

REFORMED CHURCH BELLVILLE: SUNDAY 28 SEPTEMBER 2008: EVENING SERVICE

Sing before: Psalm 73:1

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 146:1,6

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 97:7

Scripture reading: 2 Thessalonians 2 and 2 Corinthians 11

Scripture text: 2 Thessalonians 2:4

...who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God.

(2 Thessalonians 2:4)

And no wonder! For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light.

(2 Corinthians 11:14)

Because not only does he lie, but always includes a little bit of the truth, it is very difficult to handle Satan.

- He plays with this smattering of truth as if it were the whole truth and nothing but the truth.
- That is why it is sometimes difficult to distinguish the truth in certain matters.

To get us bending away from God, Satan tries everything in his power presenting the lie as the truth.

- Therefore we must live in a way continually determining whether what we do and what life offers us, is serving the glory of the true God.
- Satan makes it his business to determine the relationship of believers with the Lord.

In especially two places the Bible teaches about this.

- The one place is the tribulations of Job.
 - When the angels in heaven were facing God, reporting to Him, the devil was also present.
 - He knew exactly how good the relationship between God and Job was.
- The other instance is in Zechariah 3 when Satan stood in heaven, opposing the high priest.

From these two passages we learn about two things done by Satan:

- In order to gain knowledge about what is happening in God's plan, Satan is listening to the reports of the angels.
- Furthermore, when discovering their sins, he is quick in reporting believers to God.

You must nevertheless take close notice of his work methods.

- In order to damage the reliability of the Lord he always uses a poor presentation of the truth.
- The moment he manages to undermine our trust in the Lord, he leads us astray to sin.
- In 2 Corinthians 11:3 the Lord writes that this was the exact method used by the devil in leading Eve astray and that today he still is misleading believers in this way.

When Satan misled man to fall into sin, one of his motives was that he wanted the worship given by mankind to God, for himself.

- Today his method is still unchanged.
- The more he, through his bent honesty, manages to convince us in living to his standards, the more he is filling the place of God in our lives.

This is precisely what is written in 2 Thessalonians 2:4.

- The devil wants to sit in the temple of God, pretending to be God.
- Here the Bible teaches that the lawless human, predestined to destruction, is hiding in the church.

The devil still has the same weaknesses he had at the beginning:

- He cannot concoct something original.
- He has also no initiative.
- He always uses the word of God and hides behind it.
- He quoted Bible texts every time he tempted Jesus in the desert.

The Lord Jesus also predicted that during the last days the devil would be making use of these methods.

- The Lord Jesus said that many will come under His Name and say: This is Me!(Luke 21:8)
- The people will fall for these false preachers and their gospels because the Lord teaches in Mark 13:21:
"Then if anyone says to you, 'Look, here is the Christ!' or, 'Look, He is there!' do not believe it. (Mark 13:21)

Look, here is the Christ! Or: Look, there!

- These people all are precursors of the anti-Christ.

- The devil will enter the church and pretend to be God.

A big problem is created because of the devil's onslaught having two attributes making it very difficult to determine whether it is he or God Himself having the word and doing the work:

- The first is the fact of him presenting a partial truth.
 - He keeps quiet about something
 - and at other times he distorts or questions matters,
 - but his point of departure is always the truth itself.
- The second is the onslaught coming from a direction where we do not expect him to be: he comes into the church pretending to be God

The true believer, at any rate, will be able to sort out this problem, even should it be with a big effort, because in 2 Thessalonians 2:6 is written:

You know what is restraining him.

- You know!
- This is a reference to faith, because true faith is also definite knowledge.

This knowledge can only be found at one place, that is from the Bible under guidance of God the Holy Spirit

- The Bible is God's specific revelation.
- During this highly entrenched onslaught by the devil, the true believer's ability of perception is thus enhanced by the knowledge instilled into him by God the Holy Spirit.
- By the working of the Holy Spirit in him, the true believer is thus enabled to see through the disguise of the devil.

The proof of this statement is found in Matthew 13:19:

"When anyone hears the word of the kingdom, and does not understand it, then the wicked one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart. This is he who received seed by the wayside. (Matthew 13:19)

- Should you not have the knowledge and you do not understand the true gospel, then the devil removes the truth from you.
- 2 Corinthians 4:4 links to this. But should our gospel still be veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing:
whose minds the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them.
(2 Corinthians 4:4)

The passage we have read – 2 Thessalonians 2:12 – teaches exactly the same:

- God sends the power of misconception to tempt those who did not believe in the truth.
- You must realise how easily and practical the devil is executing his work of temptation.

