

June 24, 2018

“Astonishment and Encouragement”  
Matthew 17:24-27

FCF: Boredom and needing our sight restored

**PROPOSITION:** (anchor) That our hearts might be encouraged  
(magnet) Jesus shows us some astonishing things.

**SCRIPTURE INTRODUCTION:**

Merriam-Webster defines “boredom” as “the state of being weary and restless through lack of interest”. Smartphones betray its signs. Observe patients in waiting rooms, children on road trips, or drivers in traffic. The solution? We need to be awakened to what’s going on and where we are. Patients to the souls around them. Travelers to the scenery. Drivers to the danger.

Across the board, that’s the cure for boredom - to be awakened, to be confronted by what we’ve chosen to ignore. We need our sight to be restored. Perhaps you’ve heard that it’s possible to be bored with God. Perhaps you are this morning. We need the same here as well.

**SCRIPTURE READING:** [Matthew 17:24-27](#)**PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION****SERMON INTRODUCTION:**

“Love Languages” are the ways we express and experience love. It’s how we hear and speak love to one another. Each of us has a primary and secondary language. Each of us tends to give love in the way that we receive it. There are said to be five - physical touch, quality time, giving of gifts, acts of service, and words of affirmation. Here’s how it plays out ([READ quote](#)):

If a husband's love language is acts of service, he may be confused when he does the laundry for his wife and she doesn't perceive that as an act of love, viewing it as simply performing household duties, because the love language she comprehends is words of affirmation (verbal affirmation that he loves her). She may try to use what she values, words of affirmation, to express her love to him, which he would not value as much as she does. If she understands his love language and mows the lawn for him, he perceives it in his love language as an act of expressing her love for him; likewise, if he tells her he loves her, she values that as an act of love.

That’s just an example of how two of those languages can be spoken in one relationship.

Let’s talk about words of affirmation for a moment. These are words that build up, words of appreciation and encouragement. Proverbs has much to say on this ([READ Proverbs 18:21](#)). It’s not surprising psychologists tell us that one of our deepest human needs is to be encouraged, to feel appreciated. Whatever your love language may be, we all need this in one way or another.

Which brings us to our text. What becomes quite clear is this. That our hearts might be encouraged, Jesus shows us some astonishing things. He does and says some astonishing things here. And it is for our encouragement. What are these astonishing things? First, the nature of His identity. Second, the standing of the disciples. And, third, the reality of the relationship. As we look at these, we’ll start with the obvious and explicit and move down deeper with each one.

**I. THE NATURE OF JESUS’ IDENTITY**

The first is the nature of Jesus’ identity. This is the most obvious thing in our text.

*A) A Reminder*

This is a reminder of something in the Sermon on the Mount ([READ Matthew 5:17](#)).

## 1. Clearing up a misunderstanding

Jesus is clearing up a misunderstanding. His conduct was confusing. The company He kept was sketchy. And the Beatitudes, the marks of His disciples, were all inward and about character.

## 2. Making clear His mission

So Jesus is clearing up a misunderstanding and making clear His mission. He has come not to abolish, dismiss, or do away with the Old Testament. He has come to fulfill it. He is its goal and theme. All the prophecies, the priesthood, the laws, the key events and people pointed to Him.

*Illustration:*

Sally Lloyd-Jones puts it like this in The Jesus Storybook Bible ([READ quote](#)):

No, the Bible isn't a bunch of rules, or a book of heroes. The Bible is most of all a story. It's an adventure story about a young Hero who comes from a far country to win back his lost treasure. It's a love story about a brave Prince who leaves his palace, his throne – everything – to rescue the ones he loves. It's like the most wonderful of fairy tales that has come true in real life!

It takes the whole Bible to tell this story. And at the center of the story, there is a baby. Every story in the Bible whispers his name. He is like the missing piece in the puzzle – the piece that makes all the other pieces fit together, and suddenly you can see a beautiful picture.

### B) *This Incident*

That's the reminder from Matthew 5. Which brings us to this incident in Matthew 17.

#### 1. The question

([READ Matthew 17:24](#)) It's important to note that this was not a tax paid to Rome or to Herod but for the upkeep of the temple in Jerusalem, something traced back to Moses. There was a debate at the time over it and some rabbis took exception to paying. "What about you, Jesus?"

#### 2. The response

([READ Matthew 17:25-26](#)) The temple was understood as God's presence on earth. Jesus had come as that very thing. Besides that, kings don't tax their sons. And Jesus is the Son Himself. So He doesn't need to pay the tax. Something greater had come. It's hard for us on this side of history to hear the magnitude of the claim. This was beyond audacious. It was truly astonishing.

Such is the nature of Jesus' identity. He is the fulfillment of the entire Old Testament.

*Application:*

Think of how that should change how we read our Bibles. There are no isolated incidents or stand-alone parts. It is all yoked together, either moving towards or harkening back to Jesus.

And then think of how we should view Him. Imagine such things being said of anyone else. There have been many figures in history. For some, it takes multiple volumes to tell their story. But for Jesus, it takes centuries, scores of people, laws, and sacrifices, just to foreshadow Him. Is He not then strong enough, wise enough, great enough to be worthy of our trust?

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## II. THE STANDING OF THE DISCIPLES

Digging deeper, we come to the standing of the disciples ([READ Matthew 17:25b-27](#)).

### A) *The Conversation*

The details of the exchange in this conversation are worth thinking through together.

