

Introductory Comments:

So, we are continuing our studies from Matthew chapter 17. It has some powerful moments in the beginning, including the transfigurations of Jesus and the healing of a boy with a demon, followed by this occurrence near the end which seems pretty mild and maybe even a little unusual.

So last week we used the analogy of the mustard seed to show that with faith, we can move mountains. But there has to be some underpinning understanding of how faith works. The four points were - we need mercy from Jesus, correction from Jesus, healing from Jesus but overarching – faith in Jesus!

However, there are some great truths for us to learn in our passage this morning.

In fact, Matthew is the only Gospel writer to include this occurrence. Part of this passage has to do with paying a tax and some suggest that maybe Matthew liked this story because before Jesus called him to be a disciple, he was a tax collector.

Nevertheless, this is the Word of God and we will take some time today to discover what God has for us.

Before we do, let's go to God in prayer.

Our Father, we ask Your Holy Spirit to be our teacher this morning as we bow to the authority of Your Word. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen

Before we go much further, it's important to note that some of you may be wondering why we didn't cover verse 21 in last week's passage. The short of it is that the oldest translations that have been discovered do not contain verse 21. Verse 21 does not change the meaning of the text, and it does not change any theology in the Christian faith, so it certainly doesn't upset our Christian faith. The only reason it's not there is that it's not in the oldest manuscripts that we have and modern Bible translators want to be careful not to include anything in the Word of God that wasn't originally in the Word of God. I suspect that's enough explanation for most of you.

How many of you need reminders sometime? I need reminders about a lot of stuff. I need reminders about stuff in order to help me remember important things starting with my dreaded To Do list..

Well, today we're going to see four helpful reminders in this passage that will help us as we faithfully follow God.

Let's jump right in. Number one is . . .

I. A reminder about *Jesus' death* (vv. 22-23) [on screen]

Remember, Jesus' days on earth are limited at this point. He is nearing the end of His time on earth and He is continually pointing His apostles to the fact that He will have to die and to the fact that He will rise from the dead.

Here, Jesus is pointing them to His death again. Look at verses 22 and 23.

22 As they were gathering together in Galilee, Jesus told them, "The Son of Man is about to be betrayed into the hands of men. 23 They will kill him, and on the third day he will be raised up." And they were deeply distressed.

They are now again in the Galilee region, which is naturally near the Sea of Galilee, on the western side of the sea. This is home-base for Jesus and His disciples.

As they are gathered, Jesus is again reminding them that He must be betrayed, He must die, and He will rise from the dead. He is laser-focused on His mission and He's revealing it to His apostles.

As with the last prediction Jesus gave about His death, the disciples seem to completely miss the fact that Jesus said that He would be raised up on the third day.

They are simply focusing on the fact that He must be betrayed and that He must die.

Naturally, this distresses them deeply. Jesus is their teacher, master, Lord, and Messiah. They don't want Him to die.

However, Jesus is **reminding** them that He must die.

Hebrews 9:22 reminds us of this truth when it says, ". . . ***without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.***"

Jesus' purpose on this earth was to die for the forgiveness of sins so that the payment of our sins would be satisfied. He was the ultimate sacrifice.

We must be reminded of the necessity of His death.

Second, . . .

II. A reminder about *our loyalties* (vv. 24-26)

In this passage, we hear about a temple tax.

The temple tax was something that was required for males over the age of twenty in Jewish society to help with the upkeep of the temple.

You see, the temple was a massive complex that required a massive amount of upkeep. In order to do that, money was required, hence the temple tax.

This was not a Roman requirement, it was a Jewish requirement.

In this passage, a question is raised about whether or not Jesus pays this tax. Let's check it out:

24 When they came to Capernaum, those who collected the temple tax approached Peter and said, "Doesn't your teacher pay the temple tax?"

25 "Yes," he said. When he went into the house, Jesus spoke to him first, "What do you think, Simon? From whom do earthly kings collect tariffs or taxes? From their sons or from strangers?"

26 "From strangers," he said. "Then the sons are free," Jesus told him.

This section begins with Peter being questioned about whether or not Jesus paid the temple tax.

Tax is an integral part of life today as it was in Jesus time.. So, also, in Jesus' day, the tax collectors wanted their taxes, so they asked Peter this question.

Peter said, "Yes." Jesus did pay the temple tax.

Then, we see this subtle display of Jesus' miraculous knowledge. Before Peter even mentioned the conversation, Jesus spoke to him first. Jesus knew Peter was thinking about this.

Jesus said, "Simon," (remember Peter is called Simon sometimes) ***"From whom do earthly kings collect tariffs or taxes? From their sons or from strangers?"***

Jesus hits off Peter before Peter can bring up the conversation in order to teach a lesson for everyone.

You see, in that time there were a lot of kings who collected taxes. Well, if you were a child of the king you got some benefits, including not having to pay taxes.

Peter answers Jesus' question correctly. Kings don't collect taxes from their children, they collect them from strangers.

Jesus responds, ***"Then the sons are free."*** If the tax is for the temple of God, then the Son of God and His followers must be free from paying it! They have a special connection to God which superseded any other relationship or responsibility.

Jesus was a faithful Jewish man, but more than that He was faithful to God.

This exchange by Peter and Jesus beautifully points out that more than citizens of any country we are sons and daughters of the King of kings! We are citizens of heaven.

What a great truth for us to remember in our day and time! Our most important bond is with God and our loyalties should be to Jesus above anything else!

Even though Jesus is speaking specifically about the temple, this would apply to other institutions as well.

