

The Life and Ministry of Christ, Part 25

We just witnessed the power of the Holy Spirit working mightily through Christ when the young man was freed from demon possession. During the last months of His ministry, Jesus was constantly under the scrutiny of the Jews. They were challenging everything He did and said.

Taxes, a surprise supply – Matthew 17:24-27

Matthew 17:24 NKJV When they had come to Capernaum, those who received the temple tax came to Peter and said, “Does your Teacher not pay the temple tax?”

When Jesus arrived in Capernaum, tax collectors were waiting for them. The temple tax was a yearly tax of a half-shekel for those twenty years old and above to support the temple, (Exodus 30:13-15). The temple tax was initiated for the sanctuary in the wilderness and was continued after the temple was constructed. In Nehemiah, the tax was one-third of a shekel of silver, (Nehemiah 10:32). Peter answered hastily without consulting Jesus first.

Matthew 17:25 NKJV He said, “Yes.” And when he had come into the house, Jesus anticipated him, saying, “What do you think, Simon? From whom do the kings of the earth take customs or taxes, from their sons or from strangers?”

Why did Peter say yes? No doubt Peter along with the other disciples was feeling the pressure from those who were opposing the Lord. As soon as Peter reached the house, Jesus spoke anticipating Peter’s actions. The actions of the tax collectors was a denial of the unique position of the Son of God. Here is the King of kings and Lord of lords before the tax collectors. In Matthew 22:17, the Pharisees plotted against Jesus regarding paying taxes to Caesar. His response was similar in both instances. “Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s,” (Matthew 22:17-22)

Is it the right thing for the King of kings and Son of God to pay taxes?

Peter was called to answer the question: “From whom do the kings of the earth take customs or taxes, from their sons or from strangers?”

Matthew 17:26 NKJV Peter said to Him, “From strangers.” Jesus said to him, “Then the sons are free.”

The Lord was establishing His unique position as the Son of God and owner of the temple. He was free from paying the temple tax, yet in

order to not offend, He told Peter to pay it. If we are free to do certain things, should we do them when we know that our actions will offend others? Why would Jesus choose to pay the temple tax if He was greater than the temple?

Matthew 17:27 NKJV Nevertheless, lest we offend them, go to the sea, cast in a hook, and take the fish that comes up first. And when you have opened its mouth, you will find a piece of money; take that and give it to them for Me and you.

Notice the manner in which the tax money was supplied. Do you find it strange that the Lord supplied the necessary funds this way? Supplying the funds this way helped Peter understand that Jesus is indeed the Son of God. We may also face situations where the supply for our need magnifies God's grace and mercy to help us. The Lord always knows how to supply even when we do not have adequate resources. Consider the times that God has supplied for your needs. After this, Jesus once again began teaching His disciples some very important lessons.

Lessons in Capernaum

- **Humility - Matthew 18:1-5; Mark 9:33-37; Luke 9:46-48**
- **Warning about offenses - Matthew 18:6-11; Mark 9:42-48**
- **Lost Sheep - Matthew 18:12-14; Luke 15:4-7**
- **When someone sins - Matthew 18:15-20**
- **Forgiveness - Matthew 18:21-35**

These lessons are a result of the disciples' question, "Who then is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?"

Humility - Matthew 18:1-5; Mark 9:33-37; Luke 9:46-48

Mark tells us Jesus came into the house and the disciples were in a continued debate that had started on the road. When Jesus pressed them, they remained silent.

Matthew 18:1 NKJV At that time the disciples came to Jesus, saying, "Who then is greatest in the kingdom of heaven?"

The disciples were still focused on the popular view that the Messiah would set up an earthly kingdom. This was the prevailing view of the Old Testament prophets. The disciples still did not understand the prophesies about the suffering Savior.

Matthew 18:2-3 NKJV Then Jesus called a little child to Him, set him in the midst of them, and said, "Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven."

Matthew 18:4-5 NKJV “Therefore whoever humbles himself as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Whoever receives one little child like this in My name receives Me.”

This attitude of humility as a little child refers to the total dependence of children for survival. We must come to acknowledge that our position before God is all of love, grace and mercy. Our status and standing is totally dependent on the gift of God through Christ. Jesus just spoke about His liberty and not being subject to man, now in humility He chose to serve. We should use our freedom as an opportunity to serve one another, (Galatians 5:13).

After giving instructions on humility, Jesus gave warnings about offenses.

Warning about offenses - Matthew 18:6-11; Mark 9:42-48

Matthew 18:6 NKJV Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to sin, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were drowned in the depth of the sea.

Matthew 18:7 NKJV Woe to the world because of offenses! For offenses must come, but woe to that man by whom the offense comes!

