

REFORMED CHURCH BELLVILLE: SUNDAY 8 FEBRUARY 2009: MORNING SERVICE

Sing before: Psalm 3:2

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 116:1, 4, 7

Confession of faith: Nicene

We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible.

And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all ages; God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God; begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father, by whom all things were made. Who, for our salvation, came down from heaven, and was Incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the virgin Mary, and was made man; and was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate; He suffered and was buried; and the third day He rose again, according to the Scriptures; and ascended into heaven and sits on the right hand of the Father; and He shall come again, with glory, to judge the living and the dead; whose kingdom shall have no end.

And we believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and Giver of life; who proceeds from the Father and the Son; who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified, who spoke by the prophets.

And we believe one holy catholic* and apostolic Church. We acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sins; and we look for the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come.

Amen.

After the reading of the Law we confess our guilt and pray for forgiveness and a new life before God with Psalm 34:8

Law

Psalm: 34:8

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 9:9, 10

Scripture reading: Titus 2:11- 3:15

Scripture text: Titus 3:4, 5

But when the kindness and the love of God our Saviour toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, (Titus 3:4-5)

We are living in extremely merciless times.

- Every newscast tells about attacks somewhere and of people who died.
- We hear about rulers abusing their powers and about people being murdered everywhere.
- We, ourselves, are living behind bars, not knowing when we may be next in line to be hi-jacked or robbed.

Such times and matters compel to want to hear about the mercy the Lord has towards us.

In explaining the mercy of God Paul uses the image of sunrise.

- This image describes the Second Coming of the Lord Jesus Christ.
- Embodied in this image are all the advantages we gain from it.
 - o With the arrival of Jesus Christ the mercy of God rose over us like the rising sun (See Luke 1: 78)
 - o It freed us from sin and finally from the flames of hell.
 - o This mercy touches all the chosen: the elderly, young people, men and women.
 - o Through His eternal and holy predestination the Lord takes us into His mercy.

What effect has the mercy of God, which arose like the sun, on us?

- It educates us towards blessedness.
- The first part of the education is that we, in ourselves and in our personal association of faith with each other, must change.

Differently put:

- It continually urges us to be holy.
- We must live as people on whom the rays of Jesus' "sunshine" are falling – people no longer impaired by the darkness of hell.

This is of course not an easy road, because to live holy means that you have to deny yourself many things.

- In effect it boils down to self-chastising, because every time it clashes with the will of the Lord, you must move your own interests and joys to the background.
- In the English Standard Version Bible this is translated as "self-controlled". (Titus 2:12 ESV)

Together with this the mercy of God demands that we live justly together with other people.

- This is not easy at all – in ourselves we are unreasonable, and so are other people.
- Because of this we sometimes, for the sake of peace, shut up or in order not to start a fight, lie about something.
- This goes without even mentioning matters such as physical fraud and all the spiritual damage we cause others when we go about denigrating them.

The third effect the mercy of God has on us is that we must live piously.

- It is demanding growth in our becoming holy.
- We have to continually work in our faith.
- It must always emanate from us, bearing testimony of our faith.
- This testimony must emerge in our church as well as in our social lives.

This is why, in this passage, the Bible teaches that we must forsake the worldly desires.

- This means that we must eradicate it completely so that nothing remains in our system.
- This demand on us is becoming even greater as the apostle emphasises the fact that the Lord Jesus is coming again.
- When He returns, the complete congregation, in their full glory, will be facing Him.

In order to underline the power of Jesus and for the church to realise with whom they are dealing, a Name of God, only appearing in the Bible, is used: our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ

- This describes Jesus Christ in His unsurpassable power and majesty.
- He is our God and He is the God and Saviour of the congregation.

We also are not people just found at the roadside.

- We are the property of the Lord, purified by Him.
- We are enabled and renewed in order to be obedient and to live holy.

But a second event has to take place. This change also has to be exterior, towards other people, not necessarily believers.

- In this part we are led by the Lord in realising that this calling is not only directed internally in that we, ourselves and in our church, have to live holy.
- It also specifically addresses the way in which believers should conduct themselves towards people outside of the faith.
 - o The congregation has a general task of living a life of bearing testimony over the full spectrum.
 - o From this testimony it must be clear that, to them, their obedience to the Lord is the highest priority.

There are various ways in which this must take place.

- Here the Bible teaches that one such facet of our faith-life is that the Christian, towards the government of the day, has to display submission.
- Therefore a practical implementation of the fifth commandment is given here.
 - o Obedience to the commandments of God is a fundamental demand of His Word.
 - o The Lord establishes his demands and authority in various ways – one of them is the government ruling over nations and countries.

The principle is thus that the governments not only are present in name, they are also legally empowered by the Lord with jurisdiction. Therefore the Christians must be submissive to them. (Romans 13:1 onwards)

Obedience to the government definitely does not mean limitless obedience in such a way that the glory of the Lord is harmed thereby.

- As an example the government of the day cannot dictate who we must worship or what form this worship has to take.
- Therefore the Holy Spirit built a clear specification into the words written here:... the authorities that exist are ordained by God.
- Our responsibility is in the first instance thus directed at the glorification of God's thrice-holy Name.

Of course it often happens that the believers have to steadfastly stand to their principles. This causes the impression to un-believers that believers are pugnacious. We all are aware that this sometimes gives rise to gossiping – or as the Bible calls it: slandering. (Psalm 15:3)

Slandering is very provocative.

- It tends to bring forth the worst, should somebody slander you, immediately you go into a fighting mood: you want to sue or you threaten with counter-actions.
- Therefore, here the Lord warns us not to partake in slander.

We also must not be pugnacious or quarrelsome.

- Because all those things can cause a believer to stumble and fall – then there is no difference between the heathen and him.
- We have to be different.
 - o The Lord wants us to reflect the kingly image of God in the manner of how we do things.
 - o That, amongst others, entails not conducting ourselves like the heathen.

Guard against any form of heresy.

- The specific heretics threatening a church are not the people from the outside.
 - o They are those who are members of the church who, by means of all sorts of stupidities from the Bible, start steering the church downhill.
- The Bible names them here.
 - o One kind is those misquoting Bible verses to fit his worldly insights.
 - o Another is the one causing schism. He always has something to argue or fight about, causing an aimless plodding, tiring and dejecting other believers.

The Bible teaches that such a person is aware that he is on the wrong way, committing sin and, facing God, is standing judged. (Titus 3:11)

If we are really born-again we do not conduct ourselves in this way.

- Inside of us we have a new image of Jesus Christ.
- It is the image of somebody who overcame the works of the devil and who is prepared with his whole heart to the service of God.

Not only did the sun of the mercy of God shine over the believers of Paul's times – it is shining just as brightly on us as well.

Nobody will make progress before realising how his real condition appears to the Lord.

- We are sinners who succumbed to the darkness of sin and eternal death.
- That is from where, in His mercy, the Lord saved us – no longer are we there.

Amen.

Closing prayer.

Closing Song: Scripture Versification 1-1:3 (Ephesians 1:1-14)

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

Dr MJ Du Plessis
Reformed Church Bellville
8 February 2009
Scripture MKJV