

REFORMED CHURCH BELLVILLE: SUNDAY 9 AUGUST 2009: EVENING SERVICE

Sing before: Psalm 2:5

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 118:1+9

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 32:1

Scripture reading: Matthew 16:13-23

Scripture text: Matthew 16:16-17 and Heidelberg Catechism Lord's day 31

Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." Jesus replied, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven."

The Lord Jesus wants everyone who reads of the events of this day to know exactly who said what and to whom He gave what instructions.

- In response to the question put by the Lord Jesus, the apostle Peter makes the confession that Jesus is the Anointed who is sent by God.
- The Saviour who was sent into the world by the living God to the forgiveness of our sin.
- The Lord Jesus replies hereto that this was not revealed to him by man but by His Father who is in heaven.

Thereupon the Lord Jesus makes a very important announcement which would be valid for the future church during the centuries to come.

- The Lord Jesus gives him the keys of the kingdom of heaven.
- Jesus Christ gives the church here an important principle, namely, that the confession and the keys to the kingdom of heaven always go together.

Practically this means:

- Firstly, that the church has as members only people who confess Christ to be God and Saviour - and that only they who confess the Lord Jesus to be their God and Saviour may apply discipline in church.
- Further, the purpose of these keys is to unlock and to lock. NB. It is not whether they want to or not – they must!
- They must, with the keys that the Lord Jesus Christ gives them, lock out all who do not share in this confession that the Lord Christ is the Son of the living God.
- **This symbolises that they are then also locked out from the kingdom of heaven.**

It is furthermore important to note that Jesus Christ gives these keys to the church – to people. Not to angels.

- He puts the responsibility for the use of these keys to the sanctity of God in our hands.
- Hence the heavy responsibility which rests on every church council to ensure that the preaching of the Word and the application of church discipline is done in every church according the command of Christ.
- Otherwise they will fall under the wrath of God.

In 1 Corinthians 4:1 and following it is explained that the servants who have these keys must be servants entrusted with the secret things of God.

- They also must be people who are found to be true in their ministry and their lifestyle.
- Here the Bible demands a high standard of those who are to serve as elders and as deacons.

The two keys with which the church council is entrusted are:

- Preaching of the Word, and
- Discipline.

By these two keys Jesus Christ is served as God and King and is His might and love exercised in the church.

These keys of the kingdom of heaven are necessary to teach the believers and the unbelievers what they have in the Lord.

- The keys must be balanced
- They must teach judgment and love
- They may not teach only the one or the other.

The first purpose of the keys therefore is to teach what God is for us now and also what He shall be for us in future.

It is necessary that we shall know these things. Because the relationship between us and the Lord, and between us and heaven, is the same.

- If our relationship with the Lord is good we shall also be people who will one day be in heaven.
- But if our relationship with God is poor we shall never be in heaven. Nobody can enter heaven without God.

The keys of the kingdom of God must first of all teach us that, because of sin, heaven is closed to all people.

- No human being has the power to enter this sanctuary of God.
- The right to enter the kingdom of heaven must be obtained from God Himself.

It is here that the first key functions. The preaching of the Word of God.

- It opens the doors for the believers! In the preaching God promises the blessing that in Christ He will forgive the sins of all those who are repentant of their sins.
- Furthermore the Lord grants through the preaching these people the desire and the zeal and the courage to persevere in their faith.
- In that way they receive the right to enter heaven.

With the Words that the Lord speaks to His elect through the preaching, He, as it were, leads them into His sanctuary.

- By the continuous preaching of God's grace He draws us to Him.
- When we learn of all the good things of God it is the Spirit of God that ministers these things in our heart.

By the preaching the promises in the Gospel of salvation in the Lord Jesus are opened for us.

- We would never have known that by grace we are justified by the Lord Jesus Christ if the Lord had not preached it to us.
- We would also not have known that the ministry of Christ for us was so perfect that God does not impute us any sin.
- We would also never have known what it is to believe and what demands are made of and what responsibilities are laid on to our faith in order to may share in the redemption of Jesus Christ.
- But now we know, because the first key of the kingdom of heaven is presented to us – namely the preaching of the Word.

By this key of the kingdom of heaven the doors are in fact opened wide for us every day.

- We cannot be present at the preaching of the Word often enough because there we are assured more and more of the truth of God's promises.
- Very often we doubt and then it is the preaching of the Word that assures us of God and of heaven.
- Often we are tried and then it is this Word of God that opens for us the way to the grace of understanding and acceptance.
- Very often we feel ourselves to be so insignificant and weak and so deeply mired in our sins and then it is this Word of God that gives us the frankness to return to God.

This first key therefore teaches the faithful the following: it assures the believer of the forgiving of his sins.

- It teaches him that through Jesus Christ he has become a child of God.
- As a consequence of this fact the believer is an heir to the kingdom of heaven.

The key of the preaching of the Word teaches the believer that all his life he is in the Hand of God and that in this way God provides for him in all possible circumstances.

- There the believer is also taught that he may always expect from God only the very best.
- And at each sermon he is assured that his salvation is fixed eternally.
- He will not reach a stage where he concludes that his faith was in vain.

But the key of the preaching of the Word also has much to say to the unbelievers.

- They must hear that the gates of heaven are closed to them.
- They must hear that they have no part in the kingdom of God! Because they refuse to accept the promises of God and do not believe they are excluded from any joy that God may grant.
- They must hear that God considers their unbelief to be a despising of His mercy in Jesus Christ.

