

**Matthew 17: 24-27; “Money in the Fish’s Mouth”, A Devotional given at the
Prayer and Sharing Time, Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall
On January 28th, 2024, in the Library of the church.**

What an amazing incident this is, in the life of our Lord! It holds 3 great lessons for us which should convince us of what a great Savior He is! 1st of all – The Omniscience of the Lord Jesus concerning Peter and us. 2nd – His humble understanding of His own exalted position in relation to Peter and us. And 3rd – His providential ordering of all things related to paying what Peter owed, and what we owe as well. Let’s think about these things together so that we might grow in respect to our understanding of our great salvation.

1st of all – The Omniscience of the Lord Jesus concerning Peter and us. (verses 24-26)

The issue in this incident is right away given to us in verse 24, that Jesus had come to Capernaum, and He was staying at Peter’s house. Peter, leaving Jesus in the house, went out by himself to go to town for something. And on the way he encountered a group of men, who recognizing him as being one of the foremost of Jesus’ disciples, they asked him this question: Does your Teacher not pay the temple tax? Perhaps they were wanting to collect from Jesus personally at that time. And seeing Peter, they knew that they could ask him about it. Peter said – Yes. But not having any money to be able to pay this half shekel tax, either for himself, or for his Lord, he told them that he would mention it to Jesus and get back to them.

This temple tax was not a civil tax. All civil taxes were required taxes, and Jesus said, at a point a little later in His ministry, in Matthew 22: 21, to the Herodians who had asked Him – Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar or not? He said to them – You hypocrites! Show me a denarius. Whose image and inscription is on it? And when they told Him, He said to them, then: Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s. So Jesus was never a man who avoided paying taxes legitimately owed. However, this tax was somewhat different. This tax was a tax enacted for the upkeep of the temple.

Exodus 30, verses 11-16 explains this tax – “Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying: ‘When you take the census of the children of Israel for their number, then every man shall give a ransom for himself to the LORD, when you number them, that there may be no plague among them when you number them.’” “This is what everyone among those who are numbered shall give: half a shekel according to the shekel of the sanctuary (a shekel is twenty gerahs).” “The half-shekel shall be an offering to the LORD.” “Everyone included among those who are numbered, from twenty years old and above, shall give an offering to the LORD.”

“The rich shall not give more and the poor shall not give less than half a shekel, when you give an offering to the LORD, to make atonement for yourselves.” “And you shall take the atonement money of the children of Israel, and shall appoint it for the service of the tabernacle of meeting, that it may be a memorial for the children of Israel before the LORD, to make atonement for yourselves.” So this tax was collected at the same time that the census of the children of Israel was taking place in Moses’ day. And at that time, every man would give a half-shekel as a ransom for himself to the Lord.

Every male of 20 years and older was to pay this tax. When they did this, they were acknowledging that they were sinners. Whether they were rich or poor, they would pay the same amount. And their complying with these instructions was their saying, that this was the way, ceremonially, that they would give a ransom for themselves and make atonement for themselves through paying this tax. This paying of this tax was intended to make them see their need of the sacrifice of Christ, who would be the One who could truly atone for their sins. In paying this tax, they would be acknowledging that they needed the ceremonial cleansing which took place in the tabernacle and later in the temple.

And they were also, then, in paying this tax, recognizing the need for the upkeep of the temple. They had to pay the tax once every year because they needed to keep making this atonement for themselves. They were saying: Since we are sinners, we recognize that we need to have the Tabernacle and the Temple so that we can go through the ceremonies of the law related to our cleansing from our sins. We recognize the need for this. And so, every year we will pay this tax. Peter had told these men that the Lord Jesus would pay this tax. But he also did not know how it would be done, because he and Jesus were so poor. As far as I can determine, the tax was about \$60 for each of them. So Peter goes back home, and when he comes through the door into the room where Jesus was, Jesus had anticipated him.

Before Peter could relate anything of what had happened to him when he was out, Jesus said to Him – What do you think, Simon? From whom do the kings of the earth take customs or taxes, from their sons or from strangers? And Peter said to him – From strangers. In saying this, Peter was acknowledging that the sons of a king never paid taxes. Only the strangers to a king, that is his subjects, those who not of his family, paid them to him, and for the kingdom's maintenance. Jesus said – Then the sons are free. Meaning – I am the Son of the King who is the One whom this temple was built for. Therefore, I am free from having to pay this tax.

