

REFORMED CHURCH BELLVILLE : SUNDAY 16 OCTOBER 2011 MORNING SERVICE

Sing before: Scripture Versification 3-4: 1,2,3 [Philippians 1: 20-27]

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 149:1, 2

Confession of faith: Apostolic

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, 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 at 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 universal Church, the communion of saints; the forgiveness of sins; the resurrection of the body; and the life everlasting

Amen.

After reading of the Law we confess our guilt and pray for forgiveness and a new life before God with Psalm 32:1, 3

Law

Psalm: 32:1, 3

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 84:3, 6

Scripture reading: Leviticus 1

Scripture text: Leviticus 1:9

But his inwards and his legs shall he wash in water: and the priest shall burn all on the altar, to be a burnt sacrifice, an offering made by fire, of a sweet savor unto the LORD.

(Leviticus 1:9)

THEME: Our burnt offering to the Lord: To totally dedicate ourselves to Him.

Beloved in our Lord Jesus Christ, sometimes we do and say things we later regret because it derails so many things. You say something to another person and it comes close to irreparably damaging the relationship between you. You make a decision and after a while you find that it was definitely the most stupid decision you could have taken. It is about these matters we say and do that we would gladly give anything to be able to start from scratch. But, as it is, we seldom get the opportunity to start afresh with building relationships or to nullify previous decisions.

Luckily it is not always the case with everything that you somehow cannot start afresh. A new life-year is in a way such a fresh start granted through His grace by the Lord to all. Through His general grace the Lord of heaven and earth grants all people a new year to start afresh. And the result of this general grace granted by the Lord to His entire creation is that many people have good resolutions for the new year. Many people want to improve in the way they do things or want to start something for the first time. Possibly you also have such good intentions today, something in your life you want to do better or do for the first time. May it be that you will be lucky enough to execute your intentions successfully.

It is good and proper having good intentions about many matters. But I trust that we, together with all our numerous intentions, will have, as the first and most important resolution, always have the resolution of becoming more mature in our relationship with the Lord. May this be everybody's desire that our love for Jesus Christ will become stronger and that we will live closer and more obedient to our heavenly Father. When this takes place our Lord God is glorified and exulted, as it should be done.

Brothers, sisters and children, it is not only the desire of us humans to live closer to the Lord. The Lord Himself desires us to live and grow in an intimate and true relationship with Him. We learn about this desire of the Lord in the complete book of Leviticus. In the first two verses of the scripture we read together we hear about it. We see it in the position the tent of the congregation had to take up in the lives of the people.

The tent of the congregation is another name for the tabernacle of the congregation. It is here, in the most holy part of the tabernacle, where the Ark of the Covenant of Jehovah stood. It is here in the holy part of the tabernacle where the priests daily entered offering frankincense and praying for the people. It is here in the court of the tabernacle where the altar was whereon daily offers to the Lord were brought. And this tabernacle of the congregation was filled by the powerful presence of the Lord. The Lord wants to be in the midst of the people's lives, because He also wants His children to live in a constant tight relationship with Him. A relationship of fully submitting themselves to the Lord.

Seeing that Israel was saved by the powerful deeds of the Lord from Egyptian slavery and that He completely freed them from the rule of the Faro they want to demonstrate their gratitude and dedication to the Lord. And the method used by the people of the Old Testament in demonstrating their gratitude and dedication to the Lord included bringing offers to the Lord. Now the Lord takes, just as with the redemption, also the initiative by telling His people in which way they could best demonstrate their gratitude and dedication to the Lord.

The burnt offering was, because it was the only offer in which the complete offered animal was completely incinerated, in particular the offer whereby the believer demonstrated his or her total dedication to the Lord. It is also, together with the following four offers as described in Leviticus, voluntary offers, spontaneously brought by the believer because he or she was thankful for the grace granted by the Lord. Four matters relating to the burnt offer are made clear to us:

- 1. Who was allowed to bring the burnt offer to the Lord.**
- 2. What animals were allowed to be used as burnt offers.**
- 3. What sermons the Lord commanded to the burnt offer.**
- 4. The glorification the Lord receives by the burnt offer.**

Firstly, the people calling to the Lord for a close relationship with Him. Anybody, man or woman, could offer a burn offer to the Lord. All are called to a life close to the Lord. No person is exempted, as it will become clearer later on, rich and poor, prominent people in the community and the ordinary run of the mill person of whom many people take no notice, can live in a close relationship with the Lord.

