

# My Rights Relinquished for You

Matthew 17:22-27

*Halifax: 26 March 2006*

## **Introduction**

As we work our way through Matthew's gospel,

- We have seen how Jesus, as He moves closer to the cross in his final year of ministry,
  - begins more and more to reveal His person and work His immediate disciples.
- He initiates this greater revelation by asking them (as recorded in Matthew 16:15) "Who do you say that I am?"
  - Then when Peter confesses, "You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God,"
    - He affirms it on no uncertain terms—
      - He says, "Flesh and blood have not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven. And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock, I will build my Church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it."
    - But then He proceeds to tell His disciples the word He will do as the Christ, the Son of the Living God...
      - that He is going to suffer and die and Jerusalem and be raised up the third day.
    - This went completely counter to what the disciples expected...
      - They expected the Messiah to live forever and reign over all, not to be crucified...
      - Peter contradicts the Lord and rebukes him,
        - but only to receive a sharp rebuke himself with a call to him and the other disciples to deny themselves, take up their own crosses, and follow Jesus!
  - In chapter 17,
    - I showed you how Jesus identity as the Son of God, as well as the Father's approval of His work, is ever further affirmed...
      - First, on the mount where He is gloriously transfigured, confirmed by the Law and the Prophets, and then by the Father's voice from heaven...
      - and then by the demonstration of His power to save us—when He casts out the demon from the boy.

Now, as we come to the end of chapter 17,

- We find in today's text a transitional passage...
  - Here, He reinforces the fact that He has come, not in the glory that is properly His to receive honour, but as a bondservant, relinquishing His own rights for others...
    - The pattern of His life on earth is "my rights relinquished for you."
    - And in verse 18-19, He instructs them how to live in this same pattern...
      - My rights relinquished for you
        - He talks about giving yourself for the lowly and the needy and even those who have sinned against you.
        - He talks about relinquishing your rights to give sacrificially to your wife and to children and to the poor.
- Matthew 17:22-27 shows us how Jesus Himself, our King and Head, is our example in giving up His own rights for others...
  - Let us examine this text.

**I. First of all, see how Jesus presents the terrible injustice to His disciples that He presented to them before!**

- . In verse 22, He says
  - "The Son of Man is about to be betrayed into the hands of men..."
- 0. The idea is that He will be turned over to men to do with as they please!
  - . The word translated "betrayed" in our version is a word that means simply "delivered over" or "handed over."
    - He is going to be passed off and put under the power of men!
  - . He, the Son of Man,
    - the One the disciples have just rightly confessed to be the Christ, the Messiah, the Son of the living God!
    - **He**, of all people will be turned over to men to be disposed of as they wish—
      - given to them like a toy or a thing to do with as they please!
- 0. And Jesus tells what they will do with Him...
  - v. 23: And they will kill Him.
    - That is what men will do with the Son of Man when He is put under their power.

- Of course, Jesus has already told His disciples that He will suffer many things from them and be killed...
  - But here He emphasises is put upon the fact that He will turned over to them to do with Him as they desire.
  
- 0. It is a terrible contradiction...
  - How could it be that the Son of Man who has authority over every sickness and over wind and wave could be brought under the power of sinful men?
  - How could He be delivered into their hands that they should have power over Him, even to kill Him?
  
- . The disciples are sorry—terribly sorry—to hear such a thing!
  - 0. It surely seemed to them that everything was turned up-side-down!
    - Everything they had ever dreamed about the Messiah was completely contradicted by such a thing...
      - You can be sure that they all wanted to cry out in protest the way Peter had done—but they knew the rebuke he had received for it.
        - We are told in Mark that though they did not understand, they were afraid to ask Him.
      - They were deeply troubled and perplexed.
        - All their hopes seemed to evaporate upon hearing these words...
  
- 0. And so it always is with those of little faith...
  - . To little faith, it often seems that things are out of control and that all hope is lost...
    - As soon as trouble comes they think the worst...
      - They are like the unweaned child that gets totally distressed because his food is not there on demand!
      - They feel desperate and helpless!
  
  - . Tragedy has come and they simply cannot believe that good will come out it!
    - 0) And that is so even though they are told that Jesus will rise again from the dead.
      - Even though they are promised that all things work together for good to those who love God.
  
