

The Story – Master Of Provision

Happy Independence day to everyone. As we've expressed this morning, we are thankful for the freedom we enjoy as Americans. Thank God for all the brave men and women that have served and sacrificed and that are now serving and sacrificing to ensure freedom for all of us. I honestly don't know how much longer some of our freedoms will endure in this nation. I think we can all agree we are facing difficult days but of course that's nothing new. Every generation has faced difficulties and challenges. What's different now is that as a nation we have abandoned the spiritual mooring and lost the moral character that enabled us to overcome the challenges of the past. An op-ed in the Tulsa World this last week said it well, that we have arrived at a moment in time "when a nation's civic culture has become so debased that the nation no longer has 'the virtues necessary to sustain republican government.'" We are in trouble, and what we must acknowledge is our only hope is to be found not in government or politicians or a stronger economy or better education, but in God alone, and in Christ, our only Savior and Lord. He is the only hope for America and for our world.

Well, that's my little introductory speech for an Independence day sermon. We are in a year long sermon series and the last two Sundays we talked about Jesus as the Master of the storm and as the Master over evil spirits. This morning we are talking about Jesus as the Master of Provision. Whether it's the needs of a nation or a family or an individual, he is the Master of Provision. He is the one that can supply our every need if we turn to him in obedience and faith.

There is an interesting little story found only in Matthew's gospel. If you are reading along with us on our reading guide, you read this a few days ago. Turn with me to Matthew 17 and let's read this brief story about Jesus and Peter and then we will share some thoughts about his marvelous provision. (Read **Matthew 17:24-27**)

The first thing I want you to see in this story: **God knows our needs before we even ask.** Jewish men all over the ancient world showed their solidarity with the temple and the Holy Land by paying a temple tax. Obviously it was to be used to help support the temple. The tax collectors wanted to know if Jesus paid the temple tax, perhaps meaning had he paid it here in Capernaum or some other city, or perhaps asking if he even paid it at all, since he had been known to have some run-ins at the temple. Apparently there were some who refused to pay or who argued it was a once in a lifetime tax. We don't have time to go into all the background concerning the temple tax or the implications of paying it. Peter, perhaps in an attempt to protect

Jesus from criticism, blurts out that yes Jesus pays the temple tax. Peter was perhaps coming into the house to say, “Jesus, you do pay the temple tax don’t you?” But before Peter could even bring up the subject of taxes to Jesus, before he could even ask, the bible says Jesus was the first to speak. **“What do you think, Simon? From whom do the kings of the earth collect duty and taxes – from their own sons or from others?”** There are several explanations as to what Jesus meant by his question, but what I want you to consider is simply this: **Before Peter could ask, Jesus knew.**

I love that about Jesus. He did that so often with his disciples. They would be arguing about something, trying to keep it from Jesus because they didn’t want him to know how immature and petty they were, and he would tell them what they were arguing about, or tell them what they were thinking. He knew what they were facing. He knew their needs, their questions, even before they asked. Jesus knew what Peter was thinking and he knew what he was going to do about it.

We act like the disciples sometimes. Arguing, worrying, pacing the floor, trying to figure out how in the world we are going to make it. Wondering why God isn’t doing something. “Aren’t you aware of what the economists are saying Lord? Aren’t you aware of how difficult we are having it right now?” We act as if Jesus isn’t aware of what we are facing, what we are battling with. “Don’t you know what’s going on with my children? Don’t you know what’s happening in our marriage? In our lives? Don’t you know what the doctor’s report says?” And His answer is, “Yes. Of course I know and I care.”

Jesus said **“Your Father knows what you need before you ask him.” Matthew 6:8.** Of course God knows your situation. He is ahead of you! He knows where you are and what you need. He knows how desperate the situation is in our country and state and in your house. He knows what your bills are and what you and your children need. He knows before you can even ask. He is aware of everything that is going on and because he knows and because he loves you, I have every reason to believe he is going to take care of you and your family and your needs. He promised to supply all of our needs according to his riches in glory. He knows!

It’s good news that God knows our needs and what we are facing, but that isn’t all. Here is the next thing I want you to see: **God controls events far beyond our control.** So that no one would be offended or would accuse them of not supporting the temple, Jesus told Peter to go to the lake and throw out his line and catch a fish and he would find a coin in its mouth – a four

drachma coin, capable of paying the temple tax for both Jesus and Peter. I know we have some fishermen here. As good as you are, you have to admit there is no guarantee you're going to catch a fish when you go fishing, let alone catch a fish with a coin in its' mouth. You know Jesus was asking Peter to do something over which he had no control. He didn't say "go try to catch a fish." He said "take the first fish you catch." Go catch one specific fish – it will be the first one you catch and it will be the right one - the one with a coin in its mouth!

Peter had no control over any of that. We couldn't even begin to figure the odds on catching one fish out of all the fish in the Sea of Galilee, it would be the first fish we catch and it would have a coin in its mouth to pay our taxes. Peter couldn't control that, but he didn't have to. All he had to do was be obedient to Jesus and let Jesus do what only Jesus can do.

