

The Miracles Of Jesus Christ: The Coin In The Fish's Mouth

by Martin G. Collins

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The miracle of the coin found in the fish's mouth (Matthew 17:24-27) may be among the least dramatic of Christ's miracles, but it is certainly instructive. The context involves the paying of the Temple tax, and not surprisingly, only Matthew, the former tax collector for Rome, reports it. Although he did not collect this particular tax, it still interested him. His account of Christ's life tends to highlight the King and His Kingdom. Why, then, should the King be subject to a tax? Is He not the Son of God, the Heir of all His Father's house?

Coming to Capernaum, the tax collector asks Simon Peter, "Does your Teacher not pay the temple tax?" and Peter replies in the affirmative (verses 24-25). This tax was not a Roman civil tax but a religious one supporting the Temple in Jerusalem. God inaugurated this tax in the wilderness, instructing Moses to take a half shekel from every male twenty years and older (Exodus 30:11-16). It provided for the work of the Tabernacle and later of the Temple, including during the time of Christ. This tax was not an evil one per se, helping to cover legitimate costs of the worship of God, but as with almost all taxation, the money was often misused.

1. Does Peter err in how he answers? Matthew 17:25, 27.

Comment: Peter appears concerned that Jesus would not be esteemed a good Jew if He did not pay the tax. Not wanting to bring dishonor and danger on Him, he acknowledges Jesus' liability to pay the taxes as if He were a mere son of Israel. His reply implies that Jesus had paid the tax and would continue to do as every devout Jew should. When Peter enters the house, Jesus immediately asks him about taxation: "From whom do the kings of the earth take customs or taxes, from their sons or from strangers?" This demonstration of Christ's knowing what Peter had discussed elsewhere proves to the disciple that His divine omniscience is not limited by distance.

Peter answers the question with the only possible answer, "From strangers," and Jesus replies, "Then the sons are free." He refers to Peter and Himself as both sons of the Father, the Sovereign of the Temple, and therefore, free from the tax. However, rather than cause offense, Jesus arranges for the money to be found in a most miraculous way.

Technically, Peter errs about the legality of taxing the Son of God, but Jesus uses the principle of not needlessly offending a brother (Luke 17:1-2) to positively express His divinity and spiritual power: He performs a miracle. Christ is so considerate that He would rather pay any amount, however unjust or objectionable, than endanger God's work by unnecessarily provoking negative comments that would hurt its credibility, saying, "lest we offend them" (Matthew 17:27). His example should inspire us for when we feel slighted or taken advantage of (Romans 14:21-22).

2. How much control over the situation does Christ demonstrate? How precise is this miracle? Matthew 17:27.

Comment: Jesus' miracle consists, not only in His omniscience—knowing that the fish would yield the necessary money—but also in the fact that the first fish that took Peter's hook contained the precise sum required. The purpose and pleasure of Christ's will—which all creation obeys—guided that single fish out of multiple schools in the lake to Peter's hook. Christ, the Lord of Creation, controls all things, even the sea's fish and the earth's silver.

In describing Christ as the Word, the apostle John writes, "All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made" (John 1:3). Paul confirms this in Colossians 1:16, "For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him."

Using His spiritual power, He makes a fish produce the exact amount of silver coin to pay the Temple dues. This miracle reminds the disciples that He is indeed the omnipotent Son of God who controls all creation.

3. How carefully conceived is this miracle? How does Jesus view His relationship with His disciples? Matthew 17:24, 27.

Comment: The Greek word behind "tax" (NKJV) or "tribute" (KJV) in verse 24 is *didrachma*, equivalent to the Jewish "half-shekel," the Temple rate paid by every male Israelite above age twenty. Those responsible for collecting these half-shekels came to Peter. Unlike tolls, which were duties on goods, the Temple tax was levied on individual Israelites. The collected money, paid into the Temple treasury, defrayed the cost of Temple services. The Jews were much more willing to accept this collection than to pay the despised publicans who extracted taxes for Rome.

The miracle's preciseness is seen in the coin found in the fish's mouth, a full shekel (two *didrachmas*)—half a shekel each for Christ and Peter ("for Me and you"; verse 27)—the exact amount to satisfy the requirement. In this way, Jesus puts Himself alongside Peter as sharing His position and relationship as a son of the Kingdom. All true Christians fill this amazing position: They are no longer servants, but sons in Christ (Galatians 3:26). With His brethren Jesus shares His family relationship to His Father (John 20:17).

This account contains two principles. The first is doctrinal, teaching Jesus' place in God's Kingdom as the rightful Son. The second is moral, showing that greatness in the Kingdom derives from service and humility. Jesus' phrase, "lest we offend them," should motivate us to employ meekness and wisdom.