

=MIRACLES OF CHRIST=
Lesson 7
The Coin in the Mouth of the Fish

SCRIPTURE: Matthew 17:24-27.

AIM: to teach my pupils the truth concerning this miracle.

POINT OF CONTACT: You could start off by asking the pupils to name the different kinds of fish that they know. Then you can tell them you are going to speak about a special fish today. You might ask the pupils to give the different places in the Bible where a fish or an animal is mentioned and what kind of animal it is. You might list on the chalkboard the names of animals and fish they can think of and the stories involved.

INTRODUCTION: Matthew alone, among the first four books of the New Testament, relates this little incident of the miracle of the coin in the mouth of the fish. It is not difficult to understand why Matthew would be the only one to relate it. Matthew himself was a tax-collector. (Matthew 9:9) Compare this with Matthew 17:24, and it will be easy to understand why Matthew would be the one among all others to discuss the question of the paying of tribute money.

- I. THIS TEACHES THE FACT THAT WE SHOULD GIVE MONEY TO GOD'S HOUSE. Notice, if you would please, the word "tribute" in Matthew 17:24. The word "tribute" means "half shekel." Then we could state the question, thusly: "Doth not your master pay the half shekel?" This throws new light on the teaching. There are those who teach that Jesus was paying His taxes here. To my way of thinking, He was not paying His taxes, but paying His money to the house of the Lord. In the life of God's people, each Israelite above 20 years of age was to pay a half shekel to the service and current expenses of the tabernacle or temple. Read Exodus 30:11-16; 38:25, 26.

This payment to the house of God did not come at first as an annual payment but only as payable on occasions. Later it became an annual payment and a custom. This was called "the money for the ransom of souls." Actually it was ransom money. This was in addition, of course, to the regular tithe.

God has always had His plan to finance His work, and His people are supposed to give to that plan. First we are supposed to give the tithes and offerings (Malachi 3:8-10); but even over and above that, we are supposed to give annual offerings, special offerings, thanksgiving offerings, etc. This was an annual offering of one-half shekel.

- II. EVERYONE IS TO PAY THIS TITHE. (Matthew 17:25, 26) Jesus is saying here that a king does not require his own children to pay taxes. Since Jesus is the Son of God, the only begotten of the Father, He is not required to pay either—that is what He is teaching in these verses. However, in verse 27, He explains that in order that no one would be offended, He Himself would pay, even though he was not bound to pay. He is the only begotten Son of God, the Son of the King. He uses the parallel here of an earthly king not requiring his own earthly son to pay taxes. Even so, Jesus Himself did it.

If Jesus gave to the work of God, then certainly no one is exempt. Every person should give to God's work. (Teacher, why not pause here to give a tithing testimony or have some of the class give a testimony as to the blessings of giving. Be sure it is a brief one. Do not let anyone take over the class.)

- III. GOD PROVIDES FOR THOSE WHO GIVE. (Matthew 17:27) It is interesting here that when we give, God gives to us. It is a definite truth that liberality on our part tends to make God liberal toward us. Such promises as, "Give, and it shall be given unto you..." (Luke 6:38); "The liberal soul shall be made fat..." (Proverbs 11:25); and others in the Bible certainly teach that we can give our way to prosperity. God provides for those who provide for His work.

- IV. THIS ALSO TEACHES THE FACT THAT WE ARE TO PAY OUR DEBTS. There are theologians who believe this was a debt that Jesus was paying to the government—in other words, a tax to the government. Whether to the government or the church, it certainly teaches honesty concerning financial

arrangements. Christians are to pay their debts. They are to pay their debts when they are due. (Teacher, take a few moments here to stress to the class members the importance of debt-paying and how dishonest it is for someone not to pay his debts. Teach them that he is actually stealing someone's money. Let us build some character in our pupils along this point!)

- V. THIS ALSO TEACHES THAT THE CHRISTIAN IS TO DO NOTHING TO OFFEND ANOTHER, EVEN THOUGH IT IS NOT WRONG. See Matthew 17:27a. The reason Jesus paid was so that He would not offend others. In other words, He did not want this to be used as an excuse for someone not coming to Himself or to salvation. It is most interesting that most of us are concerned only about whether something is right or wrong. There are many things that might not be wrong in themselves, but they may cause us to hurt our testimony or influence with others.

