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# Rightly Dividing the Gospels

—Installment 71—

They return to Galilee

Jesus continues to foretell his suffering

He pays the temple tax

Gaulanitis and Galilee

Summer, ~ 29 A.D.

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Albuquerque 12 February 2017

## I. Review of recent events

- A. In the summer of the final year of his ministry, the Year of Opposition, we find Jesus laboring against multiple threats
  1. Murderous persecution
  2. Misguided support
  3. Unfaithful disciples
- B. In this period of much travel he heads north toward Mount Hermon
- C. Near Caesarea Philippi Jesus questions his disciples regarding his identity
  1. Peter answers with his second great confession, that Jesus is the Christ
  2. Jesus responds with a declaration of apostolic authority in his kingdom, the church
  3. He gives Simon the name Peter, calling his confession the bedrock of the church
- D. Jesus foretells his death and resurrection
  1. Peter, not yet understanding the nature of Jesus' mission, rebukes him
  2. Jesus sternly chastens him and delivers a sermon about the sacrificial calling he and his true disciples must heed
- E. Jesus ascends Mt. Hermon with Peter, James and John
  1. He is transfigured before them with Moses and Elijah
  2. God endorses Jesus to the three apostles and the archetypes of the Law and Prophets
  3. Jesus forbids the three to tell anyone what they have seen until after the resurrection
- F. He returns and finds the nine apostles in distress over their inability to cure a demoniac boy, arguing with the scribes amid an excited multitude
  1. Jesus rebukes the crowd for their lack of faith
  2. He heals the tormented boy in response to his father's anguished prayer: "I believe; help my unbelief!"
  3. Jesus tells his frustrated disciples that this miracle required a "heavy lift" of prayer, akin to casting a mountain into the sea, but no more powerful than the faith of a common mustard seed

**II. They return to Galilee; Jesus continues to foretell his suffering .....  
 ..... Matt. 17: 22–23; Mark 9: 30–32; Luke 9: 43–45**

- A. The substance of Jesus' prophecy here is largely the same as days earlier in Gaulanitis when Peter rebuked him
1. And it is echoed elsewhere in his teaching, as in his invoking Jonah as metaphor for himself
- B. But to the vignette, the three narrators provide complementary detail
1. Matthew
    - a. He prophesied his suffering in Galilee (i.e., on the way to Capernaum)
    - b. The prophecy filled them with grief
  2. Mark
    - a. The discourse accompanied their departure from the slopes of Mt. Hermon and continued as they travelled through Galilee
    - b. He sought secrecy, intending only his disciples to hear the awful message
    - c. They didn't fully understand him, but were afraid to ask clarification
  3. Luke
    - a. He instructed them to let the prophecy sink in
    - b. But they were hindered from full understanding
- C. This narrative paragraph describes the latter part of Jesus' retreat from the full press of his ministry following the death of John
1. The interval of retirement lasted approximately six months, from the third Passover to the following Feast of Tabernacles
  2. During the first part, Jesus declined to go to Jerusalem and Judea even for the Passover, and made himself hard to find in the northern districts, visiting wilderness areas, skirting Galilee's borders and even leaving the Herodian kingdom for a time
  3. In this second part, Jesus partly emerges from his retirement, returning to his usual base at Capernaum in Galilee, before finally returning to Jerusalem for the Feast of Tabernacles
    - a. The return to Jerusalem will mark the end of a period of secrecy.....John 7: 3-4
  4. We have understood the retirement in terms of the natural grieving for John and a strategic decision to delay the final conflict with the Jews until his ministry was complete..... John 7: 1
  5. But the accumulation of events during the period of retreat reveals its principal purpose: to teach his disciples an awful lesson
    - a. The disciples were not ready to bear the loss of Jesus and needed a measure of patient grooming to enable them to face their own suffering
    - b. Peter's experience has taught them not to contradict Jesus regarding his death, but they struggle heavily with incomprehension, fear and grief
    - c. During these six months, Jesus spends relatively less time with the public and relatively more with his disciples, preparing them for the calamity shortly to befall them
  6. His teaching regarding the triumph that would follow came mostly after the fact, during the 50 days
    - a. Thus ever does God teach us his nature by way of contrast

- i.* Light shines out of darkness
  - ii.* Matter appears from nothingness
  - iii.* Life arises from dead matter
  - iv.* Belief springs forth from doubt
  - v.* Mercy triumphs over judgment
  - vi.* Faith has the victory over sin and death
  - vii.* They who seem to fail have the final triumph
- b. Just as a sinner must know his condemnation before he can understand salvation, so the disciples must learn to suffer before they can learn to prevail