But living in an intimate relationship with the Lord is not something that could be done haphazardly and from a distance. Everything the believer has to do with this offer points to the fact that a believer definitely is actively involved. The believer himself brings the offer animal to the tabernacle of the congregation, kills and skins the animal himself, cuts it up, washes all the dung from the intestines and legs. Full submission in the service to the Lord means you yourself are personally involved in everything. Even the important part the priest has to fulfill with the blood of the offer animal does not mean that the worshipper is just a passive onlooker.

Beloved, none of us, in the place of another, can maintain a relationship with the Lord or render service to Him. The Lord calls each one of us to having a relationship with Him and rendering service to Him ourselves. The church council cannot do it on behalf of the congregation and parents cannot do it on behalf of their children.

The believer having to place his or her hand on the head of the offer animal emphasizes the personal involvement of the believer to the burnt offer. By this act it is not said that the offer animal is the property of the believer. No, this act indicates that the offer animal dies and is burnt on the altar in the place of the believer. We will return to this later.

Secondly, the offer acceptable to the Lord. The offer animal could be a bull, sheep, billy-goat or a dove. Seeing that it is a voluntary offer the Lord makes it clear that nobody is excluded when it comes to devotion to Him. Everyone wanting to demonstrate gratitude and devotion to the Lord must be able to do so. The believer who can offer a bull does so, the person that can offer a ram, does so. But the poor believer who cannot afford a bull or ram, let alone even own it, may not be exempted from having a

close relationship with the Lord. To those, the Lord Himself provides the offer animal. Such a believer may trap a turtledove or any other dove and present it as an offer animal to the Lord. Nobody, due to his banking account, stands closer to the Lord than another does. Every believer, rich or poor, young or old, man or woman, may approach the Lord.

But the Lord is specific about what kind of offer animal may be presented as a burnt offer to Him. The burnt offer is not an opportunity to get rid of that sick or inferior animal in your kraal. There may not be any bodily defect to the offer animal. The Lord, when it comes to the redemption of His children, gives only the best, therefore He, when it comes to service to Him, also expects only the best. An offer costing nothing is also worth nothing. Whoever renders cheap service to the Lord will just have a superficial and poor experience of the living God. Brothers, sisters and children, when we render fobbed off time to the service of the Lord and are not prepared giving the best to the Lord, we should not be surprised at experiencing a watered-down feeling of the workings of the Holy Spirit in our lives. Should you not be dedicated to full-time service to the Lord you would also not experience the full working of the Lord and His closeness to your life.

In the third instance there are specific acts to be followed with the burn offer. The believer presenting the offer animal to the Lord slaughters and cuts it up him or herself. The entrails and feet have to be cleaned, because nothing that is dirty may be put on the altar of the Lord. Therefore the priest himself must remove the crop and innards of the dove prior to offering it. A continual relationship with the Lord and service whereby we completely dedicate ourselves to the Lord requires that we remove of all obstacles from our minds and lives. When we serve the Lord we must not think about all sorts of other matters. We have to get rid of those wrong thoughts, deeds and words preventing us from really being close to the Lord in His holy presence. Let us therefore continually implore the Holy Spirit to help us herewith, because without the workings of the Holy Spirit we will never be able to do it.

Further the blood of the offer animal must be poured or sprinkled against the altar. In the book of Leviticus the Lord later makes it clear why blood is so important. Blood is the life of the animal, and when blood is spilled it means that a life was taken and offered, for the reconciliation of his sins, to the Lord in place of the believer's own life, And then the complete offer animal is incinerated on the altar. Nothing, because the complete offer animal belongs to the Lord, may remain for human use. The complete animal goes up in smoke and it is an offer with a sweet savor accepted by the Lord.

