

REFORMED CHURCH BELLVILLE – SUNDAY 23 OCTOBER 2011 – MORNING SERVICE.

Sing beforehand: Psalm 1:1+2.

Our help is in the name of the LORD, who made heaven and earth. Beloved, grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ. By the powerful operation of God the Holy Spirit.

Amen.

Song of praise: Psalm 138:1+2.

Confession of faith: Apostles Creed

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 Ghost, 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 thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead: I believe in the Holy Ghost: I believe in the holy catholic church: the communion of saints: The forgiveness of sins: The resurrection of the body: And the life everlasting. Amen.

After the law we pray God to forgive our sins and teach us His ways with Psalm 86:3+6.

Law

Psalm 86:3+6.

Prayer

- *Doxology:*
- *Worship:*
- *Confession:*
- *Supplication (for pardon of sins):*
- *Thanksgiving:*
- *Intercession (for the need of the congregation, the church, authorities, sinful world and appeal to the promises of God)*
- *General supplication:*
- *Illumination of the Holy Spirit (necessary for the ministry of the Word):*

Amen.

Psalm 127:1+2.

Scripture reading: Leviticus 2.

Text: Leviticus 2:13:

And every offering of your grain offering you shall season with salt; you shall not allow the salt of the covenant of your God to be lacking from your grain offering. With all your offerings you shall offer salt.

Theme: Our daily work in the Lord's service.

Beloved in our Lord Jesus Christ, the word "work" elicits various reactions from people. If you give a teenager a task in the house the work is performed grudgingly with hanging shoulders. Many people feel like this about their daily work. But there are also many people who love their work and many who would give anything just to have a job.

Yes, when we speak of work, people react differently. To some people work is a burden because the work is hard and exhausting. These people see only the curse that was laid onto the labour of man after the Fall into sin. After the Fall the LORD cursed the earth because of man's sin and said *in toil you shall eat of it, in the sweat of your face you shall eat bread.* (Genesis 3:17-19) To the person who sees only the curse, work is not pleasant and he works only because he must live. Each morning he rises with a heavy heart to go to work and he cannot wait for the workingday to end.

Then we find other people to whom their work is their whole life. They devote themselves to their work and everything else in their life must stand back for it. One could say that for these people work has become an idol. They devote all their time and energy to their work and their families and health suffer. Even the Lord and their service to Him with the other faithful takes second place with these people. They have many reasons why their work is so important to them.

And there is another group of people. People who consider their work to be so good and wonderful that they think that they can bribe the Lord with it. These people think that they can make themselves acceptable to the Lord with their good work. They think that the Lord must accept them because of their work.

Brother, sister, child, whatever you may think of work, with the grain offering and its meaning the Holy Spirit wants to guide us towards the correct attitude towards our daily work. We shall establish where our daily work fits into our service to the Lord.

The grain offering is, as the burnt offering we considered last Sunday, and the meal offering described further on, a voluntary offering. The voluntary offerings are a spontaneous reaction by the believer to the grace and love he or she receives from the Lord. Because the Lord has saved his people and He keeps them and cares for them with his own hand, they wish to bring their praise and gratitude to the Lord. Because the Lord expects only the best when his people serve Him, He gives them clear instructions as to how they can bring their praise and gratitude with the voluntary grain offering. A voluntary offering does not mean that one can serve the Lord in any way one pleases. The Lord grants everyone who wishes to do so room to bring the grain offering but He also gives specific instructions as to how this is to be done.

The room the Lord gives with the grain offering becomes clear from the three different kinds of grain offerings that may be brought. It could be of raw flour or bread and cakes baked in an oven or a pan or a covered pan, or it could be of roasted or beaten wheat. The Lord gives room so that everybody who wants to bring a grain offering can do so. But the Lord is precise – the flour must be fine flour if it is of raw flour or of bread or cakes. And if it is of roasted or beaten wheat it must come from the first fruits of the harvest. The Lord demands the very best from the believer's service. From the different kinds of grain offerings we learn that the Lord wants every believer to have the opportunity to serve Him. Raw fine flour is something that someone who grinds wheat would be able to offer, such as a miller. When baked bread or cake is mentioned one thinks of a housewife who bakes. Roasted or beaten wheat is the grain offering that would be brought by someone who labours in the field.