Look at a few examples from the Bible

- He entices David to number Israel – against the command of God – It took place and punishment followed! (1 Chronicles 21:1)
- In 1 Thessalonians 3:5 we read about Paul enquiring whether the tempter (Satan) had not maybe tempted the congregation of Thessalonica and destroyed their preaching.
- Under certain circumstances the devil thus works with a complete congregation!
- Also the devil tempts our lack of self-control! (1 Corinthians 7:5)

Making the onslaught of Satan even more complicated is the fact that during the last days he will make use of wonders and signs. These are the things you will be confronted by.

- In our read passage is written about Satan revealing himself in church through various powerful deeds, signs and wonders.
- He thus will be trying to impersonate the Lord Himself, because who else will do these kinds of things in church?

At the end of the day it will be very difficult to unravel these matters.

- Because Satan also works through people, matters become even more involved.
- In church he has a complete set of prophets.
 - Throughout the complete Bible we read about them
 - They are there since the earliest years and they will be there until the Lord arrives on the clouds.

What now? The Lord gives you the following consolation:

- When the devil tempted the Lord Jesus, Satan was defeated by the Lord's superior knowledge of the Bible.
- Every time the Lord Jesus pointed out the fact that it was not all that is written in the Bible. There are more writings in the Bible and all have to be read together.

You do have the Bible and also you have the guidance of the Holy Spirit. You are in possession of all assistance given by God.

- What is even more is the fact that the Lord Jesus Christ has already broken the power of the devil.
- With every action of the Lord Jesus the devil was beaten yard by yard, until with majesty, Jesus rose from the grave confirming His rule over Satan.

With each sermon the Lord again confirms it to us.

- Now again he is assuring us that we, as believers remain standing, through the power acquired by Him, against the devil.
- The Holy Spirit teaches that God has already granted us victory.
- We only need to realise the responsibility, accept and use it.

Even, as described in Revelation 12:4, when Satan casts a third of the stars onto earth, still then the Lord Jesus will be victorious over him and all his angels. (Revelation 12:9)

- Therefore in Luke 10:18 we read that Satan fell like a bolt of lightning from heaven.
- The Lord even reveals why it is like that: they fought and the angels of the devil were driven, by the Archangel Michael, from heaven – so finally that there will never again be place for them in heaven.

- The Lord Himself beat the devil. That is why he fell from heaven like a lightning bolt and has no more access to heaven.

Now consider the consolation.

- Even should Satan himself enter the church, pretending to be God – he arrives as a loser.
- He is not God and he lost the battle against God.
- The time of his final destruction by God has almost arrived.

It is as if the Lord is regarding Satan in the same category as a wild animal, because in 1Peter 5:8 is written that the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour.

- He has power of destruction but even in this he is completely restricted.
- Part of his work of destruction entails him pretending to be an angel of light, trying to mislead people by thereby.

You will recognise him every time – perhaps not always easily, but should you know God and His Word, then you will be able to recognise the devil.

- Part of the mercy of the Lord Jesus is that the Holy Spirit never leaves you.
- With insight and ability of differentiation He remains with you – God never leaves His children in a ditch.

But now you also have to consider the judgement in this matter. The bible teaches that there are half-hearted believers.

- It goes without saying that they are negligent in their faith-life.
- Therefore it is written in the Bible that Satan steals the true gospel from these people, replacing it with a false one. (Matthew 13:19,39)

In the Bible is written that the Thessalonians knew what it was, still keeping the devil back. We heard who is keeping the anti-Christ back and why.

- The lord Jesus Christ and God the Holy Spirit is keeping him back until the preaching of the Word has done it's complete circuit on earth.
- The lord Jesus Christ is keeping the coming of the anti-Christ back until the cross death and resurrection of the Lord has taken it's full effect amongst the chosen ones of this word.

Verse 11 and 12 puts another matter in perspective – a less enjoyable matter:

- The Lord uses the anti-Christ in His service.
- Although the anti-Christ is against the Lord, he is serving the Lord by leading the people, not belonging in the church, with him, from the church.
- He is thus serving in a position of cleansing the church.

The believers cannot be lead astray.

- In verse 13 the Lord clearly reveals that He chose us to be amongst the first to be saved.
- We, who are living during the final times of the existence of the world, have to know that we will have to reflect about our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ as the everlasting God and Saviour.

The point of this last part is that we must worship God completely.

We must increase our knowledge of His Word.

We must live in a way always testing and reflecting.

We must ensure that we detect in time the presence of Satan and live our lives to the glory of the true God.

Amen.

Closing prayer.

Closing Psalm: 4:3

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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