

The Believer as a Citizen

Matthew 17:22-27

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I trust you have your Bible with you this morning so that you can study along with us and our lesson is a continuation of our study of Matthew's gospel. And we're looking at chapter 17 and for our study this morning verses 22 through 27...Matthew 17:22 through 27.

Now the subject of our study today I've entitled "The Believer as a Citizen." And it brings us to a very very important understanding, I think particularly for the day in which we live. Evangelical, fundamental, orthodox Christianity has for the first time in my life time become very very involved in worldly politics and economics. There are many Christian lobby groups. There are many protesting Christian groups who are seen as being against what the government is doing, against what leadership is doing both on a state and national level. There's a lot of questions being asked about how involved should Christians be in politics...how involved should we be in fighting against the system...how critical should we be of our leaders, our senate, our legislature, our judicial branch. And I really believe that this particular passage gives us a bottom line principle by which we can answer those many questions.

There are people telling us today that it's a time to be angry and that we need to come together in a great mass of Christian people and protest our government, we need to take on the drift and the direction of our government. We need to elect other people to office. We need to get involved in politics and economics, and so forth and so on. And there are others who are saying to us no, we need to make sure that we maintain our very clear word of the gospel and not get it clouded up with other issues. Where does the Christian really find his balance and what is a believer's relationship to the world and its authority, its government and so forth?

And that's really the issue to which our Lord speaks in this particular portion of Scripture. Let me give you just a little biblical background. There's no question at all but that we have been called as Christians to be apart from the world...no question about that at all. We are, in fact, designated in the Bible as citizens of a heavenly kingdom. We're not even called citizens of this earth. For example, in a very important passage to which you might look, Philippians chapter 3, we read this beginning in verse 17, "Brethren, be followers together of me and mark them who walk even as ye have us for an example. For many walk of whom I have told you often and now tell you even weeping, they are the enemies of the cross of Christ whose end is destruction, whose God is their appetite and whose glory is in their shame who mind earthly things."

The Apostle Paul then sets a sort of a pattern of description of people who mind earthly things. And in verse 20 says, "For our citizenship is in heaven and we're set over and against the people of this world and we look to heaven from whom...from which also we look for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ who shall change our lowly body that it may be fashioned like His glorious body according to the working by which He is able to even to subdue all things unto Himself."

So, on the one hand we have these earthly things, but we are citizens of heaven. Our citizenship is clearly there.

In the book of Ephesians chapter 2, we find a very similar statement made in verse 19 where it says, "We are fellow citizens with the saints." So we are citizens who belong to a very special group, a heavenly group with other saints who are of the household of God. In Hebrews chapter 12 there's an important statement also made in verse 22. It says that we have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable accompany if angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are written in heaven." And again we find that we belong to an assembly of people who are heavenly.

Now because of the reality which clearly is indicated in Scripture that we are citizens of heaven, it follows as a corollary that we are called to be apart from the world system. That's very clear. Come out from among them and be ye separate and touch not the unclean thing..the Bible tells us. Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in Him. Friendship with the world is enmity against God. And James even went on to call people who are friends of the world adulterers and adulteresses. Paul wrote to the Colossians, "Set your affections on things above and not on things on the earth." We are called to be distinctly apart from such things.

In Philippians 2 it says that we are to be blameless and harmless children of God, without rebuke in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation among whom you shine as lights in the world holding forth the word of life. So we are called to separation. We are called to be apart from, have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, says Paul in Ephesians chapter 5.

Now let's talk about that for a moment. If we are citizens of heaven and if we belong to an assembly of people whose names are written there who are the household of God, the saints of God, if we are only strangers and sojourners in the world, if this isn't our home and this isn't our country and this isn't where our citizenship lies, then we might conclude from that that we really have no obligation here at all...that we're not responsible to respond to the system in any way, that we are called to a higher order. We might also conclude that not only do we by belonging to God have some kind of religious immunity, but because we have been infused with eternal life and made possessors of the Holy Spirit, we also have come to a state of superiority to the people around us which belies any need to respond to them no matter who they are. And in fact, if you follow this long enough, we could actually not only not respond but we could begin to criticize and to tear at and attack the system rather relentlessly from the viewpoint of our citizenship in heaven.

And so, that brings us to this question: what is a believer's relationship to worldly authority? How are we to respond in the world? And the Bible has some very clear and very specific answers. To begin with, look at 1 Peter chapter 2 and we'll work our way back to Matthew 17. Now remember that Peter is writing to believers who unquestionably were going through some tremendous persecution, tremendous trial for their faith. They were under an oppressive government, a government which gave them perhaps not anywhere near the liberty that we enjoy in the United States of America and in other countries in our world. But he writes to them in chapter 2 verse 9 with all of this in mind and says this, "Ye are a chosen generation," that is you're elected by God, you're a collection of people brought together by God's sovereign eternal choice...very special people chosen by God Himself.