    - 0) Oh brothers and sisters, do not be so easily distressed...
      - Your faith ought to be much stronger than the disciples' faith was when they heard these words from Jesus.

- Their faith was weak, but it did not remain weak...
- After they saw Jesus rise from the dead and understood that He died to take away the sin of the world as their great high priest,
  - They learned to trust God—
    - even when they themselves were turned over to the hands of men...
    - or when the government of the world was placed in the hands of wicked men...
      - They came to believe and be certain that God was still over it all and was working according to His purposes.
- They came to understand that the divine decree is never suspended even for a moment,
  - even when Satan is given his hour to do as he pleases...
    - When Job or Jesus is put into his hands.
    - It is yet the outworking of the divine decree!

TRANS> But they did not yet have such faith.

- And so they were terribly distressed when they heard that the Son of Man would be delivered into the hands of men and be killed.
  - And truly it was a great contradiction and a great injustice...
- . The deliverance of the Son of God to crucifixion is the boldest portrait, a naked display, of the depths of human depravity!
  0. In the events foretold by Jesus, we see what men do when the Son of God is put in their power!
    - We see the depths to which the sinful human heart will go...
      - It is the same selfishness that is in your heart—
        - A selfishness that is never satisfied until at last it has swallowed up God Himself!
        - It is a selfishness that justifies even the exploitation of God Himself!
  0. What do men do when they gain power over their neighbour?
    - . Instead of using their power to bless others, they use it to bless themselves.
      - And though they start out with some restraint,
        - if there is no outward restraint from others and by the working of God's Spirit,

- they will not stop taking more and more for themselves until the whole world belongs to them.
  - The world in Noah's day, before the flood, is an example of what men are like when God lifts His restraint from them...
    - They live as though there is no God in heaven, as if everything belongs to them.
- . They claim as their own what belongs to their neighbour.
- 0) If they are kings, they impose taxes to furnish themselves with palaces and honours...
    - and if they could get away with it and others would allow it, there is no stopping—they will keep going until they have swallowed up God Himself.
    - Oh yes, we kid ourselves that we would not, but take away the restraints of disapproving frowns and restraining laws and see how far a man will go!
  - 0) If they are businessmen, they claim their neighbour's services for unjust wages, demanding that they have a right to it...
    - If they can get away with it, they will annex the whole world to themselves.
  - 0) And if they are the working class that rises to power in a democracy, they take it upon themselves to seize what belongs to the rich as if it were their right...
    - They vote in whoever will give them the most entitlements.
    - They will raise taxes until there is no rich man left...
      - At first, they only negotiate for food...
        - But then they want more and more...
        - They want a higher and higher standard of living until at last they have obtained heaven.
- . In every case there is the same exploitation...
- 0) O yes, it is all done according to the laws of the land,
    - to them, this make is acceptable, but this is a wicked deception...
      - Just because it is legal does not mean that it is just!
    - The kind of oppressive slavery found in Egypt when Israel was there was in full accordance with the law of the land...

- Just as the ability to reduce a man's income in half by taxation is considered perfectly just in our society—
- 0) But according to the Bible, the rich has a right to what is his as long as it was obtained lawfully (which it rarely is)
    - And the working man has a right to fair wages for honest work (which he rarely performs)...
  - 0) These are rights,
    - but in Christ we are called to relinquish our rights for the sake of love.
    - ) The rich are called not only to obtain what they have according to God's justice,
      - but also to give sacrificially to those who are in need...
        - not as enforced by taxation which is to rob them, but as given freely in love.
      - ) And working man is called to go the extra mile in his service...
        - nor forced to go the extra mile to obtain his necessary bread which is to oppress him...
          - James 5:4 says to the oppressor:
            - "Indeed the wages of the labourers who mowed your fields, which you have kept back by fraud, cry out; and the cries of the reapers, have reached the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth!"
          - The labouring man is to provide extra service in love to his neighbour, but he is not to be oppressed.
      - ) But we are so far from a life of "my rights relinquished for you," that we expand what we consider our right beyond all bounds...
        - The rich by oppression...
        - The poor by cheating and pilfering.
- . And though I illustrate the self-life with work...
- It reaches into every aspect of life!
- 0) It is the principle at work when nobody wants to wash the dishes and the when the person who finally agrees to do it goes to the task with bitterness and resentment inside...
  - 0) It happens when you become bitter because nobody thanked you for your service—

- or because you did not receive as a warm a welcome when you came to church as you thought you deserved...
  - or because you didn't get enough sympathy when you were hurt.
- 0) It is the spirit of being so concerned about how you have been treated that you ignore the needs of the people around you...
- or if you do minister to their needs, it is not with a gracious spirit,
    - but with a spirit of
      - "I have to do this because nobody else cares."