Together with these grain offerings frankincense must be offered. The aroma of the frankincense burning together with the part of the grain offering is symbolic of the offering being pleasing to the Lord. Humanly speaking we would say that the offering is appreciated by the Lord. Furthermore, oil must be part of each of these grain offerings. Although olive oil was a common ingredient of all grain products, we must not overlook the meaning that the Lord gives to oil. In the Bible oil is often

used to indicate the Holy Spirit and His ministry. When someone was anointed as prophet or king, oil was used as a sign of the Holy Spirit who empowers that person to serve in that function.

At the grain offering the oil reminds us thereof that, whatever we give the Lord as a gift, it is given as a result of the ministry of the Holy spirit in the believer and not because man is by nature inclined to seek the the Lord. The oil also indicates that it is the Holy Spirit who turns something that is only simple human effort into something that is acceptable and pleasant to the Lord.

The Lord also clearly forbids the use of leaven and honey in any of the grain offerings offered to Him. In the Bible leaven is often used as a sign of bad and sinful influence. The one bringing the offering must change that which is wrong in his or her life. One cannot bring a grain offering just as if all between yourself and the Lord is 100% in order and you are free from sin, as if the Lord must be happy with your sinful life. The Lord hates sin and therefore forbids leaven in the grain offerings. For the same reason He forbids honey because honey can cause fermentation.

Beloved, with all that the various grain offerings can and must be and with all that the Lord expressly forbids, there is one ingredient that the believer may not forget – salt. All the grain offerings must be seasoned with salt. The purpose of the salt is explicitly stated – the salt points to the covenant with your God. Salt has the capacity to preserve something for a long time. In the days before refrigerators meat was pickled with salt to preserve it. It is the Lord's purpose with his relationship, his covenanted relationship with the believer, to keep the believer unto eternity. Hence the Lord says to the believer: I am your God and you shall be my child for ever. I want to keep you and care for you for ever and you must serve me and love me for ever. The salt in the grain offering therefore reminds the believer of his side of the covenant that the Lord has with him or her. The believer must eternally love and serve the Lord, he and she must remain God's child.

One last matter about the grain offerings themselves: at each of the three kinds of grain offerings only part of the grain offering together with the frankincense was burnt on the altar. The remaining part of the offering was for Aaron and his sons. This voluntary offering of the Israelites' handiwork to the Lord was the Lord's way of caring for his priests. Because the priests did not have an occupation in which they could provide for themselves through agriculture or commerce – they were fully occupied in their service in the temple – the Lord himself provided for them, amongst others, by means of the grain offerings.

Brothers, sisters and children, by nature the grain offering was a gift to the Lord, that is what the grain offering is called in the original language. This gift was donated freely to the Lord as a tribute and expression of gratitude. With this gift the believers of ancient acknowledged that the Lord has absolute power over their lives. They, who received everything from Him who gave everything, thanked Him with the grain offering. Through it the Israelites confessed that they could not live without the Lord. It is the Lord who gave them the strength to cultivate their fields, to plant, to harvest, to grind and to bake. It is the Lord who made the grain grow because He sent the rain at the appointed time. Without the Lord they would not have had bread. And with the confession the grain offering was also a prayer – a prayer that by virtue of His covenant the Lord would remain their God and not withdraw Himself from them.

We could now ask: "But what relevance has the grain offering to us as Christians? We no longer bring any grain offerings. How is our daily work then service to the Lord?" Beloved, the offering of a simple gift of flour or bread was an acknowledgement that the Lord has absolute power over the entire life of the believer. A believer's relationship with the Lord is not something that is kept in a compartment marked "spiritual". With the grain offering the routine of each day's work was brought into the presence of the Lord and given to Him as an act of worship because He is Lord of all.

Brother, sister and child, your and my offering that we put into the collectionbag during the service consists of mere money. Your and my monthly offering that we put into the envelope or pay into the church account is mere money. But it is money that we earned through our daily work in the factory, in the office or the shop. The money we receive as remuneration is the reward for the daily routine of getting up and working. This money that we freely give the Lord is part of our gratitude to the Lord. Gratitude because He gives us a job, gratitude for having the strength and gifts to be able to do the work. Gratitude because we still have a job whereas there are so many who suddenly find themselves unemployed.

