

The Kingdom's Son who Still Pays

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 26 February 2017

Preacher: Andrew Price

[0 : 00] Well, in September last year, the World Triathlon Championship was held in Mexico. I'd like to say I know about this because I participated, but that would be a lie.

In it, though, were two brothers from Britain. 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 Johnny cross the line.

And take a look at the news clip from the Guardian, the UK Guardian. So I think it's on the next slide. 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 did 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. What an incredible rock star season for Henry Schumann.

[1 : 05] 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. It's a lovely story, isn't it? Lovely. In fact, it's such a nice thing to do that I couldn't celebrate with the guy in green.

It kind of felt like, oh, you know, you're showing off a bit here now, although he's worked hard for it. But here, Alistair, the older brother, gave up his right. He could have just ran past his brother and beat the guy in green.

But he gave up his chance to win for the sake of others. In fact, on the next slide is the headline from the Guardian Post, the UK newspaper, which says that.

Well, today we come to a rather unusual event in the life of Jesus. I don't know what you thought about this event when you heard the Bible reading today. It is a bit odd. In fact, someone from the service before said they've never read this story ever before.

[2 : 13] And it was quite interesting. And it is a bit odd. I mean, it occurs only here in Matthew's Gospel. It involves talk of taxes and a rather unusual fishing story with coins.

And it's a bit hard to work out what on earth the point of it is. But as we take a closer look, we'll see, I think, that it's about forsaking freedom for the sake of others.

Giving up your right to help others, like the older brother, Alistair, who gave up his chance to win the triathlon to help his younger brother. So let's have a look at this event, which starts with a question for Peter about Jesus.

So 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, doesn't your teacher pay the temple tax?

Yes, he does, he replied. So here the first question for Peter is, does Jesus pay his taxes? But the tax in question is not the Roman tax for the government of the day.

[3 : 23] It was actually a Jewish tax for the temple. And it seems to be based on an Old Testament law, which we heard about in our first reading. Now, to sort of get the connection, we need to know a little bit about currencies.

So here I have a \$2 coin. I found it when I was fishing the other day. That was a joke. But we Australians have dollar coins. Greeks have, does anyone know, drachma coins.

And the Jews have shekels. The Romans also had denarii. And in ancient times, in terms of the exchange rate, on the next slide I think it is, a two drachma coin was equal to a half shekel coin. So they had different coins, just like we have 10 cents, 20 cents, 50 cents. They had half a shekel coin, one shekel, and so on. And so that's what it was. And a half shekel, or two drachma, was equal to about half a day's wage.

And so four drachmas was a full day's wage. And this is what Israel had to pay, a half shekel, in our first reading. So on the next slide, just to remind you of it, it says, It says, For your lives.

[5 : 03] So here we see on the screen, it's still the same amount. It's half a shekel, isn't it? Two drachmas. And we also see that it was used for the temple to keep it running. Hence, it's called a temple tax.

Though back then, as I said, it was just a tent. But notice the original reason right at the top there. The original reason was it was paid to God as a ransom for their lives, to atone for their lives, and to save them from judgment, which in this case was a plague.

Now, we're familiar with the idea of ransom, aren't we? We watch movies with ransom notes in it, and so on. In fact, there was a girl who came home from a friend's birthday party with lots of lollies, and so her older brother kidnapped her teddy and took a photo with his iPod and sent it to her.

I think the photo's on the next slide. There it is. With a text message saying, all your lollies for your teddy. Apple and their iPods have a lot to answer for.

But I think she got her teddy back without paying the ransom. But we get the idea of ransoms, don't we? Where a price is paid to save someone. Also, here in the Old Testament, the big difference is that God is not a kidnapper.

[6 : 16] Instead, God has saved Israel from Egypt. That happened earlier in Exodus. And so they owed God their very lives. And so as they accounted in the census, they're not to take pride in their own numbers as though they have achieved this.

