

# Give No Offense

---

Please open your Bible to the book of Matthew 17, or turn to page 782 in the Bible under the chair in front of you. We're looking at a very brief passage this morning.

Recently, Jesus and His disciples have been up north, which is like a different country. It's the region of the Gentiles. And now they are slowly but surely making their way back down south, once again in the region of the Jewish people. And eventually, Jesus will lead them into Judea – that's at the beginning of chapter 19. And then, things will move rather quickly and ultimately they will arrive in Jerusalem, which is the heart of the nation and where the temple resides, and it's where the feasts take place every year.

But before they get there, they come back to the place in which Jesus has been doing ministry these past couple years, an area known as Galilee. And Jesus has been staying in the town of Capernaum, and likely with the extended family of Peter.

So this is a time before the storm happens later on in Jerusalem. You might think of these chapters as a sort of 'retreat' that Jesus will undertake with the disciples. And Jesus will use this time to give some instructions on various issues related to what it means to follow Him. And the first of those happens here in verses 24-27 of chapter 17.

Read **Matthew 17:24-27**

## Intro

A few weeks ago, I was able to spend a couple days back in Kentucky with some of the guys who I had befriended during my time in seminary. Our pastor at the time, Brian Croft, organized a retreat for us to catch up with one another. And it was a good and refreshing time with some friends who are now doing ministry all over the country.

And we talked about all kinds of things, including our preaching. And at one point, one of the guys asked about how long we preach and what my word count typically is. And I told him, it's around 30-35 minutes and around 5500 words. Now, I don't know if that's surprising to you, but they were surprised. One brother in particular was amazed because he also preaches for about that long, but his word count is far less – about 2,000 words less. I am typically speaking far more words in about the same time.

And well... I suspect that means that I am talking too fast. Sorry about that... So while I was there, I was challenged to think about my preaching. You know, our normal practice at Cornerstone is what's called 'expository preaching.' And we normally walk through books of the Bible.

It's not the only way to preach, but I think it's a good one. It forces us to deal with the whole counsel of God, and you can't skip some portions that you may otherwise be tempted to ignore.

But sometimes, even doing that, I wonder if in my preaching I may be guilty of paying too much attention to some things while missing other things in the text. Because the Bible is so rich and thick with meaning, in every passage, there are multiple ways that it might be taught. There are different things that we can highlight and emphasize.

And so, in a series like this one through the gospel of Matthew, I believe the applications are often things like – look to Jesus! And believe in Jesus! And listen to Jesus!

Now hear me rightly here. I believe those things are absolutely vital for us. And I believe they are what Matthew wants us to do in response to this book. Matthew is placing Jesus before us so that we might see Him rightly and believe in Him and listen to Him.

But still, I wonder sometimes, you might be tempted to say, "Okay...but I have some questions about how to live my life Monday through Saturday. I need to some help in the practical matters of life."

Now, I believe deep down in my soul, that the most practical truth in the world is the good news of who Jesus is and what He came to do in dying for sinners like you and me. And I want to preach Christ all the time, until I die. Without that foundation, any advice on how to live, and any other foundation on which you try to live will crumble.

However, there is another level the Bible speaks to. And it's the level of the particulars of daily life. Jesus desires to teach us very practical things about the way to live our everyday lives.

And so here, I want us to ask, what is Jesus teaching us on a very practical level? And I see in this text one implication, one instruction, and one illustration. And yes, we'll see some large theology here, alongside a simple instruction for us to obey, and an encouraging illustration that will help us in that effort.

So first, let's look at the truth implied or contained in these verses. Look at verse 26...

**Matthew 17:26**

Jesus said to him, "Then the sons are free..."

I'm suggesting that there are two huge truths implied in that phrase that Jesus uses here. But I want to make an argument for that, so that you don't walk away thinking, "Well, Nathan saw that in the text, but I certainly don't."

So let's back up and see what's happening in the near context. Jesus is back in Capernaum, and some guys come up to Peter and ask this question about paying the tax. Now, it's important to know that this is not a tax for the Romans. These guys are not tax collectors in the same way that Matthew was, working for the Romans and taking extra for himself. No, these guys are from the temple in Jerusalem.

