

Matthew 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 half-shekel 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."

Intro: Last Sunday we saw that Jesus is the God-Man healer & the One Who destroys the works of the devil, so when life seems impossible, we should trust in Him with a true, active, & living faith because Jesus is our only true, active, & living Savior!

This week we see that Jesus is the God-Man Who knows all things (omniscient) & can do all things (omnipotent), but Who humbles Himself so that we might be free: free from sin & free to obey Him & free to win others to Him!

1. What about verse 21? - The Bible Is Trustworthy

Matthew 17:21: But this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting. (KJV; NKJV; NAS)

Matt. 17:21 is not printed in some of your Bibles. It's in brackets in the NASB's in the pews. It's in the KJV/NKJV.

How should we understand this? This is one of the points of this sermon: to help you understand this; to strengthen your confidence in the Word of God; to give you answers to critics of God's Word; And to understand these words.

a. We believe the Bible has no errors: Chicago Statement On Biblical Inerrancy: We affirm that inspiration, strictly speaking, applies only to the autographic text of Scripture, which in the providence of God can be ascertained from available manuscripts with great accuracy. We further affirm that copies and translations of Scripture are the Word of God to the extent that they faithfully represent the original. We deny that any essential element of the Christian faith is affected by the absence of the autographs.

Michael Kruger: Even though we do not possess the autographs, textual scholars have acknowledged that the multiplicity of manuscripts allows us to access the original text. Eldon Jay Epp notes, "The point is that we have so many manuscripts of the NT . . . that surely the original reading in every case is somewhere present in our vast store of material." Gordon Fee concurs: "The immense amount of material available to NT textual critics . . . is their good fortune because with such an abundance of material one can be reasonably certain that the original text is to be found somewhere in it." Of course, one might wonder why God chose to preserve the text in this manner. Why not just preserve the autographs? Why didn't God just allow Christians to keep the autographs sealed away in a vault somewhere? For one, it is historically unlikely that the autographs could have survived until the present day, especially if they were being regularly used. But it is also possible that God may have not wanted the autographs to survive. One can imagine how easily (and quickly) such documents would become objects of veneration, if not worship. They might have become the equivalent of Gideon's ephod (Judges 8:27)—a good gift the people begin to treat as an idol. Of course, we cannot know for sure why God providentially did not preserve the autographs. But, in one sense, it is fitting. It reminds us that the Word of God, like God himself, is not bound to a physical location or to a physical object. It is a Word that is not contained. It is a Word that goes forth.

We do not have the original written text of the New Testament. But we have numerous copies. There is no other book in ancient literature that can even compare with number of Greek New Testament manuscript copies and N.T. copies in other languages. We have around 5,500 Greek manuscript copies of the N.T. We have 20,000 to 25,000 handwritten copies of the N.T. in other languages.

Daniel Wallace: Yet if all of these were destroyed, the N.T. text could be reproduced almost in its entirety by quotations of it in sermons, tracts, and commentaries written by ancient teachers of the church (known as church

fathers or Patristic writers). To date, over a million quotations from the N.T. by the church fathers have been cataloged. How does this compare with the average classical author? The copies of the average ancient Greek or Latin author's writings number fewer than 20 manuscripts! Thus, the N.T. has well over 1,000 times as many manuscripts as the works of the average classical author. When it comes to the temporal distance of the earliest copies of the N.T. from the original, N.T. textual critics again enjoy an abundance of materials. From 10 to 15 N.T. manuscripts were written within the first 100 years of the completion of the N.T. To be sure, they are all fragmentary, but some of them are fairly sizable fragments, covering large portions of the Gospels or Paul's letters, for example. Within two centuries, the numbers increase to at least four dozen manuscripts. Of manuscripts produced before A. D. 400, an astounding 99 still exist—including the oldest complete N.T., Codex Sinaiticus. The gap, then, between the originals and the early manuscripts is relatively slim. By comparison, the average classical author has no copies for more than half a millennium.

With all of these manuscript copies, we're able to have in our hands exactly what God wants us to have concerning His perfect revelation to us so that we might know Him, trust Him, delight in Him, & follow Him in obedience!

b. What about the variants? Tim Barnett (Stand To Reason): Places where the manuscripts differ from one another are called variants. A textual variant is any place among the manuscripts in which there is variation in wording, including word order, omission or addition of words, even spelling differences . . . It's not the number of variants that's important, it's the nature of the variants. Most variants are trivial, affecting nothing. In fact, more than 99% fall into this category. There are only a small number of meaningful variants [it changes the meaning of the text] that are viable [the variant has a good possibility of being part of the original wording]. But even these affect no cardinal doctrine. The N.T. has an impressive transmission history that should give Christians confidence that we have the words written by the apostles.

