

SERMON BY REV W HUIZINGA

ON GOD'S WORD

AS WE CONFESS IT IN

LORD'S DAY 5

OF THE HEIDELBERG CATECHISM

LITURGY

Votum and Salutation

Psalm 50:1

The Words of the Covenant

Psalm 50:8,11

Prayer for the Opening of God's Word

Thank-offering

Psalm 49:2,3

Read - Lord's Day 5

- John 14:1-14

Sermon

**YOU MUST PAY YOUR DEBT IN FULL
BEFORE GOD RETURNS YOU INTO FAVOUR.**

This involves:

- 1. The way of justice.***
- 2. The way of substitution.***

Hymn 30:3,4,5

Pastoral Prayer

Hymn 24:1

Benediction

Beloved congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Today we turn from the knowledge of our misery to the way of deliverance from sin. Lord's Day 5 makes that transition.

Yet do you not find Lord's Day 5 logical and cold? It does not seem to breathe the comfort of LD 1. Compared to Lord's Days 2-4, where we personally confessed our sins and misery, where is the personal comfort in this Lord's Day?

Many complain Lord's Day 5 breathes the spirit of rationalism. Now rationalism pretends that man's reason is the final court of appeal. Only what my mind can reason out can be true. All else either does not exist or is not true. Does Lord's Day 5 not try to reason out the only way of escape?

Yet God's Word says that *what man's eyes have not seen, what man's ears have not heard, what man's mind has not conceived, God has brought to pass?* That text is given in connection with the way of deliverance!

Yet we pretend in our confession to have it all worked out. Our minds have conceived the plan of salvation. It can be neither this nor that. Thus we must be saved in this way! By logical deduction this is the only escape left. It seems so logical and rational. Our faith seems to become a mathematical formula. Where is the deep awareness of our sinfulness? Where is the humble confession of guilt? Why all this theological logic?

We out-richtly deny this charge of rationalism. For this is a confession, a summary learned from the Bible. We did not concoct it ourselves. God in his Word taught us this way of salvation. First we learn God's way of redemption. Then by hindsight and by knowledge of the Bible we confess God's revealed plan of salvation. We actually repeat God's thoughts after him. That is not rationalism, but a confession of God's revealed will. We will find that this confession contains a deep consciousness of our sin, our guilt, our deserved sentence. At the same time it breathes the deep desire for renewed fellowship with God. That is pure gospel!

I preach to you then this predetermined and divinely conceived way of deliverance under this *THEME:

**YOU MUST PAY YOUR DEBT IN FULL
BEFORE GOD RETURNS YOU INTO FAVOUR.**

This involves:

- 1. The way of justice.**
- 2. The way of substitution.**

1. The way of justice.

Q.&A.12 summarises the previous Lord's Days. We deserve punishment, now here on earth and eternally in the lake of fire. God was just when he expelled us from paradise. The sentence of death came as a just verdict. No man can complain. God amply warned man. We confess that we deserve temporal and eternal punishment. But how can we escape that judgment? That is not a selfish instinct of a prisoner who tries to chisel his way through the steel gratings of his cell, a prisoner who rightly deserves to sit in prison. It is not the sentiment of a sinner who attempts to skirt around or cover up his guilt, or who tries to outrun justice. No, this question squarely acknowledges that we deserve our sentence. We do not avoid that sentence of being *guilty*, condemned to death, even eternal death. It is the cry of a man or woman who knows that life is life with God; without God life is a hell, now and forever. This sinner desires renewed favour with God.

You and I seek deliverance **plus** renewed friendship with the God of life. That is what deliverance means. You are rescued from the greatest danger into the greatest blessing. How can we avoid the anger and curse of God? He is greater than all. He sees everyone and hears everything we say. All our thoughts are laid bare before Him. To Him we must present an account. To avoid Him is impossible.

