

November 2022

Ministers Message

Mission Department Newsletter



The Mission Department and the area mission committees will soon begin work on the 2024 mission work schedule. Now that the pandemic appears to be in the rearview mirror, we see both foreign and domestic mission work returning to normal activity levels. Those who, because of the pandemic have had to endeavor with fewer or even no services during this period long for services and fellowship. Some new service locations and congregations have also been added. That will mean more service trips and events for many of you. We remember Jesus' words: "The harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers are few; Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth labourers into his harvest" (Matthew 9:37-38).

November brings us to the end of the church year which ends with Vigilance Sunday and Judgement Sunday. The Epistle Postil article this month deals with the Judgement Sunday theme and text. November also includes Reformation Day. The theme for the day and the texts point to the foundation of our faith and the foundations of the Reformation. We see still the significance of the Reformation and its impact in our lives. One of Luther's contributions to the Lutheran Confessional Writings, the Small Catechism, is used to this day in our Sunday schools.

The Small Catechism is not only fit for use in Sunday school. It is a beneficial and useful tool to us as ministers as well. Luther said that he never mastered the catechism but needed to read and study it every day. One of the benefits of the catechism is its focus on the central themes of God's revelation in salvation history, themes that are repeated throughout the Bible. Luther also wrote another catechism. It's called the Large Catechism. It's not as well known or widely read as the Small Catechism. The Large Catechism is Luther's explanation of the Small Catechism. He explains how we are to understand the principal content of the Small Catechism—the 10 Commandments, the Creed, the Lord's Prayer, Baptism, and Holy Communion. He also touches on confession at the end of his explanation of Communion.

The catechisms provide us with a good framework for our study of the Bible. They help us to recognize and focus on the central themes of God's Word. They also bring us comfort and assurance in our endeavor and the daily battle against the teachings of this world and all manner of false prophets. Both the Small and Large Catechism are well worth our study and frequent review.

This is the last issue of Ministers Message for 2022. We hope that you have enjoyed the new format and found the content to be a helpful in your work and the study of God's Word. We plan to continue both the Epistle Postil articles and the Jesus Converses series in 2023. Please let us know if you have suggestions for items you would like us to touch on in this section in 2023. Our contact information is at the bottom of the on the last page.

We wish you all a blessed and joyful Advent and Christmas.

Mark 12:13–17

A Question about Tax Money

Esa Tuomaala

“And they send unto him certain of the Pharisees and of the Herodians, to catch him in his words. And when they were come, they say unto him, Master, we know that thou art true, and carest for no man: for thou regardest not the person of men, but teachest the way of God in truth: Is it lawful to give tribute to Caesar, or not? Shall we give, or shall we not give? But he, knowing their hypocrisy, said unto them, Why tempt ye me? bring me a penny, that I may see it. And they brought it. And he saith unto them, Whose is this image and superscription? And they said unto him, Caesar's. And Jesus answering said unto them, Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's. And they marvelled at him” (Mark 12: 13–17).

Many motives drove the people that approached Jesus. Very unworthy motives come out in our text: to catch Jesus in His words. For this purpose, the Pharisees and Herodians joined in a mutual mission.

THE PHARISEES AND ZEALOTS

The Pharisees made up a Jewish sect with its own religious and national platform. In a religious sense, they tried to follow the traditions of the elders, an interpretation of the laws of Moses which had been formed over a long period of time, as closely as possible. Following these to the point of excruciating effort was important to them. On the other hand, they were custodians of Jewish nationalism. Roman dominion, from which they were awaiting liberation, was a heavy yoke for them. They did not accept Caesar's taxation in principle, but they were content to wait in silence for conditions to improve. The strictest Jews, the so-called Zealots, by contrast, not only refused to pay the tax but rose in open revolt against Roman rule but were defeated. One of these Zealots, namely Simon the Canaanite, also called Simon the Zealot, became one of Jesus' disciples and apostles (Luke 6:15; Acts 1:19).

THE HERODIANS

The Herodians were a group that supported Herod's royal family. The Herodians, of whom several held Palestinian government positions, were not of pure Jewish descent. It was important for them to

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.

maintain good relationships with the Roman rulers, with whose support they could remain in power. As favorites of Rome, they had completely different ways of thinking from the nationalistic-minded Pharisees. As Jesus' adversaries, they nonetheless joined forces with them already early on in conspiring to kill Jesus (Mark 3:6).