TRANS> The bottom line is, sinful man, if left to Himself, will swallow up everything for himself including God and claim that He has a perfect right to it all.

- That is precisely what sinful men did when they were given power to do to Jesus what they wanted.
- But the great question is,
  - How could men do such a thing to the Son of the Living God?

## **II. How could He who rules heaven and earth be put into the hands (or under the power) of sinful men?**

- . It is a great question,
    - but Jesus our Master uses the simple inquiry of a tax man to answer it.
0. Jesus had been away from Capernaum for some time...
- As a result, He had not yet paid the temple tax...
    - This was a tax charged to every man that was over nineteen years of age.
    - It was not collected by the despised Roman tax collectors, but rather by the Jews for the maintenance of the temple.
  - . In the original, it is the "didrachma" or two drachma tax.
    - It was equivalent to a half shekel or to two denari.
      - A denari is a working man's wages for one day—
        - so two denari would be about \$150 in our money.
    - It was loosely based on the one time tax that Moses had collected for the building of the tabernacle...
      - You can read about it in Exodus 30:11-16.

- A similar tax was collected by Nehemiah for the maintenance of the temple when it was rebuilt after the captivity, though at a slightly lower amount...and it was voluntary though expected...
  - In Jesus day, the two-drachma tax had been recently re-introduced as a yearly tax,
    - although there was some leniency about it as the Sadducees refused to pay it and other Jewish sects only paid it once in a lifetime.
- . For this reason, it is difficult to tell what the tone of the tax collector was when he approached Peter and said,
- “Does your Teacher not pay the temple tax?”
- 0) He may have been speaking with contempt and scorn, or he may have been asking the question with honest respect—
- realising that just as Jesus did not keep some of the rules about hand washing or about the Sabbath, that perhaps He would also refuse to pay the tax.
- 0) There is no way to know and it really doesn’t make a lot of difference...
- But the way the question is put in the negative, it seems that it is spoken in an accusatory way...
  - Jesus had been out of town and so had not yet paid this tax...
  - The deadline was drawing near, and this tax man is asking if Jesus considers himself to be exempt for some reason...
0. Without hesitation, Peter answers that, “Yes,” his Teacher does indeed pay the temple tax...
- . He seems quite certain of this, probably because Jesus had always paid it in the past.
- Now Peter returns to the house, which,
    - if we can use the past as our guide,
    - is his own house where Jesus resided when He was in Capernaum.
  - He is probably thinking about the tax question and is contemplating brining the matter up to the Lord...
- . But as soon as he enter the house, Jesus brings the matter up to him...
- Verse 25 is very clear about this... It says



- “And when he (Peter) had come into the house, Jesus anticipated him saying, ‘What do you think, Simon? From whom do the kings of the earth take their taxes, from their sons or from strangers?’”
- From this we learn how our Lord knew what had transpired with Peter and the tax man...
  - Though it is incidental to our purpose, there is something very special about this...
    - Our Lord always knows about the encounters we have with others.
    - We are never able to tell Him about something He does not already know...
      - And very often, as in this case,
        - He uses the situations of our lives to teach us important lessons...
        - That is certainly the case here!
          - He uses this simple situation as a springboard to answer the great unspoken question that was on the disciples minds:
            - **“How could it be that the Messiah could be delivered into the hands of men and be killed—when He was the Son of God?”**
- . In this simple even, Jesus reveals to Peter the principle of His whole life on earth as the Son of God:
  - “My rights relinquished for you!”
  - Consider how He does this...
- 0. First, He establishes the point that there are certain rights and privileges that belong to certain persons...
  - . In verse 25, He asks Peter,
    - “What do you think Simon? From whom do the kings of earth take customs or taxes, from their sons or from strangers?”
      - Peter said to Him, “From strangers.”
      - Jesus said to Him, “Then the sons are free.”
  - . In other words, the son of a king is exempt from taxation...
    - I should point out that when “strangers” are contrasted with “sons” here, “strangers” does not refer to foreigners, but to those who are outside the royal family...
      - Usually, the exemption extends to those who are supported by the royal treasury as well—