That annual tax they're collecting was two drachmas or a half shekel, which would have been roughly two days wages. And every male in Israel between the ages of 20 and 50 was required to give this tax as a matter of obedience and a kind of patriotism.

So these two guys go up to Peter and ask, "Doesn't your teacher pay the temple tax?"

And I think you can sort of tell from this, that these guys have an agenda. They have sought out Jesus and want to ask this question. They've probably heard of Jesus's interactions with the religious leaders. They've likely heard some of the things he's said about the temple – like referring to Himself as greater than the temple.

So their attitude here is kind of suspicious. They're challenging Him. They're testing Him to see if He's really supportive of the temple or not. And they ask Peter – does your teacher pay the tax? And Peter replies to them, notice without consulting Jesus, he replies "Yes." As in, "Of course He does."

But notice how Jesus handles this. He's going to use this as an opportunity to teach Peter something. What does following Jesus look like when it comes to issues like this? So look at verse 25...

**Matthew 17:25**

[Peter] 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?"

And Peter knows the answer. Kings don't tax their own families; they tax the people. Our taxes don't exactly work like this today, but in that day, taxes were owed to the Emperor or the King. You paid taxes directly to Caesar. He gets all the money that is collected, so it wouldn't make sense for him to tax his immediate family. That'd be like moving money from one place in our house to another place in our house. It ends up in same place.

So Peter rightly says, the money comes from others. And then Jesus replies with these five words in verse 26...

**Matthew 17:26**

Jesus said to him, "Then the sons are free."

Now, what is Jesus saying? He's using an analogy, and in this analogy, God is likened to the king. And the temple is the place that represents God's presence. And in the analogy, there are some who are sons of the king and some who are not sons of the king. And so the question is "Who are the sons of the King who are free?"

And clearly, Jesus is the Son of the King. That's the obvious implication from this analogy. Jesus is the Son of the King.

### **Implication - Jesus is the Son of the King**

He's the Son of the living God as Peter has just declared in chapter 16. And on the mountain, Jesus heard those words from the Father, "This is my Son with whom I am well pleased." And here, this analogy Jesus uses clearly implies that He is the Son of the King, and has all the rights that sonship brings with it, including freedom from obligations to earthly kingdoms.

So that's the big implication. And out of that implication flow some other truths. Two things, first:

### **Jesus is Greater than the Temple**

One of the more subtle implications is that by claiming to be a Son of the King, Jesus is claiming that He is not obligated to pay this temple tax. And in that, He is saying that He is greater than the temple.

The temple is where God lives, so to speak. Yes, He is everywhere, but since the time of Moses He has chosen to make His presence specially known first in the tabernacle and then in the temple in Jerusalem. And the presence of God is where joy and rest and the fullness of life is found.

So very quickly, let me remind you how big this theme is in the Scriptures. We'll do some biblical theology, you ready?

Since the creation of mankind, Adam and Eve back in the Garden of Eden, God walked with them and they enjoyed His presence. The language used describes that Garden as a paradise with gold and other precious stones, and that language is also used later to describe both the tent of the tabernacle and the temple.

But because of the sin of Adam and Eve and their rebellion against God, they were exiled and cast out of the Garden. And ever since, mankind has been longing and attempting to return once again to the joy and rest and fullness that only the presence of God brings. But to do that, a price must be paid.

And under the Old Covenant, the whole sacrificial system, with all of its offerings and washings and rituals, was set up in order to help make atonement or covering for the sins of God's people and to purify them so that God could dwell in their midst. That's what they always needed – the presence of God.

And the rest of the Old Testament records the story of how God's people were continually turning away from Him, until He finally does what He warned He would do – and His presence leaves the temple. The book of Ezekiel is all about that. And yet, there is hope that God will once again come to dwell with His people. There is the promise of a New Covenant.

