

January 2025

Ministers Message

Mission Department Newsletter

From the Mission Department

As we turn over the calendar year we reflect on God's works and how He has cared for His Kingdom. May God continue to give strength and willing hearts to His vineyard workers to continue to serve in the coming year.

With a new calendar year, it brings us much to look forward to in the coming year. Take a moment to review the Noteworthy section of the Ministers Message for upcoming events. Our first Ministers Webinar of 2025 is scheduled for February 6th. The topic for this webinar is Wedding Materials. We will discuss the practical aspects in the role of the officiant when asked to serve. We will also look at what type of resources are currently available to ministers and have the opportunity to visit about what type of materials are needed or would be helpful to serve couples when asked to officiate a wedding.

We look forward to seeing many of you at the annual LLC Ministers Camp at Stony Lake Camp April 4-6. This annual camp event gives us the opportunity to visit with fellow servants of the word around timely topics. It is also a place where we are able to have fellowship with one another and receive encouragement to serve with the gifts that God has given. We wish to encourage each of you to attend, especially those that have recently been called and may be feeling timid. Signup for this camp will be available via FunJoin February 3rd.

Noteworthy

Upcoming Events

LLC 2025 Ministers Webinar #1
February 6, 2025
8:00 pm CST

LLC New Ministers Workshop
February 21-22, 2025

LLC 2025 Phoenix Winter Services
March 13-16, 2025

LLC Ministers Camp, SLC
April 4-6, 2025

LLC 2025 Ministers Webinar #2
May 29, 2025
8:00 pm CDT

LLC 2025 Outlook Summer Services
July 3-6, 2025

LLC 2025 Ministers Webinar #3
August 28, 2025
8:00 pm CDT

LLC Ministers & Wives Camp,
Prairie Shores
September 19-21, 2025

LLC 2025 Ministers Webinar #4
November 6, 2025
8:00 pm CST

Jesus and the Rich Young Man

Leo Väyrynen

Matthew 19:16–26

What good should I do that I could have eternal life? This question had become important to a young man who met Jesus on the road. The question was about entering God's kingdom. Inheriting the earthly Promised Land wasn't enough anymore for pious Jews during Jesus' time. They had to enter eternal life, but what had to be done to do so?

We can learn from Jesus' actions. He did not treat the man rudely even though he tried in vain to earn eternal life by his own works. Jesus proceeded from the man's world of experience and encouraged him to keep the commandments. In this way He wanted to help the man to see his true condition. The man wanted to know which commandments Jesus meant. "Thou shalt do no murder, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Honour thy father and thy mother: and, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself," Jesus listed. The young man said, "All these things have I kept from my youth up: what lack I yet?"

Why did the man act in that way? Why did he come to ask for the way to salvation from Jesus, if he actually honored the law and imagined that he would inherit eternal life by fulfilling the commandments of the law?



ARTWORK: RAIMO ÖSTERBERG

JESUS CONVERSES

Jesus met many people during His life. Several of them wanted to converse with Him. Jesus' teaching gave birth to questions in some listeners. They wanted to hear more since His teachings deviated from the teachings of the scribes of that time. Several people approached Jesus because of their difficulties and problems. Jesus also used to talk on His own initiative with people He encountered in various situations.

Several discussions which Jesus had with various people are recorded in the Bible. This year we will publish a series of writings in this paper by Leo Väyrynen on some of these discussions. Although around two thousand years have passed since these discussions, their topics and issues are still timely. We notice this in this series of writings.

The man lived the whole time with terrible uncertainty. He was bothered by this question: How closely must the commandments be fulfilled and are there still other commandments which should be fulfilled? He knew the commandments of the Law of Moses and was aware of the more than six hundred additional regulations which the fathers had prescribed. How closely should they be fulfilled and what yet should be done?

Such self-righteous people who are unsure of their salvation still exist. They are constantly trying to convince themselves and others that they are worthy of salvation since they have attempted to live correctly and to do good. At the same time they are consumed by anxiety about whether they have done everything that they should have done. This nagging feeling clothes itself in this question: Do you accept me, and what more does God demand of me?

Jesus answered to this troubled young man, "If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come and follow me." Thus, Jesus helped the man to see his true condition. If he wanted to keep all of the commandments, he had to be willing to give up everything he had. Here Jesus touched a sensitive point in the man's life. The man was rich, and his wealth had become an idol to him. He placed his trust in it and wanted to keep it for himself, selfishly closing his eyes to his neighbor's distress.

Jesus Converses

Despite his best efforts the man had broken the main commandment or the first commandment, which exhorts us to fear and love God above everything else and to rely on Him alone and not on temporal things. At the same time the man had broken the dual command of love, a summary of God's law, in its second part, which exhorts us to love our neighbor as oneself.

Jesus encouraged the man to follow Him and to leave everything else. It was a call from the piety of dead works to worship the living God. The man was not able to leave since his possessions had become a god to him, which he did not have the heart to surrender. What a pity! He went away sorrowfully, for he knew that Jesus was right and realized the fate of his decision.

How difficult it is for those who have possessions to enter the kingdom of God! Jesus explained that it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter God's kingdom. But salvation is not easy for the poor either. The rich loves his possessions and the poor loves his rags, Laestadius preached in his time. The poor man's stomachache is not less than the rich man's. "Who then can be saved?" the disciples asked. Jesus answered: It is impossible for man but not for God.

