

Sing before the service: Psalm 39:5

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 65:2

Prayer

Scripture hymn 1-3:3

Scripture reading: Job 9

Scripture text: Job 9:15; Catechism Lord's Day 51

Though I were innocent, I could not answer him; I could only plead with my Judge for mercy. (Job 9:15 NIV)

It is quite understandable why the tax collector (in the parable) went into the church modestly and stood at a distance when he pleaded for God's mercy, because he admitted that he was a sinner.

But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, 'God, have mercy on me, a sinner.' (Luke 18:13 NIV)

But what about Job? Why was he tempted by the devil? Because the Lord himself spoke to Satan:

Then the LORD said to Satan, "Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one on earth like him; he is blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil. And he still maintains his integrity, though you incited me against him to ruin him without any reason." (Job 2:3 NIV)

How did Job, the blameless and upright man, feel about this? What did he know about himself? He knew very well that he was not at all perfect.

- He also knew God as Judge and he knew that the Supreme Judge had to forgive his sins so that he would not be lost forever.
- Hence he knew that he was not blameless!

Hence he said:

Though I were innocent, I could not answer him; I could only plead with my Judge for mercy. (Job 9:15 NIV)

With regard to what Job declared it is important to note that Job was not summonsed by the Judge (the Lord) to appear before Him!

- However, he realises that he – all of us – will appear before the Judge one day – and that we all will be seriously in need of mercy.
- The reason is simple: The All-knowing God is conscious of all our trespasses against Him.

The book Job also contains other incidents from everyday life that apply to all of us. Just look at what Job's friends did.

- Except for one of his friends, they all ran him down and said that he deserved the punishment.
- Listen to what he said about his friends:

My friends treat me with scorn as my eyes pour out tears to God;
(Job 16:20 NIV)

All my intimate friends detest me; those I love have turned against me.
(Job 19:19 NIV)

With such friends one need no enemies to spoil one's life! Even the Lord was angry with them!

He was also angry with the three friends, because they had found no way to refute Job, and yet had condemned him. (Job 32:3 NIV)

What then must we do that will be right in the eyes of the Lord? Is it true that if people do me wrong – such that the Lord agrees that they are wrong – I am allowed to hate and detest them?

- The answer: No, we may not hate them.
- We must pray for them so that the Lord will also forgive them.

It's very easy to note this principle from the Scriptures and to convey it to others, but it's not so simple to act in line with this principle.

- Fact is that Job would not have been forgiven by the Lord had he not been able to forgive the wrongs his friends had done to him!
- The Lord expected Job to ask Him to forgive the trespasses of his friends against him (Job). He had to pray for them (when they brought the animals for the offering as instructed by the Lord) for forgiveness of their sins!

Listen to the touching description in the Bible of how the Lord went to Job's friends and told them that He was angry with them and that Job had to act as mediator so that they would receive atonement for their sins.

After the LORD had said these things to Job, he said to Eliphaz the Temanite, "I am angry with you and your two friends, because you have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has. So now take seven bulls and seven rams and go to my servant Job and sacrifice a burnt offering for yourselves. My servant Job will pray for you, and I will accept his prayer and not deal with you according to your folly. You have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has." So Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite and Zophar the Naamathite did what the LORD told them; and the LORD accepted Job's prayer. (Job 42:7-9 NIV)

This is of course a way in which the Lord portrays a specific relationship that should exist among people.

- It is clear that He expects people to strictly adhere to this – and then He forgives us for what we do wrong against Him.

After Job had prayed for his friends, the LORD made him prosperous again and gave him twice as much as he had before. (Job 42:10 NIV)

The fact that Job prayed for atonement and he and his friends received forgiveness is of utmost importance, because through that they confessed that they had sinned!

- They no longer deceived themselves about their integrity.
- They resigned themselves to the wrath of God if they would not settle matters with God and with one another.

When we pray to the Lord to forgive us our sins, we must be able to pray for it fully realising *all our transgressions, as well as the evil which still clings to us.*

- We must also understand that poor human relations will certainly not contribute to us receiving the love of the Lord!
- On the contrary – it will hamper the possibility of us receiving the Lord's forgiveness.

This is exactly why the Lord Jesus, who teaches us to pray for forgiveness of our sins, links it to our own sincere determination *to forgive our neighbour wholeheartedly.*

- Hence the Lord Jesus Christ preaches to us in this prayer that He will forgive us, but then we must also forgive.
- He will reconcile us to God – hence He demands that we should also reconcile to God those who sin against us.

He sets the example: We sin against Him and therefore He reconciles us.

- Our sins against the Lord are causing entrance to the eternal kingdom of God being closed to us.
- But through his death (punishment for our sake) and his resurrection (opening up for our sake) the kingdom of God is opened up to us.

Hence God sends us, like He sent Job and his friends, to make peace with one another.

- BUT PLEASE NOTE: Don't just say "sorry".
- Make sure that peace has been restored between you and your friends and between you all and God.

Let's look at what we confess about this in the Heidelberg Catechism Lord's Day 51:

126. Q. What is the fifth petition?

A. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. That is: For the sake of Christ's blood, do not impute to us, wretched sinners; any of our transgressions, nor the evil which still clings to us,[1] as we also find this evidence of Thy grace in us that we are fully determined wholeheartedly to forgive our neighbor.[2]

[1] Ps. 51: 1-7; 143:2; Rom. 8:1; I John 2:1, 2. [2] Matt. 6:14, 15; 18:21-35.

Amen.

Closing prayer

Closing hymn: Psalm 16:5

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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 Date: 20 January 2008 (evening)