The Greek word for offenses is *skandalizo*, (skan·dal·id·zo). It means to “cause to sin, to offend, to cause a person to distrust, to cause one to stumble.” Offenses indicates being a stumbling block or tripping someone up. The Lord said “offenses must come.” Offenses arise because the world, the flesh and the devil are in league to seduce and pervert. As a Christian we must guard ourselves to avoid becoming an agent for the enemy and causing others to stumble and sin. Jesus repeated this word (*skandalizo*) and derivatives of it multiple times in this section. Two areas about offenses are mentioned, becoming an offense to others and allowing what you say, see or do to cause you to sin. Since the bait of Satan is to bring offense, each believer must take action to guard themselves in this area. To keep ourselves from offenses we must maintain a sure foundation of faith in Christ Jesus. It is evident that everything that can be shaken will be shaken. In Isaiah 28:16, God says, “I lay in Zion a sure foundation: whoever believes (trust) will not be shaken.” We know that Satan will do anything he can to shake our confidence. Remember when the tax collectors asked Peter if Jesus paid the temple tax, Jesus told him to “pay it lest we offend them.” It is noteworthy that almost everywhere Jesus went and ministered, people were offended because of the truth of the Word and Who He was. *When Jesus was talking about being an offense, He was referring to enticing*

someone to sin. Then Jesus talks about the consequences of offenses.

Matthew 18:6 NKJV It would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were drowned in the depth of the sea.

Matthew 18:8-9 NKJV It is better for you to enter into life lame or maimed, rather than having two hands or two feet, to be cast into the everlasting fire. It is better for you to enter into life with one eye, rather than having two eyes, to be cast into hell fire.

The consequences of bringing offense and causing one to sin are very seriously.

We need to understand the eternal consequences of falling in league with Satan and seducing or enticing others to sin.

Lost Sheep - Matthew 18:12-14; Luke 15:4-7

Matthew 18:12 NKJV What do you think? If a man has a hundred sheep, and one of them goes astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine and go to the mountains to seek the one that is straying?

Matthew 18:13-14 NKJV And if he should find it, assuredly, I say to you, he rejoices more over that sheep than over the ninety-nine that did not go astray. Even so it is not the will of your Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish.

Jesus is talking about restoring an erring believer. Notice the depth of the Father's love is not just expressed toward the ninety-nine. He does not want anyone to perish. Why would Jesus and the Father be so interested in the "one" who went astray?

2 Peter 3:9 NKJV The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.

When someone sins against you- Matthew 18:15-20

Jesus just talked about not offending others and going after the one that has gone astray. Now, He addressed those who have been offended (tripped up and caused to sin).

Matthew 18:15 NKJV Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother.

What Jesus is saying goes against human nature and personal feelings. If someone sins against or offends you, Jesus said, "go and tell him his fault between you and him alone."

Matthew 18:16 NKJV But if he will not hear, take with you one or two more, that 'by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be

established.'

Matthew 18:17 NKJV And if he refuses to hear them, tell it to the church. But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector.

Jesus' plan of action was to stop the offending believer from continuing in sin. Notice that He offered multiple steps to stop believers from offending others. The message behind this section is restitution or bringing the offending person back into a proper relationship with God. This may seem backwards and difficult for those who have been offended by others.

When someone sins against you, Jesus wants you to get to a place of forgiveness and strength.

Mark 11:25-26 NKJV "And whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive him, that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses. But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father in heaven forgive your trespasses."

Unforgiveness exacts a toll on our body, mind, spirit and emotions. Jesus offered this plan of action and then He gave instructions on forgiveness.

Forgiveness - Matthew 18:21-35

Matthew 18:21-22 NKJV Then Peter came to Him and said, "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Up to seven times?" Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven."

The Book of Luke says: "If he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times in a day returns saying, 'I repent,' you shall forgive him."

Peter seems to think that there should be a limit to the forgiveness that is offered to an offender. 490 times in one day really means don't put a limit on forgiving one another. Jesus concluded this discourse with the parable about the king that wanted to settle accounts with his servants. A servant owed the king ten thousand talents. A talent of gold weighed about 200 pounds and a talent of silver about 100 pounds, so the servant owed about three billion dollars. When the king saw that he could not pay, he forgave the debt that was owed him. That same servant found one of his fellow servants that owed him a hundred denarii, or about \$5,000. The offending servant begged for patience. He said, "*I will pay you all.*" By receiving mercy and forgiveness, we should have a forgiving spirit. Our mercy and forgiveness should be

without limit.

Matthew 18:30 NKJV And he would not, but went and threw him into prison till he should pay the debt.

Matthew 18:32 NKJV Then his master, after he had called him, said to him, ‘You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you begged me.

Matthew 18:33–34 NKJV Should you not also have had compassion on your fellow servant, just as I had pity on you?’ And his master was angry, and delivered him to the torturers until he should pay all that was due to him.

Matthew 18:35 NKJV “So My heavenly Father also will do to you if each of you, from his heart, does not forgive his brother his trespasses.”

What should our attitude be toward offenses?

Why is it so important for us to forgive those who offend and trespass against us?

Can God still supply treasures in unexpected places?