And so, when Jesus, the Son of God is born, John will write in chapter one of His gospel that the Word became flesh and dwelt (or tabernacled) among us. Now with the incarnation of Jesus, God's presence has come, not to a physical temple, but in His own person. Jesus is the place where the fullness of God dwells in bodily form. And so, Jesus taught, as we saw back in chapter 12-, that something greater than the temple is here because He is here. He is where joy and rest and the fullness of life are found.

And so because the temple was always pointing to Himself, He is not obligated to pay for the upkeep of the physical temple building and the sacrificial system. It would be like if a musician is headlining a world tour, playing music all over the globe. So just insert your favorite, church-appropriate band or singers here. And imagine that they arrive at a particular concert venue. And it's sold out; everyone is there to see them play and sing. But then when they arrive, the security at the venue stops them and demands that unless they have a ticket, they're not allowed in. They need to pay the ticket price or they can't enter.

That would be ridiculous, right? The whole reason everyone is there, including the security guards, is to see the star play. It would be crazy to require the star to have a ticket for their own show.

Well, that's sort of what is happening here. The temple is all about Jesus. It's about His presence. It's about worshipping Him and making offerings and sacrifices to Him. He's the point because He is greater than the temple.

And there's a second truth here. When Jesus says, "Then the sons are free..." It's also implied that there are more sons in mind than only Jesus himself. He is not the only son who belongs to the household of God.

That's implied in verse 27,

### **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.**"

Jesus wants Peter to make the payment for Himself *and also for Peter*. In other words, 'I am free, and you are free, and by extension, all the disciples are free...but I want you to make this payment anyway.'

So in the analogy, the King's sons who are free are Jesus *and His followers*. And that means both men and women, boys and girls – all who are united to Christ. Jesus is the Son of God, and those who follow Him are sons and daughters as well because of their union with Him. Jesus is free. And in Him, all of His disciples have been granted that same freedom. So the point for His followers is this -

### **Jesus and His disciples are Free**

Through trusting in Him, we have been born again. We have been made alive in Christ. And in that we have been transferred into the kingdom of God. Our primary citizenship is no longer in this world. Our primary citizenship is in the kingdom of heaven.

Because of who Jesus is and because of our union with Him, there is now a new reality that defines and controls and explains our lives. Jesus wants us to be clear about this – we have a new citizenship.

And that means new and different loyalties, new and different values, new and different obligations. We **were** of this world. But now, in Christ, we are no longer **of** this world. That's what Jesus says is true about us. Listen to His prayer to the Father over in...

### **John 17:15-18**

I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one. **16** They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. **17** Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. **18** As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world.

We're living according the standards and values of a completely different kingdom. Jesus is *not* saying, "You're in the same kingdom you always have been, but I'm giving you an exemption." No, there's a completely different reality that we're living by. There is another citizenship that I have given you.

And therefore, we are not (careful here), therefore, we are not *primarily* living by the expectations and requirements of this world's kingdoms. The sons are free.

But, since we are still in the world, there is a way Jesus expects us to live in this world. Even though we are not of the world, and we are free, there is a way Jesus is calling us to live. In other words, we are to live in the world in a certain way, but now there is an entirely different motivation and an entirely different perspective. We live in this world and submit to its obligations because of our prior glad submission to the new kingdom.

So what does Jesus expect of us? What is His instruction for us?  
He makes that clear at the beginning of verse 27...

**Matthew 17:27**

However, not to give offense to them,

Jesus says, we do not want to give offense to them. Do not give offense. That's the instruction.

**Instruction - Do not give offense**

So the sons of the kingdom of God are in a sense, free from the requirements of the kingdom of man. And yet, while we are in this world, because of our loyalty to the kingdom of heaven, and reasons important to the King, we willingly and joyfully submit to the obligations of this world, so as not to bring offense to the gospel.

So Christian, give no offense as you live in this world. Don't neglect your financial obligations. Don't disregard the law. Don't cheat your company through less than honest or less than faithful labor. Live in this world in such a way that other people do not have opportunity to be offended with Christ.

