

Sing before the service: Psalm 68:12

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: 119:29

Prayer

Scripture hymn 12-2:5 (27:5)

Scripture reading: Isaiah 54

Scripture text: Isaiah 54:11-13; Catechism Lord's Day 21

O afflicted city, lashed by storms and not comforted, will build you with stones of turquoise, your foundations with sapphires. I will make your battlements of rubies, your gates of sparkling jewels, and all your walls of precious stones. All your sons will be taught by the LORD, and great will be your children's peace.

(Isaiah 54:11-13 NIV)

In the Old Testament we find a clear description of the restoration of a broken and repentant sinner. It is in fact a description that corresponds with the description of the New Jerusalem we find in the book of Revelation.

Let us look at the grace of the Lord from the following angles:

1. **The grace of the Lord in the way He adorns his church**
2. **The grace of the Lord in the strength of the communion of saints**
3. **The grace of the Lord in the certainty that sins are forgiven**

1. **God reveals his grace in the way He adorns his church**

In Isaiah 54 we read about a city described as so beautiful – completely beyond our understanding!

- A city built on a foundation of sapphires and the walls of the houses of precious jewels.
- The towers are of sparkling rubies.
- The walls and gates are of shining gems.

With these words the Lord describes the church of the future. Look at the image: The stones are chosen, collected, cut and ground, and each built into its own place.

Why has this been written down? What is happening in this passage?

- The bride of the Lord must be worthy of her Bridegroom, but she isn't. And this is why she is beautified.
- In a significant way it is stated here that there are two things happening simultaneously.
 - First, the Lord adorns his bride.
 - And second, at the same time, the Lord protects his bride.
- And this is the picture of the bride of the Lord: eternal, perfect and filled with the Holy Spirit.
 - All the elect stand before the Lord – reborn and in the fear of the Lord.
 - Everyone fully equipped for his task to praise and glorify God for eternity.

In the New Testament we learn how these things were fulfilled – through Jesus Christ.

- He is the King and Saviour of the church.

- We confess that He has been gathering a church for Him from all generations – since the creation and until his Second Coming.

This church is taught through the Word of God and guided by the Holy Spirit.

- This is how the Lord Jesus preserves and grows the church, because through the work of the Holy Spirit people are converted when they hear the Word of the Lord.
- And as life continues, the Holy Spirit incorporates the chosen in the salvation of the Lord Jesus.
- When believers repent they live a life of becoming purified.
 - A life in which they turn away from sin.
 - A life in which they strive to conform to the likeness of Christ.
- This also happens when people have been given to heresy and then repent through the work of the Holy Spirit and through what the Word of God reveals to them.

It's quite easy to tell all this to you in a sermon, but believers who have to go through all this agony to reach repentance and start becoming holy suffer much hardship.

- Because the elect regard themselves as having failed the test.
- Also, they dare not enter the holy kingdom of God in the condition (in which they were born, have grown up and are living) of being blemished and unclean.
- They must first become worthy to enter such a holy place.

Hence the almighty God purifies them through the Lord Jesus Christ – until they conform to the description of the beautiful city.

The content of this passage is therefore the end result of the redemptive ministry of the Lord Jesus.

- It is the fulfilment of our baptism, our resurrection and the atonement for our sins.
- The beauty of the bride of the Lord is the perfect fulfilment of our Lord Jesus Christ's redemptive sacrifice on the cross.

2. God reveals his grace in the strength of the communion of saints

There are a few things that unite believers, and one is the work of the Holy Spirit.

- The Holy Spirit not only unites people,
- He also links them to the gifts and treasures of salvation.

One of the effects of the Lord Jesus Christ's atoning sacrifice is that we are able to love.

- To love means that we should not only receive; we must also give.
- In practice it means that believers are available for their fellow believers.
- The love of God for us must be reflected in our love for other people.
 - For example, through love we must practise the gift to forgive – not on certain conditions, but unconditionally,
 - and even through self-sacrifice, in order to enable our neighbour to repair his wrongs.

Remember, the richer we become in Christ, the more we'll be like Him and able to forgive those who wrong us, and the more we can conform to his likeness.

In living together with other believers, and in the bonding and unity of our faith, God reveals the joy and glory of his presence among us, and we already see a glimpse of our being together in the hereafter.

