

Matthew 17:24

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[0 : 00] I'm going to go to Matthew 17. Matthew 17, verses 24, that's 27. If you have a church Bible, it's page 823.

Page 823 in the Black Church Bibles. I wonder if there are occasions or events in your past and you wish you could do them.

Not through shame, but mainly through embarrassment. They cause you to cringe with embarrassment. When you think about that, the only thing that allows you to get to sleep at night is the knowledge, isn't it?

That you're not alone. That others have had lives littered with embarrassment. And as we reach the end of Matthew 17, we come to what one commentator has called an embarrassing miracle.

It's the coin from the mouth of the fish. It's not in the same category, is it? As a healing. It's not in the same category of the feeding of the 5,000 hungry people.

[1 : 19] It's not in the same category as someone being raised from the dead. It is quirky, isn't it? And this miracle is peculiar to Matthew's Gospel. And maybe because Matthew is a tax collector, and that's why he included the incident.

In the temple in his account of Jesus' life. It's not recorded in any of the other accounts of Jesus' life and ministry. And so we might think of this one, but actually, as we read this, it reads like a myth, doesn't it?

So in Greek mythology, Polycrates was told that in order to appease the Greek gods, he had to throw a ring from his finger into the sea.

He did it. Apparently it worked. The Greek gods were appeased. That night when Polycrates sat down for his dinner, he found the ring that earlier he had lobbed into the sea in the belly of a fish that he was stepping into.

Myth. Is that what we're dealing with? These three verses that we're studying, they're hung on, they, on two questions. I don't know why it's not, meth. And they help us to see that it is, in some ways, an embarrassing miracle, but it's not a pointless myth.

[2 : 30] So the first question is there in verse 24. And he says, does your teacher not pay the tax? Which tax? The tax, it's a payment that has to be paid to the temple.

The temple tax is going to be paid by Jewish men. Jewish men who, between the ages of 20 and 50, it wasn't paid to Rome. And by the Jews, we're still expected to pay it.

Jesus is not going to take us down the line that he does in chapter 22, in a few chapters' time.

Where Jesus will teach us, where he takes a cenarius coin, do you remember? And he says, render unto Caesar what is Caesar's, but make sure you render unto God what is God's.

But that isn't the point of this episode. Jesus isn't teaching us to be good and upright citizens here. Jewish men were to make this payment because it contributed to the upkeep of the temple.

There's now two drachma. Two days wages. Half a shekel. Look at verse 24, there's a problem out there with this tax, the two drachma tax.

[3 : 44] And so the Jewish royal mint, the organisation that made coins, it didn't produce a two drachma coin. Or a shekel.

And so it was therefore a substantial tax that had to be paid. And you would have to club together with your friend and you pay it together. So that's why at the end of verse 27, when he has the coin, Jesus says, take that and give it to them for me and yourself.

You paid it and with someone else, your best friend or a neighbour. More than that though, it was a symbolic tax. Through your payment, you showed solidarity with the temple.

You were identifying with the people of God. Your fellow Jewish worshippers. And to that end, it became, as time went on, a bit of a superstitious tax.

People have come to believe that if you paid the temple tax in time, it was a little bit like private healthcare. It guaranteed you health and blessing. And so it was substantial.

[4 : 47] It's not a small amount. It was symbolic. It really identified you with the people of God. But it was also a little bit superstitious. And the first question in the passage comes to the Peter.

Does your teacher pay the tax? You see, the rabbis of the day were exempt from paying the tax. And Jesus wasn't an officially state registered teacher.

And therefore, he carried a tax liability. And he ought to pay. And there might have been doubts in the revenue collector's mind. What is Jesus' payment plan that Jesus had in place?

And so the questioning. We read, don't we, in Matthew 12 and verse 6. Do you remember that verse? That Jesus had brazenly declared. He'd claimed that he was, in his person, far greater than the temple.

And if he is greater than the temple. If that's what he's claiming. Well, was he contributing to the actual temple? Of course he didn't build. And Peter responds as a loyal friend.

