

## REFORMED CHURCH BELLVILLE: SUNDAY 22 MARCH 2009: EVENING SERVICE

**Sing before:** Psalm 68:5

*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 31:1+3

**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 107:20

**Scripture reading:** John 10

**Scripture text:** John 10:27-28 and Heidelberg Catechism Lord's day 7

**My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow Me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of My hand.**

The Lord Jesus employs in this passage the image of a sheep pen out in the veld.

- A number of shepherds together build a pen where they gather at night and where they sleep together.
- They all put their sheep into this pen and in the morning each one calls his sheep to him and takes them to graze.
- At the gate one slept as guard to ensure that no one came during the night to open the gate and steal the sheep.

But it so happens that a thief may come and climb over the wall into the pen and steal a sheep and kill it and run away with it.

In this figure of speech the Lord Jesus speaks of all people on earth.

- They are all in the sheep pen – the elect as well as the unbelievers.
- But only the elect belong to Jesus.
- They are the sheep who know His voice and who listen when He calls.

We, as believers, should be like these sheep.

- Although we live among unbelievers (and although there are numerous other faiths around us) we must know the Lord Jesus as our Saviour and we must believe that only through Him we may have eternal life.

Clearly, that might not be easy.

- That is why in this image the Lord warns against false shepherds.
- People who themselves do not enter the pen through the gate and therefore are unable to show other people the gate!

**These days this issue again occupies the minds of true believers who notice the number of new trends springing up in the church everywhere. When we add the number of false faiths to this, the matter becomes even more serious.**

In contrast to the false shepherds stands the true Shepherd. Not only does He know where the gate is, in fact He is the gate, He says so Himself:

**”I am the gate; whoever enters through Me will be saved. He will come in and go out, and find pasture.”** (John 10:9)

This is the Lord Jesus Christ: He was the first to tread the path of the eternal life and therefore He can show it and give it to all of us.

But the Lord Jesus did not die for all people:

- That appears from this figure of speech
- He died only for those who belong to Him
- He does not protect all the sheep – only those who listen to His voice and follow Him.

There are some people who come out of the darkness of sin and are led into the true sanctuary of God.

- He calls them here: sheep who listen to My voice.
- Nobody can enter God’s eternal kingdom without the merits of the Lord Jesus Christ.
- The division comes about through God’s eternal decree of election (predestination) for in verse 29 the Lord Jesus Christ says that these sheep were especially given to Him by God the Father
- They are also eternally bound to God - so that no one can estrange these people from God.

At some time God the Father exercised a choice and selected out of all mankind a number of people. Of this we read in Ephesians 1:4-5:

**For He chose us in Him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in His sight. In love He predestined us to be adopted as His sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with His pleasure and will.**

That is precisely what the Lord Jesus speaks of in this metaphor.

- God wants only certain people
- He lets His Son die for them
- But the death of the Lord Jesus Christ is of an extraordinary nature – listen again to verses 17-18:

**“The reason My Father loves Me is that I lay down My life – only to take it up again. No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of My own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from My Father.”**

Christ was able to die and come to life as and when He so willed it.

- He decided to die to bear the punishment for those who before creation were elected by God
- He sanctifies and perfects them – according to the Father’s decision
- Then he comes to life again thereby showing them that He shall also bring them to life.

But there is a condition! **My sheep listen to My voice!**

- We must bow before the will of the Lord and obey his commands!
- Put differently – subject yourself to the prompting of God the Holy Spirit for He commands you to obey and to believe in the ministry of propitiation of Jesus Christ.
- When the elect listen to the voice of God it is not like listening to music
  - that is not how we listen to the Lord!
  - It means that we shall be attuned to God’s commandments.

The Lord Jesus says: **I am** the gate. This is a play on words. It is about **I AM**.

The words refer back to when the LORD called Moses;

- “God said to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: I AM has sent me to you.” (Exodus 3:14)
- When Jesus says: “I AM the gate,” He means that God is the gate.
- He says that He is God!

In the Bible I AM always means GOD.

- In this passage it means that Jesus Christ is God Himself who opens the door to the eternal life for those who belong to Him.