Our devotion to God should create an unbreakable bond with Him and others who follow Him.

You should have a greater bond with a Christian of a different race than you do with a non-Christian who is part of your blood family. You have more in common with a Christian from the Middle-east than you do with a non-Christian who lives next door to you. You should be more affiliated with a Christian from a different political party than you are with a non-Christian from your same political party.

Jesus said the Son of God, and those who follow Him, are free from the loyalties of this world, even to the point of not being obligated to pay the temple tax.

Our loyalty to Jesus and to the kingdom of God should be stronger, tighter, and deeper than any other loyalties on the earth.

We must remember that.

Also our reading from Exodus 30 talks about Atonement money.

Next, Jesus gives us . . .

III. A reminder *not to offend* (v. 27)

What Jesus said concerning the temple tax was not the end of the conversation. Let's check out what He said in verse 27.

27 “But, so we won’t offend them, go to the sea, cast in a fishhook, and take the first fish that you catch. When you open its mouth you’ll find a coin. Take it and give it to them for me and you.”

The first few words that Jesus says in verse 27 are so important: “. . . ***so we won’t offend them . . .***”

Jesus is making sure that the apostles know, and that we know, that even though our loyalties are first and foremost to God, we may still observe other laws and responsibilities in order to not offend.

Here's what we need to capture from this, even though we are Christians first, we can (and should) still be good citizens, friends, family members, neighbours, classmates, co-workers and more. Christians should represent the humility of Jesus, the love of the Father, and the power of the Holy Spirit.

Our loyalty to God should not lead us to be more of an offense to others, it should lead us to be more of a blessing to others.

Now, surely there are some things that will naturally offend, such as the statement that Jesus is the only way to God.

However, let us be guided by these words from the apostle Paul as well, from Romans 12:18. He says, ***“If possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.”***

Let us seek to be loyal to God first and foremost and let us work to not be an offense to anyone.

Finally, we need . . .

IV. A reminder of Jesus’ *miraculous power* (v. 27)

First, Jesus tells Peter that we don't want to offend the temple tax collectors. So, the natural question is where will the money come from to pay the tax?

Jesus and the apostles were not rolling in extra cash. However, Jesus has sovereign control over every penny and every shekel on the planet. Here He exercises His miraculous power once again.

Let's read about it again in verse 27.

27 "But, so we won't offend them, go to the sea, cast in a fishhook, and take the first fish that you catch. When you open its mouth you'll find a coin. Take it and give it to them for me and you."

Whether Jesus knew by His divine wisdom that there was a fish that had swallowed a coin, or whether He actually put that coin into that fish's mouth we see His miraculous power on display. Imagine Peter's amazement as Peter opened the mouth of that fish and found that coin.

I used to fish quite a bit. There was nothing better than catching a nice flathead or bream. Imagine that you and I went fishing and I told you that in the next cast you're going to catch a fish for sure. Then you did catch a fish! That would be pretty amazing, right? Well, imagine that I said you'll catch a fish on your next cast and it will have a dollar coin in its mouth, and you did catch it and it did have the dollar in its mouth. Well, that would be very impressive and you would probably ask, "What's going on?"

Let us not easily skip over how miraculous it is that Jesus is able to meet the need for Himself and Peter to pay the temple tax by simply providing the money from the mouth of a fish.

Jesus not only calls us to holy living, devotion to the Father, and love shown towards others, He will also provide what we need to do it, even if it takes a miracle.

Be reminded of Jesus' miraculous power.

And, just to link in our additional readings this morning.

In the Old Testament reading from Exodus 30, the money they paid for the tabernacle was a reminder to the Jews that they had been redeemed from Egyptian slavery. In the reading from 1 Peter 1, we have been redeemed, not by gold or silver but by the precious blood of Christ.

Concluding Thoughts:

Jesus has called us to something special: devotion to God, love of our fellow man, and trust in Him. He's not only called us to this type of life, He's made it possible through His death and resurrection, and He continues to make it possible by His supernatural works.

That takes us to our bottom-line for today's sermon:

Bottom Line: The *reality* of Jesus' *death* calls us to the *priority* of Jesus *living*.

(repeat)

Because Jesus died for us, we should live for Him.

His death gives us the opportunity for a new life, a faithful life, a changed life, a loving life.

We can now be faithful to God, we can now be loving to others, we can now be a blessing to those around us fully because of the work of Jesus.

Challenge yourself to live for Him this week in the following ways:

Weekly Challenge:

1. *Evaluate the priorities in your life.*

Jesus spoke earlier in the passage about our loyalty to God as our king.

The real question for some of us may be, "Is Jesus really the top priority in my life? Is Jesus really king of my life?"

Maybe, take some time this week and evaluate the priority of Jesus in your life.

2. *Magnify the work of Jesus in your life.* If Jesus has changed your life. If He is the greatest priority in your life, magnify His work in your life.

Jesus still works miracles, including changing our lives. He can equip us to live as He's called us to live. He can help us live in a way that people aren't offended by our lives but are blessed by our lives. He can give us the courage to share our story of redemption with others. He can change our families. He can change our church. He can do great works!

To magnify means to make easier to see or to increase the attention on something.

Magnify the works of Jesus. Point others to Him. Live for Him. Be a display of the work of Jesus!

This week, magnify the work of Jesus in your life. Show Him off because He is worthy of all glory, honour, and praise!

Closing:

The death and work of Jesus changes everything. It changes how we relate to others. It changes everything.

If you've not been changed by Jesus, He can do something great in your life.

Amen