

## REFORMED CHURCH BELLVILLE SUNDAY 13 JANUARY 2008 MORNING SERVICE

**Sing before:** Psalm 89 : 11

Our help is in the Name of the Lord who made heaven and earth. Beloved, grace and peace be with you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ through the mighty working of God the Holy Spirit.

**Amen.**

Psalm of praise: Ps 81 : 1, 4, 12

**Confession of faith:** Apostolic

I believe in God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth.

And in Jesus Christ, His only begotten Son, our Lord who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead and buried. He descended into Hell, the third day He rose again from the dead, He ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty, from there He shall come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, a holy catholic\* Church, the communion of saints; the forgiveness of sins; the resurrection of the body; and the life everlasting.

**Amen.**

*After the law we sing of God's forgiveness of our sins with Psalm 25 : 7*

Law

Psalm 25 : 7

**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.**

Baptism: daughter of Gordon and Margje Kuiters

Hymn 8-1 (14)

Psalm 119 : 48

**Scripture:** Deuteronomy 30

**Text:** Deuteronomy 30 : 11, 14

**Now what I am commanding you today is not difficult for you or beyond your reach. (11)**

**No, the word is very near you; it is in your mouth and in you heart so you may obey it. (14)**

In the front part of Deuteronomy the covenant between the Lord and His church is renewed. He shows them the view and the distance of the hereafter where they shall live with Him in perfection.

The second part of the chapter deals with the practical application of the words of the Lord.

- True believers lapse into sin – even the best among us.
- Hence the Lord warns that the covenant is to be kept in its practical application.

Let us consider the following important issues:

- 1. Why was it necessary that the covenant be renewed?**
- 2. Why was it emphasized as emphatically that the covenant be kept in its formal application?**
- 3. The church of the New Testament shares in the responsibilities of the old Israel.**

### **1. Why was it necessary that the covenant be renewed?**

After passing through the Red Sea the Israelites arrived at Mount Horeb.

- Here the Lord gave them His law and did He make His covenant with them.
- The Ten Commandments received here is a covenant of grace because in His grace the Lord revealed His will to them.

Meanwhile the older Israelites who had lived in Egypt continued grumbling.

- If it was not about food, it was something else.
- Their life expressed their dissatisfaction.
- Repeatedly, they rebelled against the Lord.

*The result was that the Lord said that the people would not enter the promised land until the last of those who had lived in Egypt, was dead. In His wrath He swore that they would not enter the promised land.*

In the passage we have read the last ones have died and the entry into Canaan has started.

- From what we have read it appears that areas of land of Ruben, Gad and Manasse were already taken and occupied by them.
- But remember that we are dealing with a *new* generation
- They were not yet born when the Lord gave His law and made His covenant at Mount Horeb.

In addition the Israelites did not understand that what had occurred in Egypt.

- In chapter 29 : 4 we read that “to this day the Lord has not given you a mind that understands or eyes that see or ears that hear”.
- That explains why during their journey they were rebellious and unbelieving – they did not understand what was happening before their very eyes.
- Consider the miracle that during the forty years in the desert their clothes did not wear out nor the sandals they wore – and this went by unnoticed!

Meanwhile this generation died out and the new generation must take possession of Canaan. In His mercy the Lord now comes to them and again makes His covenant with these people.

We read this in chapter 29 : 13

**... to confirm you this day as His people, that He may be your God as He promise you and as He swore to your fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.**

In this matter a great deed of grace comes from the Lord.

- The Lord makes the Israelites His people and He is their God.
- Listen again how this is described in Deuteronomy 29 : 13 (above) and 14 – 16:

**I am making this covenant, with its oath, not only with you who are standing here with us today in the presence of the Lord our God but also with those who are not here today. You yourselves know how we lived in Egypt and how we passed through the countries on our way here.**

That day God confirmed them as His people. With it He fulfilled His promises made to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

But there is a marked difference between these three arch fathers with whom the Lord made His covenant and the people on the border with Canaan.

- Abraham, Isaac and Jacob learned from their mistakes and punishment to be perfectly obedient.
- These people saw and experienced even more, but it passed them by unnoticed.

Hence the Lord's demand that they must obey the covenant in practice or be punished.

- They must know that the covenant is rooted in your heart – in your thinking.
- That is where matters must be put right so that it can reflect in their words and deeds.

## **2. Why was it emphasized so emphatically that the covenant be kept in its formal application?**

The Lord made this covenant with Israel. They were His elected church.

- But in this church there were also other people for when they left Egypt a number of Egyptians also went with them.
- The Lord now also speaks to these strangers and those who chopped wood and fetched water (ch. 29 : 10 – 11)

But these are not all for in verse 15 we read **also those who are not here today.**

- Clearly not all the people were present for the cattle herders and others who guarded the property of the people were absent.
- And also the future generations still to be born but who are connected by their faith to God's people.

When we read Jeremiah 31 : 33, where the covenant is repeated, together with this chapter it is plain that even we who would come later are included:

**This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time, declares the Lord. I will put my law on their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people.**

This covenant of grace includes also the Jews after the Exile – and the Exile would occur only centuries later.

These people represented a multitude of heathen idolatries and did not know what it was like to have a living fellowship with the Lord through generations.

- Therefore the Lord explains that the faith He seeks is totally different from the mystical idolatries they were used to.
- The Lord refers to two examples of idolatry namely sorcery and worship of the sun and moon.

