their evil way.  
Though wilt destroy all who, false-hearted,  
From thy commandments have departed  
But as for me, I do not fear:  
The Lord is good, the Lord is near,  
I've found my shelter in thy care,  
That all thy works I declare.  
(Anglo-Genevan Psalter Book of Praise)

**Amen.**

Closing prayer.

Closing Psalm: 4:2

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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