[5 : 52] He's very succinct as me. In verse 25 he says, yes. Now this inquisition, this discussion. It might have taken place in the vicinity nearby the temple.

Because when Peter returns home, he faces the second question in the passage. Can you see it? And this time the question is from Jesus. What do you think, Simon?

From whom do kings of the earth take toll or tax? From their sons or from others?

And Jesus, in questioning his friend, is drawing out the first principle. The principle of this passage. Kings don't charge their sons. Kings don't charge their princes tax.

They collected tax from others, not from their family. And Simon Peter correctly replies in verse 26 with that answer. And my take advice also to the point of this passage.

[6 : 51] That just as royal sons would be exempt from taxes imposed by their fathers. So Jesus is exempt from the tax imposed by his father.

In other words, Jesus is saying this temple tax is an obligation to God. For the people of Israel. People who he has established under his law.

But because he is uniquely God's son. And the whole point of the chapter so far of chapter 17 has been at pains to point that out. Particularly verse 5 earlier on.

Jesus, because he is God's son, does not have to pay God's tax. Jesus, because he is the true temple.

That through his death and resurrection. Spoken of just before in the verses 22 and 23. He becomes the meeting place with God. And so this is not a special place this morning.

[8 : 14] And you don't need to go to Jerusalem. And you don't need to go to a temple. Because the temple is Jesus Christ. He is the meeting place between God and his people.

And so at the end of the gospel there is this dramatic tearing down of the curtain in the temple. At the point of his death. That confirms Jesus does not have to pay the tax.

Tax because he is God's son. That's the point. So surprised it. You children. Any children here? Little children. Do you pay rent? To your dad at home? Do you pay rent for a seat? You don't do.

You don't pay rent to live in your father's house.

You don't have to. Because you're their son or your their daughter. You don't need to. Because you're their son. That's the point.

[9 : 09] Jesus is saying. I'm God's son. I don't need to pay this tax. Now what happens next is a big surprise isn't it? Jesus wants to pay. Jesus wants to pay.

Have a look at verse 37. However. Not to cause offence. Not to give offence to them. Go to the lake. And cast a hook.

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. In case Jesus not paying of the tax.

His non-payment of the tax. Could be interpreted by those watching on. As a lack of solidarity with God. The God who gave the law. The God who gave the temple.

Lest Jesus cause a scandal. Or offend people unnecessarily. He says to his best friend. He says. Go and fish. With a net. Not with a net.

[10 : 08] With a line in a hook. It's the only time. That this type of fishing is mentioned in the New Testament. And when you put your line in your hook in. Out of the mouth. And the very first fish you catch.

You'll find the coin. And that coin will cover. Not only my tax liability. But your tax liability. Peter. Now if you're a visitor this morning.

You might find this is just bizarre isn't it? And surprising. Odd. Those of us who are familiar with the Bible.

Might find this surprising. And a little bit odd. For those of us who are familiar with the life of Jesus. We will know that when Jesus was on this earth. There were times when he turned the laws of nature on their head.

I'm also told that certain species of fish can be attracted to bright shiny objects. And they could well gobble up a coin that they cast their eyes on. Or whichever it is. God uses ordinary means.

[11 : 12] To bring about what we would call an extraordinary miracle. So that's it. The embarrassing miracle. A tax bill paid by a person who doesn't need to pay it.

Funded by the most extraordinary source. But you are sitting there thinking. As I am standing here preaching. What on earth has this got to do with me? What on earth has this got to do with me?

Three brief truths from Jesus. First truth is this. Jesus is the one with perfect knowledge. Jesus is the one with perfect knowledge.

We see that from what we're told from the pen of Matthew. It's a really interestingly written account. We must assume that Jesus was not present. When the temple tax collectors first called on Peter. Matthew wants us to make an assumption. That Jesus wasn't there when the tax collectors spoke with Peter. And yet can you see in the next verse. We read that when Peter returned to the house where Jesus was.

[12 : 25] There's a really interesting little detail. Which is unnecessary. It says Jesus spoke to him first. There it is. Can you see that?

