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The Gospel According to Matthew

A Kingdom not of this World

July 28, 2019

Sermon Text: Matt 17:22-27

Scripture Reading: Acts 8:26-40

Mat 17:22-27 As they were gathering in Galilee, Jesus said to them, “The Son of Man is about to be delivered into the hands of men, (23) and they will kill him, and he will be raised on the third day.” And they were greatly distressed.

(24) When they came to Capernaum, the collectors of the two-drachma tax went up to Peter and said, “Does your teacher not pay the tax?” (25) He said, “Yes.” And when he came into the house, Jesus spoke to him first, saying, “What do you think, Simon? From whom do kings of the earth take

toll or tax? From their sons or from others?” (26) And when he said, “From others,” Jesus said to him, “Then the sons are free. (27) However, not to give offense to them, go to the sea and cast a hook and take the first fish that comes up, and when you open its mouth you will find a shekel. Take that and give it to them for me and for yourself.”

It seems that one of the most difficult things to really understand about Christ’s kingdom is that it is not of this world. Abraham knew it:

Heb 11:8-10 By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. (9) By faith he went to live in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise. (10) For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God.

But most of the Jews did not get it. And I think that we often struggle with this same thing today. I wonder if, for instance, the eschatology that insists Christ is going to establish a kingdom on this present earth and rule from earthly Jerusalem for 1,000 years is not rooted in some of this very difficulty.

Christ's kingdom is other-worldly. While He has come into this present world and His kingdom is now present, it is not so in its fullness. So when Jesus told His disciples that He was going to suffer and die, somehow their mental paradigm, their theological framework, did not allow for this. It should have, but it didn't.

Isa 53:4-6 Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. (5) But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed. (6) All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

As we have already seen this morning in our Scripture reading from Acts 8, this passage in Isaiah was part of the ABC's of the Old Testament that Jesus revealed to His disciples. But the Jews

missed it. His kingdom is not of this present world. His kingdom consists of people whose sins have been forgiven, whose hearts have been changed, and to effect all of this, the Messiah had to bear our sins on Himself and die.

But you see nevertheless this tremendous resistance to all this:

Mat 17:22-23 As they were gathering in Galilee, Jesus said to them, "The Son of Man is about to be delivered into the hands of men, (23) and they will kill him, and he will be raised on the third day." And they were greatly distressed.

Jesus had just gone around with them not long before this:

Mat 16:21-23 From that time Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised. (22) And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, "Far be it from you, Lord! This shall never happen to you." (23) But he turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man."

A dying Messiah is even overshadowed by a resurrected Messiah! The disciples seem to have just blown off His resurrection. No one is recorded as saying – “you are going to rise from the dead? Incredible!”

Paul wrote about this to the Corinthians:

1Co 1:18-23 For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. (19) For it is written, “I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart.” (20) Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? (21) For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe. (22) For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, (23) **but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles,**

I do not fully understand why the cross is foolishness to the unsaved, but we all know that it is. As we have already seen, the Jews rejected a crucified Messiah because of their false notions about their coming king and kingdom. You see that false thinking persisting

for quite sometime even in the disciples.

But what about the Gentiles? Once more, the world’s ideas of a king are along the lines of a Caesar or an Alexander. It is that kind of a king with an overwhelming supply of force and weapons that they want. Or, as Paul notes, the Greeks wanted *wisdom*. In their thinking, some deep, profound philosophy was the key.

Act 17:18-21 Some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers also conversed with him. And some said, “What does this babbling wish to say?” Others said, “He seems to be a preacher of foreign divinities”—because he was preaching Jesus and the resurrection. (19) And they took him and brought him to the Areopagus, saying, “May we know what this new teaching is that you are presenting? (20) For you bring some strange things to our ears. We wish to know therefore what these things mean.” (21) Now all the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there would spend their time in nothing except telling or hearing something new.

But God, in Christ, conquers our real enemy through a message that is foolishness to this world’s wisdom.

Now let's bring this home, right down where we live and to the people we live among. What do they think of Christ crucified and risen? Well, they think the very same thing that the Jews and Gentiles did in NT times.