Actually we know that to run away will not help. Real happiness can only return when we rest in God. As Augustine said, "We do not rest till we rest in God." His own experience displayed that truth. In biblical terms we long to re-enter paradise. We have been exiled. As exiles in a strange land, we long for the safety and fellowship of God in the paradise God gave. God created us for fellowship. For Adam and Eve the height of the day came when God joined them at the end of the day. That made the covenant of favour so rich. To be God's favourites meant everything. We want to be back in fellowship with our God. But how can we re-enter the garden of Eden when the angel with the flaming sword blockades our way?

Israel and Moses experienced the same. God pledged that the angel would lead them to the promised land of milk and honey. They could enjoy their heart's desires. But God Himself would not accompany these stiff-necked rebels. If God would enter their midst, he would immediately destroy them.

That scene underlined the reality of God's anger against sin and disobedience. That was not pure logic. No, it was reality. Often we do not really believe that God would rage against us and punish us. Let

the severe punishments God inflicted on Israel in the wilderness banish such thoughts from our minds. Let God's sentiments to Moses convince us of that truth.

God Himself would not guide them, though He promised a land of plenty to them. This fact caused Israel to mourn, yes, to mourn. That shows how important it is to have God as our Friend and not as our Foe. If only we could be received into favour again! Israel watched intently as Moses, the friend of God, entered his presence to speak with God. If only God would live in their midst again! That too is the plea of every sinner who lives outside of God and without God.

Surely God will listen to such a heart-rending plea for mercy. Moses even pleaded with God to take his life in place of Israel's life. Moses wanted to be their substitute, but God would not hear of it.

Did the heart of God not always melt with mercy when he heard the sobs of Israel in distress? Did God's heart of compassion not bleed for Israel in Egypt when Pharaoh tried to annihilate all the baby boys? Of course!

Then comes Answer 12 –

God demands that his justice be satisfied. Therefore we must make full payment, either by ourselves or through another.

It hits us at first as cold and objective. That is why some consider it too 'logical'. Where is the God of mercy and love? Answer 12 sounds so stern.

Yet we need to hear these stern words. Think of Israel when they wanted a king so they could be like the other nations. What was wrong with that? Had God not provided measures in his law for such a king (you can read of this in Deuteronomy 17:14-20)? But Samuel has only harsh rebukes, no encouraging words. He accuses them of dishonouring their great King in heaven, of entertaining worldly pride, and of bringing disaster upon themselves. He told them what evils such a kingship would bring. Those were sobering remarks, which proved oh so true later on.

The same holds true here. We want deliverance. We long to live with God again. But then know for a certainty the following truths:

- 1 God will not allow your apostasy to go unpunished.
- 2 Temporal and eternal punishment awaits you.
- 3 The wages of sin is death.
- 4 From dust you came and to dust you shall return.

Know for sure that you must first pay in full all your debts. As Jesus said in one of his parables, you will not come out of God's prison till you have paid the last penny you owe the king. God has said in his Word that

"He who justifies the wicked and he who condemns the righteous are both alike an abomination to the LORD (Prov. 17:15)."

Know for sure that God will not live with unholiness. Reconciliation demands satisfaction for transgressions, payment of all debts, and holiness of life. These sobering truths hit us first before God proceeds with our deliverance. Judges are sober; they have to be. If our judges hand down easy, light, sentimental sentences we rightly complain. Criminals then fear no judge; they get away with murder, so to speak. Consequently our streets are not safe anymore. More and more security is needed. In the earlier migrant days people left doors open and unlocked. You cannot do that anymore. Well, if we expect strict justice to protect our streets and families, what do we expect of our heavenly Judge? Will soft compromises ruin his kingdom so that it becomes riddled with lawlessness? Or will it remain a kingdom of righteousness?

Yes, we really expect God to administer strict justice. Brothers and sisters, that means our privileged position as God's favourites now boomerangs on us. At first we were a little lower than God, crowned with honour and majesty. But the sunshine turns into thunderclouds. God's favourites run for shelter.

