

Jesus Pays His and Peter's Temple Tax

Matthew 17:24-27

by David Servant

Jesus teaches that as the Son of the King, He is exempt from paying the Temple tax, and that God often surprises us by using unexpected sources to provide for our needs.

Scripture: Proverbs 3:5, Matthew 6:26, Matthew 17:25, Matthew 17:27, Philippians 4:19

Topics: "Divine Provision", "Christ's Authority"

Description

David Servant delves into the story of the Temple tax, highlighting how Jesus, as the Son of the King of all creation, was exempt from paying a tax on a house that belonged to God, reaffirming His divine identity. Despite not having the responsibility to pay the tax, Jesus chose not to offend the tax collectors and performed a miraculous provision by instructing Peter to find a coin in a fish's mouth to pay their taxes, showcasing God's care and provision through unexpected sources.

Transcript

The Temple tax was one that all Jews were supposed to pay once a year for the upkeep and maintenance of the Temple in Jerusalem. It wasn't a large tax, but it wasn't a small one either, equivalent to about two days' wages for a working man. Because the Temple tax, like most taxes, was unpopular, special tax collectors were assigned to certain areas, and were responsible to see that as many people as possible paid. Perhaps knowing how influential Jesus had become in Galilee, several tax collectors approached Peter to find out if Jesus endorsed and personally paid the tax. Confident that Jesus was a very upright person (to say the least), Peter assured his questioners that Jesus did pay the tax, but then went to talk to Jesus about it. He was perhaps fearful that he had misrepresented Jesus, or he may have been planning on asking Jesus for the money to pay the tax while the tax collectors waited outside.

In a small way, Peter had misrepresented Jesus, and this becomes clear as we read Jesus' and Peter's conversation. As Peter entered the house where Jesus was, before he could ask Him about the Temple tax, Jesus asked Peter a question about who kings normally tax. Unfortunately, if you've been reading the New Living Translation as I suggested, you missed something significant that Jesus said. In the New American Standard Bible, Jesus' question to Peter is recorded as, "What do you think, Simon? From whom do the kings of the earth collect customs or poll-tax, from their sons or from strangers?" Peter responded, "From strangers," to which Jesus replied, "Consequently the sons are exempt" (Matthew

17:25-26). Jesus did not, as the New Living Translation says, contrast citizens of a kingdom and foreigners, but as kings's sons and his subjects.

What difference does this make? A lot. Jesus was not implying that He, being a citizen rather than a foreigner, was exempt from paying the Temple tax. Rather, He was implying that He, the Son of the King of all creation, was exempt from paying a tax on a house that belonged to that King! He was, once again, claiming to be God's Son!

Although He really didn't have a responsibility to pay the Temple tax, Jesus didn't want to offend the tax collectors, indicating that they probably were waiting outside for His money. So He gave Peter instructions for getting enough money to pay the tax for both of them. All Peter had to do was walk to the shore of the Sea of Galilee, throw in a line, and the first fish he caught would have a coin in its mouth that would exactly pay their tax!

Let's use our imaginations to picture what happened next. Peter walks out of the house and says to the waiting tax collectors, "I'll have the money for Jesus' and my tax in just a minute---I just need to go pick it up. Please follow me." Together they walk to the shore where Peter picks up his fishing rod and casts a line into the water. In a second or two, he has a fish on his line and reels it in. He takes the fish off the hook, opens its mouth, reaches in to pull out a coin, and hands it to the astonished tax collectors! I wonder if they had any more questions for Peter after that! I wonder if they became followers of Jesus themselves!

Q. What is it that made this story so miraculous?

A. God may have created a coin for a fish to pick up, but I think that's unlikely because it would make Him a counterfeiter. Therefore, He must have directed a fish to a coin that had accidentally fallen into the water from someone's purse, hand or pocket. So God had to know the exact whereabouts of a lost coin under the water, direct a fish to put it in its mouth, and have that same fish bite Peter's bait at a precise time! On top of all this, God had to let Jesus know in advance what was going to happen so He, in turn, could instruct Peter about getting their tax money!

Application: Although God rarely supplies our needs through coins in the mouths of fish, He often surprises us by using unexpected sources. That way, we are more likely to realize that He is the supplier. He cares about His children, and He loves to provide for them as they trust and obey.

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