- It makes no sense to tax those who are themselves supported by taxes...
  - But in no case is the king's son subject to taxation.
    - Exemption is a right to which he is fully entitled.
0. By implication, Jesus is telling Peter that He (Jesus) is free from this tax.
- Peter knows that Jesus is God's Son...
    - The temple was built for God's honour and glory, and God's Son is especially the One who is to be honoured there!
    - Jesus refers to the temple as "My Father's house"—not "our father's house, but my Father's house..."
  - He is the only begotten Son and therefore is exempt from the tax collected for God's house.
    - And by extension, it could be argued that Jesus' immediate servants—the twelve who were supported by Him—should also be exempted...
      - Some sources show that the priests were exempted from the temple tax, though they are not all consistent...
        - but whatever the case, the Son of God Himself was certainly exempted!
0. But Jesus tells Peter that He is willing to relinquish this right rather than to offend them...
- . He commands Peter to pay the tax—both for himself and for Peter.
    - We will look at the details of about how this payment was provided in a moment...
      - but first I want you to see how Jesus freely gives up His right so as not to offend them.
      - He is going to pay what He is in no way obligated to pay.
  - . He says He will pay it "lest they be offended."
    - 0) The word offended does not mean "upset with Me" so much, though it carries something of that idea...
      - but more distinctly, it means, "stumbled," or "caused to sin."
      - In the Bible, when someone is offended, it means they are caused to sin because of another person's actions...
        - Jesus uses the word in this way right across the page in Matthew 18:6 when He says,

- “Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to sin, it were better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were drowned in the depth of the sea.”
- 0) The concern of Jesus is that by not paying the temple tax, He might cause others to sin...
- This could happen in several ways— whether by others taking liberty to also withhold payment, or by the tax men forcing payment from him, or by giving a false impression that Jesus had no regard for the temple...
  - The confusion about his withholding of payment would come because so few people would understand the reason...
    - It was only the disciples and few others who understood at this time that Jesus was the Son of God.
      - They would assume that He was not paying the tax for some other reason...
      - So, rather than causing them to offend, Jesus instructs Peter to pay.

TRANS> The Son of God lays aside His right for the sake of others!

- . This is a big deal, not because the tax was so large,
  - It wasn't large—it was only a two drachma tax...
    - but it is a big deal because it represents the way the Son of God lived when He was on the earth...
  - Yes, He was the Son of God, but almost nobody knew that!
    - And the reason they did not know that is because Jesus had come in the form of a bond slave...
    - He had made Himself of no reputation, hiding the glory that belonged to Him.
    - He had laid aside His rights.

TRANS> This is the principle that explains Jesus' whole life on earth as the Son of God.

- . His whole life was about voluntarily relinquishing His rights as the Son of God.
0. Yes, paying a two drachma tax was a very little thing—a very little thing indeed...
- but it reveals a huge reality about Jesus' condescension!
  - Jesus hid His glory and came to earth as a servant!

- He put Himself in a rude cradle at the breast of a poor virgin...
  - He lived among the sons of this world in lowliness and poverty... with no place to lay His head...
  - And in the end, He was going to allow them to shamefully treat Him and even to deliver Him up to crucified!
    - All this to pay a penalty that He did not owe!
    - All this to pay for the sins of others—sins that He did not commit.
0. I pointed out before how we are so inclined to claim rights for ourselves—even to things that do not belong to us...
- We will keep claiming more and more for ourselves until we have taken what rightfully belongs not only to our neighbour but even to God!
  - But here is God the Son freely giving up the rights and prerogatives that justly belong to Him as the Son of God for our sake!
    - See how He freely lets go of them for the sake of love!
    - He lays aside what properly belongs to Him in order that He might give to us what we have no right to at all!
0. This explains how it could be possible that the Son of God could be delivered over to men and be killed by them!
- . He has right to be respected by them and honoured by them...
    - He has all power in heaven and earth to dash them to pieces like a potter's vessel if He so desired...
    - But He has laid all this aside because He has come to redeem His people...
      - He allows Himself to be delivered into their hands and crucified because He is willing to give up His divine rights for the sake of love!
  - . How foreign this “my rights relinquished for you” love is to this world!
    - 0) How beautiful is the kingdom where “my rights relinquished for you love” flourishes!
      - And I tell you that it flourishes in the kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ!
        - He has restored it and God is pleased with it!
    - 0) We do not live up to what our Master has begun, but let us all at least aspire to do so,
      - and by grace, let us take steps in that direction!
      - The day will come when at last God will perfect us in this love!

