

Part 31: The Kingdom Provision and Pattern

Tyler Velin | Matthew 17:22-27

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This time of the year in Missoula is one of my favorites. College students are starting to roll back in. The mornings are little bit more crisp, and the sounds of football can be heard on the practice fields across town.

But more than that, this is a time of the year where people who have been scouting out Missoula are now moving here and trying to figure out what it looks like to live here. Whether it is new undergrads, graduate students, new hires in the business world, or people who have always wanted to live here, now is the time where they transition from understanding what makes Missoula special to what it means to be a Missoulain.

Which grocery stores do you shop at? Which outdoor activities will you participate in? How will you spend your time? Where will your community be? Will you go into the new buildings downtown, or will you throw rocks at the new buildings because they aren't the old buildings? What does it mean to not just sleep in Missoula, but to actually live here?

We are in a similar season of acclimation in the gospel account of Matthew. For those of you who have been with us, we have been looking at the life and ministry of Jesus in the book of Matthew. Since chapter 13 the author has been wanting us to see with greater clarity who Jesus is and how we should respond to him. This culminated a few weeks ago when we saw Jesus transfigured on a mountain.

Following the disciples confession of faith, three of Jesus' closest disciples went up on a mountain with Jesus where they encountered three clarifying experiences: they saw Jesus radiant with visible glory, they saw Jesus establish himself as the fulfillment of the law and the prophets, and they heard God audibly say, "This is my son in whom I am well pleased." For Jesus' disciples, and for us who are following, we have a good idea of who Jesus is: He is the Christ, the Son of God.

But what does that mean for us? It's one thing to read about Missoula in a magazine, but it's another thing to figure out what it is like to actually live here. In the same way it's one thing to confess that Jesus is the Christ, but it is another thing to realize what impact that confession has on your life.

What Jesus is going to do for the next few chapters is teach us what it means to be his disciples. To fall back on our series title, Jesus is going to teach us the ethics of what it means to live as Kingdom minded people. What are some of the principles which guide our lives?

You see we can often have a flattened view of Christianity. That means that we see the need for salvation: we don't want to go to hell, and so we repent and believe. For many of us the gospel is corrective, meaning it corrects the problem that we have. But the gospel is more than corrective, it is restorative. It doesn't just remove a burden, it actually enables us to do what it is we have been created to do. The gospel saves us from something, but also for something.

In the book of Matthew Jesus mentions hell, the threat of hell, and salvation from hell eight times. That is a significant amount especially when you hear people saying that Jesus never talked about hell. But in the book of Matthew you hear Jesus talk about the Kingdom of Heaven, and what life is like in the Kingdom of Heaven, 32 times.

Jesus didn't just save us from hell, he saved us for his kingdom. Jesus cares about how we live in light of his Kingdom. The gospel is more than the removal of a punishment, it is a restoration to live the way we were designed to live. That is to say a view of Christianity which only deals with the removal of punishment and not the promise of a transformed life is an incomplete and joyless faith.

Jesus saves us and that salvation shapes our life. We saw this in Chapter 16. Look back at **Matthew 16:21,24**. Jesus predicts his death on the cross and then goes on to describe the cost of following him. And in our text today we are also going to see Jesus predict the cross, but the event which follows depicts Jesus paying a cost.

In so doing we are going to see something really important for us to understand when it comes to living out our salvation. Jesus is going to provide for us a theological focus of the Kingdom, and a practical future for life in his kingdom. What we are going to see today is **Jesus is the Son of God who lays down his rights for the sake of his people**.

Under this idea we are going to see the focus or center of this Kingdom is, "Jesus as God's Kingdom Provision," and the practical future for the kingdom is "Jesus as God's Kingdom Pattern."

To see this, let's first read the text and then we are going to look at God's Kingdom Provision. **Matthew 17:22-27**

This may seem like an odd story, but what helps us understand its significance is understanding where it falls in relation to the broader story of Matthew. It is couched right after Jesus clearly predicts his death for the third time in this book. And despite the teaching, and the transfiguration, people are still distressed at the idea that Jesus would be killed and raised again. The thought that their savior would die was both confusing and saddening.