In verse 25. And by his words. We see that Jesus knew precisely what had taken place. I think it's quite sobering isn't it?

To think that Jesus knows all things. That Jesus is the one with perfect knowledge. That his is an eye as he is seated bodily in heaven.

That sees all our daily comings and goings. His is an ear that hears all our words spoken and thought. All things are open to Jesus.

And so that means concealment. We have to know from a passage like this. Concealment is impossible. Let's do that thing in Germany for some soldiers recently.

[13 : 34] And one of the lessons that a soldier is taught when he joins the British army. Is to do with camouflage. One of the first lessons. Camouflage and concealment. Various assets.

That soldiers are to try and remember. And they are to try to hide themselves from the enemy. Let me try and remember them. First is shape. And then shine. And then silhouette.

And then size. That's four. And so a soldier is to do their ultimate. When they're seeking to be concealing themselves. Or they're seeking to be camouflaged. They are to limit their size.

Or their face. Or their shine. For example. From the gaze of the enemy. So it's why soldiers in there. Will often have dark face paint on. It's not to scare people. But it's to make their faces harder to see. And many of us here. Will be deeply ashamed. Of how we lived. Of the things that we've said. The things that we've thought. And the things that we've done.

[14 : 42] In our past. We may really deceive our parents. We may really deceive our parents.

Our siblings. And deceive the elders. Jesus sees us with 20-20 vision.

And that is why it is right to uncover. And to expose. And to bring our sins into the light. And to confess our sins to Jesus.

Which is what we've already done this morning. The psalmist knows the pain. Of unconfessed sin. Of unexposed sin. Of covered over sin.

So that sounds very true. And to the psalmist. She says. For day and night. Your hand. God's hand was heavy upon me. My strength was dried up. As the heat of the summer.

[15 : 59] But I acknowledged my sin to you. And I did not cover up my iniquity. And I said. I will confess my transgressions. To the Lord. And you forgave.

The iniquity. Of my sin. You see. The Lord Jesus. He is the one in whose name we meet with. This morning. And he is a saviour.

Who longs to forgive. And he promises us to do so. And we just need to take our sin to him.

We need to be real. With the one. Who has perfect knowledge of us. But this truth. Also helps us positively.

Doesn't it? It also helps us to live. From this day forward. Because we live. Our lives. In the presence of him. To be aware.

[16:54] That there is another. Who hears every word. That I say. That's a very helpful thing. That's to be reminded of. There will be an unseen guest.

At your table. This lunchtime. You see. Left to my own devices. I often think. That I can get away. With my own behaviour. I know.

That is not what God would want. From me. Or for me. But I think. I can get away with it. And so the question. That I think is helpful.

Is would I behave. Like this. If Jesus was standing next to me. Because it does make a difference. Doesn't it? When different people.

Are standing next to you. When you speak to those. You're married. It does make a difference. Doesn't it? When someone else. Is in the living room.

[17:50] Or the kitchen. And when your wife. Or your husband. Does something. That really frustrates you. That does make a difference. Doesn't it? How you speak. Would I behave like this.

If Jesus was standing next to me. J.C. Ryan says this. Such a standard. It's not extravagant. Or absurd. It is a standard. That interferes. With no duty. Or relation in life.

It interferes. With nothing but sin. Happy is he. Or she. That tries. To realise. His Lord's presence. And to do all.

And say all. Unto Christ. First truth. To help us this week. Jesus is the one. With perfect knowledge. Don't cover up. Do realise.

His presence. At every moment. Of every day. The second truth. We learn from this. Rather embarrassing miracle. Is that Jesus. Is the one. Who provides perfectly. He provides perfectly.

[18:44] It's really obvious. Isn't it? Very very obvious. But Jesus. He makes this fish. His paymaster. And it's another demonstration. Of Jesus. Greatness. And majesty.

The one. Who created. The creatures. Was able to command. The obedience. Of the creatures. And God. Provided. What the Lord. Demanded.

Of course. That's a wonderful picture. Isn't it? Because in a few. Chapters. Time. God. Will provide. What the Lord. Demands.

