

Saturday, March 25, 2023
Season of Lent
Day 28

Matthew 17:24–27

²⁴ After Jesus and his disciples arrived in Capernaum, the collectors of the two-drachma temple tax came to Peter and asked, “Doesn’t your teacher pay the temple tax?”

²⁵ “Yes, he does,” he replied.

When Peter came into the house, Jesus was the first to speak. “What do you think, Simon?” he asked. “From whom do the kings of the earth collect duty and taxes—from their own children or from others?”

²⁶ “From others,” Peter answered.

“Then the children are exempt,” Jesus said to him. ²⁷ “But so that we may not cause offence, go to the lake and throw out your line. Take the first fish you catch; open its mouth and you will find a four-drachma coin. Take it and give it to them for my tax and yours.”

Reflection

The terms “Temple” and “children” help us to understand what it is that Jesus is saying in this passage. The temple is the place where YHWH’s (God’s) presence resides, so it is the place where heaven and earth meet. The Israelites are the children of God, and Jesus has been revealed to be God’s beloved son. Additionally, through Jesus, his disciples have been adopted as sons (and daughters), now calling God Father.

Now, if we survey the practices of various kingdoms at the time, we will find that it is foreigners who pay taxes. So, as Rome is in charge, they collect a tax from the Israelites, not Roman citizens. So, those who are a part of God’s kingdom should not pay a tax. Ironically, the tax being collected goes to Rome to maintain the temple. So, Jesus says while we have the right not to pay, in order to maintain peace and safety, we will pay it. However, the Father will provide even this amount.

Part of our North American story is a story about rights, freedoms, privileges, and responsibilities. Culturally, we hear about “my rights” almost constantly. We, as a culture, can be found parsing out to the smallest detail what my rights are and when they are infringed. This is a part of a larger ongoing cultural shift away from a people mentality to a hyper-individual mentality. How might today’s story speak to us as disciples?

I would contend that at the heart of the gospel of Jesus is the giving up of our rights. God has the right to justice as he is the offended party. Jesus has the right to life as he does nothing to warrant death. In fact, he is the one human being who was (and is) without sin. It is his unblemished-ness that makes him a fitting sacrifice (his life in exchange for ours). Philippians 2 has a beautiful hymn of the Son who had equality with God, willingly giving up his glory for our sake.

Maybe this is the benefit of Lent. We practice giving up our rights; the right to sleep as long as we want, the right to eat whenever we want, the right to spend our time however we want, etc. Perhaps by engaging in a rhythm of sacrifice, we will be able to give up “my right” when it counts. Maybe I will be able to spend my life in service to the kingdom of God for the sake of my neighbours.

Prayer

Lord, forgive me for making my rights the ultimate good and import of my life. If you could give up what is most precious for my sake, I can put aside my rights for the sake of the kingdom and my neighbour. Teach me to think about your creation rather than my own desires. Amen.