

REFORMED CHURCH BELLVILLE: SUNDAY 20 DECEMBER 2009: EVENING SERVICE

Send forth your light and your truth, let them guide me; let them bring me to your holy mountain, to the place where you dwell. (Psalm 43:3)

Sing before:

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 34:6

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 36:2

Scripture reading: Matthew 6.

Scripture text: Matthew 6: 1-18; and Heidelberg Catechism Lord's day 46.

What the Lord Jesus Christ objects to here is the hypocrisy of the Pharisees. They are false.

The Lord Jesus therefore says:

- Do not bestow charity as the hypocrites do
- Do not pray as the hypocrites pray.
- Do not fast as the hypocrites fast.

In this sermon we shall examine the ways of the Pharisees.

In this passage the Lord makes an unusual combination of two matters, namely, prayer and hypocrisy.

- He uses prayer and hypocrisy together in one sentence, intending thereby that one person does both.

Have you ever considered this to be possible?

- That it is possible to present in your prayer to God an image that is false?
- Although this may appear impossible, the Lord says that there are people who are dishonest to God even in their prayer, while at that very moment the Lord reads in their heart what they are thinking and doing.

What is it that the Pharisees did wrong that so upset the Lord that He wants to hold them up to us as an example?

- Their wrong arose from their daily life.
- They became unfeeling towards their fellow man.
- In fact, they did not hold all people to be their fellow men, but they were afraid to admit this openly.
- The result was that they lived a life of hypocrisy.

This hypocrisy also showed in their religion.

- It could also not be otherwise, for your life and your religion cannot be separated.
- The two are an inseparable unit.

The nub of the matter is this: if your religion is wrong, your life is also false, and will not be pleasing to the Lord.

- The life of the Pharisees is proof thereof. When their life became heartless their religion became a heartless contract in which they only needed to pretend to God that they were doing right.
- Where does such an enormous mistake of faith originate? It starts when you misunderstand the grace of God and appreciate it wrongly.
 - These Pharisees could not believe that out of grace God raised a covenant with His people and that He expected only obedience and gratitude from them.
 - And they also did not understand that this grace must shine from you as a light.

They believed that in matters of religion it was every man for himself.

- If you succeed in doing right God will reward you with the life everlasting.
- Their attitude towards faith was therefore that they expected to be rewarded for everything they did - also in their prayers.

This passage teaches us that from the sincerity in your prayer you can know whether you serve the Lord truly or not – because your prayer is a mirror of your intimate communion with God.

The Pharisees no longer understood and experienced prayer to be an intimate communion with God.

- It was no longer a relationship between a creature standing before its Creator sincerely pleading for mercy for its sins – and also sincerely confessing its sins.
- This is what we learn about them in the New Testament, the Pharisees appear to have lacked the knowledge that the Lord knows what is in man's mind.

To the Christian of the New Testament prayer means even more: In our prayer we stand before God in the relationship of a child and its father.

- Not naturally – but by the grace that covers us because of the Lord Jesus Christ's ministry of propitiation.
- An extremely tender and sincere relationship that should stand out in our prayers.

To the Pharisees prayer was a task that had to be completed and done with.

- It was an opportunity to earn something.
- It was therefore their view that the harder they worked the more was the reward they were entitled to.
- This resulted in calculated, lengthy prayers – the longer the prayer, the greater the reward.

But such prayers were not received by the Lord with the same enthusiasm, because He calls such prayers “babbling” (Matt 6:7)

- The Lord clearly shows His displeasure of prayers which consist of a repetition of the same issues.
- Such prayers bear the mark of hypocrisy, because true sincerity is lacking.

Another mistake made by the Pharisees was that they believed that a prayer should impress the public.

- We also often make this mistake. We shy away from praying because we think that people may say that we do not pray well enough or eloquently or long enough.
- That is not what it is about!

Should there be an element of bragging in your prayer that prayer will not be acceptable to the Lord because the disposition behind the prayer is wrong.

- The Lord does not consider the end product – He rather looks at the place where the prayer is formed, that is our heart and our disposition.
- He looks at our faith and our vibrant relationship with Him.

The Lord Jesus also speaks of the heathens.

- His intention is to show why the kind / style of the prayers as prayed by the Pharisees is unacceptable to Him.
- The pagans believed that they had to bribe their idols with long prayers full of repetition and idle words.

There was a clear similarity between the prayers of the pagans and those of the Pharisees.

- Long prayers full of idle repetition are therefore by nature heathen.

The Lord Jesus does not deliver this sermon because He wants to say that this is the way in which we pray.

- He preaches this sermon to teach us that we should not pray like that.
- He wants us to act correctly and therefore He shows us what is wrong so that we may avoid it.

That is why the Lord Jesus told of the two men who went to pray. The one was filled with hypocrisy and eloquence.:

Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself: “God, I thank you that I am not like other men – robbers, evildoers, adulterers – or even like this tax collector. ...” (Luke 18:10-11)

The other one was sinful and had no words – but was completely honest!

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)

That is precisely what the Lord Jesus was for on the cross – also that we might live honestly and pray.

The trust in the forgiveness of our sins rests on the honesty engendered in us by the ministry of the Spirit of the Lord Jesus Christ!

Let us summarize the “do nots”:

- do not boast in prayer
- do not pray selfishly
- do not be repetitive in prayer
- We do sometimes repeat matters out of grief, but not to impress the Lord thereby.
- Public prayer must not be aimed at impressing people. A sincere prayer is directed at the glory of God.

Let us read the Heidelberg Catechism, Lord’s day 46, together.

46. Lord's Day

Q. 120.

Why has Christ commanded us to address God thus: "Our Father"?

A.

That immediately, in the very beginning of our prayer, he might excite in us a childlike reverence for, and confidence in God, which are the foundation of our prayer: namely, that God is become our Father in Christ, and will much less deny us what we ask of him in true faith, than our parents will refuse us earthly things. (a)

(a)

Matt.7:9 Or what man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone?

Matt.7:10 Or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent?

Matt.7:11 If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?

Luke 11:11 If a son shall ask bread of any of you that is a father, will he give him a stone? or if he ask a fish, will he for a fish give him a serpent?

Luke 11:12 Or if he shall ask an egg, will he offer him a scorpion?

Luke 11:13 If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?

Q. 121.

Why is it here added, "Which art in heaven"?

A.

Lest we should form any earthly conceptions of God's heavenly majesty, (a) and that we may expect from his almighty power all things necessary for soul and body. (b)

(a)

Jer.23:23 Am I a God at hand, saith the LORD, and not a God afar off?

Jer.23:24 Can any hide himself in secret places that I shall not see him? saith the LORD. Do not I fill heaven and earth? saith the LORD.

Acts 17:24 God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands;

Acts 17:25 Neither is worshipped with men's hands, as though he needed any thing, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things;

Acts 17:27 That they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him, though he be not far from every one of us:

(b)

Rom.10:12 For there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him.

Amen.

Closing prayer.

Closing Psalm: 144:1.

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

Amen

Dr MJ Du Plessis

Reformed Church Bellville

20 December 2009

Scripture: New International Version