

REFORMED CHURCH CLANWILLIAM : SUNDAY 16 MARCH 2014 MORNING SERVICE

Sing before: Psalm 116:6

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 148:5

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 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 on 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 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 130:2

Law

Psalm: 130:2

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 118:12

Scripture reading: Zephaniah 1

Scripture text: Zephaniah 1:9

In the same day I will punish All those who leap over the threshold, Who fill their `masters' houses with violence and deceit.

(Zephaniah 1:9)

Here a judgement bearing a double character is announced. On the one hand it is aimed at the world as a total world judgement, but on the other hand it is also aimed very personally against Judah and Jerusalem.

- The grounds of this judgement are specifically abandonment of God.
- It is aimed against people who learnt all sorts of idolatries and alien methods of faith and due to that forget about the Lord.

We consider the following matters:

1. **The judgement**
2. **The Cause**

1. **The Judgement**

These two verses contain an announcement of destruction over the entire earth.

- The Lord will rip away everything, exterminate it so that nothing remains thereof.
- The judgement of the Lord will literary rip away everything – man as well as beast (verse 3) and also the birds and the sea animals.

The prophecy announced here sounds like something of the curse by the Lord when Adam was punished: **...the earth is cursed on your account!** (Genesis 3:17 Bible in Basic English 1965)

There are more places where the Lord teaches that the entire nature will be destroyed due to the weakening of man's faith – per example Hosea 4:3.

- The end of verse 3 returns to the people – meaning the wicked who are the cause of this judgement.
- In verses 4 – 6 there is a change in the announcement of judgement.

- The judgement is now specifically aimed against Judah and Jerusalem.
- The Lord will exterminate the people of Jerusalem. He also names these people specifically – the wicked.

This prophecy thus had a very strong aim on its own times.

2. The Cause

The wicked are inter alia those who worshipped the Baals.

- Here it deals with Jews who accepted the Canaanite culture and faith – they thus gave up their own culture and faith.
- It is also possible that Zephaniah could have referred to some type of Syncretism that came into being from the Jahwe-faith combined with the Baal worship.

The Lord will be exterminating the entire core of Baal-worshippers, the priests as well as the worshippers (members)

Verse 5 describes more kinds of idolatries. Compare this to Jeremiah 19:13

- The first one mentioned is the Assyrian-Babylonian star service.(astrology)
- Manasseh imported this into Jerusalem. (Compare 2 Kings 23:5, 11). This idolatry is still practiced today.

Read what is written in Isaiah 47:13 about it:

You are wearied in the multitude of your counsels; Let now the astrologers, the stargazers, And the monthly prognosticators Stand up and save you From what shall come upon you.

(Isaiah 47:14)

It is exactly the same as “the stars foretell” still today found in periodicals today and eagerly read by many people.

In the same breath these people are also called the Molech-worshippers.

- They are people who held child-offers.
- But you must listen to the big mistake that occurred here: those people thought that they could succeed by integrating the Molech service with the service to the Lord.
- Therefore they swear oaths by Molech and by the Lord.

The Lord just simply rejects this as idolatry because it is only the completely pure and true faith that means something to the Lord.

In our times this kind of thing occurs:

- Just consider the amount of findings by various church leaders of today that syncretism and idolatries and Christianity are all service to the same God. It is just different roads leading to the same end destination.
- Thereafter the people who have no faith at all – not even idolatry - are mentioned.
 - These are people not looking for or serving the Lord in any way.

But take note that the Bible specifically says that these people have no excuse: they at first believed in the Lord but then became faithless.

Therefore the announcement comes so sharp that the day of the Lord comes and that on that day they will have to be quiet.

- The announcement of the day of the Lord sees in fact two events at the same time, namely the day when the Lord Jesus will arrive in the clouds and that the world will be judged as is written in verse 2 and 3.
- Further this day points at the destruction of Judah and Jerusalem by the Lord.
 - For them the day is also announced as a day of great eradication of the non-believers.
 - To the believers is in the same words the most beautiful grace: on that day the Lord prepares an offer and sanctifies His guests.

In this image two matters go together:

- We know that the day of the Lord is the day of the Second Coming of the Messiah.
- The offer mentioned here points prophetically to the offer of Jesus Christ.
- It is indeed by earnings of this Messiah that the Lord sanctified His guests.

