

REFORMED CHURCH CLANWILLIAM : SUNDAY 6 JANUARY 2013

MORNING SERVICE

Sing before: Psalm 118:13

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 18:1

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 universal Church, the communion of saints; the forgiveness of sins; the resurrection of the body; and the life everlasting

Amen.

After the reading of the Law we confess our guilt and pray for forgiveness and a new life before God with Psalm 25:2

Law

Psalm: 25:2

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 33:1, 6

Scripture reading: 2 Thessalonians 2

Scripture text: 2 Thessalonians 2:7

For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only He who now restrains will do so until He is taken out of the way.

(2 Thessalonians 2:7)

We live in a time of many complex happenings planned by the Lord.

- All are events prior to the Second Coming of the Lord.
- We can certainly say that they are all events preparing the Second Coming of the Lord.

We all know that the anti-Christ first has to come to full revelation before the arrival of the Lord Jesus. *But the anti-Christ cannot come when he wants to, he is first restrained so that the ministering of the Gospel can come to full development.* This is the crux of this passage of Scripture.

Come, let us together consider the following aspects connected to this event:

1. **Background.**
2. **The battle against false doctrine.**
3. **What is our consolation?**

1. **Background.**

The first Christian congregations did not all react in the same way to the ministering of the apostle Paul.

- When Paul preached to the churches that the end of all things was near the congregation in Corinth, for example, took so little notice that Paul in his ministering had to return to this congregation and teach that indeed the Second Coming is to happen soon.
- The congregation of Corinth was so at home in the world that the Lord Jesus – in as far as they were concerned – did not need to come again.
 - They made a lot about their wedding as well as their business lives.
 - They worked on all sorts of structures in the world and even removed their history from the expected Second Coming.
 - In practice they severed the ties between this and the future world.

But in Thessalonica the condition was completely different.

- They believed the Second Coming of the Lord to be so close that they completely stopped working.
 - They believed that time no longer had any sense and meaning because the Second Coming is now about to take place!
 - Therefore they literally just sat down doing nothing but waiting for the Second Coming.

That is the background against which this letter to the Thessalonians was written. Therefore the Lord, through the ministering of Paul, intervened into the faith-life of this congregation and wrote to them that the Second Coming was not so close that they could just sit back awaiting it with folded arms.

The Lord lets us know that the Second Coming of the Lord Jesus will only take place after the anti-Christ has been revealed. And as the congregation of Thessalonica can see, there is something keeping it back.

- In verse 1 the apostle Paul starts explaining the matters regarding the Second Coming. The day of the Lord indeed is close and it will happen that we (the believers) will be united with the Lord on that day.
- In verse 2 the Lord warns us not to lose perspective or to succumb to fear. About such involved matters any person, because due to sin, our insight is limited and our understanding poor, can start misunderstanding matters.
 - Therefore, in His grace, the Lord corrects the false expectations we have.
 - The Lord does not want His church to have untrue visions about this day and the times preceding it.
 - Therefore it is literary written here that the church must not lose its clear understanding!
- Verse 3 starts with an explanation of the things that will precede this day of the Lord.
 - The congregation must take care not to be deceived by somebody.
 - Indeed there will be people propagating the day of the Lord and also the Second Coming of the Lord in such a way that all sorts of misconceptions will be built into it.
 - The Lord Himself puts it that there will be forces importing all sorts of deceit into the announcement of the day of the Lord.

2. The battle against false doctrine.

Consider what the Lord is saying here! He brings it to the knowledge of the congregation of Thessalonica that, for them, there still is a lot of work and battle in store before the day of the Lord's Second Coming.

- They cannot just sit with folded arms.
- They must steel themselves for the faith-battle still to come!

The Bible motivates the assault of misleading and wrong representations to us. (V3. Onwards)

3 Let no one deceive you by any means; for that Day will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition, 4 who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God.

To the Thessalonians the great question was: When will the Lord come? Everybody knew that this day was nearing speedily, but when will it be?

The quotation clearly shows that you would be at the wrong side of the fence should the Lord arrive and finds you idle!

- Before the Lord arrives there will be a **large falling away** from faith. What is your part thereof – or how do you fight it?
- The man of sin has to be revealed. Do you know your Bible well enough to properly distinguish any evil person with a sectarian teaching?

These are matters falling within the scope of this part of Scripture.

The Lord thus teaches that an atmosphere of faith-tension and churchly unrest will precede the Second Coming. The church thus has a clear command to be vigilant!

- There is a spiritual force at work. It is a power driving the works of the Satan to execution.
- This Satan works in the church – just like the Lord does.
 - But he works exactly the opposite to the Lord.
 - It is recorded that he is the man of sin.
 - Literally it says that he is a man of lawlessness! (perdition)

This lawlessness will be presented in the church as exactly the thing the Lord Jesus Christ expects from His church.

False doctrine will invade the church to such an extent that the congregation will worship the anti-Christ whilst under the impression that they are worshipping the Lord. The anti-Christ will completely take over God's place in the church!

- At another place the bible also teaches that the anti-Christ will present himself as Jesus Christ. (Mark 13)
- Jesus Christ Himself was having the word when He said that false Christs will arise and that it will be said: Here is the Christ, and there!
- The principle in every case is very clear: In the church a conscious resistance will arrive against everything true and right to the Lord.
- In its essence it will be nothing else than a denial of God Himself and of His highness and majesty.

The resistance of the anti-Christ will reach its highpoint when he will resist against God Himself.

