

Review

Jesus and His disciples have traveled to Capernaum, Peter and Andrew's hometown, and are staying at their house. Unfortunately, this will be their last time in Capernaum before the crucifixion.

17:24-27 Those Who Collected

Peter was the head of the house, and so some tax collectors confront him over an issue.

Now, I am well aware that last Thursday was April 15th, and like many of you, I am still smarting from sending in that check made payable to "United States Treasury." I am no fan of taxes, and am well aware of what people think about taxes and tax collectors.

I do find it interesting that while the first three gospels contain many parallel accounts, the gospel of Matthew is the only one to include this bit of history. You may recall where Jesus found Matthew:

Matt. 9:9-12 As Jesus went on from there, He saw a man called Matthew, sitting in the tax collector's booth; and He *said to him, "Follow Me!" And he got up and followed Him. Then it happened that as Jesus was reclining at the table in the house, behold, many tax collectors and sinners came and were dining with Jesus and His disciples. When the Pharisees saw this, they said to His disciples, "Why is your Teacher eating with the tax collectors and sinners?" But when Jesus heard this, He said, "It is not those who are healthy who need a physician, but those who are sick."

From this we learn: 1) Jesus reached out to tax collectors; and 2) Tax collectors are sick!

Matthew had left tax collecting to follow after Jesus. This incident struck a chord with him uniquely, and included the event in his gospel.

The Two Drachma Tax

What was this tax that they were trying to collect? It was not the

tax being collected by the Roman Government. No, Jesus will be addressing that when we get to chapter 22. This was a different kind of tax altogether - it was the "two-drachma tax."

Two drachmas was equivalent to half a shekel. And, turning back to the book of Exodus, we read that God had commanded,

Ex. 30:12-14 “When you take a census of the sons of Israel to number them, then each one of them shall give a ransom for himself to the LORD, when you number them, so that there will be no plague among them when you number them. This is what everyone who is numbered shall give: half a shekel according to the shekel of the sanctuary (the shekel is twenty gerahs), half a shekel as a contribution to the LORD. Everyone who is numbered, from twenty years old and over, shall give the contribution to the LORD.”

Every man over the age of 19 was obligated to pay half a shekel into the temple treasury. The money was to be used...

Ex. 30:16 “...for the service of the tent of meeting...”

Does Your Teacher Not Pay?

This tax had been the source of controversy among the Jews. Reading Exodus 30 literally, it was clear that this was in regards to a census. But it had become customary by Jesus' time that this was an annual tax, and it was collected in every town across Israel by the 25th of the 12th month, Ad-AWR.

It was not universally accepted. The men of Qumran had complained that it should only be a one-time payment for each man, not annually, and the Sadducees protested it entirely, saying that it should be voluntary.

So, Peter is being confronted with the question: "We haven't received payment yet. Doesn't your teacher pay this tribute to the temple?"

Yes

Peter didn't say, "Well, gee, I don't know." He said, "Yes." Many commentaries say that he spoke rashly and incorrectly. I don't believe that. He'd lived with Jesus for three and a half years now, and had never seen Jesus break any law. On many occasions Peter had seen Jesus pay all appropriate taxes, fees, and customs which were lawfully due.

You know, it really infuriates me when I hear a Christian going on and on about how they aren't obligated to pay taxes or to obey the government and the laws. About how they answer to a higher authority.

Rom. 13:1-2 Every person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God. Therefore whoever resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God; and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves.

We as Christians are absolutely obligated to pay what we owe, regardless of how we feel about it. When I hear Christians saying, "I refuse to pay taxes because the money is spent for evil purposes, my sarcastic nature wants to tell them they are therefore not allowed to receive assistance from firefighters or police, to drive on the public roads, or drink the water from the tap, which has been purified by the public works.

But my biblical answer is to demonstrate that this money was going into the hands of the temple overseers. Was this money being spent for righteous pursuits? In chapter 21, Jesus calls them thieves and robbers.

Jesus ended up paying this money, in spite of the fact that it was 1) going into a den of thieves, and 2) He wasn't obligated to do so, as we will see in a moment.

What Do You Think, Simon?

When Peter got home, he was ready to tell Jesus the whole confrontational conversation. But as soon as he walked in, Jesus asked him a question, before he could say anything:

Matt. 17:25 ...when he came into the house, Jesus spoke to him first, saying, "What do you think, Simon?"

From whom do the kings of the earth collect customs or poll-tax, from their sons or from strangers?"

Jesus knew what had been said, because He is omnipotent. It always strikes me as amusing when people feel obligated to spend a lot of time explaining things to God. Jesus already knows what happened, better than you do!

Jesus knew of the confrontation and subsequent conversation between Peter and the tax collectors, and asked Peter this question as soon as he walked in the door of his house.

The Sons Are Exempt

"What do you think, Simon? Do the kings of the earth collect taxes from their sons? Of course not, the sons of kings are always exempt. The two-drachma tax money is going for the support of the temple. Well, if it's God's temple, and I'm the Son of God, then I'm obviously exempt."

So That We Do Not Offend Them

Since the children of the kings were exempted, Jesus would absolutely have been justified in saying, "Since My Father is the Lord of the temple, I don't have to pay the tax." But He doesn't.

He makes the point, but He doesn't make the stand. He speaks of the right, but doesn't exercise the right.

I find that people are always making excuses about why they won't do this, don't have to do that. "I don't need to pay taxes. I don't have to tithe. My Christianity isn't based on being in church all the time. I have the freedom to do this thing or watch that." Saints, that is so far from the heart of God.

Why wouldn't Jesus use this perfectly valid excuse? Because it would offend. It would be a stumbling block to others. You see, mature Christians realize this: When you take a stand for YOUR rights, for YOUR privileges, at the expense of OTHERS being offended, you are not being a disciple of Jesus.

After Jesus practiced this principle, Paul preached it:

1Cor. 8:13 Therefore, if food causes my brother to stumble, I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause my brother to stumble.

Rom. 14:13 ...determine this - not to put an obstacle or a stumbling block in a brother's way.

Jesus refused to use excuses and justifications for things He had every right to do or not do, simply because they give cause for offense.

From The Fish's Mouth

The tax will be paid, regardless of whether it really HAS to be. How will it be paid? Jesus tells Peter to go fishing. To do the job he knew how to do from the time he could walk. Taxes and tithes may seem cumbersome at times and burdensome at others, but if we simply do what God has gifted us to do, it'll happen. The provision will always be there.

Matt. 6:33 "...seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.