3. God reveals his grace in the certainty that sins are forgiven

Since the fall of man every person has experienced the consuming doubt about whether he will ever

again be perfect and see the Lord. For this reason God comes to us and ensures us of the forgiveness of our sins and everything else connected to it.

This is important, because nobody can manage the judgement of God.

- Also, there is no person who does not fear it.
- Hence it is such a deed of grace if the Lord comes to you and assures you that on Final Judgment Day you will be justified by Jesus Christ.

Thereby the Lord practically says what is written in Isaiah 54: The Lord protects and restores you in your glory. You can be assured that the Lord forgives your sins:

- **Your sins of the past:** since your birth and what you inherited.
- **Also your sins of the present time:** the sins you still have to fight every day.
- **And the sins of times to come:** the Lord will forgive you and will never think of them again.

Just remember what is written in Romans 8:1:

Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, (Romans 8:1 NIV)

The certainty of faith we receive from the Lord, is also testified by the Holy Spirit:

The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children.
(Romans 8:16 NIV)

We do not experience these things acutely as we should, according to what the Scriptures say, because we are still living in this dispensation of sin.

- But you must realise that this life will come to an end. The Lord's Second Coming is near and then everything will change in the twinkling of an eye.
- Hence the Lord already calls us "saints" in his Word although we have not entered his glory yet.

The Lord assures us of it all in his Word, which we read ourselves and what is preached to us. In addition He also assures us of it all through his sacraments – the Baptism and Holy Communion. Through all this the Lord assures us that we share in his salvation, and that the description of the city of the elect also applies to us.

Your glory is described in this passage. But, you are responsible for taking care that you are a living member of the Church:

- Go live the love of the Lord.
- Go into the world and show your godliness.
- Go live joyfully and know that your sins have been forgiven.
- And know that through the Lord you have conquered the devil and everything he destroys.

Know that the taint of sin that sticks to you will be replaced by the glory of shining marble, of rubies, and the glory of God's power.

Let's read together Catechism Lord's Day 21.

54. Q. What do you believe concerning the holy catholic Christian church?

A. I believe that the Son of God,[1] out of the whole human race,[2] from the beginning of the world to its end,[3] gathers, defends, and preserves for Himself, [4] by His Spirit and Word,[5] in the unity of the true faith,[6] a church chosen to everlasting life.[7] And I believe that I am[8] and forever shall remain a living member of it.[9]

[1] John 10:11; Acts 20:28; Eph. 4:11-13; Col. 1:18. [2] Gen. 26:4; Rev. 5:9. [3] Is. 59:21; 1 Cor. 11:26.

[4] Ps. 129:1-5; Matt. 16:18; John 10:28-30. [5] Rom. 1:16; 10:14-17; Eph. 5:26. [6] Acts 2:42-47; Eph. 4:1-6. [7] Rom. 8:29; Eph. 1:3-14. [8] I John 3:14, 19-21. [9] Ps. 23:6; John 10:27, 28; I Cor. 1:4-9; I Pet. 1:3-5.

55. Q. What do you understand by the communion of saints?

A. First, that believers, all and everyone, as members of Christ have communion with Him and share in all His treasures and gifts.[1] Second, that everyone is duty-bound to use his gifts readily and cheerfully for the benefit and well-being of the other members.[2]

[1] Rom. 8:32; I Cor. 6:17; 12:4-7, 12, 13; I John 1:3. [2] Rom. 12:4-8; I Cor. 12:20-27; 13:1-7; Phil. 2:4-8.

56. Q. What do you believe concerning the forgiveness of sins?

A. I believe that God, because of Christ's satisfaction, will no more remember my sins,[1] nor my sinful nature, against which I have to struggle all my life,[2] but He will graciously grant me the righteousness of Christ, that I may never come into condemnation.[3]

[1] Ps. 103:3, 4, 10, 12; Mic. 7:18, 19; II Cor. 5:18-21; I John 1:7; 2:2. [2] Rom. 7:21-25.

[3] John 3:17, 18; 5:24; Rom. 8:1, 2.

Amen

Closing prayer

Closing hymn: Scripture hymn 19-1 (47)

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

Amen.

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