

REFORMED CHURCH CLANWILLIAM : SUNDAY 9 FEBRUARY 2014 MORNING SERVICE

Sing before: Psalm 73:7

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 150:1

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 universal 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 99:5

Law

Psalm: 99:5

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 68:8

Scripture reading: Nehemiah 13

Scripture text: Nehemiah 13:17b

**"What evil thing is this that you do, by which you profane the Sabbath day?
(Nehemiah 13:17b)**

In this sermon we look at the following matters:

1. **How does a decaying church look like?**
2. **What are the results thereof?**
3. **How is the church repaired?**

1. How does a decaying church look like?

In this chapter we have a very clear image of how the church of the Lord looks like when it decays. The people of the church show decay in all possible areas.

During the exile the few remaining believers could not bring the normal offers. This was also true about those who were exiled to Babel.

- Naturally this was impossible because there was no temple and altar.
- Therefore the way of celebrating the Sabbath received a much stronger emphasis.
- It obtained a character of confirmation because the believers had to prove their loyalty towards God and their service to God by means of Sabbath celebration.

The Sabbath sanctification was thus a way in which the believers could strongly distinguish themselves from the non-believers.

- Therefore after the exile a difficult battle started for the people who had to be re-educated in the advantage of being allowed to rest on that day and that God wanted you to rest and serve Him.

Here are a few principles that are and will forever be very important:

- The Sabbath sanctification was a sign of the particular relationship Israel had towards the Lord.
- Whoever, by maintaining the Sabbath, dedicates a part of his life to the Lord thereby acknowledges that he belongs to the Lord. (Isaiah 56:2, 4)
- Nehemiah understood it that should you sanctify the Sabbath you bear the mark of the Lord. (Compare Isaiah 58:13)

Therefore Nehemiah was deeply disturbed when after his second return he discovered how the people lapsed in their responsibilities of faith. (Compare verse 6 and onwards)

- Nehemiah took strong stance against these people who desecrated the Sabbath.
- Note that Nehemiah did not start with his reformation inside the church itself.
 - Firstly he warned his fellow believers – in fact people of stature – “nobles from Judah”
 - These people were named next to the leaders of the community because they were representatives of the most important families. (2:16; 4:13 5;7 and 7:5).

Thus in a certain sense these people were the authorities of the day.

- The principle the Lord sets here by implication is that the authority himself contravenes by desecrating the Sabbath should they not use their power and authority to fight this sin.
- This must have been a very serious matter to the Jews who were admonished because they have just returned from exile where they personally experienced the Lord’s punishment for disobedience.

In fact the exile was because it angered the Lord that they did not obey His commandments and neglected their worship.

- Nothing prevents the Lord from punishing them again.

Nehemiah then went further with his reformation, but again he did not change the church by his reformation.

- In the second place strict measures were executed regarding Jerusalem, the city of the Lord.
- The aim was to see to it that the inhabitants of the city sanctify the Sabbath.

For the Jews the Sabbath started on the Friday evening.

- The moment the sun set behind the mountains of Moab and no sunlight shone in the gateways of Jerusalem, Nehemiah locked the gates and had them guarded by a section of his personal bodyguard. (compare 2:9; 4:10; 5:10, 16).

Soon Nehemiah experienced the deviousness of the sin.

- It was so that the animals bearing the goods of trade could not enter the city through the gates but the people could still enter and exit.
- What the dealers then did was to stop at the gates and the people of Jerusalem could still exit and do their shopping at the traders.

Only then the third step in Nehemiah’s process of stopping this sin followed.

- He went to the traders and informed them that he would bodily attack them should he find them there again.
- The people knew Nehemiah and knew that it was his nature of bodily attacking people who do not obey him and therefore they did not again go to Jerusalem on the Sabbath to trade.

Here you have the remarkable event that the authorities were used to intervene in getting the church back onto the proper track.

- Only after the entire problem was rectified did Nehemiah move the work back to where it belonged – to the heads of the church.
- He then told the Levites to cleanse themselves and then they had to supervise on the Sabbath at the city gates and see to it that the people refrain from committing this sin again.
- In this way the service to the Lord was not only done in the temple but also in the city of the Lord and amongst the people.

2. What are the results of decay?

The trespass of the priest, namely that Tobiah took up residence in the room in the temple had the result that the Levites in their turn trespassed the law of the Lord.

