

The Sons Are Free

by John Piper

John Piper's sermon emphasizes the freedom of believers in Christ, the significance of Palm Sunday, and the transition from the Old Testament temple practices to a personal relationship with Jesus as the new temple.

Duration: 42:03

Scripture: Matthew 16:21, Matthew 17:24

Topics: "Freedom In Christ", "Laying Down Life"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses three reasons why he has chosen a particular text for Palm Sunday. The first reason is that the text predicts Jesus' upcoming crucifixion and resurrection, setting the tone for the triumphant week ahead. The second reason is that the conversation between Jesus and Peter about the temple tax reveals the freedom of the children of God. The speaker emphasizes that if one lives a life of love in the freedom and acceptance of Jesus Christ, every need will be met. The sermon concludes by highlighting the importance of exalting Jesus Christ and being willing to lay down one's life for others, with the assurance that God will meet every need.

Transcript

The following message is by Pastor John Piper. More information from Desiring God Ministries is available at www.DesiringGod.org Matthew chapter 17, and I'll be beginning with verse 22. And while they were gathering to gather in Galilee, Jesus said to them, The Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill him, and he will be raised on the third day.

And they were deeply grieved. And when they had come to Capernaum, those who collected the two drachma tax came to Peter and said, Does your teacher not pay the two drachma tax? He said, Yes. And when he came into the house, Jesus spoke to him first, saying, What do you think, Simon? From whom do the kings of the earth collect customs or poll tax? From their sons or from strangers? And upon hearing his saying, From strangers, Jesus said to him, Consequently, the sons are exempt.

But lest we give them offense, go to the sea and throw in a hook and take the first fish that comes up. And when you open its mouth, you will find a stater, which is a shekel worth four drachmas. Take that and give it to them for you and me.

Father, on the beginning of Holy Week, we are always feeling inadequate to have affections that correspond with the weight of what we're about. And so I ask for all of us as we enter this week that there

would be an appropriate sense of earnestness and passion for you in your holy passion and suffering. I pray that all week long our minds would turn again and again to the coming of Jesus into Jerusalem in that last week, with his face set like flint to the cross.

I pray that you'd bring us to Thursday night with a sense of the weight of the world upon the Son of God. I pray that you'd bring us to noon on Friday with the unspeakable sense of wonder that the sins of millions and millions could be borne by one holy God-man so that we could be free. The sons are free.

And I pray that you'd bring us to next Easter morning, being spread out over three services with hundreds of people who need Christ, hearing the gospel and being won by the power of the Spirit to see and love Christ. Lord, make it a great week all over the cities, around the world, in Christendom, Lord. Purify your church and exalt Christ and gather in your elect from the four winds by the millions this week, I pray.

May missionaries be mightily encouraged this holy week, oh God. May we have ears to hear now as we open this word from your apostle Matthew. In Jesus' name I pray, amen.

There are three reasons why I have chosen this text for this morning. Let me tell you what they are. First, it's Palm Sunday and the text begins with this magisterial prediction of what's coming.

Verse 22, the Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men. They will kill Him and He will be raised on the third day. So here we are on Palm Sunday and Jesus looks into that week and He simply says, this is what's going to happen.

That's why I'm coming. I came to die. Nobody takes my life from me.

I lay it down on my own accord and if I lay it down, I will take it up again. I will rise. This week is going to be a triumphant week for Jesus.

So that's the first reason. There's a holy week flavor to that verse, even though the verse comes in the context of Matthew much earlier. Second reason, in this conversation between Jesus and Peter about the temple tax, there is revealed to us, to Peter and to us through this conversation, a glorious truth about the freedom of the children of God.

I want you to know this truth. I want us to taste it as a congregation. When He says, the sons are exempt or more literally, the sons are free, that's the message I want ringing in your ears as you leave.

The children of God are free, free. We could add, thank God Almighty, we're free. And what does that mean? What kind of freedom? And who are the sons being spoken of in this text? And what does it have to do with the temple? That whole cluster of issues presses this on me as something very, very blessed for our church.