Secondly, "You are a royal priesthood," not only are you priests to serve the most-high God, but you are royal priests. You have not only the role of the priest but the role of the king, you are royalty, you are majesty. "And you an holy nation." Holy being separated, unique, set apart. And then it says, and I love this phrase, "You are a people of His own," or a peculiar people, it really means a people for special possession. You are unique. All of these speak of your uniqueness. You're not like the world, you're chosen out. You're priests to God, you're royal priests, you're a holy nation, different than any other. You are a people of divine possession in order that you would show forth the praises of Him whose called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.

You've been chosen by God to demonstrate His praise, who called you out of the darkness of this world into the light of the glorious gospel of Jesus Christ and His glorious kingdom of light, as Colossians 1 calls it. In verse 10 he says, "In time past you were not a people, but now are the people of God." You were nobodies, now you're people of God. You had not obtained mercy, but now you have obtained mercy. And so in those two verses he speaks of our infinitely high calling. And in verse 11, "Dearly beloved, because these things are true, I beseech you as sojourners and pilgrims." In other words, you don't belong in this world. You're sojourners and pilgrims. You're like a person in this world traveling in another country. You're a United States citizen, you travel in another country, you're just a stranger there. Now you don't belong to that country. And so he defines us as strangers...not citizens, sojourners, not residents.

And what does he say? First of all, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the world, or against the soul rather. Abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul. The thing you want to first of all note as you walk through the world is to stay away from its contamination...stay away from that which will pollute you. And then he says have your behavior honest or upright among the Gentiles that whereas they speak evil, implied of course, against you as if you were evil doers, they may by your good works which they shall behold glorify God in the day of visitation. In other words, you want to take away their criticism basis, you want to live so upright, the word honest, upright, you want to live that way so that they may try to speak against you as if you were evil doers, but when it comes down to the end and they really examine your life, they're going to see that it wasn't the case.

In other words, he says you're not a citizen of the world, the world really has no claim on you. You belong to another economy. And he gives us all those details in 9 and 10. But as long as you're in the world there's a negative command. And your negative command is stay away from the pollution and your positive command is to live such an honest life among people that they find nothing to criticize...nothing.

How you going to do that? How can you so live so that they're not going to criticize? Verse 13 says it, here it comes, "Submit...hupotasso, get underneath, line up under, rank yourself under...every ordinance of man. Obey every law. Obey every law for the Lord's sake."

And there's the key. It isn't that every law is right, as God judges right. It isn't that every law is equitable, as God judges equity. It isn't that every law is even sensible as God would judge what is sensible. But we are to submit to every law of man for the Lord's sake. Why? I'll tell you why. Because if you're going to be perceived by your society as a good upright honest person with integrity and character and moral quality and proper values, they're going to evaluate you on the basis of what they understand to be the code of right and wrong, right? And society sets up laws and rules and then it says the people who keep these are the law abiding people, the people who fight

these and rebel against these and protest these and disobey these and don't abide by these, they are the antilaw, they are the rebellious people, they are saying you don't know what you're doing, we reject you, we reject your laws, we reject your standards, we reject your morality, we reject your value system, we're going to live our way. And when you do that by their perception, all you are is a rebel and an insurrectionist and an uncooperative person and a lawbreaker. And so even though we may not see all the laws as being morally reflective of God's mind, we are called to submit to all of them...I believe not only in our physical act but in our mental attitude so that our submission is a willing one to the law of man.

You see, the world evaluates people in it or any part of the world evaluates people in it by how they conform to its applied standard of morals. And when the world sets up laws, we are to respond to those laws so that we demonstrate that we are not rebellious people, we are peacemaking people, we are disciplined people, we are people who are righteous good people. And the demonstration of that even by their standard lays a foundation for credibility for the proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ. You see, if Christianity was reduced to an insurrectionist movement, no one would be interested in it who believed in law and order and understood it the best way they can, and that is by the government that exists. So you see there that we are not to submit for the sake of man, but for the sake of the Lord in the sense that we're doing it because it is for the advance of His Kingdom.

Then he says whether to the king as supreme or unto governors as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evil doers...whether you're talking about kings or governors or police...and remember now, the people to whom Peter was writing were under an oppressive situation. But he doesn't tell them to have a revolution. He doesn't tell them to throw over the yoke. He tells them to submit. That's the basic principle.

Now there is a footnote that needs to be added at this point because someone will say, "Well, now wait a minute. What if they tell us to do something against the Bible?" Very simple to answer, then you don't submit. We submit at all points except when the law of man counteracts the law of God and then we are in Acts 4 and 5 and Peter says there you judge whether we ought to obey God or men. They told him - stop preaching - and he said I can't, I have a higher law. That's where you've overstepped the bounds of civil government and you've entered into the divine realm. And at that point I opt out for God. If the government came along and tried to force a person to abort a baby, I think at that point you have a higher law in the Word of God and that's when you say I will do what the law of God says and you willingly and with the right kind of spirit accept the consequence.