A DIFFICULT QUESTION

The payment of the tax, on which Jesus was expected to make a statement, offended the Jews in both a national and a religious sense. It did not go into the country's general funds, but rather into Caesar's own coffers. Moreover, the Jewish province's own copper coinage was not valid payment; rather the Roman silver denarius had to be used. It had Caesar's image and superscription on it, for example, the word *divine*, which referred to the worship of Caesar as a divine being. A Pharisee, zealous in God's law, could not with peace of mind even consider paying this.

These two groups could together put Jesus between two fires. If He stated His consent to Caesar's tax, he would have had the Pharisees and the people against Him and could have been accused of accepting the worship of Caesar. However, if He had taken a negative position, the Herodians could have reported Him to the governor as an instigator of rebellion. The evangelist Luke has especially mentioned this

latter possibility (Luke 22:20). Thus, no matter what Jesus said, accusations could not be avoided.

TO CAESAR WHAT IS CAESAR'S

The opening of the conversation is polite. Jesus' teaching is recognized for godly characteristics by the questioners. He is serious, teaches in truth, and does not consider either man or the person of man. In addition, the form of the question would indicate that the questioners are asking due to a personal quandary. "Shall we give, or shall we not give?" Jesus' gaze pierces the polite exterior of His adversaries: "Why tempt ye me?" But after this Jesus moves on to the problem presented. Before answering, He asks His adversaries to bring the tax money for everyone to see. This was already an important act on Jesus' part. In bringing the tax money, His adversaries showed that they had in their possession and use the means of payment despised by the Jews, which bore the marks of Caesar's power. But after this Jesus makes His questioners answer this question, "Whose is this image and superscription?" Jesus certainly knew that without asking, but in teaching the adversaries trying to tempt Him, He wanted to hear from their own lips, as a testimony, the answer: "Caesar's." So, the money had the minter Caesar's image and writing. When Jesus states, "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's," He actually continues with that which His adversaries had already acknowledged: the money in accord with its image and superscription belongs to Caesar. There was no reason for not giving it back to him. The legitimacy of the paying the tax was resolved. So, the Zealots, who for nationalistic and religious reasons had refused to pay this silver money to Caesar's treasury, were wrong. On the other hand, many of those who supported this refusal, were guilty of a double standard in this, that all the same they carried this money with the sign of the worship of Caesar with them and used it to pay for their purchases. The reality of the everyday world shattered their over-spiritual piety.

UNTO GOD WHAT IS GOD'S

However, Jesus' short answer gains a very special content and weight in that He doesn't only encourage to give to Caesar that which is his, but also to give God that which is His. If the part of the answer concerning Caesar has a far-reaching significance concerning the endeavor of a Christian in the midst of society, then the latter part concerns most broadly and thoroughly his entire faith and

endeavor. If we, considering our own lives, ask, "What is God's," we cannot exclude or limit anything from this. "The silver is mine and the gold is mine," God says through the prophet Haggai. "The earth is the LORD's, and the fulness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein" (Psalm 24:1). Thus everything that we see around us belongs to the Creator of all, to God. And not only that which we see around us, but even man himself. Paul instructs the Roman Christians, "that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service" (Rom. 12:1). Thus, our entire body and its members belong to God. A child of God gives even his spirit to God, as Jesus and Stephen did, when he leaves from here (Luke 23:46; Acts 7:59). This, that we receive something into our hands and under our control, in the light of God's Word only means that we have been entrusted with something, something which has been handed over to us for a time. God takes back that which He has lent us in His own time.

Jesus' opponents were surprised by Jesus' profound answer. The possibilities of accusation were removed from both the Pharisees and Herodians. We can, marveling, also ponder the depth, richness, and closeness to the life of Jesus' short answer. Our entire present-day life is touched by the two instructions in Jesus' answer: Give to Caesar and to give to God. Giving to Caesar means the connection and obligation which we, as believers, have towards our government, to our community and all of society. We don't refuse to pay taxes, even though we know that the tax resources are sometimes used for the wrong purposes. We don't refuse to use our right to vote, like many sects do, nor do we refuse to serve in the armed forces. Caesar certainly receives that which has his image and superscription from Christians.