We have no hope in ourselves. Lord's Day 5 impresses this basic lesson on our hearts. So it makes us flee to Jesus, outside of ourselves. It is so hard for us to see and acknowledge this truth. Are we not civilised people, people who invent computers and who build airplanes to take around the globe? We can take care of ourselves! We need no help from others. We cannot see our need for a substitute. We can manage on our own. Look around you in Australia. Do your neighbours need God, need Jesus? For many people religion has no place, no purpose. The sport ovals and other pursuits attract them more than churches do on Sundays.

So it is very healthy to have this basic, introductory Lord's Day in this second part about our deliverance.

It is good also for us covenanted people.

For what must God do with his covenanted people? You know, in a way the covenant of favour spells hopelessness for man. For our corruption is total. We cannot do anything good which can please God. Yet the Book of the covenant tells us that *we must continue to do everything written in the book of the Law to do them*. But as with Israel we murmur, rebel and disobey. So the covenant can turn into a curse for us.

As our only high-priest taught us to do, we ask for forgiveness everyday for such debts and disobedience. Yet the mighty stream of foul transgression prevails, continues from day to day. Everyday we increase our debt.

One often sees a person daily get on the internet to check his stocks and bonds. Have they gone up, and how much? But how often do we

take spiritual inventory to check how far we grow in debt to God and to our neighbours? Do you love God totally? Do you love your neighbour as yourself? No! Then you grow in debt, daily. It compounds against you.

The HC stresses that ***we must repay, we*** must take the sentence, and ***we*** must love God again. Brothers and sisters, we cannot do that. It is hopeless.

This door of hope is rusted shut.

Yet there is one Mediator who is the door of salvation. All who go in and out through Him find salvation. His name is Jesus Christ. But Jesus did not act like a door just like that. No, it took the greatest sacrifices. The Mediator had to ***satisfy for us***, he paid the penalty ***in full***. In the garden of Gethsemane Jesus fervently prayed that the way of satisfaction could be bypassed. Was there no other way? "Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from Me." Is there only one way back to God's favour? Let the cup of death pass. No. Three times "no". Pay in full. Drink the cup, the whole cup. That stern message jolts us into recognising the full extent of our exile, of our sinfulness which God severely punishes. But it also reveals the extent of God's grace to restore us. God did not do it cheaply.

Brothers and sisters, your deliverance came by satisfaction, by paying the full punishment. Reconciliation came by satisfaction, through paying the ransom price. His own lifeblood! It was the lifeblood of the true and righteous man, Jesus. Only God's own Son could endure the heat of God's lightning bolts. They wore him down; He was sorely troubled. He cried aloud at the abandonment. But He bore it. We remember it regularly.

This truth of the covenant of favour also highlights another important issue. ***Man*** sinned. The animals did not. That means man must take the responsibility for repairing the damages. ***Substitution*** becomes very difficult.

2. The way of substitution.

Actually substitution is a very noble part of life. A man substitutes for his brother who is in debt. One man takes the place of another. To be a redeemer, a "goel", for one's relative who was in dire straits was a noble commandment and goal in the OT. Many nations here on earth honour such sacrificial substitution as the zenith of self-sacrifice and bravery. Did Jesus not say, "greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends (John 15:13)?"

However, God's covenant with man allows no other substitute than man. The soul that sins shall die, God consistently maintains in his

Word. Even though the Mosaic covenant provided for countless animal sacrifices, the Letter to the Hebrews tells us that the blood of bulls and goats could not really atone for our sins. Only because they pointed ahead to the **one human sacrifice** were they valid at all.

What if a **man** could be found willing and able to stand in our places? What if he were holy and righteous as Adam in the beginning? Could he help us? Brothers and sisters, he might if we had offended a man and not God. We could withstand the anger of a man maybe. But the covenant is with the LORD God. Who can endure the heat of his anger? Was Cain able to do so? No. He pleaded for mercy.