Third, the miracle of the coin in the fish's mouth has a relevance concerning the majesty and power and sovereignty of Jesus and it has a relevance concerning education for exaltation and the giving toward it and the supply of the needs we have on our way to pay what we think we ought to pay. So those are my three reasons for landing on this text for this Palm Sunday. Let's take them one at a time.

We'll start with number two. We'll go to number three and then back and end on the prediction of Jesus that He's going to die to purchase all of this. So the reason I end with verse 22 rather than begin with it is just because I want to lead right into Holy Week with a clear biblical statement that we couldn't have the

freedom being spoken of here.

We couldn't have a Christ who is worthy of worship and who meets all our needs in miraculous ways sometimes if Christ had not gone to Jerusalem to die. That's the reason we take it in the order we're doing it. So start with me at verse 24.

They're in Capernaum, you see, Jesus and His disciples, probably Peter's hometown, maybe in Peter's house or outside his house at the beginning. Some Jewish people collect the two drachma tax and they come to Peter and they say, does your teacher not pay the two drachma tax? Now let me clarify what this is. Do not confuse these collectors of the two drachma tax with the tax collectors that are the bad guys that we read about all the time in the New Testament or in the Gospels.

They're not them. This is a Jewish tax to support the temple, not a Roman tax. The Romans are not concerned here at all.

And these tax collectors are godly friends of Jews. Nobody dislikes these people. These are people who come, they fan out across Israel and they say, it's time to support the temple again.

And people gladly and readily support the ongoing ministry of the sacrifices and the priestly work in the temple in Jerusalem. This is not a hostile operation here like the tax collectors who collect Roman taxes from Jews and Jews feel like this is seditious for Jewish people to participate in that kind of tax collecting. That's not what's going on here.

So let's get that real clear. It's going to make a big difference in how we see this. This tax is rooted in Exodus 30, verses 11 to 16.

We don't need to look at the details. But in Jesus day, it was still collected in one form or another. It was an issue of patriotism or religiosity.

And so when they ask, do you folks, do you and your teacher pay this? The issue is how pro-temple are you? Because, you know, Jesus has already got a reputation that he said some pretty negative things about the temple. Remember, he's already said, John, chapter two, destroy this temple. And in three days, I'll build it up again.

Now, it's a double meaning there. He means his own body. But everybody out there is listening.

Oh, you're going to destroy the temple. That's why he's brought to trial. Ultimately, it's because one of the things he said was, I'm going to destroy the temple.

I'm anti-temple. So they're going to say to him, OK, do you pay the two drachma tax? We'll do a little test here to see whether you are supportive of the temple or not. Now, here's Peter's answer to the question in verse twenty five.

Yes, that's his answer. Yes, we do. My teacher does and I do.

Now they come into the house and Jesus. Before Peter says anything to him. Says, what do you think, Simon? From whom do the kings of the earth collect customs or poll tax? From the sons, from their sons.

Or from strangers, from others. So Jesus is not going to let this little incident go by without a lesson. Outside, they had said, Peter, do you and your teacher pay this? He said, we do.

He walks in and before he has a chance to say anything to Jesus, Jesus says, let me ask you a question. And then he creates this comparison or this analogy. And he says, now picture a king over a kingdom like Caesar over Rome.

He has a family, children and a wife. And he he needs money to support the palace and the government. Does he tax his children or does he tax the citizens? That's the question Jesus is asking to Peter.

So you need to get clear the analogy. So he's comparing God over the temple and its temple services to this king over his kingdom. And he's asking, in the analogy, who pays? Sons or non-sons, strangers, citizens? Peter's answer, verse 26, from strangers.

It's a multiple choice question. Sons or strangers? And Peter says, be strangers. Now, that's the right answer.

And so here's the conclusion Jesus draws from that. Verse 26, Jesus said to him, therefore, the sons are free or exempt. Literally, it's free.

Therefore, the sons are free. Now, this raises lots of questions to try to figure out what's going on here. Requires a lot of meditation and reflection on this.

And I said to the family, he goes at supper last night. I came down. Having spent the whole day pretty much meditating on this.

And I said, you know, I am just amazed that when you meditate a long time on the words and the acts of Jesus, how unified what he teaches is with what the Apostle Paul teaches. It's just amazing. All thoughts of disunity between Jesus and Paul are based on superficiality, I think.