Greg Koukl: This means that our New Testament is over 99% pure. In the entire text of 20,000 lines, only 40 lines are in doubt (about 400 words), and none affects any significant doctrine. Scholar D.A. Carson sums it up this way: "What is at stake is a purity of text of such a substantial nature that nothing we believe to be doctrinally true, and nothing we are commanded to do, is in any way jeopardized by the variants." (*We have what God wants us to have!*)

c. God Perfectly Preserves His Word Just As He Pleases: Psalm 119:89: Your word, O LORD, is eternal; it stands firm in the heavens.

-Isaiah 40:8: The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever.

-Matt 4:4: It is written, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God."

-Matthew 24:35: Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

-1 Peter 1:23: having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever

-2 Timothy 3:16-17: All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work.

-John 16:13: When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth

Of The Scriptures: We believe that the Holy Bible was written by men divinely inspired, and is a perfect treasure of heavenly instruction; that it has God for its author, salvation for its end, and truth without any mixture of error for its matter; that it reveals the principles by which God will judge us; and therefore is, and shall remain to the end of the world, the true center of Christian union, and the supreme standard by which all human conduct, creeds, and opinions should be tried.

Billy Graham: So I went back and I got my Bible, and I went out in the moonlight. And I got to a stump and put the Bible on the stump, and I knelt down, and I said, "Oh, God; I cannot prove certain things. I cannot answer some of the questions Chuck [Charles Templeton] is raising and some of the other people are raising, but I accept this book by faith as the Word of God."

Charles Spurgeon: The Word of God is like a lion. You don't have to defend a lion. All you have to do is let the lion loose, and the lion will defend itself.

d. When the disciples ask Jesus why they failed to cast out the demon, Jesus emphasizes the need for prayer & fasting: Matthew 17:21: But this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting.

This truth is taught in Mark 9:29: "This kind cannot come out by anything but prayer."

Jesus responds – only by prayer: MacArthur: Prayer is the highway that faith takes into the power of God.

Prayer demonstrates our faith in God, our dependence on God, & our humility before God: A.P.T.A.T.: Acknowledge you can't; Pray for help; Trust His promises; Act out what God calls you to do; Thank Him!

2. Jesus, Again, Tells His Disciples About His Death And Resurrection

Matt 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, & they will kill him, & he will be raised on the third day." & they were greatly distressed.

a. Jesus tells His disciples He will be delivered into the hands of men: There are two ways that Jesus was delivered into the hands of men: 1) by the betrayal of Judas; But also, & ultimately: 2) Jesus was delivered into the hands of men by God Himself:

- **Luke 22:22:** For the Son of Man goes **as it has been determined**, but woe to that man by whom he is betrayed!
- **Romans 3:24-25:** Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood
- **Acts 4:27-28:** for truly in this city there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod & Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles & the peoples of Israel, to do whatever your hand & your plan had predestined to take place.

R. T. France: [On Jesus being delivered] It is the same word which will later be used for Judas's betrayal & which is often used in the N.T. descriptions of Jesus' mission of suffering. While it certainly is appropriate to the action of men, the passive here may also echo the frequent O.T. references to God delivering someone into the hands of an enemy, thus picking up the divine necessity of Jesus' suffering from the "must" of 16:21.

b. Consider the horror of being delivered into the hands of wicked men, and of the holy God:

2 Samuel 24:14, 16: Then David said to Gad, "I am in great distress. Let us fall into the hand of the LORD, for his mercy is great; but let me not fall into the hand of man." . . . ¹⁶ And when the angel stretched out his hand toward Jerusalem to destroy it, the LORD relented from the calamity and said to the angel who was working destruction among the people, "It is enough; now stay your hand." (But on the cross, God did NOT relent! For you!) **GOSPEL!**

c. We need the help of God to understand the Word of God: Jesus tells His disciples a second time what would happen to Him, and they still don't understand!

- **Acts 16:14:** The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul.

3. A Lesson About Temple Taxes, Freedom, And The Power Of God

Matthew 17:24-27: When they came to Capernaum, the collectors of the half-shekel 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."

a. What tax? These tax collectors come to Peter asking him if Jesus pays the temple tax. These are not tax collectors for Rome. This was a tax that every Jew had to pay for the upkeep of the temple. **R. T. France:** An annual half-shekel tax (based on Ex. 30:11-16, though it was not there a regular payment) was paid for the upkeep of worship in the temple by most adult male Jews, whether resident in Palestine or not.

