

REFORMED CHURCH BELLVILLE: SUNDAY 13 MAY 2007: MORNING SERVICE

Sing before: Psalm 33:5+6

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 107:1

Confession of faith: **Nicea**

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 119:63.

Law

Psalm: 119:63

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: 73:11+12

Scripture: Psalm 8

Text: Psalm 8:4-6

"What is man that you are mindful of him; the son of man that you care for him? You made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honour. You made him ruler over the works of your hands; you put everything under his feet;"

There are times when life's demands are extremely high.

- That is when stress and despondency threaten to overwhelm us.
- As such moments we must remain calm and collected.

We consider the following:

1. **The Lord never forsakes us!**
2. **The refrain throughout the Bible.**
3. **The Lord's plan of salvation.**

1. **The Lord never forsakes us!**

We must know that the Lord disposes many things over people in order to try their faith.

- Matters such as physical weakness, ill health, disease and adversity such as losing one's job.
- These afflictions make us feel that the sun has departed from our life.

The Word of the Lord teaches us that in such times we must be patient for He is with us every moment.

- He does not cast us away in the sea of life and let us swim until we find land somewhere.
- He plans and controls every moment and everything that happens to us.
- If we in faithful acquiescence bow before the Lord in these matters He gives us life everlasting.
- After all, nobody deserves any blessing – we receive all blessings out of grace.

Do you remember what the apostle Paul said? He writes in 2 Corinthians 4:1 that God took pity on us and through His mercy entrusted this ministry to us. Hence we do not lose heart.

"Therefore, since through God's mercy we have this ministry, we do not lose heart." (2 Corinthians 4:1)

Even our struggle and suffering in our life is part of God's mercy.

- The Bible tells us that the Lord cares for us with great tenderness.
- Nothing good or bad befalls us by chance.
- The Lord directs everything.

The calling in life of each of us puts us before difficult demands which we must deal with and if we dedicate our life to the service of God we must know that great demands will be made on us.

- Know that God will be with you in meeting these demands.
- When the Israelites were to occupy the land of Canaan they were afraid because they knew that in doing that many would perish. Yet the Lord told them: **"Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified because of them, for the Lord your God goes with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you."** (Deuteronomy 31:6)

When we go through difficult times we must know that the Lord also gives prosperity and joy.

- Every day He gives us His protection.
- The Lord saves you as a true believer in all circumstances so that you after this life shall enter His kingdom.
- There one finds only joy.
- Remember Psalm 116:
- The poet sings that cords of death entangled him and the anguish of the grave came upon him and he was overcome by trouble and sorrow.
- Yet he sings later that he does not know how to repay the Lord for all His goodness to him because he is a redeemed servant of God.

2. The refrain throughout the Bible

There is a refrain running throughout the Bible and throughout the centuries the faithful have heard it. To us also God says: **"So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand."** (Isaiah 41:10)

Where then does evil originate? It comes from the devil,

- In this life the Lord permits the devil to interfere in our lives and bring afflictions over us – remember what happened to Job.
- But in the hereafter that will no longer be possible because the Lord does not allow the devil entry there. We confess in the Belgic Confession Article 13 that the Lord holds the devil and all our enemies in check so that they cannot hurt us without His permission or will.

The Bible teaches us that nothing can happen to us by chance, but only by the direction of our gracious heavenly Father.

- We also confess that we shall be patient in adversity.
- It is remarkable that in our confession we promise to avoid all rebelliousness.
- We also confess that for what is future we have good confidence in our faithful God and Father. Our confidence shall be so good that no creature shall separate us from God's love. (Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 10)

Let us consider an example in the Bible. Paul stands before the Sanhedrin where the people want to tear him to pieces. The Roman troops rescue him and take him to their barracks to be guarded there.

- Imagine his position – where do you go to when those to whom you must preach hate you so much?
- That night the Lord came to Paul and spoke to him: "**The following night the Lord stood near Paul and said: 'Take courage! As you have testified about me in Jerusalem, so you must also testify in Rome'.**" (Acts 23:11)

All Paul's suffering was inflicted on him with a purpose! Paul had to go to Rome there to testify powerfully for the Lord.

- Let us look at another example – Paul and the ship he was on were caught in a storm. They felt completely lost and had given up all hope of being saved.
- In this crisis the Lord revealed his saving grace to Paul. The next day Paul could tell the sailors. "**But now I urge you to keep up your courage, because not one of you will be lost; only the ship will be destroyed.**" (Acts 27:22)
- In the most trying circumstances a group of people mostly consisting of heathens heard the message that the Lord would save them.
- Interestingly they had to rely on Paul's faith and keep their courage.
- Listen to the words of Paul: "**So keep up your courage, men, for I have faith in God that it will happen just as he told me.**" (Acts 27:25)

Out of this a clear message comes to us.

- We must forget our arrogance and acknowledge an authority that is higher and greater than ours.
- To be able to remain courageous we must not try to manage matters with our own strength.
- Our despondency is often the result of our belief that we are able to manage our lives ourselves and in so doing take away His glory from the Lord.
- The troubles that arise from that cause us to become despondent.

It is also true that we often are worried about the wrong things.

When Rachel gave birth to her second child she died in childbirth.