- When people ask you, "Do you pay your taxes?" The answer should be, "Yes."
- When people ask you, "Do you pay your bills?" The answer should be, "Yes."
- When people ask you, "Is your conduct at work, marked by diligence and faithfulness?" The answer should be, "Yes."
- When people ask you, "Is your school work being completed with integrity and excellence?" The answer should be, "Yes."
- When people ask you, "Are you faithful to your marriage vows – all of them?" The answer should be, "Yes."

Whatever human institution is in view, whether its business or banking or government or marriage or family or education, as Christians we are expected to live in relation to all of those things so as not to give offense to the gospel.

Folks, the gospel is itself offensive. It's foolishness to some, a stumbling block to others. It's offensive to human pride, and there's no way around that. And God's Word says, do not compromise that or try to water it down so that it's easier for people to swallow.

But, God's Word also says, don't add to the offense of the gospel by your conduct. In fact, you are to act in such a way as to 'adorn the gospel.' (Titus 2:10) Our lives should be attractive and compelling to others, like a light shining in the darkness.

Listen to what the apostle Paul tells the church in Corinth:

**1 Corinthians 9:19-23**

For though I am free from all, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win more of them. **20** To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though not being myself under the law) that I might win those under the law. **21** To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (not being outside the law of God but under the law of Christ) that I might win those outside the law. **22** 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. **23** I do it all for the sake of the gospel, that I may share with them in its blessings.

Paul says, I'm free, but I use my freedom to serve and love others. I am willing to forgo the freedoms and rights I have if it gains me an opportunity to win others to Christ. If there are preferences I have, I am totally willing to lay those down so by all means I might save some.

What are some examples of what that might look like?

You might think of missionaries who travel to a foreign country in order to minister there and meet needs and share the gospel. It would be crazy for missionaries to go and make a big deal out of dress codes for church or about the style of music that's allowed. They would be offending people for the wrong reasons. Again, the gospel is already offensive enough; we should do all that we can to remove other offenses that aren't necessary. So a missionary might decide to eat Halal when they're in a Muslim context or eat Kosher foods when with Jewish people. That's becoming all things to all men.

Here in our context, one example might include knowing if and when to voice political opinions. Now, we need to be careful because not everything the culture says is political is off limits. But we need to exercise wisdom when we decide – is speaking up about this helping my witness for Christ and the truth? Or am I being needlessly offensive and equating following Jesus with a particular political party or platform?

We could extend this to include things like choosing to refrain from alcohol or other substances. Would my participation help or hinder my witness for Christ in this context?

Does this choice of entertainment or watching this movie or TV show help or hinder my testimony? That's a good question to ask yourself.

And this works the other way too. I know of some people who choose to live in a particular neighborhood or attend a school or work in a job so that they might have an opportunity to win others to Christ. They give up their rights or freedom to do otherwise for the sake of loving and serving others. That's becoming all things to all men.

Back in Matthew, Jesus has given this instruction to Peter before he was even able to open his mouth. And so I wonder, did Peter get this? How did he understand Jesus' words here?

Well, I think that in this case, Peter understood. Years later, Peter writes a letter to some Christians who have been scattered by persecution. And he's going to take this very clear instruction from Jesus and pass it on to them. Listen to what he says and see if you can hear Jesus's words in the background...

**1 Peter 2:12-17**

Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation. 13 Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, 14 or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good. 15 For this is the will of God, that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people. 16 Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God. 17 Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor.

Peter got it. And he's trying to help other Christians get it. He understood that the sons are free. But with that freedom in God's kingdom and in His family, there also comes a responsibility to live honorably. To use your freedom, not for evil, but as servants.

So let's get practical about this. Think about your job. Think about the laws of this land. Think about your financial integrity – paying taxes and paying bills. Think about your personal character – you don't want it said of you that he or she is not a pleasant person to be around. Don't put people off by your conduct.

Brothers and sisters, Christ-followers should be the best employees. Not necessarily the most talented, but the most faithful, the most joyful, the most patient, the most forgiving.

Christ-followers should be the best students. Not always the smartest, but the most diligent, the kindest, the most thankful.