Jesus was telling Peter that He was exempt from paying this tax. But the thing that I want you to see from this exchange between Peter and Jesus, is this: Jesus' Omniscience. Jesus, being the Son of the Living God, the Great King over all the earth, knew exactly the things that were said by these men collecting the tax, and Peter's response. And He was vitally interested and concerned that Peter would understand His Omniscient power. These things are written for our instruction too. Because we need very much to know, and to believe, that the Lord Jesus knows every conversation that we have with others. Because He is God as well as Man, He would have us to remembering this.

Remembering Christ's omniscience will help us to pray more so that we might know Him better. When we pray and ask for wisdom we will be able to learn from Him what His good will is, concerning all the things that we do and say in response to the great concerns of our life. In my Dining Room at home I have a wooden plaque on the wall that says this: Christ is the head of this house, the unseen Guest at every meal, the silent listener to every conversation. This is a true statement. Christ has the ability to hear our every conversation. And He will interact with us in prayer, directing us to His word for wisdom, and by His Spirit He can and will interact with us.

2nd – Christ's humble understanding of His own exalted position in relation to Peter and us.

(verse 27a)

“Nevertheless, lest we offend them...” So, here is the Lord of glory, the Son of the King of Heaven, who knows that He as the Son is free. He, the Son of God, is exempt from paying this tax. But still He is concerned lest he and Peter offend those collecting the tax, or others who might hear about His choosing not to pay it. Why was this? It was because Jesus understood what His own mission was. He knew that His Father had sent Him into the world out of love for poor, fallen, sinful mankind. He, the Mighty God, would choose to take upon Himself human flesh. He would lay aside the prerogatives of Deity. He would choose to humble Himself to the point of death, even the death of the cross, and become a ransom for us.

Even the way that He lived His life showed His kindness, His love, His concern for our sinful plight. Because the Lord Jesus had no sin, He had no need to ransom His own soul. He had no need to give to the upkeep of the temple. Because as He said at one point – One who is greater than the temple is here. (Matthew 12: 6) So when Jesus came in His Incarnation, the Word became flesh and dwelt among us. (John 1: 14) He came to tabernacle with men. He was greater than the temple of that day because He was the true temple. And He was the true temple because He was, and is, the Son of God. And all men worship God in Him, and through Him.

All men ought to have honored Him. But it was not the case. He did not come to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. Jesus is the great high priest of all men who believe in Him. He would willingly pay the price to ransom us. His willingness to pay the temple tax, and not offend those who were collecting it, shows His sympathy for those who He would suffer and die for. As Alexander MacLaren says – “The Prince is free, but King’s Son though He be, He goes among His Father’s poor subjects, lives their squalid lives, makes experience of their poverty, and hardens His hands by laboring with them.” “Sympathy He learned in huts where poor men lie.” (MacLaren’s Sermon on Matthew 17: 25 and 25, P.381, Vol. 7, of his Expositions of the Scripture.)

Hebrews chapter 4, verse 14 says – “Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession.” “For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin.”

3rd – His providential ordering of all things related to paying what Peter owed, and what we owe as well.

Verse 27 says – “Nevertheless, lest we offend them, go to the sea, cast in a hook, and take the fish that comes up first.” “And when you have opened its mouth, you will find a piece of money; take that and give it to them for Me and you.” Once again here, I want you to see Christ’s Omniscience. Christ knew exactly how He wanted Peter to obtain the money to pay the temple tax. He knew exactly where He wanted Peter to go to find it. He knew all the details of this because He was Omniscient. He would appoint a fish to swallow a shekel which He knew had fallen from another fisherman’s belt probably. He appointed that this fish would swim over to the place where Peter would first come to fish. And He would appoint that Peter would successfully catch this fish first off.

These particular appointments would be a miracle of His (Christ’s) providential ordering. They prove His Deity. What a marvelous miracle this was! Peter is instructed to go to the Sea of Tiberias, and cast in a hook, and take the fish that would come up first. And when he would open its mouth, he would find there a piece of money, a stater, a coin with the exact value necessary to pay the tax for both Christ and Peter. He would fulfill the law of the tribute on Peter’s behalf by ordaining that Peter would miraculously catch this fish. He would show all of us His willingness to come into the world to be our Savior. When it was His Father’s purpose to send Him, He came. He would come out of love to the Father and love to all who He would lay His life down for. He would pay our sin debt by going to the cross.

Therefore, will you not believe that this miracle of Christ’s Divine Providence is something that, in a not so obvious way, is being done for you day by day? Christ died, but He also rose from the dead. He ever lives to make intercession for you. And now, in His providentially ordering all things, He goes before you, in watching over you. Having saved you, He will provide all that you need for life and godliness. He will order all the circumstances, and see to all the details, related to providing for all of your needs, both physical and spiritual both now, and all through your life, until He brings you to Himself, to be with Him forever!