Now in saying this I am not saying you don't try to change things. I am trying...I'm saying that if you think things are wrong, then you seek to change them through the government ordained channels for change...not by rebellion insurrection or non-compliance. Because we are called to be good citizens.

Now notice that it says, verse 15, and here's the sum of it all, "So is the will of God that with well doing you may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men." In other words, God wants you to be such good citizens that you shut the mouths of the critics, that they look at you and they admire you from their value viewpoint because that's where they have to start, isn't it? You see, they can't evaluate you from God's viewpoint, they have to evaluate you from their own. And if you are one who conforms to the best and to the standards that society sets down, they see you as a person with values. And that's the beginning. And even though you're free, verse 16 says, you've been set free, as it were, from the world, you are not to use that freedom as a covering for your maliciousness. You're not to say, "Well, I'm free, I can do what I want," and then go out and act what amounts to a

malicious way against others. But you're to be slaves of God, submissive.

Then verse 17 sums it up, "Honor all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God and honor the king." You know, it really bothers me the way people attack the President. Now I'm not necessarily here to defend any one President or one presidential viewpoint or party or anything else, but I want you to know something that you must have already thought about at least once or twice, the problem in America is not the problem created by any President we ever had...it is the problem created by a mass of Godless, Christless, selfish greedy people. And built into democracy is the seeds of its own dissolution ultimately because when men find that they can vote to themselves things out of the public treasury, ultimately they'll destroy themselves economically and in every other way. And then you add to that the disintegration of the family, the disintegration of marriage, the rise of the drug culture, and all of the things that are related to the rise of crime and you cannot put the blame at the foot of any party or any President or any Congress. Because they cannot infuse morality into an immoral society. Now we are called then because we're not going to be able to change the drift of society by rank...wrangling over the political leaders, we are called then to pray for them, 1 Timothy 2, and to get out into that society and sew the gospel in the hearts of people. And we do that when we are perceived as people who have a desirable life style and a desirable value system and a desirable morality and a desirable message, not when we're seen as political lobbyists for a certain viewpoint or insurrectionists.

And I know that's a strong statement but I intended to make it anyway. The truth is the truth.

Turn to Romans 13....Romans 13, and here we have the Pauline perspective, "Let every soul," and notice how nobody gets away in that one, "Let every soul be subject," same word, hupotasso, "come under the higher powers," speaking of government, "there's no power but of God, the government is of God," He put it there, government is a divine institution as much as the church is, as much as the marriage is, as much as family is, for the preservation of man and so every soul is to be submissive even if you're under a Roman emperor who believes he's God, and even though the laws may not be equitable, even though they may not be sensible, even though they may not be fair...you're to be submissive. "For there is no power but of God, the powers that be ordained of God." They're there because God put them there, it doesn't mean we don't take our processes to change things if we want to and God works through that process. But they're there because God put them there, it's a divine reality. So if you resist the power then you resist the ordinance of God.

Have you ever wondered why Christianity didn't start a slave insurrection in Rome? Because the Roman government was ordained by God. Do you know that? We can see that now. It was the Roman government that provided one world language which it facilitated the preaching of the gospel...the Greek language. It was the Roman government that provided the Pax Romana which brought peace to that whole part of the world which allowed intercourse between countries and nations all over the place so the gospel could spread so freely. It was the Romans who established the Roman roads and highways and trade routes and ship routes so that the gospel with its missionaries could be carried all over the place.

You see, God put the Roman government there to facilitate the gospel even though they didn't believe it. And so it's not our role to second guess God but to accept what the Bible says that the powers that be ordained of God, if you resist the powers that be, you resist God. And if you do that, verse 2 says you bring judgment on yourself. For rulers, and here is a general principle, are not a terror to good works but to the evil. And that's true in almost every society. There may be some very

isolated exceptions to that, but every society sets up laws and the people who conform to those laws find they can survive and the people who don't, fall under punishment. And that's the way it is in human society. "Will you then not be afraid of the power?" You don't want to be afraid of your government? Then do what is good then you'll have praise of the same. "For he is the minister of God to thee for good. And if you do what is evil, then you have a right to be afraid, for he bears not the sword in vain, he's a minister of God and avenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil."

The government has been set there to punish the evil doer and reward the one who does good. And if you conform to the society's laws as they exist, you will find that in all those societies..and there may be some very rare exceptions, but for the most part this is always true...within those rules you conform and you'll survive. And we look at a country like Iran and we say, "Boy, I mean, they do things that are terrible, they massacre people." And there are times when, of course, they're way out of line with what would be considered to be right and they're acting against the will of God. But in the main, they have rules. And if you keep the rules, it's okay. I know some people were upset when they found out that when you steal something in Iran they chop off both your hands so you won't steal anymore. But all you have to do to make sure you keep your hands is don't steal to start with. I mean, that's the way the rules are.