Meditating long and deeply creates another impression. So let's ask a few questions about the meaning of this. Who are these sons who are free? The sons are free.

And how are they free? Now, verse 27, I think, gives a clue as to who the sons are. So look at it. And I'll just pass over the miracle.

We're going to take that in a moment. But just read the brackets of this verse. However, Jesus says, so he says, the sons are free.

However, then jump to the end of the verse. Take that, namely the coin. And give it to them for you and me.

The sons are free. But. Pay it anyway.

So who are the sons here? The sons are Peter and Jesus, at least. In other words, Jesus and his disciples are the sons. The sons are free.

But Peter, so as not to give offense. Pay it anyway. So that's the clue as to who the sons are.

The sons are Jesus and his disciples. Now. Keep in mind here what I've already said.

The Romans are not in view here at all. This is not Jews versus Romans. And this is not Jesus versus Romans.

When Jesus distinguishes sons from non-sons. He's making a division in Israel. Just like John the Baptist before him.

And just like the apostle Paul. After him. Remember what John the Baptist said? He came preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.

And Jews flocked to him to be baptized. Mostly. And some didn't.

And the ones who didn't were saying to themselves. We have Abraham as our father. And John responds.

Do not presume to say. We have Abraham as our father. God can raise up from these stones children of Abraham.

In other words. Don't think that your descendancy physically from Abraham. Exempt you from judgment.

If God needs to fulfill his promise and doesn't have any candidates. He'll create some out of stones and make them the children of Abraham. And fulfill his promise.

His word will not fail. And you can't make it fail. Even if you are judged as Israel.

So John with his baptism is putting a dividing line in Israel. He's drawing a line right down the middle. Saying.

If you repent. You're part of the true Israel. If you don't repent.

And you just say. We have Abraham as our father. You are not true Israel.

Not the children of God. And Paul comes along. Later.

And says in Romans 9.6. Not all Israel is Israel. And then in verse 8. Chapter 9. He says. It is not the children of the flesh.

Who say. We have Abraham as our father. It's not the children of the flesh.

Who are the children of God. But the children of promise. Are the children of God.

So within Israel. First John the Baptist. Now Jesus.

And then Paul. Split Judaism wide open. Between those who will believe.

And follow Jesus. The Messiah. And those who won't.

And claim. The benefits. Of the promise.

Anyway. Because they're Jews. Even though they reject Jesus.

Their Messiah. That's a. Huge division. And that's what's going on here.

When he says. The sons. Are free.

He means. Those who have attached themselves to me. Are you now.

Are now. United to me. The son.

Remember that happened. Just a chapter earlier. Who do you say that I am.
Peter says. You are the Christ. The son.
Of the living God. And so as you attach yourself to. The son.
Jesus teaches you become. Sons of God. In a lesser.
But a real sense. For example. Matthew five.
Nine. Blessed. Are the peacemakers.
For they shall be called the. Sons. Of God.
He's talking to his. Disciples. So I am the son.
Attach yourself to me. By faith. And follow me.
And you will be. Sons. Of your father.
In heaven. It's the same thing we see in Romans. Eight.
The spirit testifies with our spirit. That we are the. Children of God.
And if children. Then heirs. Heirs of God.
And fellow. Heirs with Christ Jesus. If we will suffer with him.
That we may be glorified with him. It's this. It's this.
Heirship. With Jesus. That defines this new.
Sonship. Because here's. Here's an issue.
That a Jew would raise. At this point. With Jesus.
Jews. People would say. Wait a minute.
It says. In Exodus. Four.
Twenty. Two. That all of Israel.
Is the son of God. Israel. Is God's son.
Exodus. Four. Twenty.
Two. Israel. Is God's son.
You say the sons. Are free. We're all free.
And Jesus didn't say the son. Is free. Meaning all Israel.
He said the sons. Are free. Meaning.