- Those who are religious, like the Jews, typically believe that their own religious deeds will save them. They may well claim to believe in Christ, but if you question them closely you will find out that their faith is not really in Him at all.
- And then you have those who, like the Greeks of old, devise their own systems of "enlightenment" which pronounce them quite alright.

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We should add one final point here. The disciples' distress at Jesus statement surely also involved their love for Him. The part that jumped out at them was not the resurrection, but that He was going to be killed. And they were still in that state at the cross. Similarly for us, knowing all that we do and knowing that Jesus has risen, when we read about His crucifixion

and suffering, we are grieved. Our sin. Our sin put Him there.

A Fish With a Coin

You probably all have watched *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*. Remember how Gollum originally found obtained the ring? His brother and he were fishing and his brother fell overboard when he hooked a big fish. While underwater, he just happened to spy the ring in the gravel where it had been for 2000 years. In a similar way, Bilbo happened upon the ring in the darkness of those goblin caves.

Now, of course these things are presented somewhat as blind chance, or motivated by some dark force. The ring wants to be found, you know. It is all fiction.

But do you realize that fact really is stranger than fiction? And we have a real example of it here in these next few verses. Not with a ring, but in this case a coin. A coin that had been no doubt dropped into the sea – who knows how long before. And then of all things it is, at Christ's command, picked up by a fish and delivered exactly where He directed.

Let me try to explain something to you that I am coming to see more and more clearly. It is this:

The Bible is far more supernatural and amazing than any work of fiction or fantasy human beings have ever dreamed up. If you are bored with the Bible I can tell you with certainty that it is because you don't get it. People are amazed when they watch some fiction like Stargate where people can cross over to another planet light years away just by stepping through it. But do you know that the OT tabernacle was a microcosm of the universe we live in and that it shows how the Earth the God's footstool – that is, how there is a connection between heaven and Earth? God, as Paul told the Athenians, is not far from us. In Him we live and move and have our being.

And right here in this little account of a fish and a coin, we see God invading this world, directing everything in it, for our good and for His glory.

(24) When they came to Capernaum, the collectors of the two-drachma tax went up to Peter and said, “Does your teacher not pay the tax?” (25) He said, “Yes.”

And when he came into the house, Jesus spoke to him first, saying, “What do you think, Simon? From whom do kings of the earth take toll or tax? From their sons or from others?” (26) And when he said, “From others,” Jesus said to him, “Then the sons are

free. (27) However, not to give offense to them, go to the sea and cast a hook and take the first fish that comes up, and when you open its mouth you will find a shekel. Take that and give it to them for me and for yourself.”

The two-drachma tax. What is this? Notice your ESV has a heading here which says, The Temple Tax.

Exo 30:13 Each one who is numbered in the census shall give this: half a shekel according to the shekel of the sanctuary (the shekel is twenty gerahs), half a shekel as an offering to the LORD.

William Hendriksen explains what this tax was: [New Testament Commentary]

“This has nothing to do with taxes exacted by Rome. It concerns redemption money, the ransom price – ‘a ransom for his soul’ – which every Israelite, 20 years and over, was by the Lord ordered to pay, and which was used for the maintenance of the sanctuary. It amounted to half a shekel, equal in value to the didrachma. The drachma, a Greek silver coin, was about equal in value to a Roman denarius. It amounted to a workman's average daily wage. Since this temple tax was paid in Jewish coin the money-

changers profited by making a small charge for exchanging foreign money for Jewish.

Now it was this double-drachma or half-shekel which neither Jesus nor Peter had as yet paid, perhaps due to an absence from Capernaum. So the collectors approach Peter with their question, which Peter answers with “Yes.” Jesus does pay that tax.

Then, once they are inside the house, Jesus uses the situation to teach –

“What do you think, Simon? From whom do kings of the earth take toll or tax? From their sons or from others?”
(26) And when he said, “From others,” Jesus said to him, “Then the sons are free.

What is this? What is Jesus’ point here? Sons of the king are not taxed. What does He mean?

Jesus is using this setting to once again declare that He is the Son of God. This tax was collected for the maintenance of the Temple which was Jesus’ Father’s house! The Son does not have to pay this tax. He is the Son of the King of Glory. He is the King of Glory.