And the last matter becoming clear is the honoring received by the Lord for this offer. Although sins or even specific sin is not mentioned here the Lord says that the offer animal is accepted as reconciliation for the believer. The relationship between the Lord and mankind can only be proper and intimate when whatever is stands in its way is removed. The burn offer does not deal with a specific sin, but with mankind who is a sinner by nature, namely a sinner in his deepest being. To live in peace and harmony with the Lord we have to do something about our sinful nature, we must admit and confess it to the Lord and eventually get rid of it.

Further, by the burn offer, the Lord receives thanks and praise from the believer. It thus not just deal with exterior acts – you don't just incidentally bring a burnt offer. A burnt offer is an offer from the heart of the believer because he or she wants to thank God and praise Him for His being. This offer thus deals in particular with the attitude of the heart of the believer. And then the total cremation of the offer animal becomes a depiction of the believer's complete dedication to the Lord. Nothing less than this

total and unqualified submission of the believer, depicted by the burnt offer, is a fitting reaction to the Lord's continual grace and love.

The bad part about the burnt offer to the Lord, just as with so many other things we do for the Lord, is that it is tainted by the sinful nature of mankind. The burnt offers, later in the history of Israel, became something that was done just by the way. Their hearts were no longer involved and their lives no longer bore witness to a full submission to the Lord. Because these burnt offers by Israel to the Lord became so empty and worthless the Lord supplied His own Offerlamb. That was what was depicted in the burnt offer our Lord Jesus later fulfilled. He totally gave Himself up to his service to His father. In His obedience to His Father, He allowed Himself to be used up. And that what is depicted by the burnt offer, the Lord wants to still continue in the life of every person belonging to Him.

Jesus Christ's offer on the cross was a voluntary offer from Him to His Father. Voluntary He took mankind's sin onto Himself and in order for us not dying for our sins ourselves, gave up His life in our place. Jesus was not compelled to die for us, but because His Father loves the world, He wanted to. And Paul describes Jesus' total submission of Himself on the cross to die and be buried as a burnt offer. Jesus' offer on the cross was an offer to God to a sweet savor. Peter also refers to Christ's cross-offer in the language of the burnt offer. Jesus Christ is **the Lamb without blemish and without spot** (1 Peter 1:19) He is perfect in every way because He is also devoid of sin.

But, beloved, the special meaning of the burnt offer is described to us when the Hebrew writer (in Hebrews 10:5 onwards) quotes Psalm 40 and applies it to Christ, putting it this way:

5 Therefore, when He came into the world, He said: "Sacrifice and offering You did not desire, But a body You have prepared for Me.

6 In burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin You had no pleasure.

7 Then I said, 'Behold, I have come-In the volume of the book it is written of Me-To do Your will, O God.' "

The offer of Jesus Christ on the cross was the last blood-offer brought in aid of separating us permanently as God's property.

Now an offer whereby blood is spilled is no longer necessary. All that now remains is to dedicate ourselves in all that we are and have to service to the Lord. This means that under the leadership of the Holy Spirit we must scrupulously render daily attention to our own sinfulness by confessing it to the Lord and hold onto Jesus Christ our redeemer. This means that in all that we think, do and say, we must be bent on bringing the Lord thanks and praise. The actual service we must do for the Lord is not only our gathering in the worshipping service or when we have home worship during the evening, but our complete life we give as a live and holy offer to the Lord. At any rate it is not something that can be done for our sakes by somebody else. The Lord, indeed, desires his children to live in such a close and intimate relationship with Him.

A missionary in the Far East once wrote: *Just one life, that is all we have to offer. How can we use it to the highest honour to God and to the greatest blessing of other people? How can we be as useable as possible and as effective as possible as Christians?* (Michael Griffiths) The burnt offer gives the answer to these questions. This one life we have must be offered to the Lord. Believers who really appreciate

the wonder of God's grace to them do not have a life of their own, and also do not desire a life of their own. Nothing is more satisfying to them than satisfying the Lord with a life aimed only to honoring and glorifying Him.

Beloved, the Lord grants us the great mercy of life. And this morning He gives us the opportunity of starting from scratch in our relationship to Him, or to do better than previously. We can, through the working of the Holy Spirit, out of gratitude for His love and grace, dedicate ourselves totally to Him. Let us make this resolution into a reality.

Amen!

Closing prayer.

Closing Psalm: 40:3, 4

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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