Christ-followers should be the best citizens. Not just being doormats or disengaged, but the most law-abiding, the most dependable.

Christ-followers should have the most faithful marriages. You want to be salt and light in this culture? Follow Christ in your marriage.

Some of you are doing these things already. Some of you won't hear what I'm saying. But some of you are in a place to hear and be shaped by this teaching from Jesus and Peter in the Scriptures. And you need to repent and turn again to God and your spouse.

Christ-followers should be the most parent-honoring people of all. Many of you already are. And for that, young people, we thank God. But again, some of you won't hear me this morning. But others of you have the ears to hear and can commit yourself once again to honoring your father and mother as Christ would have you. And you can be that person at school or among your friends who does not grumble and complain about your parents. You show them honor.

If you have been united with Christ, you are not **of** this world. And yet you live **in** it. And so Jesus says, "Give no offense. Instead, shine like lights."

And Jesus recognizes that there are costs to this. Paying your taxes will cost you something. Refusing to take shortcuts at work will cost you something. Keeping your marriage strong will cost you something. Not cheating at school when it seems like everyone else is, will cost you something.

But here is where Jesus gives a very helpful and encouraging and somewhat unusual illustration. Look once more at verse 27...

**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."

Now, this must have been very strange for Peter to hear. He used to catch fish for a living. And I doubt that he'd ever found a shekel in the mouth of a fish. And interestingly, Matthew doesn't give us a record of Peter doing this. It doesn't say, "And Peter went, and caught a fish, and it had a shekel in its mouth."

And so, some have said that Jesus is just speaking figuratively here. And so they spare themselves having to believe something, namely, that Jesus commands all things including nature.

But you know what I think happened? I believe Peter went, and cast a line, and caught a fish, and lodged in its mouth was a shekel. And he used that to pay the temple tax for both Jesus and himself.

So yes, of course, Jesus is making a point. But the point is only made because Jesus actually has the power to supernaturally provide. His point wouldn't have much weight if it didn't actually translate to real life.

But as it is, Jesus really does want to illustrate a truth for Peter and for us – that He provides for His followers. That's what this little section teaches.

### **Illustration – Jesus provides**

Jesus is showing Peter and us that He is calling for us to live a certain way in this world, and so you can trust that I will provide what you need to live like that. I'm calling for you to live a certain way in the world, and so everything you need to live like that, I will make sure that you have.

It's a simple illustration. He has called us to live this particular way, and so as we do, He will supply all that we need for a life of godliness.

There's a principle here that we need to know and own. God will, in Christ, provide everything you need for a life of godliness and obedience. Nothing will be lacking for that. The point is not that God will always work a miracle to get you out of tough or difficult situations in life. No, it is that He will work all things together for your good, which is to say that He will conform you to the image of Christ.

And in that process, He will show Himself to be worthy of your trust and your worship. I imagine that Peter is once again amazed at Jesus when he opened that fish's mouth.

Think about it, this miracle here requires some supernatural power and knowledge if it is to work. Someone had to drop a shekel into the sea. And somehow a specific fish which wasn't either too big or too small, needed to try to swallow that shekel such that it would be caught in its mouth. And that fish needed to be near to where Peter would throw in his hook at a particular time, and on and on.

So when Peter sees that coin, he will have opportunity once again to see that yes, Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God. He is worthy of my worship and my trust.

And if you pay attention to your own life, you too can see examples of how God provides. And that should be an occasion for you too to worship and trust in God.

So here Jesus gives this purposely strange, but also very encouraging illustration to tell us today, “Yes, I want you to live a certain way in this world. Give no offense. And I will provide everything you need to follow me.” God wants you to know that He will work for you in ways that you would never dream of.

So, what does Jesus expect of us? He expects us to live as citizens of the kingdom of heaven, as sons and daughters who are free.

But while we are still in this world, we are to live in this world in such a way as to give no offense to the gospel by our conduct. And He expects us to trust that He will provide what we need to live that way for His glory, amen.

Let’s pray...