

Ministers Message

Mission Department Newsletter



Noteworthy

Upcoming Events

LLC Phoenix Winter Services
March 17–20, 2022

LLC Ministers Camp
April 1–3, 2022

LLC Board Members Workshop
April 30, 2022

LLC Ministers Webinar
Pentecost—The New Covenant Established
June 2, 2022 @ 8:00 CDT

LLC Summer Services
June 30–July 3, 2022

Reminder

If you haven't signed up for the LLC Ministers Camp, do so soon.

The Bible, Our First and Best Tool

The Bible is our first and best tool as servants of the Word. The apostle Paul, when he offered his co-worker Timothy pastoral advice and instruction, told him that Holy Scripture was able to make him “wise unto salvation” and was “profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness” (2 Tim. 3:15,16).

A Bible text provides the subject for our every sermon. It is also a tool that we use to explain our chosen sermon text. Thus, familiarity with the Bible is a necessity for both selecting and explaining a text. If we only read the Bible when we prepare for an upcoming sermon, we can expect to come face to face the unpleasant realization that we have neglected our duty. We would be well served to develop the habit of reading the Bible every day.

Martin Luther, our forefather in faith, shared his personal practice when he wrote: “For a number of years, I have now annually read through the Bible twice. If the Bible were a large, mighty tree and all its words were little branches I have tapped at all the branches, eager to know what was there and what it had to offer.”

In 2009 our brother Aimo Hautamaki explained the blessing that a minister finds in regular reading of the Bible: “The old principle of explaining the Bible with other Bible portions is possible if the book is familiar to us. The memory also needs refreshment. Here, if anywhere, it is true that repetition is the mother of learning. With the help of reading the Bible we ‘gather material’ for the Holy Spirit in sermons.”

It can be challenging to develop the habit of reading the Bible each day. There are a number of tools available to help us develop the habit. One valuable tool is a Bible reading plan. Bible reading plans provide a schedule, a goal and direction, and a focus for our reading. They can provide a place to start and a place to go to. Many Bible apps include a variety of reading plans. The OliveTree app, for example, offers over 153 reading plans. Plans range from 5 days to one year in length. They include a variety of approaches such as plans for reading the entire Bible, topical plans, seasonal plan that focus on Advent, Christmas, Lent, or Easter related texts for example. There are also plans that focus on the lives of biblical characters or on select books of the Bible.

If you, regardless of good intentions, have struggled to develop or maintain the practice of reading the Bible each day, consider using a reading plan. Brothers who have used such reading plans have found them to be helpful.

May God bless your study of His Word.

Discourse on the Need for New Birth

Esa Tuomaala

“There was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews: The same came to Jesus by night, and said unto him, Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him” (John 3:1,2).

Nicodemus belonged to the Pharisees, a religious group which greatly honored the Law of Moses and sought to comply with it. In addition, he was a “ruler” or a man belonging to the Jewish leadership. We meet him later also in the midst of this group, when there is a question about matters concerning Jesus (John 7:50,51).

Nicodemus approached Jesus at an unusual time, at night. It was unlikely that he was compelled to do this because of urgency arising from a distressed conscience—that, in fact, has driven many whom God has awakened to move regardless of the time of day. Rather, we can conclude that his coming at night was due to fear of what others would think and a fear of being labeled. It would have been

JESUS CONVERSES

The gospels present us with a rich picture of Jesus’ public ministry. There we find His works and miracles, teachings, parables, and also some of His conversations. Some of those conversations were with adversaries, some with the curious, and others with the downcast or seeking. Some of the conversations were with individuals and others were with groups.

In these conversations we can see how Jesus approached people and responded to their questions. His teaching, methods, and manner offer us valuable lessons. We can apply them in our own lives and in our work as servants of the Word. The articles in this series will examine some of the enlightening conversations that took place between the Son of God and His contemporaries.

difficult to explain to his fellow Pharisees what business he had with the Galilean preacher the next time he met them, when admitting to being His follower could lead to being banned or separated from the synagogue (John 9:22). On the other hand, it is evident that Jesus allowed people who wanted to approach Him to do so not only during the day or late in the evening, but also at night.

The opening of Nicodemus’ discussion was skillful and polite. It contained a noble acknowledgement that Jesus was a teacher sent by God. On the other hand, it didn’t state anything about the most important fact, that Jesus was the God-sent Messiah, the Christ, and Son of God. Jesus does not fall into the trap of courtesy, nor does He continue the discussion about His own duty to teach but brings up the most important thing for Nicodemus: “Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot see the kingdom of God.”

With the emphasis of an oath – saying the word “verily” twice (in the original language



Jesus Converses

Greek: “amen, amen”) He affirms that without new birth a person cannot see the kingdom of God. Jesus, with slightly different words, repeats this indisputable matter later in the discussion. First, He expresses on what basis it happens, saying: “Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit.” Then he directs His speech especially to Nicodemus and his associates, saying “Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again.”

Faced with Jesus’ unconditional words, the night visitor becomes amazed. He asks questions of the teacher from Nazareth and through them he reveals the condition of his own heart. Three questions revealed much: “How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother’s womb, and be born?” “How can this be?” The content of Nicodemus’ words also reflects the thinking and attitude of many people of our time. People hold on to worldly things. Spiritual life and discussion about it is strange to them. Nicodemus understands nothing about that spiritual happening, new birth, repentance, the change in the heart and life, which Jesus expected from him.