As Jews, they believed in a resurrection, but it was one general resurrection where everyone would come back to life at the same time. So they see nothing distinct about Jesus death or Jesus' resurrection and it leads them to sadness. Why does Jesus have to die? What difference would it make for their hopes?

And it is in this atmosphere that we read about Jesus and the temple tax, and this is where we see our first point today. **Jesus is God's Kingdom Provision**. This is what Jesus is trying to bring into focus for us and for the disciples in this story.

Jesus is helping them understand the significance of the cross because from this point onward Jesus and his disciples begin their journey to Jerusalem where all Jesus predicted would come true. And to understand Jesus, you must understand the cross.

Jesus and his disciples come to Capernaum, which is likely where Peter lives, these temple tax collectors come to ask him a question. Now these tax collectors aren't like Matthew the writer of this book.

Matthew collected taxes for Rome. But these men are most likely Jews who collect what is called in this text the "two-drachma tax."

This was not a tax which went to Rome, this was a fee which was used for the upkeep and worship at the Jewish temple. Depending upon which sect of Judaism you were a part of you had a different perspective on how often you had to pay this tax, but this tax found its warrant in two passages in the book of Exodus: **Exodus 30:13, 38:25-26**.

There were some exemptions from this tax: Rabbi's and foreigners didn't have to pay it. But Jesus was neither official Rabbi nor foreigner. He was a Jewish adult male who by any other circumstance would be expected to make his contribution. So these tax men approach Peter and ask if Jesus would pay the tax.

Peter affirms the tax men that yes, Jesus does and will pay the tax. "Why wouldn't he?" Peter thinks to himself. [Spanish Class] Then Peter gets back to the house, and before he even has a chance to sit down Jesus meets him with a question: "What do you think Peter?"

Jesus knew exactly what had just happened with Peter and now he is going to ask him some more questions regarding his answer. Look back at **Matthew 17:25**.

Jesus uses an analogy to teach Peter something profoundly important. Do Kings tax their own children? Or do they tax the outsider? The outsider. Why? Because children have the familial benefit of being the son of the King.

While this isn't true in modern democracies, it still is true in other areas. The children of professors at the University are able to attend the school tuition free. Often the immediate family of military workers get certain fees waived and discounts applied even if they themselves never served in that capacity. The family of a chef doesn't have to pay when their father cooks them a meal at home.

By the nature of their relationship that they are exempt from it.

The Son of a king doesn't have to pay a tax, and look at where Jesus goes with this: **Matthew 17:26**.

Jesus' point here is very clear. God's son is exempt. If the son of an earthly king doesn't need to pay a tax to live, then why should the son of the heavenly King have to pay a tax to worship? Among the layers of irony in this text lies the stunning truth that here people are attempting to collect a tax to preserve the systems of worship from the very object of worship itself.

Remember what Peter and the other disciples affirmed just a bit ago: **Matthew 16:15-16**. Peter knew that Jesus was the son of God, but he didn't yet understand what that meant for him in life. He understood Jesus' relationship, but he didn't yet know how to apply it to his life.

Note Jesus' kindness towards Peter. Jesus didn't rise up on his high horse and scoff at Peter's brash ignorance. Instead he helped Peter understand more clearly his divine identity. At various points in our life we will all encounter blind-spots in our faith just like Peter did. But because we worship a kind God, it is his desire to kindly and gently help us understand even if that means confronting our own wrong thoughts.

Jesus doesn't have to pay the tax because he is the son of the God of the temple. But Jesus also doesn't have to pay the tax because he is the new temple. Remember what Jesus said a number of months ago in the book of Matthew? Jesus said of himself: **Matthew 12:6**

Not only is Jesus exempt because he is the son of God, but Jesus is exempt because he is the fullness of the very thing the temple is meant to be. On the night when Jesus would die, the veil in the temple which separated the presence of God from God's people would be torn in two. That is because for New Covenant believers we do not worship God at a place [such as the temple], we worship God through a person. Jesus is the one who brings us to God. Jesus is the great high priest who restores us back to the fullness of God's presence.

Jesus had no need to pay the temple tax for he was exempt in identity and in role. Jesus is the Son of God and the way to God. Yet, this was not where the story ended. Look at what Jesus did immediately after Jesus affirms his liberty from the tax: **Matthew 17:27**.