Just glance down again. To verses 22 to 23. And God. Will provide. Through the giving. Of his son. His perfect son. The Lord Jesus. Will die on a cross.

And he will be the one. Who will perfectly. Successify God's law. And so Jesus. Is the one. Who provides perfectly. Him. And those of us who followed. The Lord Jesus.

[19:41] For years. We can testify. Can't we. To this truth. That even in the smallest details. Of our lives. Jesus needs. Knows. Not only. What we need.

For salvation. But also. For sanctification. For our growing like him. He knows. What it is. What is necessary. For us. To be.

Conformed. To his likeness. And he promised us. To provide. For what we need. And to never let us know. My problem is.

There's a disconnect. Isn't there. Between. What I think. I need. And what I want. What we need. And what I want. So maybe it's that house.

Maybe it's. That relationship. Maybe it's. That job. Maybe it's that retirement. Maybe it's that church. Maybe it's those children. Maybe it's that promotion. But you see.

[20:38] Jesus is. The perfect. The perfect provider. And he does. Give you. What you truly need. For godliness. It's the truth. That's an encouragement.

I might think. I know what I need. But Jesus knows. Perfectly. What I need. He knows better. So Jesus provides. Perfectly.

Jesus is perfect knowledge. And the third. The final brief point. Is Jesus provides. The perfect pattern. Jesus gives us. The perfect pattern. For life. Perfect knowledge.

Perfect provision. Perfect pattern. Let's look down. Verse 27. They are. Remarkable words. In verse 27. Where Jesus says. However.

Not to give. Offence. To them. Not to give. Offence. To them. Rather than. Give. Offence. To the. Tax collectors.

[21:37] Is. Jesus. Jesus works. For miracles. As we've seen already. Jesus could have been. Well within his rights. To claim exemption.

From the tax. He was the son of God. Chapter. Sancte. Verse 5. He could rightly be excused. From paying the emperor. On his father's house. But Jesus claims. No exemption. No tax avoidance. Why? Lest he should offend people. And in doing this. Jesus reveals. What Christians call. Meekness. It's not.

To be confused with weakness. Blessed are the meek. For they shall inherit the earth. Meekness is that attribute. Of strength. Of power.

Denied. Of strength. Under control. And so Jesus. Limits his freedom. To serve. A larger purpose. That he will fulfill. In a few chapters.

[22 : 36] He will. Limit his freedom. For the sake of the lost. That is why this miracle. Unique to Matthew. Is in some ways. One of the most important.

In the Bible. Because Jesus is giving. To you and I. Those of us who call ourselves. Followers of him. A model. A pattern. For the responsible. Exercise of Christian freedom.

It's only a Paul. Apostle Paul. Talks about him. In 1 Corinthians 8 and 9. Let's just go there for a minute. 1 Corinthians 8 and 9. Okay. 1 Corinthians 8 and 9. It's on page.

Grab a Bible and turn there. It's on page 956. Page 956. And if you just glance down. 1 Corinthians 9 and verse 12.

1 Corinthians 9 and verse 12. It's on page 956. And halfway through that verse. Paul says this. Nevertheless. We've not made use of this right.

[23 : 44] But. We endure anything. Rather than put an obstacle. In the way of the gospel of Christ. In this passage. Paul is talking about.

Whether he should draw a salary. Whether he should get a wage. From the Corinthians. He's pastoring the church. He's saving for them. Wording half of them. He's got every right. To take a salary. But the bigger picture.

That determines his Christian freedom. Is what is good for the gospel. What is good for the church. And so his argument concludes. In verse 22. And he says.

To the weak. I became weak. So that I might win the weak. I become all things. All people. But by all means.

I might save some. I do it all. For the sake of the gospel. For the sake of the gospel. That I might share with them. And it's blessings. And so Christian people.

[24 : 41] We are free people. Free people. We are free from sin. Free from the burden.

And the curse of the law. Free from guilt. Free from what people think of us. It's wonderfully liberating.

We don't understand how liberating it is. It's gloriously liberating. The freedom of the gospel. No condemnation. Now I dread. Jesus and all in him is mine.

