

Paid in Full

OK Confession time! I was on my way to Tarbert, Loch Fyne, a few weeks ago, and me and Susan stopped off at Arrochar to share a fish supper. I went into the fish and chip shop; Susan went ahead to park the car in the large car park overlooking Loch Long. There were hardly any cars in the car park; it was a dull grey day and we were only going to be a short time whilst we ate our fish suppers.

We had parked there often, in fact, it's been a ritual, a break from the long journey to Tarbert. But this day was different! I didn't realise that they had installed an invisible eye; a camera that takes a photo of your car when it arrives and leaves the carpark. Nobody told me and I walked straight into the trap.

This week I received a demand notice for £100. Reduced to £60, if paid within 3 weeks. The invisible eye had caught me red-handed.

Well, we all learn by our mistakes – don't we and I'm sure most of us will have committed a minor traffic offence at some time in our lives. It's not my first! However, it was the most expensive fish supper that I've had!

Fortunately, I had the funds to pay this fine. If not, I may well have ended up in trouble.

Three weeks to pay, or it rises to £100, and thereafter well maybe I would end up in court. Who knows?

In our reading today, Jesus paints a picture of a debtor's prison with these words...

⁵⁷⁻⁵⁹ “You don't have to be a genius to understand these things. Just use your common sense, the kind you'd use if, while being taken to court, you decided to settle up with your accuser on the way, knowing that if the case went to the judge you'd probably go to jail and pay every last penny of the fine. That's the kind of decision I'm asking you to make.” Eugene Peterson – The Message.

What does this say to us today?

Jesus is telling them to settle their debts.

Who is the judge in the story? The Judge is God, He has the final say. Jesus warns them, not to let things run till the judgement day but rather settle now before it's too late.

'Settle with your accuser on the way.'

I've shared the story of my fine, with some friends and some said, "Don't pay it, you only have to pay the council and the police, not a private company like the invisible eye and they will eventually give up trying to get money from you." But the word that I received this week from Jesus in this parable is,

If someone brings a charge against you – for me – a parking fine, and if you don't settle it, then they will drag you before the judge, who will hand you over to the police and you will be thrown in jail and you won't get out until you paid the last penny.

What happens if you can't pay the last penny? What happens if you have no money and you end up in a debtor's prison? Back in Jesus' days, prisoners were openly beaten, if they could not pay, in the hope that a family member or friend, would see this and come forward to pay the fine.

Now, these things don't happen today but if they did, I'm sure that you would have stepped in and paid the fine for me, if I couldn't pay before I ended up as a beaten-up prisoner. Wouldn't you?!

So settle with your accuser on the way, said Jesus.

He is telling them to settle our account with God. That's what the line in the Lord's Prayer is all about. Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debts. Forgive us Lord what we owe you.

But what happens is we can't pay the debt?

Continue with me on that memorable and painful journey to Tarbert Loch Fyne. When we reach the picturesque village of Tarbert and we

descend into the centre of Tarbert; perched high on a hill, is the outstanding parish church, where me and Susan were married, with its gothic crown and tall spire. But what always catches my eye is the weather vane, at the peak of the church, and immediately I look to see which way the weather cockerel is pointing.

I always hope that it's pointing south, a sign that warm air is coming up; I definitely don't want it to point north because, that may alert me to an arctic blast, and east is a cutting wind in Tarbert, it blows right up Loch Fyne and right into the entrance of Tarbert harbour. More often than not, it's west, and you know what that means, Atlantic lows – rain! So, I observe the direction that the cockerel is pointing and Susan will say to me, "John you are worse than the captain in Mary Poppins who was always looking for the wind of change."

Jesus makes this point to his listeners, you are good at observing the wind and the weather, for you can tell and predict what is about to happen but you are really hypocrites, two-faced people, you can look at the earth and sky and predict one thing but you can't tell what's happening, right in front of your noses. You can't interpret the signs of the times and see what God is doing in his World through me.

In this passage, there is great frustration in the voice of Jesus.

They are people who can see him but don't understand his message, and they hear but don't take it in, and Jesus is angry with them. "How I wish the fire was kindled."

But he knows that the fire has not started yet. The fire that he came to earth to start has not spread; he saw in his baptism, that things will change and the fire will spread.

His baptism, his death will be the game changer. This will bring the fire to the world. The fire is judgement.

When he spoke of his baptism what did he mean?

He was speaking of his death.

Jesus speaks of his own death through his baptism. A baptism of suffering, wounds, agony, blood and death. He was ready and willing to suffer all things, so that his people would know God's grace and forgiveness. It was burning like a fire within him. He was passionate. But

notice, he says, "I'm distressed until it is over". He was enduring this pain and agony before it even came to be.

The people of Israel, his people, were unable to pay the debt that they owed God. Unable to pay, So, here comes the solution.

They are guilty before God, they have no resources to pay but Jesus provides a way for them. His baptism is going to be their salvation. His baptism will open the prisoner's door and set them free.

Jesus has paid the price in full. He is the judge who comes out of the dock and sets the prisoner free by taking his place. This is the good news. That Jesus stands in our place before God. We stand condemned for our sin and Jesus says, no, I will take it for you.

I will pay the last penny. I will pay it in full.

This is what this passage is all about. The call to settle one's accounts – the way to salvation through Jesus...This has not changed in 2000 years – The message is still the same. Romans 3 v9-31, "We all have a debt of sin before God that somehow needs paid." Either Jesus does it for us by his sacrifice on the cross or we pay every last penny ourselves, resulting in a debt that we can never pay for we don't have the resources to do it. The coin that Jesus speaks about, which the man in prison had to pay back was the lepton, which means the thin one. It was worth even less than a penny. It was the widow's mite. Jesus is emphasising the point that this man would not get out of prison until every last penny or mite was paid in full and he had no resources even to pay a lepton.

Those who refuse to acknowledge Jesus or to ignore the plain signs of the way things are going will only have themselves to blame when they are finally called to give account.

My final point is that Jesus' ministry forced people to decide and so it will cause division – even families will be split over Jesus!

People should see the signs and make an informed decision

So we are all accountable before God. We all have a debt to pay to God. We are all unable to pay that debt. But that debt has been paid through Jesus and he has made it possible to know freedom and grace.

This is the heart of our Christian faith, that we have been set free and that we have no condemnation to face.

This is amazing grace wrote John Newton.

It's for all of us, rich or poor, strong or weak, King or pauper, we can all experience this wonderful grace. It gives you peace in your heart, that you are made right before God. That God is with you and on your side and you have nothing to fear in this life or the next.

Religion won't save us, money won't save us, power or prestige won't save us, only Jesus through his baptism of death and resurrection.

Bishop Ryle....“Peace with God is the principal thing which the Gospel of Christ offers to the soul. Peace and pardon stand in the forefront of its list of privileges, and are tendered freely to everyone that believes in Jesus. There is one who can deliver us from the adversary. Christ has blotted out the handwriting that was against us, and has taken it out of the way, nailing it to His cross. Being justified by faith we have peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ. There is no condemnation for those that are in Christ Jesus. The debt has been completely paid.”

Now returning to my guilty confession. You will be glad to know that it has been paid in full and your minister won't be appearing in court. But more importantly, the debt that I owe to God and that we all owe to God has also been paid in full and all that God asks for us, is to receive his payment and to live for him, lives worthy of the one who has set us free.

Today, receive his payment in full, only you can do this for yourself, and know that you are his child, set free to live in his Kingdom.

In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit

Amen.