- He will sit in the temple of God and pretend to be God.
- Practically it just means that he will distort the worship in such a way that he will lay claim for himself to all the worship and honor due to God.
- We will have difficulty in distinguishing between true and false should our knowledge of God and His Word not be sharply honed because the Lord warns that the anti-Christ will perform powers and signs to prove that he is so-called God.
- Just prior to the Second Coming the anti-Christ will perform many demonstrations, but for the time being he is held back so that he cannot yet sow destruction in the church.

3. **What is our consolation?**

The question now arises: What is it restraining the anti-Christ? And why is he being restrained? Why must there still be waited?

- The words here in the Bible teach, without it being written, the fact that the devil cannot do what he likes.
- He also cannot let the anti-Christ come when he likes, neither let he do as he wants! There is a power greater than himself delaying him. Here in the Bible it is not recorded who the power is.

Paul just writes that the congregation of Thessalonica knows who it is!

- It is the Lord, but because it is so obvious it is not stronger underlined by saying it.
- The congregation knows at least that only God decides in His Council over all times and events, therefore why must the apostle again tell it to them in writing?

The question is only: How does the Lord do it? Here we always have to keep in mind the words of the Lord Jesus Himself about the end of times.

- The Lord said that terrible things would precede the last days: wars, earth quakes and famine.
- But then the most important words: **And the gospel must first be preached to all the nations.** (Mark 13:10)
 - Even should the end approach with speed, the gospel must first be preached until God's Council is thereby completed.
 - Here the Bible thus teaches a great consolation: This entire lawlessness is reigned by Jesus Christ until the gospel has gone its way.

God uses the preaching of the gospel as the tool to hold back the arrival of the anti-Christ and Jesus Christ is the Person causing that delay. By His almighty power the Lord Jesus Christ reigns the lawlessness and the arrival of the anti-Christ.

But there comes a time when the Lord Jesus will no longer hold back the anti-Christ. Not because He cannot but because He wants to grant the devil the opportunity of fully executing his evil.

- You must thus know that a time will arrive of the anti-Christ performing many powers and signs to tempt the people.
- He will let sin and lawlessness appear so good (and Biblical!) that large parts of mankind will follow him.
- He will also not break down life – be aware of that! To the people it will appear as if he is making life perfect!
 - With these presentations the anti-Christ will make it look like he has removed the aversion of sin.
 - Because the Lord Jesus will be giving the anti-Christ full opportunity in executing his evil it will also let that which averts people from sin disappear: it will become easy to do all sorts of wrong things and to follow the anti-Christ – this whilst you might be under the impression that you are serving the Lord!

You must not think that people will follow him against their will.

- It will only be the true believers who will be oppressed and tortured against their will because they can recognize the anti-Christ for what he really is and therefore not follow him.
- It is an extremely dangerous time the Lord is warning us about.
 - It will be a time when people would be horribly deceived.
 - They will be completely caught up in the grip of the lie without even realizing it.

It will really happen that they will follow the anti-Christ because verse 1 teaches that for this reason God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie.

- But carefully note: this will not be relevant to all people, only to those who will be lost.
- Verse 13 is very clear about it that there are people the Lord loves and that the Lord chose these people for salvation.
- It is also for their sakes that the anti-Christ was kept back.

You must also keep in mind that all powers in heaven and on earth are subservient to the Lord and that they can only do what the Lord wants them to do – so also the devil and the anti-Christ.

- Therefore in this conduct of him the anti-Christ is also a servant of the Lord.
- In this passage it is written that the work of the anti-Christ is for the purpose that everybody not believing the truth but had a pleasure in injustices, could be judged.

The application of this portion on us is that we must keep in mind that we are living at a later stage than the Thessalonians.

- We are living in the times where the Satan and his oxen leader, the anti-Christ, are systematically released to go from bad to worse.
- Therefore you have to seriously rethink: Where do you and me stand in our relationship towards the anti-Christ? Can we recognise the man of sin should we get to deal with him?
- Do we have sufficient faith to resist against faith-temptations?

It is very easy to state that you are a true believer, but that does not mean you telling the truth. You could for a long time already be in cahoots with the lie and Satan – the same way he does it in the Name of Jesus Christ.

- Why do so many of us only attend one worship service on a Sunday whilst we could attend both?
- What about the members who also do not financially offer towards the continuation of the worshipping service?
- The arguments of those who want the church to conform to the world for the sakes of numbers are on a more serious level – God does not only count, He also weighs!
- It is clear, beloved brothers and sisters that areas of dishonesty exist in our faith-lives.
 - False doctrine is not only to by example deny the pre-destination or to join the salvation by Jesus Christ to all sorts of human uses.
 - False doctrine is also having all sorts of inventions of sinful nature used to circumvent true worship.

The question is whether such people will have any claim to grace upon the arrival of the Lord.

- Remember that the cross-death of your Saviour Jesus Christ was that you could have true and real responsibilities in His Name towards Him.
- He died and arose so that you as victor can rule over the devil and his cronies – such as the anti-Christ.
- Furthermore He sent the Holy Spirit to guide you in the matters that are true and right in the eyes of the Lord.
- But, and this is the crux, you can only follow Him if you are also fully responsible in everything pertaining to the honour of God and the true faith in the salvation of the Lord Jesus.

The consolation is that you are chosen, as it stands here, and that you fully stand in the grace of the Lord.

But the responsibility remains that you must know the opponent and not be led into temptation by him.

Amen.

Closing prayer.

Closing Psalm: 1:4

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

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