

## REFORMED CHURCH BELLVILLE : SUNDAY 29 JANUARY 2012 EVENING SERVICE

**Sing before:** Psalm 15:1, 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 107:1, 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 62:4, 7

**Scripture reading:** Luke 19:1-27; Heidelberg Catechism Sunday 42:110

**Scripture text:** Luke 19:8-9a

**8 Then Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, "Look, Lord, I give half of my goods to the poor; and if I have taken anything from anyone by false accusation, I restore fourfold."**

**9 And Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house,**

(Luke 19:8-9a)

**Heidelberg Catechism**

**Q. 110.**

**What does God forbid in the eighth commandment?**

A.

God forbids not only those thefts, (a)  
and robberies, (b)

which are punishable by the magistrate; but he comprehends under the name of theft all wicked tricks  
and devices, whereby we design to appropriate to ourselves the goods which belong to our neighbour:

(c)

whether it be by force, or under the appearance of right, as by unjust weights, ells, measures, fraudulent merchandise, (d)

false coins, usury, (e)

or by any other way forbidden by God; as also all covetousness, (f)

all abuse and waste of his gifts. (g)

(a)

1 Cor.6:10 Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God.

(b)

1 Cor.5:10 Yet not altogether with the fornicators of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or with idolaters; for then must ye needs go out of the world.

Isa.33:1 Woe to thee that spoilest, and thou wast not spoiled; and dealest treacherously, and they dealt not treacherously with thee! when thou shalt cease to spoil, thou shalt be spoiled; and when thou shalt make an end to deal treacherously, they shall deal treacherously with thee.

(c)

Luke 3:14 And the soldiers likewise demanded of him, saying, And what shall we do? And he said unto them, Do violence to no man, neither accuse any falsely; and be content with your wages.

1 Thess.4:6 That no man go beyond and defraud his brother in any matter: because that the Lord is the avenger of all such, as we also have forewarned you and testified.

(d)

Prov.11:1 A false balance is abomination to the LORD: but a just weight is his delight.

Prov.16:11 A just weight and balance are the LORD'S: all the weights of the bag are his work.

Ezek.45:9 Thus saith the Lord GOD; Let it suffice you, O princes of Israel: remove violence and spoil, and execute judgment and justice, take away your exactions from my people, saith the Lord GOD.

Ezek.45:10 Ye shall have just balances, and a just ephah, and a just bath.

Ezek.45:11 The ephah and the bath shall be of one measure, that the bath may contain the tenth part of an homer, and the ephah the tenth part of an homer: the measure thereof shall be after the homer.

Ezek.45:12 And the shekel shall be twenty gerahs: twenty shekels, five and twenty shekels, fifteen shekels, shall be your maneh.

Deut.25:13 Thou shalt not have in thy bag divers weights, a great and a small.

Deut.25:14 Thou shalt not have in thine house divers measures, a great and a small.

Deut.25:15 But thou shalt have a perfect and just weight, a perfect and just measure shalt thou have: that thy days may be lengthened in the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee.

Deut.25:16 For all that do such things, and all that do unrighteously, are an abomination unto the LORD thy God.

(e)

Ps.15:5 He that putteth not out his money to usury, nor taketh reward against the innocent. He that doeth these things shall never be moved. Luke 6:35 But love ye your enemies, and do good, and lend, hoping for nothing again; and your reward shall be great, and ye shall be the children of the Highest: for he is kind unto the unthankful and to the evil.

(f)

1 Cor.6:10 Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God.

(g)

Prov.23:20 Be not among winebibbers; among riotous eaters of flesh: Prov.23:21 For the drunkard and the glutton shall come to poverty: and drowsiness shall clothe a man with rags.

Prov.21:20 There is treasure to be desired and oil in the dwelling of the wise; but a foolish man spendeth it up.

**Theme:** Gratefully I live with my possessions as God's steward

Beloved congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, by means of His Word in the Eighth Commandment the Lord takes us squarely into our everyday lives. By this Commandment he talks to us about that which we daily occupy ourselves with, our possessions, our money and work. When we hear this we undoubtedly think about our banking accounts, overdrawn or healthy, and our income taxes. We come into contact with the larger economic world, its many problems of supply and demand, idleness, famine, obligation to produce and labor strikes.

And now we must not think that the Eighth Commandment has nothing to say about these matters. The Lord, because everything belongs to Him, has something to say about everything. Everything created by God belongs to Him. He is the absolute Owner thereof and exercises unlimited authority over it. But He pleased God in placing the earth and all its contents under the management of mankind. To some people, according to His decision of distribution, He gave more to manage than to others. And the command to mankind: Mankind must manage God's property, entrusted to him by the Lord. Whether it be very little or a lot, the responsibility stays the same for everyone.

In the parable we have read Jesus tells that one golden coin was given to each of the ten servants. These coins remained the property of the nobleman who entrusted them with it, but they had to be the managers, administrators thereof. A manager must manage the goods, the money in this case, in such a way that the owner can benefit by it. The manager must enrich the owner of the assets. Seeing that the coins remained the property of the owner, the servants, at the return of the owner, had to report on their actions.