It's liberating. And yet the challenge to each one of us this morning. Is how we exercise that freedom. For the greater good of the gospel. This is what Paul is talking about.

Luther wrote about this. In his revelation treatings. The freedom of the Christian man. He wrote these words. The Christian person. Is the most free. He is Lord of all. Subject to none.

[25 : 46] Next sentence. The Christian person. Is the most dutiful servant. Subject to everyone. And so as followers of Christ.

As believers in the Lord Jesus. As those who are in him. We reign over all things in Christ. For we reign in order to serve.

To serve people. And serve the gospel. Of all Robert says. If you are a Christian. You are to be a bowed. Low person. Somebody who is willing. To forsake self.

For the sake of others. So how does this look in practice? Let's think. As citizens of the nation. For a moment. Alright. We might not like.

The political. Measures and strategies. Of our rulers. We might really strongly. Disapprove of some of the legislation. That they pass. But how do we use.

[26 : 44] Our freedom. Not to cause offense. Keeping the big picture. Of the gospel in mind. Let's be really clear. I'm not saying.

Use gospel freedom. In order to compromise. In chapter 21. Jesus will return to the temple. And he will show. Righteous indignation. And anger. For what is going on there. But use of the gospel freedom.

Carefully. In a way that doesn't cause offense. Is what Jesus is modeling for us. So. If you want to wear a cross.

I wouldn't wear a cross. You can talk to me about why I wouldn't do that. But if you want to wear a cross. If you wear a cross to work. You think. I want to be a witness in work. So you wear the cross to work. You're free to do that.

But your boss. Or others in the office. Are offended by it. What do you do? I think you can choose. [27 : 49] To not wear it. For the offense. For the cause of it. What about a little fish bag. They were massive in the late 80s. Every Sunday school prize. There was a little fish. And you wear it.

You wear the fish bag. Someone says. What's that? And I say. A fish. As if they understand that. What that is. I'm a follower of the Lord Jesus. You want to wear it as a witness. But somebody gets offended by it.

Will you use your freedom carefully? Because it might cause an unnecessary offense. It could be an example of the freedom. I have to use for the sake of the gospel.

How about as a member of this church? How do we use our freedom. For the sake of others in the church family? Any change is suggested.

Change to the order of service. Or change to how we discharge the Lord's Sabbath. Or change to how we structure small groups.

[28 : 45] Or change to how we spend our money. That God has given to us as a church. The issue is. How do I use my gospel freedom. For the sake of others. And for the sake of the gospel. And as a personal level.

We move into chapter 18. We need to rid ourselves of the thinking. I have rights. And insisting on them. It has to be my way.

So that others are offended. And the work is damaged. And so we need to be asking the question. How do my words. And my actions. Impact others.

And I want to say to you. It is huge. That churches get wrecked. And ruined. It is not in persecution. When it comes. We will stand when persecution comes. God will give grace to that day. It is not when big morality questions come up. Because ordinarily. They are quite clear.

[29 : 46] But it is the little things. That kill churches. Not immorality. Not persecution. The subtle erosion. Either of Christian freedom.

Or people using their freedom. In a way that harms others. Let's get back to 2 Timothy chapter 17. Jesus could not be clearer. He could not be clearer.

Chapter 17 and verse 26. The sons are free. The sons are free. And that says.

You are free in Christ. And you would use that freedom responsibly. That is the sign of maturity in God's people. People who are living. As Jesus did.

And so it will affect the holidays I go. It will affect the programs I watch. It will affect the house that I want to buy. It will affect the car that I drive. It will affect the way that I spend my money. It will affect what I put online.

[30 : 46] It will affect the way that I act after church. I am free to do whatever I like. But with freedom comes responsibility. How will I not cause offence?

How will I not cause discouragement? And so think. Will you? Think. How do my actions affect others? With my gospel freedom.

And that's the pattern of life Jesus is modelling. Three things for an extraordinary miracle. Jesus is the one with perfect knowledge. Jesus is the one who provides perfectly. And Jesus gives the pattern.

For life in him. Let's pray. Let's pray.