At the border of the promised land the Lord again reveals Himself very clearly to the people.

- The Law of the Lord that they received at Mount Horeb is their guide.
- This Law is written in their book but the Lord has through His Holy Spirit also written it in their hearts.
  - That is why the Lord says that they must not seek His commandments in heaven (or in mysteries).
  - They need also not send someone across the sea to find it in some other country or people.

The Lord's Law is no longer out of our reach or hidden from us.

- The Lord says that it is in our mouth and in our heart to obey it.
- The Holy Spirit works the will of God in our whole being.
- That is why this inner faith must become visible in what we do everyday.

The Lord says to the people who should do so that for them He promises life and happiness.

- People who do the will of the Lord spontaneously and joyfully, experience happiness in their life and the Lord's peace.
- To them the word life has two meanings:
  - The first is that they shall live on earth with the blessing of the Lord.
  - The second is that they shall also live in the hereafter.

For those who are obdurate the message is exactly the opposite – they shall experience unhappiness and death.

- We all know people who are always dissatisfied and complaining.
- Often they are embittered and feel that life owes them something.
- They use this as an excuse to do sin.
- It is the eternal death (to be in hell) that shows itself in this way in the unrepentant person.

The Lord's judgment awaits such people.

- The Lord says that He will not forgive them.
- His judgment and His anger will *burn* against such people – that is a simile that clearly depicts hell.

The Lord will also not let their *hell* commence only in the hereafter. He commences His punishment in this life already. See what the Lord reveals in chapter 29 : 21

**The Lord will single him out from all the tribes of Israel for disaster, according to all the curses of the covenant written in this Book of the Law.**

The Lord will single him out from all the tribes of Israel for disaster. But that is not all:

- The Lord will single him out accordingly to all the curses of the covenant written in the Book of the Law.
- From these words it is clear that what the Lord shall do to such people will be horrible.

In contrast to them are those who share in the Lord's mercy. The Lord shall bless them richly.

- Not only spiritually but also bodily.
- The Lord shall bless the land that they are going to.
- That means that as citizens of that land they shall receive the Lord's favour as long as they worship and serve Him.

That is how close the Lord shall come to them.

- That is also the reason for the Lord saying that His word is very near to them, in their mouth and in their heart so that they may obey it.
- With this confirmation of God's omnipresence and merciful presence He also confirms that it is He who blesses the repentance in us and works in us.

The Lord demands of them a true life of honesty to break with one's sins.

- One does not commit murder or hate other people as Cain did.
- We must feel a true searching for and desire to serve the Lord.

*To such people the Lord gives in this passage His covenant promise that we are His own who shall receive His complete blessing on our work.*

Our obedience / repentance is our response to the working of God the Holy Spirit in our heart and mind. That is also the meaning of the covenant:

- You put right with God what you have done wrong against Him.
- It is God who governs His own through the inner working of His Word and His Spirit.

Naturally, this prophecy applies in the first place to Israel. They would – and did – feel in the flesh that the Lord forgave them when they showed remorse for their sins.

### **3. The church of the New Testament shares in the responsibilities of the old Israel.**

This prophecy also applies to the church of the New Testament.

- When one considers Colossians 2 it is as if we hear something of the baptism in the words *circumcision of the heart*.

Colossians 2 : 10 – 12:

**And you have been given fullness in Christ, who is the head over every power and authority. In Him you were also circumcised, in the putting off of the sinful nature, not with a circumcision done by the hands of men but with the circumcision done by Christ, having been buried with Him in baptism and raised with Him through your faith in the power of God, who raised Him from the dead.**

- The circumcision is the sign of the covenant. The word is very near us, it is in our mouth and in our heart so we may obey it. The Lord confirms His covenant with us through the circumcision of the heart.
  - We all know that to the members of the church of the New Testament this happens through the working of the Holy Spirit in us.
  - We also know that the Holy Spirit works in our hearts the fruit of the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Does this passage speak of judgment or of mercy? It speaks of mercy because the Lord Jesus Christ died to confirm to and over us the forgiving mercy of God.

- He dies so that we might be reconciled with God for all those time that we transgressed against God.
- Further He dies also so that God the Holy Spirit could be poured out on us.
- With that the Lord's ever present grace to us becomes a reality.

This passage reveals to us God's readiness to forgive.

This passage does not only reveal a distant future.

- The Lord promises in this passage that He will bless us comprehensively if we are obedient.
- He intends this also physically and in our time – He intends this even today for us as citizens of our country for the promises of the Lord for the faithful are always the same and true.
- Our text definitely refers to the future also for we know that the Lord reveals to us that His presence shall be with us and over us in the hereafter forever.

Although now we are still in sin the presence of the Lord in this time guarantees His presence in eternity. The comfort of that is this:

*Although my conscience troubles me because of my sins, the **Other Comforter** that the Lord Jesus Christ sent us as God Himself in His omnipresence, works His grace in my heart and mind so that I may live in His truth and in His love.*

Let us then live in complete obedience to the Lord – as He commands us here.

**Amen.**

Closing prayer

Closing psalm: Psalm 148 : 5

The Lord blesses you and keep you;  
 The Lord makes His face shine on you and be gracious to you;  
 The Lord turns His countenance to you and gives you peace.

Amen.

Dr. M.J. du Plessis  
 Reformed Church Bellville  
 Date: 13 January 2008 (morning)

Quotations from N.I.V.