

REFORMED CHURCH BELLVILLE : SUNDAY 7 August 2011 EVENING SERVICE

Sing before : Psalm 62:4, 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 111:1, 2

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 19:1, 4

Scripture reading: Romans 9:30-10:21; Lord's Day 25:65

Scripture text: Romans 10:17

So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ. (Romans 10:17 ESV)

Heidelberg Catechism:

Lord's Day 25

65. Q. Since, then, we are made partakers of Christ and all his benefits by faith only, whence comes this faith?

A. From the Holy Spirit, who works it in our hearts by the preaching of the holy gospel, and confirms it by the use of the holy sacraments

Theme: God's manner of bestowing the sanctifying belief on us

Beloved congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, twice in our Catechism we confess the necessity of belief. First we do so in Lord's Day 7, just before we start to clarify exactly what we mean with each of

the articles of our Apostolic Confession of faith. This is what we confess: All the people around the world will not become sanctified through Christ, as they fell into sin through Adam. Christ only saves those people who are joined to Him through true faith and who accepts His favour. Those who do not believe in Christ will not be able to appear before the Father and will not receive the life eternal.

When we reach Lord's Day 23, which is at the end of our Apostolic Confession of Faith, we once again come back to the necessity of faith. We are justified before God only through a true faith in Jesus Christ. Therefore, it is clear that we must believe in Christ in order to be saved. There is no other way to salvation. It is then possible for us to give only one answer, in unison with Paul and Silas, to any who may ask, "What must I do to be saved?" : Believe in Jesus Christ and you will be saved.

Considering that faith is so important, since we can only through true faith be joined to Christ and receive His favour, it is important for us to know where a true faith comes from. In Lord's Day 7 we received a hint of where such a belief comes from, but it is in Lord's Day 25 that the question is put to us directly. In order to answer this question the Holy Spirit leads us back to Romans 10.

Brothers, sisters and children, in Romans 9 - 11, the problem of the disbelief of the Jews is addressed. The disbelief of the Jews was something about which Paul was extremely concerned, because they were his people. In chapter 9 he starts by stating how sad he is about his Jewish brothers because they do not believe in Jesus Christ. In chapter 10 he writes that it is his greatest wish and prayer that God would save them. In chapter 11 he continues writing of his conviction that God has not spurned the Jews.

When the content of Romans 9 is taken into account, one notes that the focus is on the predestination that God has done. And, should Paul stop writing about the disbelief of the Jews at this point, the disbelieving Jews could easily say that it isn't their fault that they are not saved. God had not elected them. With such a comment they would easily justify why they do not heed their responsibility to embrace the gospel of Jesus Christ with faith. God, however, knows the sinful arguments of man very well. It is because of this that the Holy Spirit guided Paul to write about the responsibility of man in Romans 10.

When one has the wrong comprehension of his responsibility, you will look for your salvation wrongly. That is exactly what the Jews did. They searched for a law that could provide Gods acquittal. The Jews thought that if they obeyed the law 100% and did precisely what is expected through the law by God, then God will have to acquit them from the punishment for their sins.

Thus the Jews were wilful. They wanted to be set free from their sins, by God, through their own accomplishments. This cannot happen. No person is capable of obeying the Lord's Law 100%. The matter of fact is that we have fallen so deep into sin that we are incapable of doing good and are inclined to all that is evil. After all, our best works are tainted by sin and unacceptable for God.

This wilfulness is not restricted to the Jews only. Even today there are people who want to acquire salvation from God in their own way. They know that God alone forgives sin and they are correct. However, they lack the proper insight and therefore think that they will automatically be saved if they do the proper things; as long as you read your Bible and go to church and lead a good life, you will be saved. Faith in Jesus Christ does not feature with these people and that is exactly why Christ becomes

a stumbling block to them. Christ remains a rock against which these people continuously stumble.

If they should build on the faith in Jesus Christ, He would become a corner-stone for them. Someone they could hold on to and someone in whom they could trust to truly be saved and receive the life eternal. In contrast to the Jews, who trusted in their accomplishments, there were the pagans, who had received acquittal from God. They received this, not because they searched for it, but because they built on the faith in Jesus Christ. How did it happen that they built on the faith in Jesus Christ? Brother, sister and child, you who know that Jesus really is the only and perfect Saviour, and who trust with your whole heart that He has also saved you from all your sin, how did it happen that you believe?

The Holy Spirit provides the answer in our scripture text. Faith comes through the sermons that a person hears, and the sermons that we hear are the proclamation of Christ. This is then exactly what we confess in Lord's Day 25. The Holy Spirit creates faith in our hearts through the proclamation of the holy gospel.

What we read in verse 17 is a short summary of the five different steps, which the Lord uses to give the sanctifying faith to people. The Holy Spirit lays the Gospel of Jesus Christ as a foundation in the hearts of those who has been chosen by the Lord to act as preachers. And through the Holy Spirit these people are led to go wherever the Lord sends them. Paul was sent out by the Lord to proclaim the Gospel to the pagans. Today God still sends out preachers across the world to proclaim the Gospel of salvation through Jesus Christ, to people. The Lord has also sent servants of the Word to you and me, in order for us to hear about Jesus Christ our saviour.

The Lord does not only work faith in our hearts with the proclamation of the Gospel during the service on a Sunday. Also, through the proclamation by the elders in their house-visits, and in Catechism opportunities, the Holy Spirit is busy working in people's hearts. That is why house-visits and Catechism opportunities are important and not something, which we can just postpone if we don't feel up to it. Children, through this proclamation, the Holy Spirit makes sure that Mom and Dad are given the tools in order to constantly teach you about the Lord Jesus. Therefore, Mom and Dad, it is necessary for you to tell and teach your children about Jesus Christ, if, it is your heartfelt wish that your children will stand, with you, before the regal throne of our God.