I have come into the world. As the son. And now.
A new thing. Is happening. In relating to God.
I am here. As the Messiah. The son of God.
I'm going to lay my life down. For my people. And I'll save them.
Those who believe in me. And embrace me. Will be unified to me.
By faith. And will become. Individually.
And personally. Not corporately. Only.
But individually. And personally. Sons.
Of the living God. Children. Of God.
That's. What he's talking about here. As he appears.
And moves. And calls people. Into fellowship.
With himself. He is calling. Into being.
The new Israel. Who are individually. Personally.
And intimately. United to the Messiah. And thus.
Sons of God. Not just. Israel.
The son of God. But within Israel. Saved.
By Jesus. United to him. By faith.
And sons. Of the living God. And those are free.
Those are. Free. He says.
Which raises now. Another question. If you say.
Believers in Jesus. Followers of Jesus. Become united to the Messiah.
Become the sons of God. And they are free. And those who do not.
The unbelievers. In Jesus. Are not free.
Not free. From. The temple tax.
Are you saying then Jesus. The temple. Is to be supported by unbelievers.
Not believers. So it sounds like. The sons are free.
You don't have to pay this tax. Let the. Others pay the tax.

So support the temple. In your unbelief. But if you believe.

You don't have to support the temple. Is that the point. That's not the point.

That's not the point. Well. What is the point.

What is the point. Couple of things. The first one is this.

I think Jesus is saying when he says. I am here as the son of God. And.

I gather to myself a people. Who are the sons of God. And they gather to me to worship me.

And honor me as Emmanuel. God with them. And therefore that temple.

Is over. Doesn't need support anymore. It's over.

Matthew 2661. I am able to destroy the temple of God and to build it in three days. That's what they were accusing him of saying and it's true.

I am able to destroy the temple of God and in three days to build it again. What does he mean. He meant this body.

This is the temple. What does that mean in the context of Jesus. When Jesus says I'm going to lay my life down and the temple is going down for three days.

And the temple is coming up again in three days. What is he saying about the temple. This body and that temple.

What's he saying. He's saying. I'm the temple.

I'm the presence of God. I'm the place of worship. You are free from place now.

You are free from building. You are free from taxes. You are free from animal sacrifices.

You're free from the priesthood. You come to me and you're free from all that because that is over. That's what he's saying first of all.

That's over. I am God incarnate. I am the place of worship.

I am tabernacling among you. Or in another place Matthew 12 6 he says something greater than Solomon is here. Something greater than the temple is here.

Meaning here on this little square foot of ground. Something greater than the temple is here. And they were supposed to hear it's over.

It is over and in 40 short years it will be flat and never raised again as a place of communion with the living God. Jesus is now the place of communion with God and you can commune with him anywhere and you are free from buildings. You are free from location.

You're free from Old Testament sacrifices. You're free from Old Testament priesthood. You are free to unite with Jesus and know God personally as his own child and you do not have to pay that tax anymore because that building is over and all that it stood for is now found in me and I'm going to go lay my life

down and make it complete in just a few weeks.

That's the first thing I think we should caution ourselves with when we say oh he's saying unbelievers should now support the temple. Here's the second reason I don't think that's what he means because in verse 27 he sends the free sons to pay the tax. Strange.

Verse 27, however, so that we do not offend them, let's skip over the miracle, we'll come back. So he's not saying sons don't support the temple, unbelievers support the temple. He's saying sons don't have to support the temple.

It's over. But sons, to advance my cause, if it helps, support the temple. If it doesn't help, don't support the temple.

You're not bound to support the temple. This is not a law. You are on a new footing now.

What advances the cause of King Jesus? Not what is the rule or what is the tax by which I have to support this Old Testament thing. Now you're on a new footing here. What advances the glory of Jesus? That is what I will give my money to, that is what I'll give my life to, that is what I'll give my bondage to.

I am absolutely free from men, I'm free from these Old Testament regulations and Jesus says you're free, now go pay it. Because I judge that in this case it will remove an obstacle and enable us to get to where we're going in the laying down of my life in Jerusalem in due time. So what's the main point of this first observation about the freedom of the children of God? The main point is this, when you trust Christ, when you come to Him, when you follow Him, when you acknowledge Him as Lord and Messiah of your life, promise fulfiller of the Old Testament, sacrifice for your sins, your righteousness, your forgiveness, your justice before God.