Was the early world able to climb high enough to escape the floods of God's judgment?

Were Sodom and Gomorrah able to outrun the flaming stones from heaven?

Could Korah, Dathan and Abiram avoid being swallowed alive? In every case the answer is a resounding "no". Man cannot dodge God. In the final judgment men will call on the mountains and hills to cover them so they need not face the all-penetrating and all-powerful God. But it is impossible. No mere creature can sustain God's heavy anger against sin. Nor can any mere creature restore to us righteousness and life.

Those goals require the strength, endurance and ability of God Himself. Now if you were a rationalist, would you not despair? Could you reason out a way of escape? No you could not. Consequently you would be as pessimistic as today's philosophers of despair. Their last word of wisdom is that life is absurd, there is no meaning.

Well, if even a righteous man cannot help us, is our cause not hopeless?

What is impossible with us men is possible with God, as Jesus said. God opens the way of substitution. In the OT, day after day, and year on year, God allowed animals to take the place of sinners. Animals died in the place of people. But it all pointed ahead to the **human** substitute for sinners.

Now substitution is very noble. Husbands died for their wives and families in times of persecution. Even in our human society you can read of endless stories of humans substituting for each other, out of selfless love.

Yet the Bible has a unique history of selfless and loving substitution. For example, when God ordered Abraham to sacrifice his special son, Abraham went ahead. When God saw his willingness, God stopped him. Instead, God provided a ram caught in a thicket. A substitute! This prophesied how God would provide the great Substitute.

In OT the redeemer substituted his money, his goods for his next of kin.

Yes, our Lord teaches us *greater love has no one than this, than to lay*

down one's life for his friends (John 15:13). Lay down your own life for someone else? That takes love. It takes sacrifice and courage.

Substitution requires all those things.

We might take our friends' place for a certain task, when your friend is sick or having a baby. You help each other. You may even donate a kidney for a friend or relative. Wonderful! But lay down your life for your friend?

Yet this is exactly what God promises. For this is what we need. There is no other way.

God brings the deliverer, the seed of the woman who will crush the head of the wily Serpent. In other words the Saviour will be a real man, descended from the first parents. God also promised to send a righteous man - for the Messiah would be called the *Branch* who is given the added title in Jeremiah, *the LORD is our righteousness* (23:6).

Moreover, God promised that Mediator will be more than any mere creature, more than any man - *For his name shall be called 'wonderful counsellor, mighty God, everlasting Father and prince of peace'* (Isaiah 9:6). We remember some of these promises around Christmas time.

So what seems impossible, God delivers. A unique, amazing Substitute!

God keeps his promises. As we confess in the Form for the Lord's Supper, God fulfils all his pledges to the forefathers in the OT. When the time had fully come God sent forth **his son, born of a woman, born under the law** (Gal.4:4). As the seed of the woman He crushes the head of Satan. Being born under the law, Jesus can fulfil the law and its requirements. Jesus is also the strong man, as he called himself, who could defeat the Devil and spoil his house. No mere creature could have done that.

No wonder then that Jesus called himself **the way, the truth and the life**. There is no way left back into fellowship with God than through Him. Only through Jesus can we be received back into favour. Then we can be reassured of dwelling with God forever in God's mansions. A place will always be ready for us. Yes, He is the one and only, the unique door of salvation. As Jesus often says, *knock at this door, and it will be opened*. Indeed, Jesus claims, *I am the door; if any one enters by me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture* (John 10:9). He is the door of salvation. But then it is also necessary for us sinners to accept that verdict of being totally condemned in ourselves, and that Jesus is the only door of salvation. Then we must knock at that door. It will be opened. As Jesus told the church at Laodicea,

Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if any one hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me (Rev 3:20).

What a beautiful picture of renewed fellowship - eating and drinking together!

Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life - for those whom God has

already taken to Jesus, and for all of us who believe and who want to enjoy God's favour and fellowship again. Amen