Generally speaking, government sets rules. They may not be equitable. They may not be sensible in all cases. But as we conform to them, we give honor to God and we silence the mouths of the critics who are looking to morally discredit us and they will invariably do that on the basis of the morality which they perceive to be the genuine morality and that usually is that which has been posted in terms of their own country. So we are to so live to shut the mouths of the critics. And if we live right, then those policeman and those who are in authority in verse 3 will do us good and if we do evil, they'll do us evil in verse 4.

Verse 5 then brings it down, "Wherefore you must needs be subject," and there we are back to that same word again. We're to be underneath, submissive, not only to avoid wrath but to have a clear conscience. So there's a negative--stay away from judgment that way. There's a positive--you have a clear conscience, you've done right.

Now what does this mean? Well, here's the hardest part of it. "For this cause, pay your taxes also." That's right. You say, "But I don't like my money to go to buy a yacht for some African sheik, \$45 thousand of tax money last year went to buy a yacht for some African...I don't like my money to go to pay for an atomic development thing...I don't want my money..." See. The powers that be ordained of God, pay your taxes.

Pretty simple command, I think. For they're God's ministers. You say, "The IRS?" That's right. The IRS. And they are tending continually on this very thing, "Render therefore to all their dues, all of it, tribute to whom tribute is due, custom to whom custom is due." And those are two different things, two kinds of taxes. One has to do with taxes on articles and goods, the other tax is on people. So you pay your Income Tax, you pay your Sales Tax, you pay your duties, all of those things, fear to whom fear, honor to whom honor is due, you reverence those who are in authority, you honor those who are in authority, you pay all of the taxes that are required of you, personal taxes, income taxes as well as sale taxes, duty taxes and everything else. Now that's pretty straight stuff.

It would be so easy, you see, for Christians even in the Roman society as in the society to which Peter wrote, to look at themselves and say, "Hey, and we're subjects of a heavenly kingdom, and we

belong to a King who is not of this world, and we live for His return, and after all, this world hates us and they persecute us and look what they're doing to us, and we're superior spiritually. We have no obligation to them." And then you get to the idea where you think you're so superior and you've got everything going for you, you just start one wholesale blast of the society in which you live. You'll never find that in the New Testament. And that society had a lot about it that ought to have been changed. But God knew the way you changed the society is not by blasting away at the people in authority in it, the way you change the society is by winning the people who are in that society to Jesus Christ and it changes from the inside out. So Paul makes it clear that we are to be good citizens.

Now with those in mind, let's go back to Matthew chapter 17 and this is where it all came from. That well could have been based on Jesus' teaching right here. Now as we look at verses 22 to 27, and we're just going to go through them rather briefly now because of the ground work that's been established...we find ourselves in a section of Matthew where the Lord is privately teaching His disciples. In this particular phase of His life, the last six months up until His death, He spent the greater portion of the time with His disciples. There were some times that He was with multitudes and crowds and He did respond to the needs of the masses from time to time, but primarily He focused on the Twelve. And in chapter 17, beginning at verse 14 and running through verse 34 of chapter 20, that whole section, 17, 18 and 19 and 20, four chapters, we have a series of lessons Jesus gives the Twelve...private teaching about all of these important areas that they need to understand: faith, humility, offense, discipline, forgiveness, marriage, divorce, children, wealth, compassion, rewards, leadership, a lot of things. And He's giving them all the information so that when He goes back to heaven and they carry on the work of the Kingdom they'll know how to live, they'll know how to act, they'll know how to respond to what goes on. So this is really their seminary education, their senior course...very intense, very powerful.

Now through that flow of teaching that He has with the private...in the private times with the disciples, He injects at periodic points a prediction of His death so that they never lose that sense that He's going to die. And He just...He'll at the most difficult moments put it in there and just bring them up short. And we find that's exactly what He does here in verse 22. And we read this, "And while they came together, gathered together, wandered about," several ways to translate that thought, "while they were roaming around in Galilee together, the Twelve and Jesus, Jesus said unto them, The Son of Man shall be handed over to the hands of men."

Now we don't know where they were particularly, they were just in Galilee wandering about. They were in Caesarea, Philippi, you'll remember, they came down, went into the mountain of the transfiguration, came down off the mountain, Jesus healed the demon possessed epileptic boy and now they're still going through Galilee, perhaps on their way to Capernaum where they're going to stay for a little while. And somewhere along that time Jesus just jolts them again with what is the third prediction of His death. The first one was in 16:21, the second, chapter 17 verse 12, and now comes the third statement regarding His death.