- The law stated that they were not allowed to own land because they would then be more interested in their farming than in the service of the temple – which now happened, even though they were compelled thereto.
- We read in verse 10 that the priests made use of their superiority in numbers and abandoned the rules of the temple.

There were amongst others, rules that set out the payment to every person serving in the temple (12:44-47)

- When the priests now abandoned these matters it left the Levites and temple singers without any income and they were compelled to leave the temple service.
- This of course resulted in the diminishing of the temple service, in other words also in the diminishing of worship service.

What happens when the church decays? The people of the church also decay.

- Therefore we see that the celebration of the Sabbath also came into play. What then was wrong?
- Should you read this chapter with care, shocking facts come to the foreground because you find that the moment the people desecrated their Sabbath celebrations their entire life of faith fell apart.

Then matters in their church building and their church administration went awry – then you find a heathen living in the place where the people had to place their offers.

- The result thereof was that worship services no longer were good and right for the Lord because certain services in the church folded.
- Together therewith total lowering of faith levels in general with the people occurred, because by example Nehemiah saw that the men did all sorts of work in the fields.
 - Per example they harvested and pressed on the Sabbath.

- They also traded on the Sabbath.

Is it not so that perhaps these things are also true about our times?

- Do some of us not do all sorts of so-called loose jobs on the Sabbath?
- Or trade?
 - Matters like our Sunday newspaper that is bought or consider things like groceries being bought on a Sunday – whilst we could have easily bought it during the week.
 - Is the principle of doing work and trading, as we do it, not the same as what we read about in Nehemiah?

You must take note that this passage about the Sabbath sanctification is in the middle of three events.

- Firstly it is the desecration of the temple building.
- Then secondly it is the Sabbath desecration.
- In the third place is the matter of mixed marriages.

It is not without reason that the Bible has these three parts in this sequence.

- The meaning of the place this history has is to indicate that should you desecrate the Sabbath,
- then you cut the tie to God and
- then you only do things wrongly – literally in every walk of your life.

3. How is the church repaired?

The church is repaired by the grace of God.

- In this passage it is clear that the Lord forgave the people their sins long before they have ironed out all their mistakes of faith.
- The proof thereof is that seemingly after about a century they have for the first time again read from the books of Moses and then realized that the Lord is dissatisfied should they marry non-believers.

The Lord does exactly the same to us.

- The Lord Jesus Christ came to die for us whilst we are in a state of sinful disrepair.
- On the cross the Lord Jesus prays: "**Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do.**" (Luke 23:34)
- There He bears with misery the punishment of God for all our injustices.

But then something important takes place and that is that the tie between God and us is repaired.

- And now our lifestyle and our way of worship must stress the existence of this tie.
- It will come to the foreground especially in the way we celebrate the Sabbath.

In this regard we are in exactly the same boat as the Jews of the times of Nehemiah, namely that especially the way in which we celebrate the Sabbath, draws the line between the non-believers and us.

There are many people arguing that the Jewish Sabbath is not the New Testamental Sunday.

- Just keen in mind that both these days serve the same purpose.
- It provides opportunity to worship God in the service of worship.

The New Testament itself moves the Sabbath one day ahead, in other words it is no longer the seventh day but the first day of the week.

- The claim is so much stronger upon us because the intention is that we who celebrate this day, must let the kingship of God of this day, come out in our worship.

Jesus Himself made a sharp division between those who did not properly celebrate the day and those who truly knew the Lord and properly used the day.

Take note of the sharp division the Lord made in the two temple purifications between those who even misused the temple during the week!

- The Lord Jesus twice purified the temple of Jerusalem so that the worshippers therein could be serviceable to the Lord.
- Also take note that the Lord Jesus did it forcefully because he evicted the people with a whip!
- Thereafter He reminded them that that place has to be a place of prayer!

Brothers and sisters it seems as if our spirit of time can easily lead us astray. The way in which the people of our times keep up the Sabbath in general has many similarities with the way of Sabbath celebrations the Lord rejected in the days of Nehemiah.

Watch and pray that we do not get lost together with the world in looseness and frivolousness and desecrate the Sabbath. It carries the sign of God-forsaken with it.

Amen.

Closing prayer.

Closing Psalm: 33:11

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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 9 February 2014
 Scripture: Modern King James Version