

The Kingdom's Son who Still Pays

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Date: 26 February 2017

Preacher: Andrew Price

[0 : 0 0] Well, last September, the World Triathlon Championship was held in Mexico in September last year. I'd like to say I know that because I participated in it, but we all know that would be a lie.

Although we do have some pretty accomplished people amongst us today. Anyway, in this championship triathlon, there were two brothers from Britain, an older brother called Alistair and a younger brother called Johnny.

And just metres before the finish line, the older brother Alistair actually gave up his chance to win the race to help his younger brother cross the line. His younger brother was actually coming first, but then, well, instead of me telling you, why don't we take a look at the Guardian's post.

But the metres from the finishing line, unbelievable. Johnny Brownlee would start to find fatigue. He did not know where he was and something that we have never seen before. Alistair Brownlee would help his brother to the finishing line.

Henry Schumann could not believe his eyes. He would have himself an ability to get to the finish and win the grand final. The crowd absolutely could not believe what they were seeing. Henry Schumann, the man who had been the bronze medalist at the Olympic Games, would claim the grand final.

[1 : 1 5] What an incredible rock star season for Henry Schumann. And as he crossed the line, he would look back and not believe what he was seeing. The two Brownlee brothers trying to make their way to their finishing line with Richard Murray just seconds behind.

And Alistair Brownlee would help the younger of the Brownleys in, push him across the line. It would be Johnny second, Alistair third. Isn't that nice? It's a lovely story.

In fact, it's such a nice story that I found it hard to celebrate with a guy in green. He's kind of showing off going, and he's worked hard. He should be able to celebrate. But it's such a nice story.

Your heart goes out to the other brothers. And Alistair, the older one, he would have had a chance. The guy in green and Alistair, the older one who helped, they were kind of neck and neck.

And so Alistair had a chance to win the World Series, and yet he gave it up to help his brother. And in fact, on the next slide, I think the headline from the Guardian Post actually says that.

[2 : 1 5] It gives up his chance to win to help his brother. Well, today we come to a rather weird event in the life of Jesus. I don't know what you thought about the event when it was read out in the Bible reading, but it is a bit odd.

I mean, it only occurs here in the book of Matthew in the Bible and involves talk of taxes and an unusual fishing story with coins in the mouth of fish and so on.

And it's a bit hard to work out what on earth the point is. But as we take a closer look, we'll see, I think, it's about forsaking freedom to help others, about giving up your rights to serve others.

And like the older brother, Alistair, who gave up his chance to win for the sake of his younger brother. And so let's have a look at this event, which starts with a question for Peter about Jesus.

So at point one in your outlines and verse 24 in your Bibles. After Jesus and his disciples arrived in Capernaum, the collectors of the two drachma temple tax came to Peter and asked, here's the question, doesn't your teacher Jesus pay the temple tax?

[3 : 23] Yes, he does. Peter replied. So here the first question for Peter is about whether Jesus pays his taxes. But the tax in question is not for the Roman government of the day, like income tax we pay.

It was for the Jewish tax for the temple. And it seems to be based on an Old Testament law, which was our first Bible reading. Now, to see the connection, we need to know a little bit about ancient currencies.

So here I have a \$2 coin. I got it when I went fishing the other day. Glad you laughed. It was a joke. But we as Australians have dollar coins, you know, \$1, \$2 and so on.

The Greeks have, does anyone know what Greek currency is today still? Not worth anything, sadly. Drachmas, yeah. And the Jewish currency are shekels.

And so on the next slide here, this is how the exchange rate works in Jesus' time. A two drachma coin was equal to a Jewish half shekel coin. So we have five cent, ten cent.

[4 : 27] They had half shekel, one shekel and so on. And that's equal to about half a day's wage. So that's the connection. Keep that in mind then. So Jesus has got to pay a half shekel tax.

That's the tax. And then come to the next slide. This is our first Bible reading. And let me remind you of what we read here. God says to Moses, Notice when you take the census of the people of Israel, each shall give a ransom for his life to the Lord when you number them, so that there'll be no plague amongst them when you number them.

And notice, each one who is numbered in the census shall give this, half a shekel. It's the same amount, you see. You shall take the atonement money from the people of Israel and shall give it for the service of the tent of meeting, which was the Old Testament tabernacle.

It was a temple that was a tent and it got carted around. And it will be a memorial for the Israelites before the Lord, making atonement for your lives. And so here we see on this slide that it's the same amount, half a shekel or two drachmas.

And here we also see that it was used for the temple to keep it running. Hence, it was called a temple tax. Though, as I said, back then the temple was a tent.

[5 : 39] But notice the original reason right at the top of the slide there. The reason was to pay to God this tax as a ransom for their lives.