### **III. Jesus pays the temple tax at Capernaum..... Matt. 17: 24–27**

- A. Only Matthew, the lone tax collector among the apostles, tells this story
- B. The temple tax originated with the Law of Moses ..... Ex. 30: 11–16
  - 1. The annual tax of one-half shekel on each adult male helped to support the temple
    - a. It fell into disuse, but was restored in the time of Joash..... II Chron. 24: 4–6
    - b. In Jesus’ day, it also supported the scattered synagogues such as the one at Capernaum
  - 2. It was given in the spirit of atonement, a covering for sin in parallel with the blood of bulls and goats
- C. The shekel
  - 1. Originally a measure of weight counted in grains of barley (on the order of 150 grains)
  - 2. A coin of moderate value common in the ancient world
  - 3. The half-shekel tax amounted to about 7 grams of silver, weighing about 20% more than an American quarter
  - 4. The shekel was worth four drachmae, roughly four denarii (“pennies” in the KJV)
    - a. Since a denarius was a standard day’s wage for a common laborer, the half-shekel temple tax amounted to approximately two days’ wages annually..... (Matt. 20: 2)
- D. The collectors of the tax posed their question to Peter, who evidently also owed his own
  - 1. Matthew’s account says nothing as to whether the other disciples also owed taxes, only Peter and Jesus
- E. Historians say the Pharisees and Sadducees disagreed as to whether the tax were voluntary or compulsory
  - 1. The question put to Peter may have been intended not only to encourage payment, but to test Jesus regarding the disputed point
    - a. Note the sense of remonstrance in the negative formulation: “Doesn’t your master pay the tax?”
    - b. Usually collected around the Passover, Jesus and his disciples likely were a few months late
      - i.* Jesus had been absent from Capernaum all but perhaps one Sabbath day..... John 6: 59
- F. Peter’s reply to the tax collectors, “yes,” is correct but characteristically presumptuous
- G. When he comes inside the house, Jesus gives him a mild rebuke in the form of a question

1. Jesus spoke first (“prevented him”), meaning that Peter hadn’t told him the tax collectors’ question or his answer
  - a. This little revelation belongs to a class of minor miracles common to Jesus, wherein he knows what happens outside his natural sight and hearing, even unto the thoughts of a man’s heart
- H. Jesus’ question: Do earthly kings tax their sons or strangers?
  1. Peter’s answer: strangers
  2. Jesus’ conclusion: Therefore the sons are exempt
    - a. The argument Jesus makes here is mostly unspoken, but could be fully stated in the form of a syllogism with three premises and a conclusion:
      - i. The temple tax is rendered unto God.....(Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, 18.9.1)
        - (i) We take the same view today: although our collection is taken by men and administered by men, we regard our gifts as unto God and administer them reverently in that understanding
      - ii. I am the Son of God
      - iii. Sons are exempt from taxation
      - iv. Therefore I am exempt from paying this tax
- I. Rather than claim his privilege, Jesus provides the means to pay the tax in a way that demonstrates all nature is tribute to him, because he is indeed the Son of God
  1. He can compel a fish to provide payment
    - a. Swallow a specific coin
    - b. Bite Peter’s hook before any other fish
  2. Trivia: this is the only instance in the Bible of fishing with a hook
    - a. Many instances of fishing with nets
      - i. In the ancient world just as today, commercial fishermen used nets, while casual fishermen used lines and hooks
    - b. The OT has a few references to hook fishing, but all are metaphors for the capture of men except the discussion of Leviathan, who cannot be hooked .....(Job 41)
- J. This event teaches two important principles of Christianity
  1. Avoiding unnecessary offense
    - a. Even that which is allowed is sinful if it causes men to stumble ..... I Cor. 8: 4, 7–13
    - b. Paul did not claim all his rights as apostle in the church..... I Cor. 9: 1, 4–5, 11–15
  2. Payment of taxes
    - a. Jesus shows that he intends for his disciples to pay their taxes, and will help them be able to do so
      - i. Even though we can also claim to be Sons of God..... John 1: 12
    - b. He would later reinforce this principle ..... Matt. 22: 17–21
    - c. Rulers lay legitimate claim to our tribute (taxes) ..... Rom. 13: 1–7