- **Exodus 30:14-15:** Everyone who is numbered in the census, from twenty years old and upward, shall give the LORD's offering.¹⁵ The rich shall not give more, and the poor shall not give less, than the half shekel, when you give the LORD's offering to make atonement for your lives.

b. Jesus pays it: Peter answers correctly – Yes, Jesus pays it! Jesus is not anti-temple like you think!

c. Jesus knows: It's possible that Jesus just somehow overheard this conversation between the temple tax collectors and Peter. But I am more persuaded of Ligon Duncan's view:

Ligon Duncan: You remember in John, chapter 21, verse 17, after Peter had denied the Lord three times and the Lord was involved in restoring Peter to the ministry, and He asked him three times, "Peter, do you love Me? Feed My sheep." And Peter kept confessing, "Yes, Lord, I love You." And finally do you remember what Peter says? And the Lord says, "Peter, do you love me?" And Peter says, "Lord, You know all things. You know I love you." Peter knew by experience that the Lord knew all things. He'd been out in that street talking with those tax collectors and come into a house one day and learn that the Lord knew all things. And the Lord knew his heart. Peter had learned that, and we see it here in this instance. This is a testimony again to the divinity of our Lord that He has the capacity to know things that we could not know in and of ourselves. By the way, J.C. Ryle says in passing about this event, "There is something unspeakably solemn in the thought that the Lord Jesus Christ knows all things." You know it's popular today to have the WWJD, What Would Jesus Do? bracelet or T-shirt or other paraphernalia. The question is whenever you're faced with a decision to make, you ask yourself, "What would Jesus do in this situation?" Let me pose something even more solemn than that. You realize that every time you make a decision, every time you have a thought, every time you mutter something under your breath, and the person you are muttering at can't hear that the Lord Jesus knows all things, He sees all things, He's there. How does that correct the way we operate in our actions, our thoughts, our decisions, our words? The Lord Jesus knows all things, and that is unspeakably solemn.

Think of what Jesus has already told us in this text! He knows He's going to be delivered into the hands of men, that He will be killed, & then rise from the dead! He knows everything! He's telling His disciples what will happen

d. Jesus teaches us that the sons are free: Matthew 17:25-26: "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."

The sons of kings don't pay taxes! Jesus is the Son of the King (and He's also the King!); The temple is His Father's house! (**Luke 2:49:** Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?; **John 2:16:** And he told those who sold the pigeons, "Take these things away; do not make my Father's house a house of trade.") Jesus doesn't need to pay the temple tax! He is the temple! He's the One greater than that temple Who's here! He Himself is the very presence of God! And the physical temple and all the ways God was worshiped through it would be passing away! In Christ we are free from temple worship! Free from offering sacrifices! Free from coming to God through a sinful high priest! Free from not being able to enter the very presence of God! We get all of that through Jesus! Through His life, death, burial, & resurrection! (**Hebrews!**)

And in Christ Jesus by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone, we are sons too:

- **Matthew 5:9:** Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.

- **Galatians 4:4-5:** But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law,⁵ to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.

e. Jesus humbles Himself & seeks to give no offense: Matthew 17:27: 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.

What amazing humility and condescension we see in our LORD Jesus Christ here: **Psalm 8:1, 3-4:** O LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth! You have set your glory above the heavens . . . ³ When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, ⁴ what is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him?

Jonathan Edwards: 1) There do meet in Jesus Christ infinite highness and infinite condescension.

2) There meet in Jesus Christ, infinite justice and infinite grace.

3) In the person of Christ do meet together infinite glory and lowest humility.

4) In the person of Christ do meet together infinite majesty and transcendent meekness.

5) There meet in the person of Christ the deepest reverence towards God and equality with God.

6) There are conjoined in the person of Christ infinite worthiness of good, and the greatest patience under sufferings of evil.

7) In the person of Christ are conjoined an exceeding spirit of obedience, with supreme dominion over heaven & earth

8) In the person of Christ are conjoined absolute sovereignty and perfect resignation.

9) In Christ do meet together self-sufficiency, and an entire trust and reliance on God

Commentator: If Jesus refused to pay the tax . . . They would conclude that he rejected all that the temple stood for and accordingly turn away from him and his message of salvation.

If Jesus Christ, the LORD of glory, humbled Himself this way for the sake of lost sinners & sought not to give offense, how much more ought we to give up our freedom in Christ, humble ourselves, & seek not to give offense?
- **1 Cor. 8:13:** Therefore, if food makes my brother stumble, I will never eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble.
- **Acts 16:3:** Paul wanted Timothy to accompany him, and he took him and circumcised him because of the Jews who were in those places, for they all knew that his father was a Greek.
- **1 Cor. 9:22-23:** To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some. I do it all for the sake of the gospel, that I may share with them in its blessings

f. Jesus can do all things: Who controlled fish & did what He wanted with fish in the O.T.?