- We read that the midwife said to her that she should not be afraid because the child was a son. (Genesis 35:17)
- See how inappropriate a remark can be. The midwife is worried about the sex of the child while Rachel is dying!
- When we get our priorities in the right order we shall be less worried about many things.

When worry besets you, you must be very much aware of God's grace.

- The true believers are people who know themselves to be in complete dependence in the hands of God.
- It is they who are called to share in the grace of the Lord.

Let us consider another example from the Bible. A blind man sits beside the road and begs the Lord to be merciful to him.

- Jesus stopped and said: **"Call him"**. The blind man was then called. **"Jesus stopped and said "Call him". So they called to the blind man, "Cheer up! On your feet! He's calling you!"** (Mark 10:49)
- The Lord then healed him.
- So the light came into his darkness so that he could literally see God the Saviour.

In another passage the Bible tells us not to become despondent. Suffering has a particular purpose in our lives. Although we may be wasting away outwardly, the Lord says, inwardly we are renewed day by day. **"Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day."** (2 Corinthians 4:16)

Satan has put much effort into his plan to make man believe that there are powers beside God that dispose of man's fate.

- As against these false beliefs the Lord reveals Himself clearly. He is God from eternity to eternity.
- In Job 12:7-12 it is written that the Lord created all creation and that He rules and governs it. God is so mighty that He keeps everything individually.
- Matthew 6:26-30 adds to this that the Lord feeds every bird. They do not sow or reap or store away in barns, yet the Lord sees to it that they have food.
- The Lord also tells us to look at the lilies of the field – they do not labour or spin – they grow because God lets each of them grow.
- And Psalm 104 tells us that each blade of grass that grows does so because the Lord planned it.

All people who know how great their dependence on the Lord is also know how weak and sinful man is.

- That is why the poet of Psalm 38:18 says: **"I confess my iniquity; I am troubled by my sin."**
- That is what should trouble us – our sins must trouble us so that we may confess our iniquity.

The evening before His crucifixion the Lord explained the future to His disciples and exhorted them not to remain stuck in this life and its troubles.

- They must set their sights on the time after our history when the Lord has conquered the world. There we shall have godly peace. **"I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."** (1 John 16:33)

3. The Lord's plan of salvation

From what we have considered it is clear that the Lord cares for everything.

- When we consider this together with what we read in Ephesians 1 it is clear that before the creation of the world the Lord had already conceived His plan of salvation.
- Now He executes this plan.

You must always remember that the whole life of the Lord Jesus, His suffering, death and resurrection prove the immutability of the plan of God for your life.

- The coming and the ministry of the Lord Jesus were promised in God's providence.
- He came and fulfilled all the promises that were made about Him by the Lord in the Old Testament for centuries.
- The providence concerning a Redeemer is made true in Him.
- These things were promised and given so that we may remain courageous and trust in God.

But it is not a case of only remaining courageous. We also have a task to fulfill.

- A good example is found in Joshua 7 and 8.
- Ai was a little village but its people routed the Israelite army.
- The Lord explained the defeat as punishment for the sin of Achan against Him.
- After Achan and his family were stoned to death the Lord commanded Joshua to attack Ai once again.
- Joshua was afraid and discouraged but the Lord spoke to him: **"Then the Lord said to Joshua: Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged. Take the whole army with you and go up and attack Ai. For I have delivered into your hands the king of Ai, his people, his city and his land."** (Joshua 8:1)

See what the Lord says:

- Joshua must do his duty. He must take the whole army and attack Ai.
- The principle contained in this is that we must do what we can to overcome that which troubles us.
- Then we must trust in the Lord that He will take care of the rest.

We need not be ashamed when we are afraid and discouraged. But we must not allow ourselves to be so caught up in it that we fail to do our duty.

- The danger is that we become so discouraged that we lose our way and we relapse and stop bearing witness for the Lord.
- Consider this: The Lord Jesus also was afraid.
- His anguish was so great that His sweat was like drops of blood. (Luke 22:44)
- Yet He resolved in submission to God to deliver Himself into the hands of the deceitful people who hate Him in order to save them.
- You are also one of those He saved.

That is why we may not allow discouragement to sideline us so that life passes us by.

- It is our duty to live life to the glory of God.
- We were created with a purpose – to do everything that the Holy Spirit tells us so that we manage life responsibly.

But you must remember that there is a progression in the Lord's revelation. In the final fulfillment of the plan of salvation the Lord Jesus shall return one day.

- Then He comes on the clouds to destroy this earth and the present history.
- Then He will judge the responsibility shown by each of us during our life on earth.
- Then He will judge our works and our faith.

We are unable to understand everything. There are matters that will push us into a corner, but the fact that we are redeemed children of God must awaken a fighting spirit in us so that our salvation is not obliterated by our despondency. We live in the divine power of Jesus Christ.

Those who with the highest responsibility believed in the salvation that God ordained in His Mediatorship shall live on the new earth in the eternal presence of God the Almighty.

Amen

Closing prayer

Closing Hymn: 1-1:1

The Lord bless you and keep you.

The Lord make His face shine on you and be gracious to you.

The Lord lift His countenance on you and give you peace.

Amen

Dr MJ Du Plessis

Reformed Church Bellville

13 May 2007

Scripture NIV