There are a lot of things we spend time worrying about that we can't control. We can't control the economy or whether terrorists attack us. We can't control whether our company lays folks off this year. We can't control other nations or leaders. We can't control the decisions our grown children and grandchildren make, but we don't have to control all these things. God's in control. He will provide. All we need to do is be obedient and rest in him. We can trust God to take care of the things that only he can take care of. He can even provide the money for our taxes in the mouth of a fish if he needs to. (You might use that as an excuse the next time you want to go fishing and your wife complains – just tell her you are going to get the money to pay your taxes.)

Stop worrying and trust God with the stuff beyond your control. God knows where you are. He knows what you need and he is in control. He controls the events we cannot control. Our times are in his hands. Trust Him. He is going to take care of you, even to catching the right fish when needed. He is Lord over all. Trust him. Here is the next thing I want you to see:

We can trust God's perfect timing! Stop and think for a moment about the timing involved in this miraculous catch. In the first place, someone had to have thrown or dropped a four-drachma coin at just the right time for a fish to catch it in its mouth, rather than it sinking to the bottom. The odds seem to be against that. Then at just the right time, that particular fish decided to swim by the place where Peter, sent by the Lord at just the right time, decided to throw out his fishing line. He wasn't fishing by a net this time. He was only looking for one fish, the first fish, the right fish. It suggests a divine appointment between Peter and the fish. I'm thankful for God's perfect timing.

Most all of us can testify to God's perfect timing. We may not always even be aware of it. Maybe he spared you from a terrible accident and you didn't even know it. If you had left the house 2 minutes earlier... Maybe that long wait for the train kept you from being in harm's way a few miles down the highway. Maybe it was a chance meeting with the person who would change your life in some way. Someone got off the elevator at that exact moment you were getting on. I don't know what it was, I just know God's timing is always perfect and right.

He knows what is going on in your life. He knows where you are, right this moment, and he is here for you. He will be right on time for you. The songwriter said, "He may not come when you want him, but he'll be there right on time." You can trust him with the timing of your life and your circumstances.

Several years ago I read a little book called *When God Winks At You*. The author makes the case for "how God speaks directly to you through the power of coincidence," but there are some things in the book that are far beyond coincidence. They point to God's perfect timing on behalf of his children. Let me share a story with you. (Page 53).

God's timing is right for you. Trust him! He knows where you are, what you need and when you need it. He is here for you.

I said this story reveals Jesus to us as the Master of provision. I believe he supplies our needs, but here is the key: **If we obey God, he will supply our needs.** You notice there was something Peter had to do in order to see his needs met. He had to obey what Jesus told him to do. He had to go out to the lake and do this crazy, foolish sounding thing the Lord asked him to do. Imagine, this professional fisherman - imagine how many fish he had caught in his lifetime and he hadn't ever found a coin in the mouth of one of the thousands of fish he had pulled out of the Galilee. He knew this was crazy, what Jesus was asking him to do. Now he is walking out there, in obedience - and most importantly in faith - about to throw his line out into the lake expecting to find a fish with a coin in its mouth.

"How come you aren't throwing the nets out today, Peter?" "Oh, I'm not really fishing today, just thought I would see if they're biting." "Seems funny for a professional fisherman to be fishing on his day off. What are you really doing, Peter?"

"What are you doing Peter?" I'll tell you what he was doing. He wasn't fishing, he was obeying. He wasn't expecting to catch a fish, he was expecting by faith to see the provision of God manifested. He was expecting by faith to find a coin to pay the temple tax. He was

expecting to see God honor his word as Peter responded in obedience.

The fish wasn't going to jump into the boat or up onto the shoreline. The fish wasn't going to come flopping up onto the porch of the house. Peter had to respond in faith and in obedience and go to the lake. He had to do his part and throw out the line. He had to act upon his faith. But don't miss this – **Peter's obedience allowed him to lay hold of God's provision!** Hear me again: **Obedience intersects with God's provision.**

We're trying to figure out how we are going to pay the bills and provide for our families and pay our tithes and pay our faith promise to missions and somewhere out there - in a place and in a way we cannot see or perhaps even fathom – God is preparing a fish to swallow a coin to pay your bills - or he is preparing some ravens to bring you food like he did for Elijah, or a job is about to open up or an opportunity is about to present itself. I don't know how he will do it, I just believe that provision is prepared for the children of God if we will continue to respond in faith and in obedience to God and his word.

You may think God is asking you to do something crazy. Sometimes he does. Going to the Sea of Galilee expecting to catch THE fish, THE first fish, THE only fish with a four-drachma coin in its' mouth out of all the fish in the sea, that's crazy! Yet that's what Peter did. God asks us to believe for the unlikely, to trust him for the impossible, to hold out for the miraculous. He asks us to obey him in faith and when we do, we discover his provision - sometimes in the most unlikely ways.

Trust him because God has everything under control. His provision is available. His promises are true. He knows your need before you can even ask. He is master over everything, including the events far beyond your control. His timing is perfect and if you will obey him, he will provide. Don't be afraid, regardless of the circumstances. Instead, trust him and keep on obeying his word. Don't stop. In God's time, God's provision will intersect with your faithful obedience. If you don't believe me, just ask Peter about how he paid his temple tax.

Jesus is the master over the storm, he is master over the forces of hell and he is the master of provision. Trust him, keep obeying God and his word, **“And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.” Philippians 4:19**