And while they wandered through Galilee, Mark 9:30 tells us the "they" is the disciples and our Lord, He tells them the Son of Man will be "handed over." That's a passive verb, somebody will hand Him over and it's the first intimation of Judas being the culprit in the betrayal and that's why some translators have taken liberty to translate it "betrayed" because that is the implication there. Now when He is handed over, look what it says in verse 23, "They shall kill Him." He will be handed over and they shall kill Him. Now we know that Judas was the betrayer who handed Him over. We know

the men to whom He was handed was the Sanhedrin, the Jewish leaders. And we know then from verse 23 that they killed Him. Whenever the Bible puts responsibility for the death of Christ in the hands of anyone, it always is in the hands of the Jewish leaders. And you can't ignore that. It is not an anti-Semitic thing to say that, it is the truth to say that. The Jewish people rejected their Messiah and they were responsible for His execution. In Acts 2, Peter said in his sermon, "Ye men of Israel, ye have taken and by wicked hands have crucified and slain Jesus of Nazareth." You did it. The Romans were the executioners but the Jewish leaders were the murderers and they whipped the mob into a frenzy.

Now that is not a statement against Judaism. That is not a statement against all Jewish people who ever lived. In fact, every man who ever comes onto the face of the earth who rejects Jesus Christ, Hebrews says is guilty of crucifying the Son of God again and putting Him to open shame. And we're not indicting all Jewish people in saying that. That's just what the Bible says. They were the ones who received Him when He was betrayed. They were the ones who killed Him. And the guilt was laid at their feet. And all others in the world who ever reject Him stand with the crucifiers.

And then it says, "And the third day He shall be raised again." And so, you see, He was in a sense passive in all of these. Somebody betrayed Him. Somebody else killed Him. And somebody else raised Him from the dead. And, of course, that was God the Father who raised Jesus from the dead. That's very clearly indicated to us in the book of Acts as well.

And at this point, of course, it says at the end of verse 23, they were exceedingly sorry. Why? Because they didn't understand the resurrection. In the comparative passage of Mark 9:32, it says they understood not and were afraid to ask. When Jesus said He was going to die, that's all they heard. It may well have been very much like Martha when Jesus in John 11 came to Bethany and they said Lazarus is dead, he's been dead for four days, by now his body stinketh, and all of this. And Jesus said he'll rise. And Martha said, "I know he'll rise in the last day at the resurrection, what I'm concerned about is now." And it may well have been that that's where the disciples were. They were somewhere in Daniel 12 thinking about the fact that when Jesus said He would rise again, that sure, everybody's going to rise someday when there's that great resurrection. And so they missed the third day, or they didn't understand what the third day meant or what kind of a day. So all they heard was that He was going to die. And you can imagine that three out of the twelve who had come down off the mount of transfiguration seen the resplendent glory of Jesus Christ, now they come down, they see Him use His power to heal this demoniac and they're on cloud nine and all of a sudden now He says to them I'm going to die. And that's all they need to hear and they're back in the despondence of their despair. And so they're in great despair.

But they have to be reminded. Later on after the resurrection they'll look back and all this makes sense to them. And that's important, you see, because if He got killed and they didn't know it was coming, and they didn't know it was in the plan, they might look back and say, "Boy, that must have been a strange thing for God to have to deal with...never intended that." So the Lord just tells them it's going to happen, tells them it's going to happen, tells them it's going to happen. They don't understand. When it happens, they understand, they look back and say, "Oh, that was the plan."

Now after that announcement, we come to our text verse 24. "And when they were come to Capernaum," and you can stop there. Capernaum, beautiful little city on the northmost point of the Sea of Galilee, city where Jesus lived, city where Jesus preached, taught, healed thousands. A city where Peter lived. And as they journey from Caesarea Philippi down through Galilee heading for

Jerusalem where He will die, they stop for a few days, no doubt, in Capernaum perhaps to stay as guests in Peter's house because his house is there. In fact, I've been on that site several times and they believe they've uncovered Peter's house. The reason is they've uncovered a house at the level of this particular period and it has the sign of the fish in the walls. It may well have been the very house where Peter was.

But they were guests in the house. The disciples were in the house and Jesus...rather Jesus was with them in the house and Peter was out in the street somewhere maybe going to get some food or whatever. And as the scene opens, we find the first element in the story, I'll call it the "Payment demanded...the payment demanded." "And when they were come to Capernaum, they that received tribute...they that received tribute." Here are the tax collectors, "...Came to Peter and said, Does your Master pay taxes? Tribute? Didrachmon?"

Now Jesus and His disciples have been absent for a long time...months. They had left Galilee a long time ago, gone through Tyre and Sidon, Gentile area. Gone over to the east, down the eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee to the ten city area called Decapolis, also a Gentile area, back up from there to Caesarea/Philippi which was in the Palestine Jewish territory but populated mostly by Gentiles because it was on the very border of the Gentile lands. They had been all through these places in the months intervening. Now they come back to Capernaum and they're immediately confronted by the tax collector who says, "Just because you're not in town doesn't mean you don't pay your taxes." And he asks the question this way, "Does your...does not your Master pay didrachma?"

Now apparently this is not a Roman tax. This is a Jewish tax relating to the temple. The Romans taxed them and the Romans had agents to do the taxing called "publicans." These were Jews who sold themselves to the Roman government to exact taxes from the people. They gave some to the Roman government what they wanted and then they pocketed the rest. They were usually thieves and robbers, to put it mildly. And they became hated by the people because they were collecting taxes from their own people to give to the oppressors, the Romans. But these are not such as publicans, these are people within the Jewish system, and they were allowed a certain amount of autonomy. They could operate their quasi theocracy to a certain extent. And so they were collecting the temple tax for the services of the temple.