But in us Christians, despite being corrupted by the Fall, is the image of God and the Creator's inscription. Thus, our greatest obligation of obedience is to God. We must show obedience to God's Word. It is comforting to see that this obedience does not, according to Jesus' words, lead us to over-spirituality or to a strained relationship in temporal life, or to the revolt of the Jewish Zealots, or to hair-splitting Pharisaism, but rather to sober and peaceful life. Keeping faith and a good conscience belong to this, as well as the hope of eternal life.

2 Thessalonians 1:3-10

Judgement Sunday

Veijo Sydänmetsä

AWAITING THE DAY OF THE LORD

In his first letter to the Thessalonians, Paul recalled how he preached the gospel to them night and day (1 Thess. 2:9). In his second letter, he, as a sower, rejoiced that God had given increase and brought his thankfulness to God for this. Paul was especially gladdened by this that the fruits of faith were so beautifully evident in mutual love among the Thessalonians.

PERSECUTIONS AND DIFFICULTIES IN THE LIFE OF A CHRISTIAN

It becomes evident in the letter that the endeavor of faith had not been outwardly easy for the young Thessalonian congregation. Christians had to experience persecution and distress. Paul wanted to strengthen the brothers living under persecution and distress to patiently await the coming of the Day of the Lord.



Christ, the Lord of the Universe

Christ the King Sunday is another name also used for Judgement Sunday. These two different themes form a whole. Thus, the last Sunday of the church year is joined with the following Sunday, Advent. The same message is heard at the beginning and end of the church year – or at the end and the beginning – God approaches us in Christ and sets us before His face.

However, the perspective of Advent and Judgement Sunday is quite different. While the Lord of Advent arrives humbly riding an ass, the Christ of Judgement Sunday arrives in His power and glory with His holy angels. The Lord of Advent arrives as a redeemer for all people, while the Lord of Judgement Sunday arrives to gather only His own.

The Day of the Lord separates people into two groups. Some rise to the resurrection of life, others to the resurrection of condemnation. God's righteousness will be ultimately realized in the last judgement.

The day's epistle texts relate of the last judgement, which is just and to which all must one day come. They encourage people to find the merciful God in His kingdom already in this time and to move from under the slavery of the law to the freedom of the gospel.

Paul saw the persecutions and tribulations of the Thessalonian congregation as proof that they believed correctly. Jesus' prediction was realized in them: "If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you" (John 15:19). They were able to patiently await the day when the Lord Jesus would appear from heaven with His holy angels.

Epistle Postil

We, the children of God of today, are able to travel under conditions which are outwardly quite different from our Thessalonian brothers and sisters. We do not need to fear for our bodily security. However, we are acutely aware that we are strangers and pilgrims here in this time and we also may experience ridicule and slander.

ONE DAY OUR PORTION WILL CHANGE

God's Word clearly reveals that one day an end will come to this world. This will not happen by man's actions or by accident, but rather according to God's plan. For some this will be the awaited day of redemption but for others it will be the feared day of judgement.

The revelation of God's Word concerning the lot of an ungodly person on the Day of the Lord is unconditional. For those people who haven't accepted Christ's gospel in this time, the day is horrifying. Their lot is eternal condemnation, eternal separation from the Lord and His glory.

Although Paul states this, he doesn't seek perverse delight from it. It isn't God's intention, nor a Christian's intention either, that even one soul would be lost. That's why repentance and the forgiveness of sins is preached in hope and prayer that a person who has become separated from God would again find the way to the hope of eternal life.

READY TO LEAVE

The world will once perish on the day of Christ's second coming. Then also time and temporalness, in the form we experience now, will end. The Acts of the Apostles indicate that the apostles awaited the second



coming of the Lord already in their time. When the Lord had not yet come, many doubted His coming altogether.

We don't know the time or the moment when the Lord will come. The Bible doesn't encourage us to worry about that matter either, but rather states unequivocally that no one knows of that day except God himself (Mark 13:32). The Bible instead encourages us to fix our attention on this that we would be ready to leave, whether the Day of the Lord would come when we are still here in this time or only then when we are awakened from rest in our graves. We await the Day of the Lord, and this also gives us strength to continue our endeavor.

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