A ransom. And to save them from judgment, which in this case was a plague. Now we're familiar with this idea of ransom, aren't we? We watch movies and we see ransom notes and so on, which demand money.

In fact, there was a girl who came home from a friend's birthday party with lots of lollies. So her brother used his iPod to take a photo, kidnap her teddy and take a photo and hold the teddy for ransom.

Here's the photo. And he sent a text message with the photo and said, all your lollies for your teddy. That was the ransom. Apple has a lot to answer for, doesn't it, with their iPods.

I think she got the teddy back for the record without having to pay the ransom. But we get the idea, don't we? A ransom is where you pay a price to save someone or a teddy.

[6 : 39] Well, so too here in Exodus 30. But the big difference is that God was not a kidnapper. Instead, God has saved Israel from Egypt, you might remember from the Old Testament.

And so Israel owed God their very lives. And so as they accounted in the census, they are not to take pride in their great numbers as though they have achieved it.

Rather, they are to acknowledge that they owe their very existence, their very lives to God by paying God this half shekel as a ransom for their lives. And if they didn't acknowledge God like this, then they would be judged for their pride.

And a plague would come. But the point is, this temple tax was paid to God as a ransom for their lives and was used for the temple upkeep.

Now, since it was paid to God, then when Peter, back in Matthew 17, is questioned by the temple tax collectors, Peter assumes, yes, of course, Jesus will pay this tax.

[7 : 38] But when Peter comes back into the house, he's asked a second question, this time by Jesus. And it's a question about this assumption.

So at point two in your outlines and verse 25 in your Bibles. When Peter came into the house, Jesus was the first to speak. What do you think, Simon?

Peter had two names, Simon and Peter. So what do you think, Simon Peter? He asked. From whom do the kings of the earth collect duty and taxes? From their own children or from others?

From others, Peter answered. Then the children, or literally the sons, are exempt, Jesus said to him. So before Peter can speak, when he comes back into the house, Jesus questions him.

And Jesus questions him about this assumption that Jesus will just pay this tax. Because it seems Peter has forgotten for a moment who Jesus is.

[8 : 39] And so Jesus asks Peter a question to get him thinking. He says, look, do children, or literally do sons of earthly kings have to pay taxes?

And Peter gets this one right. He says, no, they don't have to pay. The kings get taxes from other people, not from their own children or sons. And so Jesus literally says in verse 26, then the sons are free.

The sons are exempt. They're free from having to pay the tax. You see, Jesus is trying to get Peter to realize that he doesn't actually have to pay the tax. Because he is a son, the son of God.

On the next slide, as far as I know, this guy does not have to pay taxes, Prince Charles. He is actually exempt from paying taxes. Taxes are collected from others in the kingdom for him and the royal family.

But he is exempt, free from paying taxes. Why? Because he is the son of the queen. Well, so too Jesus is also exempt from paying taxes to God.

[9 : 44] Why? Because he is the son of the king, God. In fact, just a few verses earlier in the top left-hand corner of your page there, verse 5, Peter heard God say about Jesus, this is my son.

And so just as the sons of earthly kings or queens are exempt, so also the son of the heavenly king is exempt. After all, the temple is his father's house.

And Jesus does not owe God a ransom for his own life because Jesus lived a perfect life. In fact, he was not saved by God. But the point is, Jesus is teaching Peter that Jesus is free from paying this tax to God.

Why? Because he is the son of God. I did read one article, though, about Prince Charles. Although he does not have to pay taxes, he has given up that right and voluntarily does pay taxes.

I'm not sure how much he actually does pay. One article said that his taxes are less than his servants. But another article says he pays 45% of his income.

[10 : 54] He's given up his freedom for the sake of others, you see. And that's exactly what Jesus does next. So point three in your outlines and verse 27 in your Bibles. Jesus says, But so that we may not cause offense, go to the lake and throw out your line, take the first fish you catch, open its mouth, and you will find a four drachma coin.

Take it and give it to them for my tax and for yours. I don't know if you like fishing or not, but it puts a new spin on the fishing stories.

No longer can you say, I caught a fish this big. You can up the ante and say, I caught a fish with this much money in it. And it is a fair bit of money. A four drachma coin was a full day's worth of wages. But the point is not the fish.

The point is, although Jesus is the son, he still pays. Although he has the right not to pay, he gives up that right for the sake of others, you see.

Like Alistair did in the video at the start. First, Jesus gives up his right so that he does not cause offense, verse 27. The word for cause offense here can also mean cause them to fall.

[12 : 07] But Jesus gives up his right, his freedom, so they won't fall. And second, Jesus gives up his right and pays not just for himself, do you notice, but also for Peter.

Jesus pays Peter's temple tax, the tax that was originally a ransom to God for life. Why do it through this bizarre miracle?