#### 1. Use of the plural

Note Jesus' use of the plural in this little parable. He doesn't just say "son" but "sons". There is clearly some intentionality to this. If this was just about Him, Jesus could have used the singular.

## 2. Amount of payment

Then note the amount of the payment He makes - not just two drachma but twice that amount, a shekel, enough for Him and Peter. If it's just about Him, he would have just paid for Himself.

### *B) The Significance*

What is the significance of these things? It has to do with the doctrine of adoption.

#### 1. The work of adoption

What would that mean? The Westminster Shorter Catechism puts it this way ([READ Q:34](#)):

Adoption is an act of God's free grace, whereby we are received into the number, and have a right to all the privileges of the sons of God.

J. I. Packer in his classic work, Knowing God, says something quite profound ([READ quote](#)):

If you want to judge how well a person understands Christianity, find out how much he makes of the thought of being God's child, and having God as his Father. If that is not the thought that prompts and controls his worship and prayers and his whole outlook on life, it means that he does not understand Christianity very well at all.

#### 2. All centered on Jesus

We need to hear that. And to know that this is all centered on Jesus. First, it is all because of Jesus - His living the life we should have lived and dying the death we deserved to die. And, with that, we are treated much as Jesus for the Father now regards us as much a child as His Son.

That, my friends, is the standing of His disciples. And it is absolutely astounding.

#### *Illustration:*

In the Roman world, adoption was something done by an adult who wanted an heir and someone to carry on the family name. Usually, this was done not with an infant but when the boy was of age - after he had proven and shown himself fit to be brought into the lineage.

That's not how God the Father does it. His is a free love. He brings us in and puts His name upon us not because of what He knows of us but, frankly, despite what He knows of us.

#### *Application:*

Such is the greatness of His grace. Think of the implications here. For how we live - this is why we obey His commands. He is our Father and we long to honor, please, and imitate Him. For how we pray - not impersonally or mechanically but freely and boldly, knowing that He hears. For how we trust - with no need to worry in anything for He is our Father in everything.

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### **III. THE REALITY OF THE RELATIONSHIP**

Which brings us to the last point. Here we are going even deeper, going beyond what is implied to interrogating the text ([READ Matthew 17:25b-27](#)). Do you hear something odd?

#### *A) Strange Reason*

Jesus' reason for paying this tax - when He clearly doesn't need to - seems strange.

#### 1. The coin in the fish

Of course, that's not the only strange thing here. There's the coin in the fish. We assume Peter went and did this. Clearly the miracle is not the point of this account because it's not recorded.

## 2. Jesus' explanation

Jesus' explanation is the strange thing. Since when does He not want to offend these people?

### *B) Sweet Revelation*

Which pushes us from the strange reason to a sweet revelation. Now think it through.

#### 1. Flow of events

Start with the flow of events. Jesus and His disciples have just returned from the trip to Caesarea Philippi. He will soon begin moving towards Jerusalem. He will have fewer opportunities for private time with His disciples. And they are greeted by the temple tax collectors. If He pushes back on this issue of the tax, that will surely cause a scene, a confrontation. So Jesus pays it.

#### 2. His heart

What then do we discover? The heart of Jesus. He chooses not to push it this time so that He and His friends can have time together. That's the measure of His affection for them. And us.

Does this surprise you? It should astonish you. Such is the reality of the relationship.

### *Application:*

Again, let's think of the implications here. First, what does this say about Jesus? The sinless Son of God longed for and needed friendship. How much more do any of us? Little wonder we are hearing more about the epidemic of loneliness in this country. Did you know that, when it comes to a shorter lifespan, loneliness is comparable to smoking and obesity?

So we see some things about Him. And then about us and how He feels about us. Truly, we need to be with Him. But He longs to be with us. And not just for our sake, though that's part of it. But it's also simply because He loves us. We are truly objects of His great affection.

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## **CONCLUSION:**

No doubt you've heard the phrase "above and beyond the call of duty". I was reminded of that last week when I received an e-mail from a friend with a quote from E. B. Sledge's With the Old Breed - said to be one of the top books on 20th century battles. Sledge was a Marine veteran of the battles of Peleliu and Okinawa. Here's the quote from the book ([READ quote](#)):

Thus we watched helplessly as the four stretcher bearers struggled across the muddy field with bullets falling all around them. It was one of those terribly pathetic, heartrending sights that seemed to rule in combat: men struggling to save a wounded comrade, the enemy firing at them as fast as they could, and the rest of us utterly powerless to give aid...To our dismay, the two carriers in the rear got it by a burst of fire. Each loosened his grip on the stretcher. Their knees buckled, and they fell over backwards onto the muddy ground. The stretcher pitched onto the ground. A gasp went up from the men around me, but it turned almost immediately into roars of relief. The two Marines at the other end of the stretcher threw it down, spun around and grabbed the stretcher casualty between them. Then each supported a wounded carrier with his other arm. As we cheered, all five assisted one another and limped and hobbled to the cover of the bushes, bullets still kicking up mud all around them. I felt relief and elation over their escape...

You read that and can't help but be moved by the bravery, camaraderie, and sacrifice.

Above and beyond. Just as Jesus is with us - beyond what is expected or deserved. Take a step back and think. All was created good. God's intent for us was to care for and steward this world. We rebelled, thinking we knew better and could live apart from Him. Which wrecked everything. And still does. His response? He could have wiped us out. But instead, He came as one of us to make things right. My friends, that is above and beyond. That is the theme of His song, the constant in His ways with us. Which is just what our text shows - above and beyond.

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