By the way, it was a very sophisticated operation. In every town and villages...in village, they set up little booths and they would have them in a conspicuous road and as people came by and passed along, they would collect the taxes from them, make sure everybody paid. And they would be set up for long periods of time to make sure they didn't miss anybody. And it all goes back to Exodus chapter 30. In Exodus chapter 30 when the tabernacle was established and it was carried from there to the temple, God gave a law through Moses. "And the Lord spoke unto Moses," Exodus 30:11, "When thou takest the sum of the children of Israel after their number, then shall they give every man a ransom for his soul unto the Lord." How much, verse 13 says, "Half a shekel after the shekel of the sanctuary." A half shekel shall be the offering to the Lord. Verse 15 says, "They shall not give more if they're rich, they shall not give less if they're poor when they make an offering to the Lord, half shekel for the service of the tabernacle of the congregation that it may be a memorial to the children of Israel before the Lord to make atonement for your souls." Half shekel.

Now Nehemiah reduced it to a third shekel when they came back from captivity because they were so poor. But the half shekel had been reinstated and in this particular temple in Jerusalem, there was a half shekel temple tax that had to be paid by every Jewish male and had to be paid annually.

And, by the way, if you didn't pay it, they took compensation out of your personal belongings.

Now the term used here is didrachma. And basically a half a shekel, that's a Jewish concept, was equal to two Greek drachmas, d-r-a-c-h-m-a-e, two Greek drachmas. And the tax then became known as the double drachma, or the didrachma, that's the Greek term. And that is the one...it basically represents two days wages. That is the tax they were after. The half-shekel which equals the didrachma in Greek coinage.

And so, they came to collect that. Now commonly speaking, it was customary because there was no double didrachma in Greek coinage, they had the term but the economy had inflated to the point where they didn't have didrachma. So what they used was a stater. And the stater was equal to two didrachma, or four drachma. Are you with me? So people would normally go together and pay one stater, and that would cover their temple tax.

By the way, when the temple was destroyed, it's very interesting to note that after the temple was destroyed, the Romans levied the very same didrachma tax to be paid for the temple of Jupiter Capitalinus(?) and carried on that tradition forcing the Jews to pay for a temple of the pagan idol.

So, the collectors come and look what they say, "Does not your Master pay taxes?" Boy, there are lots of people who would like to say that the next verse said, "He said no." A lot of people would like that. There are people who are Christian people who don't pay taxes. They don't think they have any reason to pay taxes, they don't like what's done with their money and so forth and so they don't pay. And some of them get away with it because the government knows that to prosecute and track them all down and go through the fight would be to lose more money than you would gain. But Jesus, does He pay taxes? Verse 25, "Peter said yes...yes, Jesus always pays His didrachma." And you can imply from that that He always paid His taxes...always. Jesus is not a tax evader. He's not a tax dodger.

So, we see the record beginning then with the payment demanded. Now let's look at the "principle discussed." Peter said yes He does. "And when he was come into the house." Now Peter off the street, back to the house where they're gathered, probably his own house, "Jesus speaks first to him." He knows exactly what went on...omniscience, right? He knew it all. "And He says, What are you thinking, Simon?" What's going on in your mind? What are you thinking about? You know what he was thinking about? This whole thing about does your Master pay taxes, yes He does and I can see him walking back and saying, "Why?" Why would Jesus pay taxes, He's God? It doesn't make sense.

"What are you thinking, Simon?" What's your opinion? And, by the way, this is the way of the master-teacher, ask a question and start the internal process moving. Simon, He calls him, that was still his common name, not yet fully known as Peter, even though his name had been changed in chapter 16. Then He asks him a question, "Of whom do the kings of the earth take custom or tribute?" And there's those two kinds of taxes, people tax and goods tax, "Of whom do the kings of the earth take their taxes?"

Now let me give you little note here. Taxation in those days was not like it is today. The countries were run by one individual, an emperor, a king, there was not democracy as we know it. And so the one who is at the top of the pile, at the top of the pyramid, is the one who called all the shots. And he

basically taxed the whole society under his control for two reasons: to support his kingdom and to support his family. And he collected it all and used it for the support of his family and the support of his kingdom.

Now He asks a very simple question, "Now when the king sets out to take his taxes, who does he take it from? Does he take it from his sons or strangers?" Well, you don't have to be Phi Beta Kappa to know the answer to that. He doesn't take it from his own family, he's taking it for his family. What point would there be to tax his own family, he's collecting it for them. So it's obvious and Peter would know the answer and he says, "Of strangers," in verse 26, of course. You see, they didn't have a democracy where everyone paid taxes like we do on a structured basis, equally everyone responsible to pay. In those days, if you ran the place, you did all the collecting and none of the paying. And so it was very very obvious that kings did not take their taxes from their own sons.

