

## REFORMED CHURCH BELLVILLE: WEDNESDAY 31 DECEMBER 2008: MIDNIGHT SERVICE

**Sing before:** Psalm 66:1

*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 105:2

**Prayer:**

- **Doxology**
- **Worship**
- **Confession of sins**
- **Forgiveness**
- **Gratitude**
- **Prayer for the need of the congregation for 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 105:2

Scripture reading: 1 Thessalonians 5

Scripture text: 1 Thessalonians 5:23

**Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.**

(1 Thessalonians 5:23)

How did we experience this past year?

- To some the year was easier, but to others it was very hard.
- Some of us were, because of serious illnesses and even death, subjected during the past year, to extreme tension.
- Theft, murder and car hi-jacking increased. At this stage we are the country with one of the highest criminal activities is the world.
- All these matters tend to stifle us. Therefore many people are emigrating to other countries.
- Because everything is tending to fall apart, a large faith-confusion is conspicuous amongst the Christians themselves.

Should we open the Bible and do a study about our times, we mostly read about the violence and misery under which, prior to the Second Coming of the Lord Jesus, the believers are suffering.

- Though in this chapter we have read, there is a magnificent balance because
  - o it is describing how, to those who believe, matters will be on that day
  - o and how completely different it will be to those not believing.

During the times of Paul writing this letter there was extensive prosecution of the Christians of Thessalonica. The congregation was under heavy pressure and daily there was sorrow. Against this background it is understandable that the Christians yearned for the arrival of the Lord.

- Then their misery would have come to an end and their enemies punished by the Lord.
- Therefore they also prayed that the Lord must come and punish their oppressors.

Against this backdrop Paul is writing to the congregation that they should be aware of it that the Second Coming of the Lord would come like a thief in the night.

- The dual character of this day already appears in the fact of Paul referring to the Second Coming as “the day of the Lord”
- This has ties with the Old Testament. In the Old Testament the day of the Lord is described as a day of tremendous dread to the enemies of the children of Israel – including to all those disobedient to the Lord.

Mostly this day is predicted as a day of judgement, per example Amos 5:18:

**Woe to you who desire the day of the Lord! For what good is the day of the Lord to you? It will be darkness, and not light. (Amos 5:18)**

This was exactly what that congregation wanted to hear!

- Because in their mind’s eye, they could already picture their oppressors roasting and writhing under the judgement of the Lord!
- In the Old Testament it was also predicted that on that day welfare and prosperity would, to the children of the Lord, be born.
- We can thus understand why the congregation of Thessalonica clutched to this day as deliverance.

But they did not properly understand this matter because, in the New Testament, this day acquired a completely new meaning.

- In the New Testament the Second Coming signifies the moment of arrival of the Kingdom of God.
- Then a new heaven and a new earth come, installing there forever the greatness and majesty of the Lord.
- It is not a day or moment that could be used as revenge by a congregation, relishing the terrible punishment metered out to somebody who had harmed them so much.

Exactly this makes that day exceedingly important to us. Where will we be standing on that day?

- So easily we can be embittered against other people and although we might not always say it, think that the Lord, in His time (representing us!) will punish them.
- It is all very well to think that the Lord will, on that day, punish all those devoid of God, but are we, ourselves, ready for that day?

Even the greatness of God is too much for a human to handle.

- That is why Paul is reminding the congregation about that day arriving like a thief at night.
- Should your case with the Lord not be completely in order there will be some hostility in that day.
- Therefore the Bible teaches us that knowledge of when that day will be is not important, but what is of importance is knowledge of how that day will be.

We have to wait in preparedness.

- This entails us differentiating between the right and wrong things being said and preached.
- There will be many people not understanding or expecting the arrival of the dread.
- They will be busy convincing everybody that all is well: "Peace, peace!"

Listen to verse 3:

**For when they say, "Peace and safety!" then sudden destruction comes upon them, as labor pains upon a pregnant woman. And they shall not escape. (1 Thessalonians 5:3)**

There is a specific ignorance amongst people because they do not learn nor heed history.

- During the days of Noah exactly the same took place.
- The people were still standing around ridiculing when the rain came and death surrounded them.
- Exactly the same will happen during the Second Coming.

This sermon deals with the fact that the believers must be ready for the unexpected Second Coming of the Lord. Therefore we are included in the consolation of the Second Coming:

**But you, brethren, are not in darkness, so that this Day should overtake you as a thief. (1 Thessalonians 5:4)**

We know what the planning of the Lord is towards His believers.

- But also we know what is expected from us being ready for the arrival of the Lord.
- The Lord is teaching by a figure of speech when He is warning us not to be asleep or intoxicated like the others.
  - o We must be awake and sober.
  - o We must pay close attention to the things happening in our surroundings.

Indeed it is true that many people became unbelievers because they think that the Lord would not be coming any more.

- There are also people claiming that, should after two thousand years the Lord not yet have arrived, then the complete Christian worship, from the start is false.
- The Lord does not want us to land into the same grove.
  - o Therefore He reminds us to, like soldiers, fight, whilst awaiting the Second Coming.
  - o We have the Love of Christ and we have the hope of the coming of the Kingdom of God.
  - o Every day the Holy Spirit is teaching us this.

In fact, so that we may live, the Lord Jesus Christ died.

- This means that the violence and death, by which the Day of the Lord will accost the earth, has lost its sting to the believers.
- For us the Second Coming is an easy day because we will be entering life eternal.

How do we wait? The answer is clear: By constantly praying.

- Pray for each other.
- Always be on your knees facing the Lord.
- Admonish the disorderly.
- See to each other's church attendance and sharpen each other so that the Christian live of the complete congregation may be on standard.

Also the congregation must see to it that all are responsible and hardworking.

- Some of the Thessalonians stopped working.
  - o They were under the impression that they, until the arrival of the Lord, may sit around idle.
  - o The Lord does not take well to laziness, He commanded the congregation to see to it that all of them worked.

Together with the matters mentioned at the start of this sermon, our congregation must keep in mind, realising one matter very clearly: Through all the ages God remains the same.

- Should things happen, as seen through our eyes, no matter how crooked and distorted, God is in full control.
- Through all these happenings around us, we have to hold onto our responsibility and calling to God.

Even should there be many of us feeling that there is no future in South Africa, God still has His future in mind for us.

- This means that we still have to constantly comply with our responsibilities.
- We all still have to live faithfully and honourably facing God.
- We still have to study and accomplish, because in the first place we are not doing this for a country or nation, **We are doing it for God.**

Because God is not granting belief to everybody, it is true that not everybody will understand it. Consider what is written in Matthew 13:11:

**He answered and said to them, "Because it has been given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given. (Matthew 13:11)**

But:

- Every person sanctified by the blood of Christ will understand it.
- Such a person will every day strive to this and even under aggravating circumstances continue making known the honour and glory of the Lord.
- We have to always remain courageous and must live like children of the light, because, that we are.

Perhaps you now may ask: Is it possible to daily carry on without becoming despondent?

- The answer is: Yes, because the Triune God is granting us His peace, it is possible.
- Through the virtues and effects of Jesus Christ, He completely sanctified us.
- Through His Holy Spirit He is guarding our spirit, soul and body completely and irrefragably till the Second Coming of the Lord Jesus Christ.

**Amen.**

Closing prayer.

Closing Psalm: 118:1

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**

Scripture MKJV