With our offerings in the collectionbags and the envelopes we acknowledge and confess that the Lord has absolute power over our lives, for, if He does not provide for us, we would have had nothing to live from. When we give our offering we do so with a prayer: "Lord, let us keep our job. Do not withdraw your hand of grace and bliss from us, for then we shall die." With our offering in the collectionbag and our monthly offering in the envelope we bring our daily work into the presence of the Lord. And when we give the money it is part of our worship of the Lord because He is Lord of all.

This brings us, beloved, to our work and our worship. With the bringing of our offerings we acknowledge that the Lord is our true Provider. But to some extent this is questioned by the fact that what we bring as an offering is the result of our own bodily exertions. The same applies to the grain offering. Although the Lord is the source of everything, human strength and labour was required to put the offering onto the altar. When one sees the offering in this light it is fair to say that one's offering is in fact a dedication of one's work to the Lord. By means of the offering we bring the gifts we employ in our daily work as a gift to the Lord and He accepts it.

According to Scripture work is not a necessary evil but actually an act of adoration. The curse that was brought onto mankind's labour and which troubles our work did not remove the purpose of our daily work or change it. The purpose of our daily work is still to serve the Lord with it. However boring your work might become to you and however difficult it might be, perform it with the knowledge that you do so for the Lord. That was the teaching that the Lord through Paul gave to the Christian slaves in Colosse when he said: **"And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance, for you serve the Lord Christ."** (Colossians 3:23-24) When we perform our daily work as if we worked for the Lord alone, we perform our instructions obediently and is our obedience an offering with a pleasing aroma to the Lord.

But now another dimension is added. If our offering is accepted by the Lord as the grain offering of the Israelites was accepted, and our offering, as the grain offering of the Israelites, is the result of our hard work, does this mean that our own work makes us acceptable to the Lord? And does this mean that the Lord accepts us because of our own hard work? Beloved, we must see this clearly, when the Lord teaches about the grain offering He does not speak of atonement for our sins. Hence nobody can come with the argument that he or she brought such a large offering and that because of this the Lord must accept him or her.

There are two reasons why our own hard work cannot ensure our salvation. The grain offering was rarely brought as the only offering to the Lord. Mostly the grain offering was an additional voluntary offering together with one of the offerings intended as a propitiation for sins. Our work, no matter how valuable, can never contribute anything to obtaining redemption from sin from the Lord. Only the perfect ministry by the Lord Jesus Christ can earn redemption of sin for us with the Lord.

The second reason we see in the actions at the altar. The believer may not himself put onto the altar that part of the grain offering that is to be burnt with the incense. The grain offering is brought

to the priest and he placed part of it onto the altar to be burned. The believer of old required an intermediary. Our offerings to the Lord can be put before Him only through the intercession of our only High Priest, Jesus Christ. Only Jesus' perfect offering reconciles us with God and makes us acceptable in the Lord's presence.

Lastly, but of no lesser importance, we must note what place our daily work may take in our daily lives. With the grain offering the Lord teaches us that our work is not an end in itself. All our energy and time may not be usurped by our daily work. The Lord wants us to bring our work to Him by means of our offering so that we do not serve ourselves with our work but serve the Lord with it. When we, through our monthly offering and our offering in the collection bag, consciously bring our daily work to the Lord we keep the correct perspective on our work. We may not allow ourselves to be so caught up in our work that we have no strength or time left for anything and anybody else.

Beloved, with the burnt offering the Lord teaches us to devote ourselves entirely to Him and to Him alone. With the grain offering the Lord teaches us to devote our daily work entirely to Him and to Him alone. With our daily work we are in the service of the Lord, because with the result of our hard work we come to serve the Lord by means of our offerings.

Amen

Closing prayer

Closing song: Psalm 128: 1+4.

The LORD bless you and keep you;

The LORD make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you;

The LORD turn his face towards you and give you peace.

Amen.

Rev Coen Vrey
Reformed Church Bellville
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