Rather, they were to acknowledge God who has achieved this and to whom they owe their very lives. And so pay God this ransom for their lives, if you like.

If they didn't, if they took pride in their own success and didn't acknowledge God, then they would be judged with a plague. 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, back in Matthew chapter 17, then, since it's paid to God, then Peter, when he is questioned by these temple tax collectors, Peter says, yes, of course, Jesus is going to pay the temple tax.

But when Peter comes back into the house, he is then questioned again, this time by Jesus and about his assumption that Jesus would just pay the tax.

[7 : 27] 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?

Simon Peter, he had two names, if you remember. 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 are exempt, Jesus said to him. Peter comes back, Simon Peter comes back in the house.

Before he can speak, Jesus wants to question him about his assumption. Because it seems as though Peter has forgotten for a moment who Jesus is. And so Jesus asks Peter whether the children of earthly kings or literally the literal word is the sons of the earthly kings pay taxes.

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

[8 : 38] They're free or exempt from paying taxes. As far as I know, the next gentleman on the next slide, this person who I'm sure you all know. I don't know if you did know this, though.

He's exempt from paying taxes. He does not have to pay income tax. Rather, taxes are collected from all other Brits for him and the royal family.

Why? Well, because he is the son of the queen. And Jesus is trying to get Peter here to remember who he is. Jesus is saying that just as earthly sons of earthly kings are exempt, so he, as the son of the heavenly king, is exempt.

You see. For Peter has heard a few verses earlier in verse 5 when he was on the mountain at the transfiguration, Peter heard God himself say about Jesus, this is my son whom I love.

And so you see what Jesus is trying to get Peter to twig to? He's trying to help him to remember that he is actually the son of God. And as the son of God, he is free from paying tax to God.

[9 : 52] After all, the temple is his father's house. And Jesus does not owe God a ransom for his own life because, well, Jesus did not sin. And he was not saved by God.

But the point is, Jesus is teaching Peter that he is free from paying the tax to God. Why? Because he is the son of God. I did read in one article, though, about Prince Charles that although he does not have to pay income tax, he actually has given up his right and does voluntarily pay some tax. The article has mentioned that it was less tax than his servants had to pay. But nonetheless, he still pays. Although in his defense, he does make donations and so on. You see, he has given up his freedom for the sake of others.

And that's what Jesus does next. So point three in your outlines, verse 27 in your Bibles. But, says Jesus, 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. And now this puts a new spin on the fishing stories, doesn't it?

[11 : 07] You know, you don't have to say, I caught a fish this big. But you can say, I caught a fish with this much money in its mouth. And it was a fair bit of money. Remember, two drachma, half day's wage. So four drachma, a full day's wage.

But the thing is, it's not about the fish. The point is that although Jesus is the son of the kingdom, he still pays. He gives up his right, his freedom, you see, for the sake of others.

First, he gives up his right so that it does not cause offense, verse 27. The word for cause offense here can also mean to cause them to fall. But Jesus gives up his right, his freedom, so that they don't fall.

And second, Jesus gives up his right to pay, to not pay, so that he can pay not just for himself, but, verse 27, but for Peter as well.

Jesus pays Peter's temple tax, the tax that was originally a ransom to God for life, if you remember Exodus 30. Of course, why does Jesus do it through such a bizarre miracle?

[12 : 17] Well, Peter was a fisherman, so there might be a connection there. Yet I suspect it was to show that Jesus really is the one who pays, who himself pays. You see, Jesus did not carry around a money bag, and certainly not a day's worth of wages.

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

It's not the disciples, it's the one who could only do miracles, Jesus, the son of God. But what is the point of this weird event? Why has Matthew recorded it for us here?

Well, it's worth remembering the context in which Matthew records it. You see, what do we read in verse 22 and 23, just before this event? Verse 22 and verse 23, we read that Jesus is about to be handed over and killed.

You know, nailed to a cross. And three days later, rise again. Now, this is the very thing Jesus has already told his disciples about twice already.