Well, Peter was a fisherman, so maybe there's a connection there. But I suspect it was to show that Jesus was really the one who paid it. After all, it seems like Jesus didn't carry much money around with him, and certainly not a whole day's worth of wage.

And we read elsewhere in the Bible, in John 12, that it was actually Judas who was in charge of the disciples' money bag. And he used to skim the top as well, actually. But this miracle leaves us in no doubt about who it is that pays.

It's Jesus, because only Jesus can do this miracle. Jesus pays, even though he's the son, and exempt from paying. But what is the point of this rather unusual story, this event in history?

[13 : 17] Why has Matthew recorded it for us here? Well, it's worth remembering the context in which Matthew records it. Have a look back in your Bibles at verse 22 and 23, the verses that come just before this event.

In those verses, or those sentences, we read that Jesus is about to be handed over and killed. That is, crucified on the cross. And three days later, rise again.

Now, this is the very thing that Jesus has been trying to tell his disciples about, that he must suffer and die. And it's the very thing the disciples were struggling with, that they found hard to accept.

In fact, the Jews, as a nation, could not accept that God's Messiah, God's King had to suffer and die. It just didn't fit with who they thought the King was supposed to be. And so Matthew, who writes to a very Jewish audience, includes this rather weird event to show us why Jesus must die.

And for although Jesus is the Son of God, the Messiah, and he has freedom not to die, Jesus willingly gives up his freedom to die for others at the cross.

[14 : 30] He will pay, die, and pay the ransom for their lives. And so not cause them offense or fall under judgment because of their own sin. In fact, Jesus himself will put it like this on the next slide just a couple of chapters later.

In verse 20, chapter 20, the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve. He gives up his freedom and to give his life as a ransom for many.

You see, what we see here in this unusual event is a glimpse of what Jesus will do later at the cross, where he gave up his freedom, his right as God's Son, and humbled himself and died for you, for me.

Because we've all sinned. We've all ignored God and lived our own way instead of God's way. And the consequences or the payment for sin is death. Like we heard in our children's song today, the wages of sin is death.

Not so sure about the action, but anyway, makes it clear, I guess. But Jesus pays for our sin, you see, by dying in our place.

[15 : 41] He pays the ransom for our lives with his life. I once heard a story that apparently took place during the Crusades. You know, the Crusades that happened across Europe and the Middle East in the 11 and 1200s.

A French lord called Lord Grimbald was captured by a Turkish prince. And Lord Grimbald was just not long married before he left on Crusades to a young woman called Lady Eleanor.

And it seems the Turkish prince who captured him in a twisted act decided to test her love for her husband, her new husband. And so the ransom for his life was Lady Eleanor's right hand.

Bit twisted, isn't it? And yet out of love, she had it amputated and sent to release her husband. She gave it. And yet Christ gave much more.

He gave him his whole self, didn't he? For the cost of our sin is death and the ransom for our life is the life of God's perfect son.

[16 : 50] Nothing less would cover it. Yet out of love, Jesus willingly gave it at the cross. He died for us, taking the punishment for us. He gave up his freedom and right as God's son so that we might be set free from the wages of sin.

are free from facing judgment and instead given forgiveness and hope of heaven. And he's given this for all who believe. And so the first question for us this morning is, do you believe in Jesus?

Do you believe that Jesus is the son of God who gave up his freedom to pay for our ransom? To bring you forgiveness and life eternal? The video we saw at the start was of Alistair who gave up his freedom, his chance to win the World Series to help his younger brother Johnny across the line, as you saw.

But a couple of days after this, the media interviewed the younger brother, Johnny. And do you know what he said? He said, I hated seeing my brother do that for me.

I'm grateful, really. But you see, he wanted to do it himself. He was too proud to admit that he couldn't do it himself and that he needed help.

[18 : 07] And people, to be honest, can be that way with God. We can think we can do life on our own, that we don't need help. But the reality is we do.

I mean, life is hard enough without God. Most of you have lived long enough to know that. What's more, eternal life is impossible without Jesus.

So do you believe in him? That's the question. Have you accepted him as your king who served you by giving his life as a ransom for you? Like Alison has. We heard this book before.

And for us who have, then we had to follow Christ's example. And we see this is what the Bible writers do. So on the next slide is a verse from Philippians and the guy who wrote it, Paul, says this.

He says, In your relationships with one another, have the same attitude as Christ Jesus. What attitude is this? Well, Jesus was in very nature God. Yet he did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage.

[19 : 08] Rather, he gave up his right as God and made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness and being found in appearance as a man.

He humbled himself by becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross. You see, Jesus did not hold on to his equality with God as God's son, but he gave up his freedom, his rights to become a servant, to die for us.