The Savior, the Good Shepherd, however, does not cut the discussion off prematurely. He brings out Nicodemus’ responsibility as a teacher of the people. In that position he should surely have understood the significance and necessity of new birth. It is interesting that Jesus’ words are not simply in the form of a bilateral me – you discussion, rather Jesus continues the discussion thusly: “We speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen; and ye receive not our witness.” We who? Jesus is apparently placing His disciples alongside himself as God’s coworkers and preachers of the kingdom of God. He identified with them in this sense. He at that time already formed a congregation with His disciples, which had a united testimony, an identical message. That again wasn’t acceptable to the group of Pharisees, which Nicodemus represented. “You don’t believe,” Jesus says of them.

However, this discussion during the night does not even end with this. Jesus’ speech shifts to the Old Testament picture of redemption, the bronze serpent, and even further to the lifting



up of the Son of Man and the sentence, which is called the miniature gospel and core message of the entire Bible: “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (John 3:16).

Let us remember that Jesus spoke this clear gospel message with such a Pharisee whose blindness had become evident earlier in the discussion. In accord with the Parable of the Sower, Jesus cast the precious seed of the Word there too, where there did not seem to be any possibility of it germinating.

The discussion Jesus had is instructive in many ways for those who have been helped into faith. Our main duty is to keep preaching the gospel, not only by arranging services, but also by entering into discussions with unbelieving people. In these discussions, into which God according to His wisdom leads us, our responsible duty is to discuss the necessity of new birth or repentance, regardless of the individual in question, in other words to all, who due to their unbelief, have not yet repented. Humbling oneself to repentance opens a person’s eyes to see God’s kingdom on this earth and leads a person into it. At the same time, we wish to remember the love with which Jesus offered Nicodemus the possibility of believing regardless of his unbelief. Not only the words are important, but also the basic attitude, the mind of the Good Shepherd and Christ, with which a believer always wishes to approach an unbeliever. ■

Ephesians 5:1–11

Jesus, the Victor over Evil's Power

Eero Lumijärvi

ENDEAVOR AS CHILDREN OF LIGHT

Our text is from Paul's letter to the congregation in Ephesus. Paul sent it around the year 60 AD while he was a prisoner in Rome. In addition to Ephesus, the letter was apparently intended to be read by Christians in other areas of Asia Minor. Paul points to the importance of the congregation in his letter. At that time, Ephesus was the largest city in Asia Minor. It was the hub of the major land and sea



Jesus, the Victor over Evil's Power

Third Sunday in Lent

The third Sunday in Lent considers Jesus as the Victor over evil's power. In the Lord's Prayer, we ask, "deliver us from evil." The prince of evil diligently does his destructive work among humans. He is in union with human flesh and blood. Death came to the midst of mankind as the wages of sin. The enemy of souls is called a three-fold enemy: the devil, the world, and our own flesh. He is the prince of darkness. His kingdom is the kingdom of darkness.

The New Testament readings for this Sunday are from Ephesians, the Revelation and 1 John. In the first text, Paul encourages God's children to endeavor as children of light. In the portion from the Revelation, a servant of the Word who had become spiritually rich is encouraged to be diligent and repent. In the last text, John in his epistle reminds that one born of God does not sin. For all of these listed duties, we need God's power. It is contained in the gospel, in which the strength acquired from Jesus Christ as Victor over the power of evil is given to believers.

routes. A congregation of God had been born in the city. This is related in Acts 18:20, in addition to the Epistle to the Ephesians. Of the seven letters sent by Jesus in the Revelation, the first is sent to the angel, or servant of the Word, of the congregation of Ephesus.

FROM DARKNESS TO LIGHT

The Ephesus congregation consisted of people who had received the grace of repentance. At that time they had been translated from darkness to light and begun to follow Jesus Christ. Jesus said to His disciples, "he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of

life” (John 8:12). Although a child of God lives in the midst of the unbelieving world, he wants to remain separate from all sin and the darkness of the unbelieving world. Paul warns that believers should not be partakers of the unfruitful works of darkness. A child of God has the same desire yet today. Nevertheless, sin always attaches to us. That’s why it is God’s great mercy that we can believe all of our sins forgiven in His kingdom. God’s mercy is new each morning. God’s people proclaim the gospel of the forgiveness of sins to all people who are penitent over their sins.

DO NOT ADAPT TO THE WAYS OF THE WORLD

The unbelieving world keeps its own immoral and lewd lifestyle. Paul warns that such should not even be mentioned among God’s children. A child of God should not adopt the language usage of unbelievers. We must hear what the people of this world speak at school, work, and during our leisure time. It is not surprising if ungodliness strives to stick to us. We don’t want to take part in the laughter of unbelievers, when one of them says a joke with a double meaning. It would be easy to nod as if in agreement with their jokes or lewdness. This is not appropriate for children of light.

One must quite consciously battle against ungodliness. It is fitting to ask God for strength, skill, and courage that we would sometimes be able to remind unbelievers that their actions are not right. When we fall into fault it is necessary for us to ask them for forgiveness as well. But above all, we can speak to other children of God of falls that have occurred and our sins. They will preach even them forgiven. Through the gospel we receive God’s power to preserve a good conscience in the endeavor before us. The apostle reminds us “that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and

of God.”

Peter reminds us how the unbelieving people vexed righteous Lot with their ungodly life. Lot suffered in his heart when he had to live among unbelievers and see and hear their lewd life (2 Pet. 2:7,8). Today’s child of God has the same experiences. Jesus comforts His disciples, “In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world” (John 16:33). ■



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