So Jesus then draws a conclusion. "Then are the sons free." That's right. And if this passage ended there, oh boy. You say, "What is this saying?" We're free. Why? Because God is the King of the earth and God rules everything and we're the sons of God, so we get all the benefits and we don't have to pay our taxes. It's a really good illustration because it was a temple tax being collected and who was the king of the temple? God was. And who was His Son? Jesus Christ. So if there was any tax that Jesus Christ shouldn't have paid, it was the temple tax. He was the Son of God who was the king of His dwelling place, the temple. So it would have been a perfect time for Jesus to say I'm not paying My tax, after all, God is the head of the temple and I'm His Son and He doesn't tax Me. And further than that, we're all the children of God and the world is God's and He's our King, and we don't need to respond to the world. They were giving their money to support us and God.

And, you know, in a sense He could say that. I mean, that would be theologically pretty straight stuff. I mean, God is our King, isn't He? We are His children. Joint heirs with Christ. Brothers of Christ. Sons of God. Children of the King. So we...everything is for us and God isn't going to take from us, He's going to give to us. So we don't need to pay our taxes. And after all, didn't Jesus say in Luke 2:49, in Matthew 12:6 and John 2:16, didn't He say this is My Father's house? Didn't He affirm that in fact the temple was His Father's house?

And I suppose even the tax collectors would have agreed that if He could prove He was the Son of God, He wouldn't have had to pay a half-shekel. Cause that's the way it was in those days. Kings didn't tax their own kids. If He could prove He was the Son of God, He'd be off the hook. But look what happens. We're free, folks. Yeah, I mean, technically speaking we could just say forget it, you're not getting a dime out of me, I belong to another world. It would be like me traveling through another country and having some guy come up and say, "Have you paid your income tax?" Hey, I don't belong in this country. I don't live here. I'm from the United States of America and I don't have to pay you anything.

"Oh yes, how many children do you have?" Well, you have four children...a wife...let's see, that will be \$14 thousand." I'm not paying you anything, I don't belong in this country. And technically I'm right, am I not? And, I mean, I wouldn't pay. I'd get out of there. You can't levy a tax on me, I'm a stranger and a sojourner, I belong to another nation.

In a sense, that's true. But look at verse 27. This is really clear, notwithstanding, in spite of all of that fact, in spite of the fact that that's true, "Lest we should...what?...offend them...lest we should offend them." Now wait a minute. We...you mean we don't want to offend the lost, the tax collectors, the

IRS, the government? We don't want to offend them? That's right, we don't want to offend them. No, no, we don't want to offend them.

Oh, I think there are some evangelical Christians who must offend them a lot, don't you? I mean, they must be sick of them. They must be saying to themselves, "I don't know what kind of religion Christianity is, the kind they've got, but I sure wouldn't want anything to do with it." You see, you know, when Christians attack and attack against the government, I'm not talking about moral issues, I'm talking about just general policy, I think we need to speak against sin and evil and we need to even say "Thou art the man" when there's a sinner and an evil doer. But when you...we just continually attack, I think we offend. We do offend.

He says we don't want to offend them. We don't have to pay that. We don't have to...we're free. But we don't want to offend them, see. Why? Well, because we don't want them to throw out our message. Isn't that right? Because they won't accept us. So the Lord paid His taxes.

Well, you say, how did He do it? Well, He says to Peter, "Go to the sea." I like that. He doesn't even tell him where, just go, Peter, to the sea...the Sea of Galilee, any ole place. "And throw a hook in the water," no bait, just a hook...bare hook. "And pull up the fish that first comes, take him. And when you have opened his mouth, you'll find a piece of money, take it and give unto them for Me and thee."

Now that's incredible. You say, "I'll pay my taxes, too, when I can fish like that." Now the Lord did it this way for two reasons. One, because He didn't have any possessions to start with, and secondly, because He wanted to show Peter who He really was again and the other disciples. He says, "Go anywhere you want on the seashore, just throw in a bare hook, I've got a fish who's waiting. And as soon as that hook...hook it."

And somebody dropped a stater, a double didrachma, enough for both in the water. Some fish was on a divine mission. Go, fish. See. Goes down, puts that deal in its mouth, doesn't even swallow it, just leaves it in the mouth, looks around...there's that hook, see. Pops it up, there's the coin.

I have to believe that he threw the fish back. You can't waste a fish like that. In fact, that fish may be in heaven, I don't know. Swimming in the river of life...for all I know. Marvelous fish. In the Old Testament God used a big one. In the New Testament He used a little one...ha-ha.

But that is incredible. That's what I call the "Provision delivered." The payment's demanded, the principle was discussed, and the provision was delivered. The Lord was going to pay His taxes and even set all of divine power in motion to make sure it got done.