[13 : 28] And it's the very thing the disciples were struggling with, as we've seen over the last couple of weeks. It's the very thing the Jews struggled with. They did not think the Messiah was supposed to die.

And so Matthew, who writes to a very Jewish audience, includes this rather weird event to show us why Jesus must die.

For although Jesus is the Son of God, the Messiah, verse 5, and he has every right not to die, he gives up his right for the sake of others.

He willingly gives up his right to pay the ransom for our lives, you see. And so not cause others to fall under judgment.

In fact, Jesus himself will put it like this on the next slide. So just a couple of chapters later in verse chapter 20, he says, See, what Jesus does here in this weird story is a little glimpse of what he will do later at the cross, where he will give up his freedom as God's son and humble himself to be a ransom for us.

[14 : 48] For we have all sinned. We've all ignored God and lived our own way instead of God's way. And the consequences or payment for sin is death. But Jesus pays for our sins by dying in our place.

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

And a French lord called Grimbald de Poncefort, I can't say that in French, but maybe Joy can help me out later, was captured by a Turkish prince. Now, Lord Grimbald was not long married to Lady Eleanor.

And it seems the Turkish prince, in a twisted act, decided to test her love and demanded Lady Eleanor's right hand as a ransom for her husband's life.

And out of love, Lady Eleanor gave it, amputated it and gave it. And yet Christ has given much more. For the cost of our sin is death.

[15 : 58] And the ransom for our life is life. The life of God's one and only perfect son. That was the only price. And yet out of love, Jesus willingly gave it.

He gave up his freedom, his right as God's son to die for us, so that we who believe might be set free from the wages of sin. Free from facing judgment.

Free to receive forgiveness instead. And life eternal. If we believe in him. So that's the first question for us this morning. Do you believe in Jesus?

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

And a couple of days after that, they interviewed Johnny, the younger brother. And you know what Johnny said? He said, I hated seeing my brother carry me across the line.

[17 : 13] Isn't that terrible? You see, he wanted to do it himself. He was too proud to admit that he couldn't do it on his own, or that he needed help.

But you see, people can be that way with God. People can think that we can do life on our own. We don't need help, but we do. Life is hard enough without God.

I'm pretty sure you've all realized that by now. What's more, eternal life is impossible without Jesus. We do need help. And so do you believe in him?

Have you accepted Jesus as your king who served you by giving up his life as a ransom for you? And for us who do believe, then we are to follow Christ's example.

That's how the Bible speaks about what Jesus did for us. And so on the next slide, the Apostle Paul writes this from Philippians. He says, See, Well, what did Christ Jesus do?

[18 : 14] Well, being in very nature God, he did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage. Rather, he gave up that right 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.

See, here's another picture of Jesus giving up his freedom, his rights, for the sake of others. And Paul says, What are we to do in response? Well, we'd have the same attitude. Top of the screen. Same attitude and our relationships. We're to be willing to give up our freedoms, our rights, to serve others. A person at my Bible study said last week, giving up our freedom to serve others, that's called parenthood.

And there's truth in that. But we can do it in other ways too. For example, when we come to church, we have every right and freedom to talk to our friends and to catch up with them.

But I'm often so encouraged by people here who give up that freedom, give up that right to talk to the new person, to welcome someone they don't know. There's one example.

[19 : 27] A guy in my Bible study group, Nigel, he brings every week another person who cannot drive to Bible study and takes him home. Now, he's every right to come straight to Bible study and drive straight home, but he goes out of his way.

He gives up that right, goes out of his way to serve this other guy who can't drive. Here are some examples of having the attitude of Christ in our relationships, you see, giving up our rights, our freedoms for the sake of others.

Or take another example from the Apostle Paul on the next slide from 1 Corinthians 8. He says, Be careful, however, that the exercise of your rights does not become a stumbling block to the weak. Therefore, if what I eat causes my brother or sister to fall into sin, I will never eat meat again, he says, so that I will not cause them to fall or cause offense. Same word as Matthew 17.