- **Psalm 105:29:** He turned their waters into blood and caused their fish to die.

- **Jonah 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.

Here Jesus controls this fish! This is a boss move! He's showing them He's the God-Man! All He does is win!

John Piper: If Jesus is bringing the temple to an end for the true children of God, because "something greater than the temple is here" (Matt 12:6), then it is fitting that he show that he is worthy of our worship. This miracle involves divine power & wisdom & knowledge. Someone had to be sure that a shekel (precisely worth four drachmas - two for Jesus and two for Peter) was dropped in the sea. Someone had to be sure that the fish scooped it up, but did not swallow it all the way. Someone had to be sure that the fish that scooped up the coin would be near where Peter drops his hook in the water. & someone would have to be sure that the fish bites Peter's hook, without swallowing the coin, & stays hooked till he gets the coin. When Jesus says that this is, in fact, all going to happen just as he says, he shows himself to be just what Peter confessed him to be: the Son of God worthy of worship and trust. You don't have to go anywhere or pay anything to worship God. He has come to you. There he is. Here he is!

g. Jesus will provide all that His people need to do what He's called them to do: Jesus will provide for you dear believer! You can trust Him! He will never leave you nor forsake you! He is your Provider & Protector!

John Piper: The other point of the miracle is that when you act in freedom and love – not under coercion or constraint – God himself works for you in ways you would never dream. It's like the feeding of the five thousand. Jesus says to the disciples who have five loaves and two fish borrowed from a little boy, "You feed the five thousand." When they set out to do that (just as when Peter sets out to pay the temple tax), God causes the five loaves and two fish to become enough to feed them all. And God causes a coin to be there in a fish's mouth. The point is not that God will always work a miracle to get you out of some scrape, but that he will do whatever he has to do to help you pursue the path of freedom and sacrificial love that may seem impossible to you . . .

Summary of these final verses in Matthew 17: Ligon Duncan: **First**, Jesus here makes it clear that though believers are given tremendous freedom under the gospel, freedom from the doctrines & commandments of men, freedom from the burdensome yoke of the ceremonial law; yet, those freedoms are to be used for the sake of others; **Second** . . . we learn . . . that believers need to learn to trust in God's providence to supply them for all their needs when they are in the way of duty (Douglas Kelly's alarm clock story); **Finally**, we learn here that believers are to embrace the deity of Christ. Do you see the three testimonies to the deity of Christ here. First of all, Jesus claims to be the unique Son. "I'm the Son of God. I don't have to pay the temple tax." Secondly, He knows Peter's thoughts when Peter is out in the streets. Thirdly, He knows because He has decreed that there is a coin in the mouth of one fish in the lake of Galilee, & that one fish is going to be the one that Peter pulls out first. You see the testimony to the deity of Christ here? Jerome, the ancient Christian commentator, said of this passage, "I know not which to admire most here, our Lord's foreknowledge or His greatness."

h. The Cross: John Piper: This whole story was introduced by the omniscient prophecy about the Son of God and Son of Man in verses 22-23: "The Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men; (23) and they will kill Him, and He will be raised on the third day." This sovereign Christ, who governs the drop of a coin and the path of a fish, has set his face like flint toward Jerusalem and death. Why? To purchase for us sinners the glorious things that we have been talking about (Matthew 20:28). We can't become the children of God; we are sinners. We don't deserve to find a coin in a fish's mouth; we deserve to be thrown into the mouth of hell. We are not free from the condemnation of the law; we are under the curse of the law - unless the Son of Man gives himself freely as a substitute for us on the cross and purchases for us forgiveness from all sin and escape from hell and freedom from condemnation. And that is what Jesus did. That is what Holy Week is all about. That is what we need to believe and embrace, and ponder this week. The foundation of our everlasting freedom as the children of God is the death of Jesus. All God's promised help in our lives was bought by the blood of Christ. Believe this. Cherish it this week. Come and worship and bring a friend to hear about it next Sunday morning – Easter.

Jesus is the God-Man Who knows all things (He's omniscient) and can do all things (He's omnipotent), but Who humbles Himself so that we might be free: free from sin and free to obey Him and free to win others to Him.

Christ Jesus They'd Betray And Kill
He Bore God's Wrath Upon That Hill
He Took Our Curse, His Blood They'd Spill
But Death Could Never Hold Him Still
He Rose Again To All Fulfill
And Our Salvation Finally Seal

By Faith Alone We're Just And We'll
Grow In Christ And Do His Will
Pay Tax, Give No Offense, Or Steal
And Humbly Follow Christ's Ideal
For Him We Live With Holy Zeal
He Is Our Joy, Our All, Our Thrill!