In the same way, as Jesus taught by this parable, God appointed mankind as stewards to His possessions. Adam and Eve were instructed to care for and till the Garden of Eden.

But, as we now all know: Since the times of Adam and Eve in the Paradise, mankind succumbed to a sorry state of sin and misery. And when mankind robbed himself from the holy and perfect relationship with God his life totally putrefied. Mankind is no longer satisfied to be just a steward, now he wants to be a full-fledged owner. Mankind no longer regards his possessions as belonging to God, but as his personal property. And eventually the earthly goods became a god to many people.

In stead of staying in the high status where the people are the children of God and stewards to God's property and living from His hand, mankind, by his cleverness and rebelliousness robbed himself of everything. Mankind has fallen so far that they became children of Mammon. No matter whether his conduct now is good or bad, authorized or unauthorized, mankind will use it to enrich himself and bring his offers to the money hungry Mammon.

This, beloved, was the case with Zacchaeus. Due to his own sin he landed in a distorted relationship towards his earthly possessions. He was struck down at the feet of Mammon and therefore he stole

from people, even from his own people, and blackmailed under the guise of the law. The Roman government appointed him to gather taxes for the state coffers in Jericho.

But like many other tax collectors Zacchaeus also collected more money than was needed. Because he was a government official the people paid up. Should they decline giving, he blackmailed them in a sly way into giving what he asked. Whatever more he collected than prescribed, he kept for himself. He really filled his pockets as we see that he was a rich man.

We all will agree that this method Zacchaeus operated as tax collector was improper. He, at the cost of others, enriched himself and satisfied his lust for money by operating under the banner of the Roman government. How terrible to go to these measures just for the love of money.

But brothers, sisters and children, our God does not only forbid such terrible things in the Eighth Commandment. **God does not only forbid the theft and robbery, which is punishable by law.** Not only people who steal cattle, engage in transit robberies, burglary and theft and because of it, land in jail, have transgressed the Eighth Commandment. The Lord does not only judge us regarding our deeds. He also sees our thoughts and heart desires. Therefore, in the Eighth Commandment He also forbids the **knavish and trickery ways we employ in trying to lay our hands on the property of our neighbour.** Even the money and goods that some people, including some believers, illegally withhold from people knowing nothing about it is regarded by God as theft.

We can hide nothing from God. He thoroughly knows us. And to lead us on the way of true stewardship wherein our gratitude is clearly visible we will consider at the hand of Sunday 42 how God wants us to obtain our earthly goods and how we should use it.

The way in which we obtain our worldly goods is only right or wrong. There is no grey area between right and wrong. We confess the wrong ways of obtaining earthly goods in the first question and answer of Sunday 42 – these are the ways God Himself forbids. The first wrong way that comes to notice is theft.

Theft takes on various forms. It can happen in secret, openly or by force. We must confess and acknowledge that most people, believers as well, commit theft in secret. This takes place by the falsification of weights, length and content measurements, goods and money. Beloved, let us not now not to quickly say that we have never, either in secret or openly, stolen.

Let us bring this matter down to ground level, here were we work and live every day. Many people complain about the labour act approved by the government of the day. But brothers, sisters and children, we must not exclusively be worried about the laws used by the government. In the first place, we as believers, should we want to be worried, must be worried about the Laws laid down for us by our heavenly Father. Take note, we are not attempting to judge each other, we are listening to the Word of God. The Lord Himself judges our deeds. And facing God each one of us must honestly and truly be able to say whether we, knowing how high the cost of living is, are paying our workers at home or at the business their just salaries. Or are we paying a mere pittance because our coffers should rather become fuller than emptier.

But we do not only steal from people. In secret we are stealing in various ways from God and the different things belonging to Him. We, who are appointed as mere stewards, are robbing God from the matters and things He entrusted to us. We are robbing Him of His time should we have lots of time for many matters, but on Sundays not have the time to be present at His worshipping services. Or if we spent God's time that we had for our matters and then be too tired to serve Him by Bible Study or Home-worship. We rob God of His children should we not educate the children of the covenant entrusted to us in a way that they may learn to serve and honour Him in everything, including the worshipping service. Beloved this sounds hard and rash, but every one of us stand fully exposed to the face of God. He does not only see our deeds, but also every thought whereby we secretly deceive Him is well known to Him.

Apart from theft there are also other wrong ways like exorbitant profit, gambling and misleading advertisements used to acquire worldly matters. Exorbitant profit is too much profit and unauthorised profit made from goods bought and resold. Such profit is usually found where the need or inexperience of a person is exploited by claiming more for yourself than justified by the law or God.

By gambling the trust in God is pulled down and placed on luck. A gambler trusts in luck to turn him into a rich man and eventually luck becomes his god because he gets addicted to gambling. And meanwhile the winner of the gambling game leaves with your money – money he did not work for but in fact stole with your authorisation. Not even a mock gambling could be motivated to the face of the Lord. In any game of gambling it is not Christian love ruling, but the greedy disposition of the sinful person. To this we can also, without hesitation, add the Lotto. We may try and justify it as we like, it still remains a trust upon luck and theft.

