

# THIS WEEK'S MESSAGE

AUGUST 8TH-9TH, 2020 // BOOK OF MATTHEW

## TAXES & FISH (MATTHEW 17:24-27)

Jesus and His disciples returned to Capernaum on the north shore of the Sea of Galilee, which was His base of operations.

- It seems that the group hadn't had much time to settle in before they were approached and harassed by those representing the Jewish religious establishment (vs. 24).
- This group apparently wanted Jesus and His followers to pay the temple tax.

This issue of Jews paying a temple tax was quite controversial in its day- devout Jews disagreed on its purpose and necessity.

- The Pharisees saw it as an annual patriotic duty, the Sadducees disapproved of it entirely, and members of the Qumran community paid it only once in a lifetime.
- This was a hot-button issue that seemed to divide more than unite.

Rabbis were exempt from paying this tax, but still Peter is questioned on whether His teacher will perform His patriotic duty and pay the tax.

- He responds with, "yes"- either based on assumption or on Jesus' previous practice of paying this tax (vs. 25).
- But Peter and Jesus apparently didn't have the means to pay this tax at the moment.

As Peter steps inside his house, Jesus asks him, "Who pays taxes? The sons of kings or other citizens?" (vs. 25)

- Peter knows the answer and responds with, "others" (vs. 26).
- Clearly the sons of kings are exempt, so by all rights Jesus shouldn't have to pay the tax on His own Father's house.

One of things Jesus is getting Peter to see is that the children of God are free from old covenant obligations that have been nullified by the new covenant.

- As born again, N.T. Christians we're free from the obligation of the O.T. law.
- But then Jesus says something fascinating: "But so we won't offend them...go fishing, there'll a coin in the fish's mouth, then pay the tax" (vs. 27).

Since when was Jesus worried about offending the Pharisees?

- In chapter 15, He was alright with ruffling their feathers over fundamental principles.
- But here Jesus is compliant in doing what He doesn't have to do in order to not divide or create unnecessary conflict over a controversial issue of secondary importance.

Why? Because of primary importance in Jesus's ministry at this point was most certainly NOT a meaningless debate over secondary issues.

- He was going to the cross to save and redeem humanity back to the Father- nothing needed to distract Him from that mission.
- So even though He didn't have to- He complied, did what He needed to do to pay the tax, and moved onto more important matters.

When we make our primary mission as followers of Jesus engagement in debates over secondary cultural and political issues that are chocked full of controversy and complexities...

- We create unnecessary stumbling blocks and offenses that cloud the central message of the Christian Gospel.

## WHO IS THE GREATEST? (MATTHEW 18:1-4)

We're tempted to roll our eyes for the silly bickering about, "who was the greatest" (vs. 1).

- The recent events on the mountain of transfiguration might have aggravated the problem, particularly when it came to Peter.
- We might roll our eyes at these disciples for this particular squabble, but selfishness and disunity amongst the people of God is rampant.

When Christians argue over trivial and secondary matters and insist that our viewpoint is the only one that matters, we're essentially doing the same thing.

- The root source of these problems 100% of the time is pride- thinking of ourselves as more important than we really are.
- When we live for ourselves and not for others, there will always be conflict & division.

They bring the squabble to Jesus- asking Him to name which one of them is the greatest.

- Jesus bypasses them completely and calls a little child into their midst (vs. 2).
- The only way someone can even gain entrance into the Kingdom is to "turn" ("be converted") and become like a child (vs. 3). What is He talking about?

Children can't take care of themselves- they need a parent to feed, provide, and care for them.

- What Jesus is calling for is a fundamental change in our heart where we recognize our smallness, we turn from relying on ourselves, and we trust in the Father.
- This is a call for humility of heart, not childishness of thought or behavior.

To even enter into the Kingdom of heaven requires this type of conversion which starts with an acknowledgement of our weakness and inability.

- Sadly, there are many in our churches who have never been converted because they've never chosen to humble themselves, admit their weakness, and to trust in the Father.

- But what does greatness look like?

Greatness in God's economy is humility.

- You might have everyone in the world impressed by how much you know, how spiritual you may seem, and how smart you think you are- but if you have pride in your heart, according to Jesus you are the least in the Kingdom.

- By nature, all of us are self-centered rebels that want to be celebrities instead of servants.

We want our names known, viewpoints celebrated, and accomplishments applauded.

- The kingdom of this world involves us all jockeying for position by trying to get our names known, our voices heard, and our accomplishments noticed.
- But it's a bankrupt system because the people who "win" will inevitably be dethroned by someone with a louder voice.

How do we achieve greatness in God's Kingdom?

- We first acknowledge how small and insignificant we are ("like a child"), and then we make our lives about making Jesus known and serving the needs of other people.
- It's an "upside down" Kingdom where it's everything in reverse- to live, you must die; to find your life, you must lose it; and to be great, you must become small.

## TEMPTATIONS TO SIN (MATTHEW 18:5-9)

Continuing to talk about children, Jesus shifts the conversation to talk about receiving children in His name.

- Some have interpreted these verses to mean that we should not mistreat children or lead them to sin- there's truth to that, but that's not the point of this passage.
- Remember- Jesus has just equated all of His true followers with children (vs. 3).

So whenever we see "child" or "little child" in the rest of this passage, the reference is most likely NOT to physical children but to the spiritual children of God the Father- "Christians".

- Whenever we receive or welcome one of God's children, we're welcoming Christ (vs. 5)
- But whenever we cause another believer to sin (meaning, "to cause to stumble, to offend"), there are serious consequences (vs. 6).

Jesus says that it would be better for such a person if a, "heavy millstone were around his neck and he were drowned in the depth of the sea" (vs. 6b).

- There is a zealous affection God feels for His children- and He will severely punish those who mislead, deceive, defraud, and influence them to sin.
- We must be selflessly concerned for each other's holiness!

The world is fallen and under the curse, so it's inevitable that temptation to sin will come to us.

- But woe to those by whom it comes (vs. 7).
- In other words, judgment is upon those who actively influence other believers to join them in sin against God and others.
- If our presence in the life of someone else makes it easier for them to sin and be casual and dismissive about it- God will judge us.

We don't add to the world's temptations by leading one another to sin in the church.

- Don't gossip or tempt other believers to hate and slander whenever we're all fighting off that tendency in our own hearts.
- Don't tempt other believers to lust after your body whenever we're trying to fight to stay pure and faithful to our spouses.

Don't tempt other believers to get intoxicated by drinking in front of them if they've had a problem with it in the past.

- Don't tempt other believers to lower their standards by watching a movie or listening to music with them that will violate their conscience and lead them to sin.
- We're called to be steppingstones for each other- not stumbling blocks!

The only way to be sure you're not leading other believers to sin is to be radically committed to your own holiness.

- Jesus speaks of cutting off hands, feet and eyes in order to fight sin (vs. 8-9).
- He's obviously speaking figuratively, but the main point is that drastic action is necessary to overcome temptation. How serious do you take your sin?

## Are there stumbling blocks in my life?

Am I a stumbling block or steppingstone? (1 Pet. 3:8-12)