Furthermore we must note that the people in the parable are all known to Jesus.

- He knows each one by name.
- But they too know Him as their Saviour (Shepherd).
- It is a matter of mutual recognition!

Every saved person knows that he is part of this mighty deed of God! And that is why he acts accordingly!

And yet this passage also bears a note of terror. He tells the Jews standing around Him: "You are not My sheep."

- There are, therefore, people to whom the church will be an unknown place and stay that way.
- Such people feel terribly unhappy in the church because they do not fit in and do not want to be there.
- Of them we also read:
- They wanted to stone Jesus because of His words
- The Lord Himself could not satisfy them!

We may not allow this matter to pass us by unnoticed.

- For this parable teaches us that in His ministry the Lord Jesus created a sharp and irreconcilable division.
- He died for some so that they could never be snatched out of His hand.
- But as surely he died to the perdition of others.

We need not be disturbed, for those who are not saved bear certain distinctive characteristics: You can know whether you are one:

- They lack true faith
- They are not truly concerned about salvation
- Their faith is aimed at trivialities and not directed at the true depth of the ministry of propitiation of Jesus Christ.
- Their philosophy of life is in contrast to the ministry of the Holy Spirit – that is why they are always in conflict with Him.
- To them the Bible is not true and infallible – they accept and reject it at will.

We find some among the Jews listening to the parable.

- The Lord refers to them as thieves who come to steal, kill and destroy.
- They cause suffering and live for suffering!
- In verse 12 he refers to them as irresponsible hired hands. Having heard this they said that Jesus was raving mad – verse 20:
- **"Many of them said, "He is demon-possessed and raving mad. Why listen to him?"**

Let us see what the effect of this parable should be in our lives:

- The Lord assures you here that you shall live after death and be part of the kingdom of God.
- He ensures this unshakeably – that is why He died for you
- You now spontaneously live to the greater glory of this almighty God who so definitely destined you for Him and you see to it that all you do in this life speaks of it.

If you are unable to truly believe these matters your life will lose all meaning;

- You then become someone living without purpose.
- Someone who says: “Why should I trouble myself? For today I live and tomorrow I die.”
- A person without a future.

But remember the other side:

- We have security when we follow Christ unreservedly.
- When we in true faith and unshakeable conviction cling to the facts written in the Bible – the facts of salvation and eternal life through His death.

Do you know this, beloved brothers and sisters?

Do you hear the voice of the Holy Spirit admonishing you to repentance but at the same time comforting you and assuring you thereof that you are part of Jesus Christ’s elected flock?

Let us read the Heidelberg Catechism Lord’s day 7 together:

**Question 20: Are all men then saved by Christ, as they have perished in Adam?**

**Answer: No, only such as by true faith are ingrafted into Him, and receive all His benefits.**

**Matthew 7:14; John 1:12; 3:16; 18:36; Rom 11:16-21.**

**Question 21: What is true faith?**

**Answer: It is not only a certain knowledge, whereby I hold for truth all that God has revealed to us in His Word; but also a hearty trust which the Holy Spirit works in me by the Gospel, that not only to others, but to me also, forgiveness of sins, everlasting righteousness and salvation, are freely given by God, merely of grace, for the sake of Christ’s merits.**

**John 17:3+17; Heb 11:1-3; James 2:19; Rom 4:18-21; 5:1; 10:10; Heb 4:16; Acts 16:14; Rom 1:16; 10:17; 1 Cor 1:21; Gal 2:20; Rom 1:17; Heb 10:10; Rom 3:20-26; Gal 2:16; Eph 2:8-10.**

**Question 22: What is then necessary for a Christian to believe?**

**Answer: All that is promised us in the Gospel, which the articles of our catholic, undoubted Christian faith teach us in sum.**

**Mathew 28:19; John 20: 30-31.**

**Question 23: What are these articles?**

**Answer: 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; who 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 on 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 catholic Church; the communion of saints; the forgiveness of sins; the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting.**

**Amen.**

Closing prayer.

Closing Psalm: 149:2.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all.

**Amen**

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22 March 2009  
Scripture: New International Version**