Also with the advertising and selling of our goods we stand under the eyes of the all-seeing God. We may not extol our goods to be what they are not worth. As believers we must always be honest and just. The Lord justifies making a profit on your goods. No business or farming can exist without a profit, but then it may not be an exorbitant profit or profit due to false advertising.

Beloved, profit and interest can be a justifiable way of income, but then only if it is coupled to our labours. We must obtain our income by true and hard work in the career where God put us. Thereby we can look after our family and have some left over to give to those in need. But then the purpose of this work must be seen in a pure light. The purpose of hard and faithful work is not exclusively to earn a good income and progress in life - although it is also important – but the purpose is to, in the first place, be of service to God and our neighbour. Indeed we are working by the power God granted us as a gift, to also be stewards there over.

Beloved, this means to say that should we obtain our income in an honest way, like the Lord through His Word tells us to do, it is right and good. And if the Lord blesses us to, from our income thus derived, become rich, we admit it to be the grace of God He lavishly bestows upon us. Jesus did not judge the work of Zacchaeus as a tax collector, but the way in which Zacchaeus operated to become rich had him facing the Lord convicted, this was known to Zacchaeus himself as well.

But it is not only by the acquisition of earthly goods that we can either comply with or transgress the Eighth Commandment. Also how we use the goods entrusted to us as stewards, can be either right or wrong. We indeed confess that God prohibits **all avarice, misuse and squandering of His grants.**

A miser is somebody possessing and using earthly goods wrongly. He, because he just wants to quire more and more for himself, forgets that he is a steward. He does not want to manage the goods in his care, but wants to reject God as the Owner and be the owner himself. To such a person everything goes about money and the possession thereof. Mammon has become his god. And in reality he does not possess his goods but his goods possesses him.

The miser cannot depict the image of God. God is a giving God. He gives generously and plentiful, holding nothing back that we need. In stead of the miser also depicting this image of God by giving, he just accrues. The Proverb writer calls such a man a leech. He never gets enough. The bad part of such a man Paul tells Timothy is that **some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows**

(1 Timothy 6:10)

Brothers, sisters and children, we know that to the eyes of the Lord, it is wrong to be a miser. We, indeed, do know the Scriptures. But the church of the Lord must be wary not to become a miser. This can so easily happen when the church closes its eyes and ears to every cry of distress reaching the table of the church council. We might not always intend to be avaricious when saying that we rather receive than give. But when we continually say this, then later we live what we say and live avariciously. Keep in mind we will be held accountable to judgement of Christ. And may the day never arrive of the Lord Jesus Christ having to tell His church: "For I was hungry, and you did not give me anything to eat."

But now the Lord also does not want us to unconditionally keep dishing out until we are poor. The church in Jerusalem impoverished itself by its blind dispensing. We further confess that God also **prohibits all misuse and squandering of His grants.**

Somebody squandering and misusing the grants placed in his care by the Lord does also not want to be a steward. Jesus Himself is an example to us against misuse and squandering. After He fed the people with the bread and fishes He sent His disciples to gather the remains. The gifts granted by the Father may not be wasted. Therefore with the Christian there must be sharing instead of avariciousness and thrift instead of squandering.

The law of love was given to us as guideline in using our assets in the right way. Firstly we must love God. Also I have to serve and glorify the Lord by the way in which I use my money and other earthly goods. Serve Him with the full offering due to Him and not by with what we think we could put aside for Him. Let us not deceive and rob the Lord by means of our offers.

Secondly we must love our neighbour. Love starts in our own homes. Use your earthly possessions to care for yourself and your family. Use it to help those in distress so that they also may experience the love showered into us by the Lord and glorify and serve Him because if it. Use our earthy possessions to give to the authority so that the authority can fulfil its calling. In short: pay the taxes owed by you to the authority so that the church may have a peaceful surrounding in which she, as the bride of Christ, can do her work.

Beloved, God is a giving God. He gave His Son to us, His only Son, in aid of redeeming us from our distress and misery. He fully gave us His Spirit so that we may really live as redeemed people. And the meaning of Christ's redemption on the cross is that we again stand in the proper relationship towards

our worldly goods. Through the grace of the Spirit in his heart Zacchaeus realised that he was just a steward. Therefore he immediately proved by his deeds what Christ meant for him, proved by his deeds by returning what he stole and exhorted. Then salvation came to him and his household.

We, because we believe in God, confess that we are saved and children of Abraham. May the Spirit in future lead us to prove by our deeds and words out of gratitude that we are stewards of everything God entrusted to us.

**Amen!**

Closing prayer.

Closing song: Scripture Versification 9-1:9, 10, 11 [Exodus 20:1-17]

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**

**Rev. Coen Vrey**

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**29 January 2012**

**Scripture Modern King James Version**