I'm not sure if you've noticed, but we find ourselves in the middle of an election year. In the midst of this season you've probably heard countless phrases such as: fight for your rights, know your rights, so and so wants to take away your rights, you have the right to ask for such and such policies.

Much of the Western world is obsessed with what our rights are. We know them, and we are going to demand them. But one UK Member of Parliament wrote an essay speaking to the danger of such a love affair. She writes, **"Our lawsuit-heavy culture has created world where everyone knows their rights, but nobody accepts their responsibilities. A fatal misassumption plagues our whole approach to civil liberties: the predominance of the individual over the communal."**

She continues: **"'I know my rights' has invaded our common [language] and poached us of the vocabulary of responsibility. The cult of the individual, coupled with the predominating definition of worth as being a product of material success, results in an impoverished understanding of personal fulfillment and collective wellbeing."**

In other words, we are so caught up on what our rights are that cannot to think about politics, policies and even relationships themselves without thinking chiefly about ourselves.

If you want to see how antithetical the gospel is to our modern culture, all you have to look at is Jesus' action in this text. The very one, the only one who would ever be exempt from such a tax is here paying it. And he is not only paying it for himself (which wasn't even needed) but he was paying it for Peter.

Now remember how this story is immediately following Jesus' prediction of the cross. In light of that let's look back at the institution of this tax in **Exodus 30:14-16**.

Jesus didn't need to pay the tax. Jesus didn't need help worshipping God. Jesus didn't stand under an obligation to preserve access to God. We do. We once had perfect and uninterrupted access to God, but our sin removed us from that.

We have a barrier between us and worship. We are the ones who need access to God. We are "the others" because our sin has separated us from God.

In the equation of the Kingdom we are by nature outsiders, exiles, and strangers. This is why the temple structure existed, to provide temporary access to God. Look at how the author of Hebrews speaks of the priests in the temple: **Hebrews 5:3**. Every priest born of man is under the obligation of a sacrifice. But Jesus is not. Jesus had no sin. Jesus was under no obligation to make a payment to God because he was God.

But Jesus didn't rise up and demand his rights. Instead he paid the tax himself and extended that payment to those who were rightly taxed.

Look with me at **Romans 6:23**. Friends, we have more than a tax over our heads. We have a debt of death. We have no right to be exempt from the punishment of death which our sin demands. Yet Jesus, the only son and the only sinless man, died for our sins and invites us to take his relational privilege with God.

Notice that he doesn't pull the typical heir to the throne attitude: Don't worry about it boys, my daddy will take care of it. Jesus provided real payment. It came from a fish. This wasn't to show the novelty of Jesus but instead it is a lesson to us.

Jesus told Peter to go to the water, to cast a hook, to take the first fish which came up, to open the mouth of that fish, then he will find specifically a shekel worth four drachma. When Peter finds that shekel in the mouth of that fish he can go and use that provision to pay the tax. And this action was done so that when that tax was paid Peter would not be able to stand before men and claim that in any way he had done anything to provide his own payment.

It was only by the merit of God's divine providence that the tax was paid. This is our atonement. Though Jesus had the right to not make a payment, he took the responsibility to pay for Peter. Why? Because this is what Jesus was always supposed to do: **Matthew 1:21**.

Look at Jesus words in **John 8:36**. Also Paul, **Colossians 2:13-14**.

In this story, it is God who placed the tax and it is Jesus who paid it. There is no better story to follow Jesus' prediction of the cross than this. Jesus is God's Kingdom provision for our sins. He is the one who will pay the debt of death for us though he himself was not obligated to do it.

Jesus is God's provision who laid down his rights so that we might share in his sonship. And this bring us to our second point in closing: **Jesus is God's Kingdom Pattern**. If atonement is the focus of the kingdom, then the laying down of individual rights is the future of the Kingdom.

Now when Jesus paid this tax he hinted at atonement, but he didn't actually accomplish our redemption. This tax was something which Jesus could have chosen to not pay, and Jesus would not have broken God's law. He was entirely free from it.

Look back at verse 27. Jesus paid the tax in this text "So as to not give offense to them." Now this is interesting because time and time again in the book of Matthew we see Jesus not conforming to the rabbinic code. We have seen him say things that have been offensive to the Pharisees, and as we continue he is going to say more offensive things to the Pharisees.