What happens when you come to Jesus like that is that you become His child or the child of God, more precisely, you become a child of God and He becomes your point of worship and your person of worship and all that old attachment to the temple and its system falls away. And if, if there is any building involved incidentally and culturally, like the one in which we stand, in relationship to this Lord and this Jesus, it is absolutely non-essential to Christianity. Christianity is a religion without a geographical home base and without any architectural attachments.

This building is incidental and cultural. It is shot through with American culture and it is absolutely incidental to the cause of Bethlehem Baptist Church. If it got blown up this week, we'd meet in the parking lot on Easter Sunday morning or somewhere if it's too cold and we would praise God.

We would set our face to ask, what's the meaning of that almighty sovereign God and show us how to be church now with one another and glorify your name, Lord Jesus, in our lives. And when it comes to supporting a church like this or building the other one, you're on a totally new footing now, but I'm getting ahead of myself. Back off for a minute.

Let's go to point number two, the miracle. What is this miracle about here? Let's read verse 27, however, so that we do not offend them, go to the sea and throw in a hook and take the first fish that comes up. And when you open its mouth, you will find a shekel.

And Steve was right. That's worth about four drachmas, which is enough to pay for Peter and Jesus the tax. Take that and give it to them for you and me.

Now, what is the point of that little phenomenal miracle? Two things, as I judge one, if Jesus is now presenting himself to the disciples as the end of the temple and as the place where God is met and worship is done. Then it would be fitting for him to show himself as worthy of worship. And have you thought about what it took to get this coin into Peter's hand? Someone must decide that a coin be dropped in the sea.

Maybe it happens between the time he says it and time Peter gets there. Maybe it's been there for years. Somebody has to decide that a little fishy swim along and scoop this coin up into his mouth, but not swallow it.

And someone must decide and ordain and bring about that this little fishy be swimming nearby when Peter drops his line in the sea. And someone must see to it that the fish bites this hook, doesn't swallow the coin and stays on the hook until he's up out of the water and the coin is taken out of his mouth. That's God running the world in minute detail.

And I think in Jesus' mind when he said it might have been a twinkle in his eye that said to Peter, you want to worship? Fall down here. You don't need to go anywhere to worship. Just fall down now, because what I have just told you is going to happen in about 15 minutes.

That fish will bite your hook and it'll have in it exactly the right amount to pay this. And I did that. I did that.

And therefore you can go pay it in order to remove a stumbling block. But don't you make any mistake. Here's the place where you worship.

Jesus Christ is Emmanuel, God with us, and he is to be worshipped. So come back to me, Peter, and don't get stuck in the temple which is passing away. That's the first meaning I see in this miracle.

The second meaning I see is that freedom, the sons are free, means that you make your decisions about what you do, not on the basis of the law of the temple anymore, but on the basis of what will advance the cause of the kingdom, the cause of Christ. It's a kingdom-oriented, ministry-oriented, people-oriented, God-exalting thing that you think about. You say, all right, now what do I do with my life? You just don't get out your list and say, well, you pay the tax to the temple.

And then you pay your tax and you feel like you've done your duty and God's impressed and you're accepted. That whole dimension is not appropriate for the children of God. Rather, you say, all right, I have a life to live.

I have a savior. He set me free from hell and death and Satan and sin and the old temple sacrifices. How shall I then live? And the answer is to advance this Christ.

Anything that will remove obstacles from people seeing Jesus. Anything that will lift up and magnify Jesus. That's the way you live your life now.

And here's the added twist with the miracle. Jesus says, Peter, I'm teaching you now how to live in order to remove stumbling blocks. I want you to pay the tax anyway.

You don't have to. You're free. But for me, to glorify me, to remove obstacles from my being understood in the world and to give a right impression to people about me, shape everything in your life around me and on your way to do that, which may cost you your life someday, I'll meet every need no matter what.

So, for example, you don't have a shackle. Go down and drop a hook in the sea and when you pull it up, take the shackle and support my cause, not the temple. The lesson here is huge.

The lesson here is huge. It's just like the lesson of the feeding of the 5,000. Isn't it? Here these disciples, they have a little boy's lunch with five loaves and two fish and they have 5,000 people plus women and children and Jesus says, feed them.