Here the issue is eating certain meat that weak or young Christians think is wrong. And so even though he knows he can eat anything, he gives up his rights for the sake of others, you see.

[20 : 31] Here's another example. Perhaps a more relevant example for us might be the issue of alcohol. The Bible says we are free to drink alcohol, not get drunk, I need to be clear, because it's hard to practice self-control and godliness when you're drunk.

But we are free to have a drink or two. 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, it's wrong to drink any alcohol. And so if we're out with them and we know this, then we're to be willing to give up our freedom so that we don't offend them or pressure them into do something they think is wrong. I may have told you this story before, but a friend of mine was having dinner one night with a missionary friend back home for a few months.

And after dinner, they decided to play the card game called cheat. You know that card game where you've got to get rid of all your cards and you put them face down and say three tens and other people have got to work out if you're cheating or telling the truth and so on.

Anyway, this lady missionary had never played before and was a little hesitant. And so my friend said, oh, look, it's easy. And explained the rules and off they went. But when the lady tried to cheat, my friend said that he could see the beads of sweat rolling down the side of her face.

[21 : 44] You see, she wasn't keen to play, not because she didn't understand the rules, but because she thought all cheating was wrong, sinful. And so she was distressed and my friend stopped the game.

Now, we know it's just a game, a bit of fun, but not for this lady. And so if my friend continued, he would have effectively forced her to go against her conscience and so fall into sin.

Paul says, be willing to give up your rights for the sake of others. And the ultimate goal of giving up our rights to help others is to see them saved from judgment for sin and brought into God's family with the hope of heaven.

And so then on the last slide there, this is what Paul continues with. He's making the same argument in 1 Corinthians 8 and he says in chapter 9, Though I am free and belong to no one, I've made myself a slave to everyone.

Why? Well, to win as many as possible. And to the Jews, I became like a Jew to win the Jews. To the weak, I became weak to win the weak. I've become all things to all people so that by all possible means, I might save some.

[22 : 52] See, Paul's goal in giving up his rights and freedoms, in fact, Christ's goal in giving up his rights and freedoms, is to see people saved.

Saved from judgment for sins and giving the hope of heaven instead. And so Paul knows, although he's free to eat pork and bacon, he knows Jews find that offensive. So he'll give up that right so that he can share with them the message about Jesus.

He does everything he possibly can to see people saved, you see. There's a person from 1030 Church who last year caught a flight back from Canberra after a very busy conference.

She was exhausted after the conference and so she was looking forward to a nice, quiet, peaceful ride back to Melbourne. And as she sat down in her seat, she sat next to an elderly gentleman who wanted to talk.

And so she gave up her right to quiet and peace and spoke with this man. And in the course of the conversation, found out that he used to be a Catholic and so had an opportunity to talk with him about Jesus.

[24 : 00] And in fact, she, I think, even got an address from him to send him some more information about Jesus. I mean, I'd love to say they prayed the prayer and he became a Christian there and then he didn't.

But you see, here is someone who was willing to give up her freedoms to try and see someone saved. Well, this somewhat weird event in Matthew 17 is a reminder that Jesus, the son, gave up his freedom for the sake of others, to pay the ransom for our lives rather than see people fall. And so we owe him our very lives and are to follow his very example. In the words of an old hymn, Jesus paid it all, so all to him I owe.

Let's pray. Gracious Father, we thank you for this part of your word to us, which at first glance looks rather unusual.

And yet, Father, we thank you that it is a picture, a small picture of what Christ has done for us at the cross, where he gave up equality with you. He gave up heaven and came to earth to die for us as a ransom for our lives.

[25 : 18] And Father, we pray that you would help us to follow his example, help us to be willing to give up freedoms and rights to serve others and ultimately to see them saved. We ask all these things in Jesus' name.

Amen.