And Paul says, do you notice at the top, we are to have the same kind of attitude in the way we relate to one another, willing to give up our freedoms and rights to serve one another.

Someone at my Bible study group said last week, giving up our freedom to serve one another is called parenthood. And there's truth in that.

But we can do it in other ways too, can't we? For example, when we come to church, we have the right and freedom to talk with our friends who we haven't seen for the week. And yet I'm often encouraged by people who give up that freedom to talk with their friends so that they can welcome a new person or get to know someone they don't know.

[20 : 18] That's a small example of following Christ's example. Or take church lunch today. We have the right and freedom to go home for lunch and have a nice quiet meal. Yet I know people who decide to stay even when their kids are a bit grumpy to get to know others and encourage them.

Of course, I realize people cannot stay each time, but you get the point, don't you? This is what it means to follow Christ's example in our relationships with one another. Or take example from Paul.

On the next slide, he kind of gives us another view. He says, Be careful, however, that the exercise of your rights does not become a stumbling block to the weak. He says, Therefore, if what I eat causes my brother or sister to fall into sin, I will never eat meat again so that I will not cause them to fall.

Same word as in Matthew 17, cause offense. Here, Paul is talking about giving up his rights if it causes others to fall. And the issue here is eating certain things that some Christians think are wrong.

So a more relevant example for us might be the issue of alcohol. The Bible says that we are free to drink alcohol, not get drunk, I need to say. It's hard to practice self-control and godliness when you're drunk.

[21 : 30] But we're free to have a drink. Jesus turned water into wine. Paul tells Timothy to drink wine for his stomach and so on. But I also know that for some Christians, they think being a Christian means you cannot drink at all.

And so if we're out with them and we know about this, then we're to be willing to give up our freedom for the sake of others so that we don't offend them. I think I may have told you this story before, but a friend of mine was having dinner one night with a missionary lady who was back home for a couple of months.

After dinner, they decided to play the card game called cheat. Do you know that card game where you've got to get rid of all your cards and you say, I'm putting down three tens and you put it down and the other person's got to see if you're cheating or not and so on.

This lady hadn't played before and she was a little bit hesitant. My friend said, oh look, it's easy and then he explained the rules and off they went. But when this lady tried to cheat, my friend said that he could actually see the beads of sweat rolling down her face.

It was. You see, she wasn't keen to play not because she didn't understand the rules but because she thought all cheating was sinful.

[22 : 42] And so she was distressed and my friend stopped the game. Now we know it's just a game and a bit of fun but you see, it wasn't for this lady and so we're to be willing to give up our freedoms for the sake of others.

Of course, the ultimate goal of giving up our rights to help others is so that they might become Christians and be saved from judgment and have the hope of heaven, the certain hope of heaven.

This is where Paul goes with this argument. So in the next chapter, he continues the same line of thinking and he says, Though I am free and belong to no one, I have made myself a slave to everyone to win as many as possible.

To the Jews, I've become like a Jew to win the Jews. To the weak, I became weak to win the weak. I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some.

See, Paul is willing to give up his freedoms and his goal to see people become Christians saved from judgment headed for heaven.

[23 : 45] And so, although he knows he's free to eat pork and bacon, which I'm very thankful about, he knows Jews find it offensive. And so, he gives up his freedom of eating that so that he can share with Jews Jesus that they might be saved.

Or I'll take another person from this congregation who was flying back from Canberra last year. She had a big conference on and was exhausted and was looking forward to a nice quiet trip on the plane, kind of settle back and just close her eyes.

Of course, when she sat down, she sat down next to an elderly gentleman who wanted to talk. And so, instead of saying, Look, I'm really tired. Can I just rest?

That was her right. That was her freedom to do that. But she gave up that freedom to talk to this man and try and look for an opportunity to share Jesus with him. And she found out this man used to be a Catholic but some things happened in his life which meant he's walked away from God and so she was able to share with him the message of Jesus who offers hope in the midst of hardships.

I think she even got an address to post some more information to him about Jesus. You see, he is someone who is willing to give up her rights, her freedom for peace and quiet. to try and see someone saved.

[25 : 03] Well, this somewhat weird event in Matthew 17 is a reminder that Jesus the Son gave up his rights for the sake of others to pay the ransom for our lives rather than see us fall under judgment.

And so, we owe him our very lives and are to follow his very example. In the words of our next song, Jesus paid it all and so all to him we owe.

Let's pray. Our gracious Father, we thank you for this reminder this morning that Jesus, although he is the Son, gave up his freedom to come to earth and die on a cross for us so that by his death he might pay our ransom.

And Father, we pray that you would help us to follow his example, to be willing to give up our rights and freedoms for the sake of others and to serve and help others and ultimately to see others come to know Jesus so they can have the same hope of heaven we have.

And we pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.