And yet, having made this clear:

(27) However, not to give offense to them, go to the sea and cast a hook and take the first fish that comes up, and when you open its mouth you will find a shekel. Take that and give it to them for me and for yourself.”

Now surely this is the kind of incident that is going to be chalked up to fable by most people, right? But if we stop and ask the right questions, turning to the Old Testament once again for an explanation, we find that this in fact is the very kind of thing that shows us who Jesus is:

Jon 1:17 And the LORD appointed a great fish to swallow up Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.

Jon 2:10 And the LORD spoke to the fish, and it vomited Jonah out upon the dry land.

Jesus once more is demonstrating that He is who He says He is. He is the King, the Son of God. He does not have Peter launch a boat and throw out a big net so he can get a big number of fish and search through until he finds one with a coin. Nope. He tells him to take a hook and line, catch one fish, and that fish will have the necessary coin in its mouth – enough to pay the tax for Jesus and Peter.

You will notice that a reference to Jonah's story occurs in very close proximity here –

Mat 16:1-4 And the Pharisees and Sadducees came, and to test him they asked him to show them a sign from heaven. (2) He answered them, "When it is evening, you say, 'It will be fair weather, for the sky is red.' (3) And in the morning, 'It will be stormy today, for the sky is red and threatening.' You know how to interpret the appearance of the sky, but you cannot interpret the signs of the times. (4) An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of Jonah." So he left them and departed.

[Also see the same statement in 12:39]

What is the application for us (besides the fact that now I know that if the Lord wanted to, He could put a fish on my hook every time)?

- The detailed providence of God. A lost coin, picked up by a fish, who happened by Peter's hook, coin in mouth. The coin, no doubt dropped into the sea by someone, just the right amount needed and the fish to pick it up.
- Jesus is therefore the LORD. He is the same One who commanded the fish to swallow and transport Jonah.

- Lessons in the school of faith. Peter's faith was no doubt strengthened when he opened that fish's mouth and there was the coin, just as Jesus had said. Christ takes each of His people through lessons and experiences to strengthen our faith too.
- And finally, wisdom for us in regard to not making issues of everything, even if we have the right to abstain from something. Jesus did not have to pay that tax. He was the Son. But it seems that these tax collectors were not of the same evil ilk as the Pharisees and so Jesus pays the tax. Why make them stumble over something that is really not worth demanding one's rights about.

Listen to J.C. Ryle on this as we close:
[Expository Thoughts on the Gospels]

"Our Lord's example in this case deserves attention of all who profess and call themselves Christians. There is deep wisdom in these five words, 'lest we should offend them.' They teach us plainly that there are matters in which Christ's people ought to sink their own opinions, and submit to requirements which they may not thoroughly approve, rather than give offence and hinder the gospel of Christ. God's rights undoubtedly we

ought never to give up; but we may sometimes safely give up our own. It may sound very fine and seem very heroic to be always standing out tenaciously for our rights. But it may well be doubted, with such a passage as this, whether such tenacity is always wise, when it shows more grace in a Christian to submit than to resist.”

At the same time, and this requires wisdom, we know that there are things we must never compromise – things that concern the gospel for instance. We see this stand in the Apostle Paul as he confronted Peter and we also see it in this instance in which Christ did quite the opposite as in this half-shekel tax incident:

Mat 15:12-14 Then the disciples came and said to him, “Do you know that the Pharisees were offended when they heard this saying?” (13) He answered, “Every plant that my heavenly Father has not planted will be rooted up. (14) Let them alone; they are blind guides. And if the blind lead the blind, both will fall into a pit.”

The Lord’s wisdom is required if we are to properly respond in each particular case. Some people deserve our patience. Others deserve no answer. Let them be offended and do not waste your time on them.

Finally, let’s be certain that we are reminded by this account of the fish and coin that Christ is able to meet our every need. He is Creator, Sustainer, and King. Everything in this universe is subject to His command – even a fish.

Psa 8:6-9 You have given him dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under his feet, (7) all sheep and oxen, and also the beasts of the field, (8) the birds of the heavens, and the fish of the sea, whatever passes along the paths of the seas. (9) O LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!