- How splendid it will be to live in a kingdom where everyone is busy about nothing else but loving his neighbour!
- But let us endeavour to do it now—even in this fallen world—as our Lord Jesus did!

0) Love in a fallen world is the most lovely kind of love—

- It is only here, in this fallen world, that, like our Saviour,
  - we can love those who do not love us back...
- It is only here, in this fallen world, that, like our Saviour,
  - we can love with a love that costs us dearly—even our honour, our riches, our life!
- Make the most of your opportunity—for the time is short!
  - The days of sacrifice were soon be over—let us make the most of the opportunity now for the glory of our loving Saviour who has gone before us.

TRANS> You say, “Oh, but it is so hard to give up my rights to love...”

- Indeed it is...

### **III. But our text teaches us that God will provide grace for us to do it!**

- . See how the Lord provides for the service of love...
    - 0. Jesus is paying a tax that He does not rightfully owe, but God provides it in a very marvellous way...
      - . The Lord instructs Peter to go down to the sea with a hook, and find a coin—a stater, which was enough for both Jesus and Peter’s portion of the two drachma tax.
      - . Consider what a remarkable thing this is!
        - Peter is simply told to go to the shore with his hook...
          - The Lord does not tell him where to go, just to go...
          - And at the same time, He is, in the workings of His providence, commanding a fish to pick up the coin, hold it in its mouth, and go and meet Peter.
        - It is a wonderful combination of foreknowledge and foreordination.
          - Our Lord will bring everything together to provide Peter with this coin for the tax...
0. Take comfort in this that the Lord provides for the service of love!

- . Do not think you can't afford the service of love...
  - It is true that there may be certain ways you will want to love and cannot...
    - But if you are committed to it, you will begin to find ways to do it and you will give up your rights to do it, and you will find that God will provide abundant resources for it.
  
- . There are some people who think if they give a lot they will be blessed—and then they can have a lot for themselves...
  - But that is not our Lord's reason promising to bless those who give a lot...
  - He blesses those who give a lot in order that they might have more to give.
  - He provides what you need to serve others...
    - Once you begin, you will find that He will provide.
    - His grace will be there to provide you to love.
  
- . Now consider our Lord Jesus Christ who stripped Himself of His glory to come to this earth...
  - Here He was, as man, coming to die for our sins...
    - God did not furnish Him with what He needed in such a way that He did not need to die...
    - But He furnished Him in such a way that His death would be sufficient to take away our sins...
      - He anointed Him with the Holy Spirit above measure so that He could fulfill His office as our prophet, priest, and King...
      - He provided all that was needed so that He could also impart to us the Holy Spirit.
  
- . And so what is the great result of Jesus laying aside His rights in order to die for us?
  0. It is resurrection on the third day!
    - By this the Father shows His acceptance of His Son's sacrifice for our sins!
    - Jesus, in love to us, took upon Him our death...
      - And the now the Father has given Him life for Himself and for all of us.
  
  0. There is a gold coin in the fish's mouth that is enough for him and for us!
    - He has given up all His rights and prerogatives in order to give to us what we need but have no right to be given...
      - And the Father has blessed His gift and caused it to prosper.
      - By Him we are given eternal life.

- How glad you ought to be that Jesus did not calculate what He would give and not give based upon rights...
  - If He had, He never would have even come to this earth—much less died for our sins!
  
- So now, as long as you are here,
  - Go forth in His name, giving up your own rights in order to love your neighbour...
  - Focus not on what you are entitled to, but focus on what you can do for your neighbour...
    - Give up your life for others as our dear Lord has given up His life for you.
    - “My rights relinquished for you.”
      - That is the principle of God’s Son in this fallen world.
      - That is the way of His kingdom.