That's like saying to Peter, pay the tax. I don't have any money. Just pay the tax.

Feed them. Pay the tax. Feed them.

This is my cause. I'm going to glorify my power here. And so they just start feeding them.

He said to them, I'll do it. And God does the miracle. And Peter, on his way to the temple, goes by the lake, throws in his line, pulls up, takes out the coin, throws it in the church.

That's freedom, folks. That is a free obedience. That is a freeing message.

So when he lifts off of you the law of the temple and he says, now make it your lifestyle to glorify me and remove obstacles to understanding me and making me look glorious and beautiful in the world. That's going to be really costly. It's going to cost some of you your lives because it's the path of love.

I am a loving Christ. If you want to show me as a Christ, I am. You love people.

You lay down your life for people. And if it's costly, just remember, I will meet every need. I will meet every need.

My God will supply all your needs according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus, Philippians 4:19. God is able to make all grace abound to you so that you may have enough of everything and may supply in abundance for every good deed. And you can see, can't you, that education for exaltation is just a little millimeter beneath the surface for me here, that the giving of last Sunday and the pledging of last Sunday is just right beneath the surface because we talked about a Gideon venture and an Isaac factor, and now we could add the coin component.

Do you see the point? The point is you are free. You do not have to believe in or support a building in order to be accepted by God. That's another issue entirely.

Coming to Jesus, being bound to him. The question is, will you make your choices to magnify Jesus now? Not law-oriented, but Christ-oriented. The law of Christ, magnify Christ, glorify Christ.

Then if you judge that a new building is one way by which now in this point in history, in this location, in this culture, it might be a good thing to advance the cause of education for exaltation in Christ, then you might say, I will give. And giving freely like that then means if you give freely like that, you're going to find coins in fish's mouth. I have heard stories already that is happening.

You're just going to find them. I don't promise that God will get you out of every financial scrape ever in your life. I promise this.

I think I can promise this from the word of God. If you set your face to lead a life of love in the freedom of the forgiveness and acceptance of Jesus Christ, every need you have will be met. Every need.

Let him define it, not you. Let him define need. Every need you have to love, to love in freedom will be met.

It's not easy to decide what those steps are to take of love. I'm not explaining that. That's not, I don't have a law for you.

I have a Christ for you. I have freedom for you. I have a hope for you and I have a promise for you.

I have no law for you live to exalt Jesus Christ and all your needs will be met. Now I close very briefly by referring to verse 22. The son of man is going to go up, he's going to be rejected, he's going to be killed, and he's going to rise again.

What's the point? The point here we are at Holy Week and it simply is this. I don't deserve to be free from sin, guilt, death, temple, fear, all the things Jesus freed me from. I don't deserve to have a coin found in a fish's mouth.

I deserve to be thrown into the mouth of hell. I don't deserve to have help on the way to love. I deserve judgment.

So how can I be promised freedom and promised escape from hell and promised provision for all my needs? Answer Christ died for me. That's the only answer. I have a substitute.

I have a glorious savior who put himself in my place and all my sins were borne by him and he supplied me the righteousness that I never could work out on my own. And therefore I am freed by him. And that's what this week is about.

We're going to look at it on Thursday night. We'll look at it on Friday noon. We'll look at it on Easter Sunday morning.

It's all about Christ's provision for sinners. Sinners who can claim to be a child of God, claim to be free, claim to be provided for miraculously in all of our needs. Jesus bought it.

That's what Holy Week is all about. Let's pray. Father, I plead with you now to take hold of human hearts in this room and bring them to see and love and trust Jesus.

And I pray that you would adopt them into your family and that you would set them free. And I pray, oh God, that this would be a week that no one would ever forget, especially any unbelievers in the room. May this be the week in which Jesus Christ is seen to be the son of God, the one who is to be worshipped above all other beings, and the one who sets us free and meets all our needs according to his riches in glory.

I want you to stand for a benediction. Now unto him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before the throne of his glory with rejoicing, to the only wise God be glory and majesty and dominion and authority before all time now and forevermore. And all the people said, Amen.

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