God's law promises salvation to those who entirely fulfill the law. But even now sin-corrupt man has not advanced to the degree that he would be able to fulfill the law. Therefore,

the law has become a teacher unto Christ. Coming into the company of Christ and living faith is God's work, not man's. Even today God is able to give new birth as His children to those who have knowingly or unknowingly founded their salvation upon their own works or possessions and thus become practitioners of a dead spirituality. Are there such people among the readers of this article?

God does His work of new birth with the help of the preaching of repentance and the sermon of reconciliation that He has preached from His kingdom. The road of the law's works does not lead to salvation, only God's grace saves a person. The sermon of the law awakens knowledge of sin. Only the assurance of absolution will free one from sin and the slavery of the law to the portion of a child of God and freedom and give a secure certainty of salvation, which is not dependent on the thanks and acceptance of all of the people in the world.

When a person receives the grace of repentance, he comes as we are used to saying, with all that he owns into the kingdom of God. Possessions are then not seen as a matter on which salvation and eternal life can be founded. It is seen as God's gift and a loan, which can be used for the benefit of neighbors and people in need and for the work of God's kingdom, for it also need temporal funds.

Siionin Lähetyslehti 2000_02

Epistle Postil

Second Sunday After Epiphany

Markku Seppänen

LECTIONARY YEAR I

Romans 12:6-16

GRACE GIFTS

Apostle Paul speaks of gifts which God uses in His congregation. The congregation is the body of Christ. The gifts become sanctified through faith. The core emphasis of our text is correct humility and the knowledge that God is the giver of gifts. Paul also speaks of Christian life by giving loving instructions concerning our attitude toward fellow humans and our endeavor in everyday life.

God's grace also brings about good fruits in temporal life. Ethically proper life is not the prerequisite of faith, rather its effect. In his epistle Paul instructs the Romans with the tenderness that comes from God's love.

VARIOUS GIFTS IN SERVING

According to Christian Doctrine, God especially reveals himself through His Holy Word and in His Son Jesus Christ. God opens His Word in His congregation, where He dwells through His Spirit. Our text brings out how God at this time reveals himself and His will in His congregation through the various gifts He has given to its members.

Epistle Postil

The primary purpose of God's gifts is to reveal Christ's love and to help people to believe. Someone, for example, has the gift to explain God's Word. Someone has received the gift to share wisdom, another knowledge. Some have a teacher's gift; another has received the gift of practical work. The important thing is that all gifts become sanctified through the Spirit and that they are used for the glory of God.

There are various gifts in the congregation, but the Spirit is one says the apostle. In the same way that the body has many different members, and all have their own function, God's congregation also has various gifts. God uses them to fulfill His own intentions. God's arrangement is often completely contrary to what we humans think. The smallest members of the body and those which seem to be the least are often the most important in terms of life. It also is the case in the body of Christ so that God receives glory in everything. God emphasizes childlike faith and humility through His gifts.

The gifts also include responsibility. Let the Bible be explained while remaining in the truth so that it is in unity with faith. Let the teacher live worthy of his teaching, and he who leads, let him bear care and sorrow over it. Who is given an office, let him care for it properly and he who helps others and gives of his own, let him do it without being asked. Thus, the apostle teaches.

The gifts have been given to serve our neighbors. We are all in the service of the Giver of the gifts. It is not appropriate for us to use them for our own benefit and honor. Serve one another with that gift which each one of you has been given (1 Pet. 4:10). The most important thing is that all gifts would be in the congregation for edification.

GIFTS AND HUMILITY

We humans have the tendency to brag and take honor for God's gifts for ourselves. An example of humble faith is Paul's letter in which he sincerely relates of his experiences to the Corinthians. He did not come with excellency of speech or deep wisdom to declare God's testimony, but in weakness and fear speaking of Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 2). The true spirit of faith is not in human wisdom, but in God's power.

The Catechism instructs that gifts, correctly understood, beget a humble and thankful mind toward the Giver of life and further God's glory. We must be careful that they do not lead us to pride or sensuality. The apostle emphasizes humility in several passages of our text, saying: "For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think" or "mind not high things." In using gifts, we are encouraged to, "prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God."

Such an attitude towards gifts is not in harmony with the modern way of thinking and its image of man. The spirit of the world exalts man and upholds superficial values. Self-presentation, self-interest and the pursuit of popularity are emphasized everywhere. A Christian lives in the present time. A child of God wishes to endeavor in such a way that God would receive the glory in all things. Paul warns about conforming to the ways of this world.

HONOR ONE ANOTHER

At the end of the text the apostle gives instructions concerning Christian life. These emphasize the love of neighbor and respect for other people. We are guided to a bright hope, humility, patience, hospitality, service, understanding our enemy, and especially to compassion in our neighbors' joys and sorrows. Compassion is a precious gift. It can be influenced by God's love. Who has been forgiven much also loves much, as Jesus taught the Pharisee in explaining the great love of the sinful woman (Luke 7:36-50).

Noticing and being compassionate to other people are much in need. There is much pain and anxiety in the world. It is important to maintain notice of others in this lonely and selfish world. Although, on the one hand, the world is becoming more integrated and messages that promote communication travel quickly, it often appears that people are lonelier than ever. In our time that worships money and the standard of living, the sense of community has worryingly decreased. Care, love and compassion for the life situations of others give meaning to life and blessing to both parties involved. Communication gives life "flavor." When the gospel can make our own hearts tender, we can bear other's burdens, rejoice in their successes and sympathize in their sorrows.

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