“What does it matter?” someone might ask. It matters a great deal what folks think of us. Our testimony should be clean and pure. Do not misunderstand; we should not do wrong to make folks think well of us, but we should certainly be willing to give up anything questionable or even something that might be all right to do, if it will help us to reach others. This is perhaps the reason Jesus was baptized, the reason He tithed, etc. so that He might be a good influence. He was never a sinner; hence, He never needed to be saved. He did not need to be baptized. As the Son of the King, He did not have to pay the half shekel, but these things He did because of His influence.

Let us always be willing to give up anything within reason, especially those things that are questionable, in order to keep our influence and our testimony for Jesus Christ.

- VI. THIS MIRACLE ALSO TEACHES THE IMPORTANCE OF HUMAN INSTRUMENTS. Notice, Jesus sent Peter to get the money. He could have spoken, as He did in the case of the loaves and fishes, and performed this miracle. However, He always uses human instruments. He sent Peter to get the fish; Peter opened the fish's mouth; and there was the coin! He did not need Peter to do the work, but Peter needed to have a part in the work. Jesus never saves a soul and never performs a miracle without someone being responsible, some human instrument having a part. Let us yield ourselves to be that instrument.

- VII. THIS ALSO TEACHES US THAT WE SHOULD WORK FOR OUR MONEY. Jesus could have just given the money to Peter, but not so. He sent Peter to the sea and sent him fishing. Bear in mind, fishing was Peter's work; so Jesus sent Peter to work to get the money. We should teach our boys and girls that they should work for what they get! An easy handout, socialism, etc. are certainly not pleasing to God. God's law is that if a man would not work, neither should he eat.

- VIII. NOTICE THE WORDS IN MATTHEW 17:27, “...AND GIVE UNTO THEM FOR ME AND THEE.” Peter did not ask Jesus about his own offering for the temple; he had asked Him about the Lord's offering. Peter went to get the Lord's offering, and in so doing, the Lord gave him his own offering. What a beautiful picture this is of Matthew 6:33! If we seek first God's kingdom, He will add these other things to us. Peter was interested in doing the work for Christ, and in so doing, Christ did the work for Peter and provided his need also. What a wonderful way God has of providing for the needs of people! This is found so beautifully here.

- IX. IN THIS ENTIRE MIRACLE, JESUS IS TEACHING PRESCRIBED, SYSTEMATIC AND PLANNED GIVING. This should be taught to the class. Notice that God's day is found in I Corinthians 16:2. The amount is found in Malachi 3:10. Jesus commends this in Matthew 23:23. God's plan is, on the first day of the week, every Christian should bring the tithe and offering to the Lord.

CONCLUSION: To help you for your lesson Sunday, you might check the word “tithe” in your concordance to find what it was used for in the Scriptures. You might read the story of Abraham, who was the first tither; or Jacob, who was a tither. Then you might look up the word “giver” or “gift” in the concordance for some help. There are many directions a teacher can go in a lesson like this, but it definitely is a stewardship lesson.

QUESTIONS:

1. How much of our income belongs to God?
2. Is this all we should give God?
3. How much money was in the mouth of the fish? (No doubt there was one shekel, because there was enough for both Peter and Jesus.)
4. What will Jesus do for those who give to Him?
5. Where was this money to be brought? In other words, it was for the service of what place?
6. Which is the only one of the first four books of the New Testament which mentions this miracle?
7. Why do you think it is mentioned in this book and not in any of the others?
8. How many days after a debt is due should a person pay it?
9. What should a person do if he finds himself completely unable to pay an honest debt? In other words, suppose a person becomes sick and cannot work; what should he do if he cannot pay a debt on the date it is due?
10. What is the best way to get money?
11. Tell in your own words the little story that Jesus gave as an analogy with this truth.
12. Did Jesus really have to pay the half shekel?
13. Then why did He do it?
14. Why didn't Jesus just say the word and have a coin appear in His hand? Why did Peter have to go out fishing to get it?
15. What was Peter's vocation?