So why does Jesus have such a compassionate tone here. I think there are two reason. The first is that the men who asked were not in an official temple position. Most scholars believe that the people who ask for the tax were most often lay people. They weren't trying to trap Jesus as many of the Pharisees did. Instead they were honestly wondering if Jesus was going to pay or if they should stop asking him.

And second Jesus knew that him paying this tax would not in any way scandalize his role as the messiah, or fight against what it was he came to accomplish. But it could perhaps cause these men to think that Jesus stood opposed to temple worship, which Jesus did not.

Jesus paid the tax for Peter to show his nature of atonement and Jesus paid the tax for the tax men so as to not place before their faith a stumbling block. He had every right not to, but he felt the responsibility to pay it.

This is where Jesus' pattern is important. Jesus laid down his rights to serve others. Life in God's kingdom isn't about your own glory or comfort. It's about the glory of God and the good of others. Rights, privilege and power are not the problem. The problem will always be the ends to which we use our rights, our privilege and our power.

If anyone could boast in their rights, it was Jesus. If anyone was privileged, it was the Son of God. If anyone had power, it was the one through whom and for whom all things were created. But he used his status to save and serve others instead of insisting on his rights to the detriment of others.

Now I want to be careful here. This doesn't mean that we give up doctrinal positions. That's not what Jesus is doing here. As we will see in the remainder of this book, Jesus hold hard doctrinal positions even when it becomes offensive to others and a threat to his own safety.

But if we really believe that our identity is in Jesus the Christ who was God's provision to us to save us from sins, then wouldn't the natural response be to freely give up preferences and comforts which have nothing to do with Jesus?

We should never deny the practice and truth of our faith for fear of giving an offense, but we may need to deny ourselves rather than to give an offense.

J.C. Ryle says something similar: **"God's rights undoubtedly we ought never to give up; but we may sometimes safely give up our own. It may sound very fine and seem very heroic to be always standing out tenaciously for our rights! But it may well be doubted, with such a passage is this, whether such tenacity is always wise, and shows the mind of Christ! There are occasions when it shows more grace in a Christian to submit than to resist."**

There is a word Jesus uses in verse 27 is a word which can mean give offense, cause to sin, and cause to stumble. And as Jesus is going to transition into his teaching on how we should live as Kingdom minded people, this word comes up time and time again. It is the same word used here in **Matthew 18:6**.

The point is that Jesus is going to call us to consider the impact our actions have on others and that's a reasonable request because that's what Jesus did towards us.

But he did it as more than a pattern, he did it as a means of salvation. If Jesus didn't die for our sins this would be a terrifying premise because we would always be looking for ways in which we could prove by

our works or provide by our comfort our own atonement. But because Jesus has saved us by his righteousness, we can consider others more clearly.

What I want us to see here as we transition into the picture of what it looks like to live Kingdom minded lives, is that to claim the righteousness of Christ is to simultaneously affirm a lifestyle of laying down your own rights. For it is the gracious laying down of his rights which saved us.

Where are places in your life where you can be a better witness by considering the needs others over your own rights? You may feel able to watch a movie with lots of violence and have it bear no effect on your holiness, but what if your roommate struggles with that? You have every right to watch that movie, but is it responsible?

You may be able to drink alcohol without struggling with comfort of drunkenness. But can your non-Christian friend you're drinking with do the same? You may have every right to keep your schedule busy and full but is that what's best for your family? Your spouse? Your church?

In light of this text, as we enter into the business of the fall, perhaps it would benefit you individually, the church corporately, and our city locally to reflect on ways in which you may model the same attitude of Jesus in this text.

The cross of Jesus Christ and his sacrificial atonement is the focus of Kingdom living, and because of that it enables us to lay down our lives for others. Learning to live life in the shadow of Jesus' sacrifice is hard work because it is a life of self-denial. But it is a life which Jesus himself has modeled for us, and in his modeling of it he has saved us. Those who have been saved by Jesus' work will suffer no loss by submitting themselves to the same.

In surrendering his rights and pursuing the cross, it cost Christ his life, but in the end he gained the world. So we know that in following him it may cost us our rights, our comfort, and our vices, but that is nothing if in the end we have gained Christ.