The preaching of the Word teaches that people who exalt themselves and who desire only the earthly kingdom shall never receive the kingdom of heaven as their inheritance.

- Such people worship themselves and do not have God as their king!
- Preaching of the Word teaches such people that a terrible judgment awaits them.
- That by their sins they are bound to God's curse.

Then there is the second key. That is the expulsion out of the church.

- The preaching of the Word separates the listeners.
- Firstly those who listen and believe. And then those who listen but refuse to believe.

That is where the binding and loosening on earth, of which Jesus speaks, fits in.

- Those who prove themselves to be unholy must, with the second key of the kingdom of heaven, be expelled from the church – and consequently be excluded from heaven.

There sometimes are members of the church who, despite the teachings of the church, conduct themselves in a way unworthy of the Lord.

- They are those who are guilty of an unchristian teaching and way of life.
- They are firstly admonished.

Because that is the way in which the second key starts to function.

- If they refuse to heed the admonitions they are excluded from the sacraments.
- If they remain unrepentant and persist in their sins they must bear the consequences of their evil ways.
- Then the kingdom of heaven is closed to them.

But even in the expulsion there is a symbol of grace.

- A person is not excluded from the church and the kingdom of God out of hate.
- It is done for his preservation. That is grace.

Such a person must feel what it is like to be excluded from the community of saints. That can lead to his repentance and in that way to his preservation. We read of such a case in 1 Timothy 1:20:-

Among them are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have handed over to Satan to be taught not to blaspheme.

These two men had to learn the hard way how to do the good things. Or the passage in 2 Thessalonians 3:14:

If anyone does not obey our instructions in this letter, take special note of him. Do not associate with him, in order that he may feel ashamed. Yet do not regard him as an enemy, but warn him as a brother.

That is why somebody who was subject to the church discipline is readmitted to the sacraments when he shows remorse and an improvement in his life.

- But it must be a true remorse – not only a superficial expression of sorrow.
- It must also be plainly visible in his way of life.

Jesus therefore gave the keys of the kingdom of heaven to the church to purify us all of sin.

- To teach us then the mercy of God.
- To pass the judgement of God over us should we refuse to repent.

The principle of the keys is, in the first place, love.

- Only then, if we refuse to know the love of God, is the wrath of God brought down on us.

The meaning of these matters in our life is that they give us certainty and hope.

- I have the peace of God's mercy.
- I have the certainty that God will avenge all unrighteousness.

The keys of the kingdom of heaven teach me respect for and awe of God. But they also teach me to pray together with the church and, together with the church, to keep ungodliness out of the communion of saints.

Let us then thank the Lord for these keys of the kingdom of heaven which, for us that believe, open the gates of heaven in Jesus Christ.

Let us read together what we confess about these matters in the Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's day 31

Q. 83.

What are the keys of the kingdom of heaven?

A.

The preaching of the holy gospel, and christian discipline, or excommunication out of the christian church; by these two, the kingdom of heaven is opened to believers, and shut against unbelievers.

Q. 84.

How is the kingdom of heaven opened and shut by the preaching of the holy gospel?

A.

Thus: when according to the command of Christ, it is declared and publicly testified to all and every believer, that, whenever they receive the promise of the gospel by a true faith, all their sins are really forgiven them of God, for the sake of Christ's merits; and on the contrary, when it is declared and testified to all unbelievers, and such as do not sincerely repent, that they stand exposed to the wrath of God, and eternal condemnation, so long as they are unconverted: (a) according to which testimony of the gospel, God will judge them, both in this, and in the life to come.

(a)

Matt. 16:18: And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

Matt. 16:19: And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.

Matt. 18:15: Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother.

Matt. 18:16: But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.

Matt. 18:17: And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican.

Matt. 18:18: Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.

Matt. 18:19: Again I say unto you, That if two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven.

John 20:21: Then said Jesus to them again, Peace be unto you: as my Father hath sent me, even so send I you.

John 20:22: And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost:

John 20:23: Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained.

Q. 85.

How is the kingdom of heaven shut and opened by christian discipline?

A.

Thus: when according to the command of Christ, those, who under the name of christians, maintain doctrines, or practices inconsistent therewith, and will not, after having been often brotherly admonished, renounce their errors and wicked course of life, are complained of to the church, or to those, who are thereunto appointed by the church; and if they despise their admonition, are by them forbidden the use of the sacraments; whereby they are excluded from the christian church, and by God himself from the kingdom of Christ; and when they promise and show real amendment, are again received as members of Christ and his church. (a)

(a)

Matt.18:15: Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother.

Matt.18:16: But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.

Matt.18:17: And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican.

Matt.18:18: Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.

1 Cor.5:2: And ye are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he that hath done this deed might be taken away from among you.

1 Cor.5:3: For I verily, as absent in body, but present in spirit, have judged already, as though I were present, concerning him that hath so done this deed,

1 Cor.5:4: In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when ye are gathered together, and my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ,

1 Cor.5:5: To deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.

1 Cor.5:11: But now I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such an one no not to eat.

2 Thess.3:14: And if any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed.

2 Thess.3:15: Yet count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother.

2 Cor.2:6: Sufficient to such a man is this punishment, which was inflicted of many.

2 Cor.2:7: So that contrariwise ye ought rather to forgive him, and comfort him, lest perhaps such a one should be swallowed up with overmuch sorrow.

2 Cor.2:8: Wherefore I beseech you that ye would confirm your love toward him.

Amen.

Closing prayer.

Closing Psalm: 47:1.

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

Amen