In the ground text it says that the word of Christ must be heard. With this, the Holy Spirit means that the word that has its origin with Christ, as well as the word which has Christ as content, must be heard. His coming to the world, His perfect obedience to His Father, His obedience even up to His death, His resurrection because He paid the debt for our sins in full and His reign from the right hand of God; this is the word of Christ that must be proclaimed. It is through this proclamation that the Holy Spirit works faith in our hearts. In this proclamation we hear that Jesus Christ was sent by His Father as ransom for our sins. With this proclamation the Holy Spirit works a firm belief in our hearts that Jesus Christ also saved me and you.

When the Holy Spirit has worked this unmovable knowledge and firm faith in ones heart, one believes and once you belief, you call upon the Lord. Loved ones, it is through this calling upon the Name of the Lord that we accept the favours of Christ as our own. Then we embrace Jesus in faith. We hold on to Him with the arms of faith and beg that God would, for the sake of Christ, forgive our sins and grant us

the everlasting life, as Christ has already paid for our sins.

Loved ones, that is what is meant by building on the belief in Jesus Christ. Through the work of the Holy Spirit you know that you are lost without Christ. Therefore you hold on to Christ, with the faith that the Holy Spirit has bestowed on you through the word of Christ.

Every person who lays himself barren before God, receives wonderful promises from the Lord. Listen to what these promises entails: No one that believes in Christ shall be left wanting. No one! Faith in Jesus Christ is not shot in the dark that one hopes will hit the target. It will work, the Holy Spirit has given you faith through God's word which is trustworthy. You will not be disappointed on the day of Christ's return.

The following is promised as well: It does not matter where you come from. Jews will be no better off than Greeks. Your sex and age does not matter. Men will not receive more than women. Adults will not be treated better than children and young people will not receive a bigger gift than the elderly. The same Lord, is everybody's Lord and He blessed everyone who calls on Him abundantly. What does this blessing entail with which He will bless the faithful? They shall be saved. Each person who calls on the Name of the Lord in true faith, will be saved and will receive the life everlasting.

Brothers, sisters and children, faith is essential in order to be saved, and to receive the life eternal, and therefore God doesn't leave it up to us to attain it. He knows that we would not be able to receive faith on our own. That is why He decided to let the Holy Spirit give the sanctifying faith to us by means of the proclamation of the Holy Gospel. May we strive to attend each and every opportunity where the Word of God is preached, for we know that the Lord is busy with us during these opportunities, He works with you and me personally, in order to strengthen our faith in our Lord Jesus Christ even more.

We need not look far for salvation. Through the work of the Holy Spirit the word of Christ is close to us, in our mouths and in our hearts. With our hearts we believe that our God has resurrected His Son, as He paid the debt for our sins in full. With our mouths we confess that Jesus is the Lord. By confessing, we accept the favour of Christ as our own, by means of our faith. We supplicate ourselves in front of Him, as He is our Lord, our Owner and King.

Loved ones, the proper insight regarding salvation is then as follows: we do not depend on our own achievements, but through the power of the Holy Spirit, we lay ourselves barren and He fills us with Christ and all His favour, through the faith that He works in our hearts with His Word.

The Lord, literally extends His hands to us, in order for us to be saved, and yet there are people who do not believe. Paul saw this amongst the Jews. Not all the Jews heeded the Gospel that was preached. He gives two possible explanations for their rejection of the Gospel. Firstly, that they, perchance, had not heard, which is untrue. The Jews were the first nation with whom the Lord had taken extreme care, with whom He spoke personally from the beginning.

Paul quotes Psalm 19 to prove this, and the quoted text refers to the voice of creation that proclaims the magnitude of God across the earth. The Lord uses His whole creation to make known His general revelation to everybody. If God's magnitude and glory is revealed from east to south through His general revelation, imagine how great His desire is then to proclaim His particular revelation in Christ

across the whole earth! Indeed He does exactly this. Wherever there were Jews in the known world, at the time in question, the Lord had the Gospel of Jesus Christ preached by Paul or through people who had come to believe through the preaching of Paul.

The Jews can not say that they have not heard the Gospel. I would even wager to say that there is no one in our country who can say that they have not heard of Jesus Christ. Jesus is proclaimed everywhere, in magazines, on the radio and television, on the internet. No one can say that he has not heard.

The second explanation for the Jew's disbelief, could be that they did not understand. Is the Gospel of salvation through Jesus Christ then difficult to understand? No! The Jews grew up in a situation where Lord spoke to them continuously. They knew His voice. People who did not grow up close to God, who were not used to His voice, understood the Gospel and came to believe in Him. Therefore both the explanations that could be offered for the disbelief of the Jews are null and void.

The only sensible explanation for the disbelief of the Jews is their own wilfulness, even the Lord calls them wilful. They are rebellious people. That is why no one, in our time, can say that they do not understand. The Lord enables the proclamation of His message in the most uncomplicated way, but if someone does not want to hear, he will not understand.

We thank the Lord that He made us willing to listen and to understand. We thank Him for the preachers whom He has sent to us to preach the Gospel of salvation through Christ. We thank the Holy Spirit for the faith that He has worked in our hearts through this proclamation
Amen!

Closing prayer.

Closing Psalm: 84:3, 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

Rev CCA Vrey
Reformed Church Bellville
7 August 2011
Scripture ESV