And they found in His mouth, it says, there's a phrase there, "the piece of money," that's one word in the Greek, stater, that's that stater, that four-drachma coin that was exact amount. And He said you give it to them for you and Me. And the implication is the other disciples, too, would pay their taxes and that they would pay other taxes also. Marvelous.

That leads us, lastly, to the "principle derived." What does all this say? Let's go back and see where we started. Listen, however unpleasant it might be, however difficult, however seemingly inequitable it might be, and though we are not even a part of the world system, we are to fulfill our duties as

citizens. We are free from man's law, in a sense. Yes...bound by the law of God. But the law of God says you do not offend. If Jesus hadn't paid His tax, do you know what He would have said to those people? "I don't care about your temple, I don't care about its service. I don't care about your nation. I don't care about you people at all."

You think they would have listened to His message? When you're a good citizen you say I care about this nation, I care about this people, I care about its leadership, I care about this country and I want to do what's right. And people are drawn to such a person.

Now this takes us right back, let's go again, right back to 1 Peter chapter 2. And I want to end where we started. It says in 1 Peter 2:13, here we go back to what we said, "Submit then to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake, whether it be to the king, as supreme, or unto governors, or unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evil doers," that's the policeman, "and for the praise of them that do well, for so is the will of God that with well doing you may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men." Your righteous deeds, you see, your well doing, your honorable life style will become a rebuke to their criticism. Be a good citizen, pay your taxes. You'll rebuke the evil doers and you'll bring people to a knowledge of the Savior.

Sometimes it isn't even equitable. Look at verse 18. "Slaves," now this was a big issue, boy, you could have crusaded against slavery like mad. They could have had an anti-slave movement that wouldn't have quit. "Slaves, overthrow your masters, grab your freedom and go." Is that what it says? "Slaves, be subject to your masters with all reverence, not only to the good and gentle but to the perverse."

Oh my, you mean you've got a perverse master, you're supposed to submit to the guy? That's right. "For it's worthy of thanks if a man for conscience toward God endures grief suffering wrongfully, if you take it, you establish such a testimony." You want to win your boss at work? Take it, endure what he gives with a Christlike spirit and you'll lay a platform to make your message believable. Chafe and rebel and argue and fight and hassle and squabble, you'll destroy any testimony you ever had. You see, in verse 20 he says there's no glory if you suffer for your faults and take it patiently, but if when you do well and suffer, you take it patiently, this is acceptable with God. So it isn't always going to be equitable. Now again I say, when some...when the law of the land is contrary to the law of God, then we have to do the law of God and take the consequence.

But this same principle, Peter's not through with it. In chapter 3 he picks the same principle up again. "In the same manner," he says. Same principle, "You wives, be in subjection to your own husbands, that if any obey not the Word, they also may without the Word be won by the behavior of the wives." He says evangelism begins by your life of submission to those in authority over you. And just like a wife will begin to win an unsaved husband by submitting to him as the one in authority in a loving and gentle way, so a Christian becomes capable of reaching the society he's in for Christ when he learns to submit to that society with a gentle and meek spirit. That's the principle. When they behold, verse 2 says, your chaste conduct coupled with reverence, they see your pure life, that's the key. Submission to authority, whether you're talking about a marriage or a nation, provides a platform for the gospel.

And the supreme example comes in verses 21 to 25. Here's the point at which you are called, here it is, "Because Christ also suffered for us." He took suffering He didn't deserve from authority that had no right to do it to Him. And He did it so that He could win us, right? Can we do the same to win

others? That's the point. He left us an example. He didn't do any sins, so He didn't deserve any punishment. There was no deceit found in His mouth. And yet when He was reviled, He never retaliated. When He suffered, He never threatened. "But He committed Himself to Him that judged righteously and bore in His own self our sins in His own body on the tree that we being dead to sin should live unto righteousness by whose stripes ye were healed."

In other words, Jesus sets the utter pattern. He submitted to authorities that He had no reason to submit to, in a divine sense. He had submitted to authorities that had no right to do to Him what they did, but He did it for our sake. Can we do the same for the sake of our society? It's a very important message and I trust the Spirit of God to confirm it to our hearts. Willingly did Jesus choose to suffer unjustly for the sake of the salvation of others, that's our pattern.

Thank You, Father, for the Word, this morning. Thank You for the clarity with which Peter and Paul and our dear Lord have spoken. We pray that the message has truly been their message, not mine. And shall help us, Lord, as we live in this world, to seek to change the things that need to be changed, to stand uncompromisingly against evil, to even say "Thou art the man" when it needs to be said, to never step aside from a rightful God-honoring, Christ-exalting duty, to never tolerate sin at an individual level or a national level. But at the same time, to be model citizens who willingly outwardly and inwardly submit to the authorities who pray for our leaders, as Paul told Timothy, who honor them, who reverence them, who abide by the laws they have made that we may give a good account of Christians that the gospel may become attractive. We know, Lord, that if the society is to be changed, it isn't changed by new laws, it's changed by new people. May we seek to see that happen. Till Jesus comes, we pray in His name...amen.

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