In verse 8 the Lord points out the social and ethnic wrongs that developed amongst the people.

- The Lord says that the house of kings – the rulers and the princes – who wear clothing are not the same as the Jewish traditions.
- In our times we no longer are so particular towards clothing, therefore it is difficult for us comprehending this matter –
 - but you must just keep in mind that the clothing apparel of the Jews of those times there was also a connection to be found with their faith.
 - Therefore the outlandish clothing was here the symbol of the connection of these people to the heathen idols.

The next verse further displays the disposition of the people and their government.

- Their faith was very impure because they also had other kinds of superstitions.
- As an example they leaped over the doorstep of the house.
 - This means that they did not step on the entrance steps but literary jumped into the house and also exited in the same way.

The superstition relevant here is that it was believed that the spirits of the house dwelt under the steps at the entrance to the house. The people believed that the spirits would harm them should they step on them.

This superstition crept, since the days of Dagon, from the Philistines into the Jewry.

- The history of 1 Samuel 5:2 – 7 teaches that Dagon fell twice to his face in front of the Arc of the Lord and was found by the Philistines who arrived in the morning.
- The second time when they put him upright his hands and head broke of and was laying on the steps when they arrived there.

The Bible tells that since that day the priests of Dagon never again stepped on the doorstep of the temple.

- This habit also spread from the temple to the houses of the people.
- Amazingly this habit still existed up to the 17th century in certain regions of Persia.

The Lord clearly put Himself against these people as well.

- Idolatry, syncretism, faith decay and total non-belief together with superstition is a battlefield where the Judgement of God is executed.
- The judgement is thorough and severe because verse 12 states that the Lord will search Jerusalem with lanterns – this indicates that nobody would be able to hide or escape from the judgement of the Lord.

Application

This chapter in the Old Testament is much more modern than you would realize because should we test our own modern New Testamental congregation to this prophecy we find that we also struggle with syncretism in our church.

- Especially in our church affairs there are many persons favoring integration between matters that are not right and the Bible.
- You as members must take care that the church may not condone matters that are not very pure on track with what is the Word and glory of God.

To be able to distinguish between right and wrong is not always so easy because we must take from the Bible the principles we apply to measure by.

- The living out and application of your faith thus rests upon your interpretation of what the Bible is and this matter causes in our times many problems amongst believers and especially the theologians.
- There is only one way by which you will be able to see and distinguish properly what you are to do if you want to truly serve the Lord, and that is that you must bend in prayer under the insights given to you from the Bible by the Holy Spirit.

Should you resist against the Bible or come with the well-known argument that there are many matters in the Bible that are no longer applicable today you would in all probability land in the same problem the people landed in who served the Lord and Milcom at the same time and swore by both at the same time.

- This really angered the Lord because He said that He would exterminate them.
- This entire matter of how you see the Bible and how you go about with the Lord will also determine whether there would be members in our congregation gradually falling away from the Lord as it is written in verse 6.
- Should we have members that must be encouraged because they often have very little living with the congregation we must be sternly warned by this passage from the Bible.

Then there are those who jump over the doorstep. The superstitious ones.

- The description of those who jump over the doorstep is in fact in verse 9 a summary of everybody that will be judged and punished by the Lord.

- They are idolaters, the syncretistic, the deserters, the totally non-believers and the superstitious.
- The Lord names them all in one breath because they all belong outside of His saving grace.

All these matters must now not cause us to fall into fear and anxiety because you must remember that the Lord says that He Himself will sanctify His guests.

- He had His Son offered on Golgotha to the redemption of our sins.
- Thereby the Lord Himself made provision that our sins against Him will be forgiven.
- The demand just remains for us to come to conversion when we stray in our faith and that we must have true remorse about it.

During the times of Zephaniah the Lord sent prophets to the people to tell them that they are wrong and should come to conversion.

- The people thus always had the guidance of the Lord showing them where the road of faith goes.
- The Lord today still works like this and although in our times there are no more literary prophets because He sent us the Holy Spirit to assist us every moment with His guidance.

Congregation, take great care and be intelligent when dealing with matters of faith because this chapter shows how easily you can lose the track.

- To somebody who has lost the track, the turning around is not that easy.
- To such people the judgement of the Lord stands before them.

Amen.

Closing prayer.

Closing Psalm: 47:1

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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 16 March 2014
 Scripture: Modern King James Version