

# The Curious Incident of the Fish and the Coin

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[ 0 : 00 ] And we'll read that short passage once again from verse 24 to the end. It's on page 992. When they came to Capernaum, the collectors of the half-shekel tax went up to Peter and said, Does your teacher not pay the tax? He said, Yes. And when he came into the house, Jesus spoke to him first, saying, What do you think, Simon, from whom do kings of the earth take toll or tax, from their sons or from others? And when he said, From others, Jesus said to him, Then the sons are free. However, not to give offense to them, go to the sea and cast a hook and take the first fish that comes up. And when you open its mouth, you will find a shekel. Take that and give it to them for me and for yourself.

If I was going to give a title to this passage, it would probably go along some of these lines, the curious incident of the fish and the coin. But then you have to be careful with that because lots of people would want to read this, these few verses, just out of curiosity and nothing more. There are many curious incidents in the Bible, if that is the way you approach the Bible. But that's not the way we are coming to it today. I have no question whatsoever about the reality of what happened. I accept the truth of what happened here. This is not just a parable. It's not just a nice thought. This really happened because Jesus is God and God is the God of the universe. And he knows every single incident that takes place. And he's able to order every single incident that takes place in the world. And we'll be the losers if all we're coming to, if the only way in which we're reading this chapter is by curiosity. It's far more useful to us to once again, to recognize that this once again is a revelation of Jesus Christ. And it's a revelation of him, not just in his power and his unique knowledge of what's going on, even down to the depths of the sea. It's a revelation of Jesus in three things, in three respects. First of all, he is the Son of God. Let's look at the very beginning of this passage to what goes before. When they came to Capernaum, the collectors of the half shekel tax went to Peter and said, does your teacher not pay the tax? He said, yes. When he came to the house, Jesus spoke to him first saying, what do you think, Simon? From whom do kings of the earth take toll or tax? From their sons or from others? And when he said from others, Jesus said to him, then the sons are free.

Now, this tax was a tax on every male over 20 years old. And it was simply because they belonged to Israel. It was almost like a poll tax, I suppose you could call it that. And it went towards the upkeep originally of the tabernacle in Moses' day. And then it went towards the upkeep of the temple.

It was half a shekel. So that you had to pay that if you were over 20 years old. And on this occasion, it's clear that Jesus had not paid. He appears to have paid before then, because remember, Jesus was over 30 years old. And this question had not arisen in the 10 years between Jesus being 20 years old and having to start paying the tax. And now when he was over 30 years old. So it's clear that up until now, he had paid the half shekel. But for some reason, he hadn't paid it on this occasion.

[ 4 : 45 ] And I believe it's quite clear why he hadn't, just for this very reason. So that to make those who collected the tax stop and think and ask, who is this Jesus of Nazareth?

He wasn't a rebel as far as these things were concerned, because it was him that said, render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's. But render to God the things that are God. So Jesus didn't have a rebellious spirit against authority. Not least the authority that was instigated in the Old Testament in the book of Exodus. That wasn't the case at all. But Jesus, on this occasion, wants everyone to stop in order for him to make this point that he is the son of the king. And as such, he doesn't need to pay it, although he will.

And in making this revelation, Jesus is announcing to the whole world that not only is he the son of God, but he is also everything that the temple represented. Again, one of Israel's mistakes was that

they lost sight of the significance of the temple, and it became for them just a magnificent building without the glory of God. They were ardent in their love for their temple as a place of bricks and mortar. But they had lost sight of the need to recognize that this was the place where God dwelt. Now, Jesus was rectifying that by forcing them to think about what the temple meant. You remember that the temple was built in Solomon's time. Well, not this temple, but the first temple had been built in Solomon's time. And there was no more magnificent building in all the world than Solomon's temple. There was no more, and to this day, there remains no more expensive building in the world than Solomon's temple. It was truly unique. It was astonishing. And you remember that it was pretty much the same design as the tabernacle that God commanded Moses to build when the Israelites were going through the desert. And it consisted basically of two areas. There was an outside area, and there was an inside area. And the same was true with the temple. There was the courtyard in the temple where the sacrifices were made on a daily, a monthly, and a yearly basis, where the altar was, and where the animals were taken, and where the animals were slain, and where the animals were offered to God as payment, as the atonement, to make atonement for the sins of Israel. But there was also the inside of the temple. And the inside consisted of two places. One was the holy place, and the other was the most holy place. And the holy place, in the holy place, there was the two pieces of furniture. There was the lampstand, the golden lampstand, and there was a table on which there was bread. On the inside, in the most holy place, there was one piece, there was one item, and that was the Ark of the Covenant. And in Solomon's time, the glory of God filled the most holy place. The Shekinah glory of God. This was truly the place where God chose to dwell in his temple. The presence of God was there, so much so that no one was ever allowed to go into that place where the glory of God was dwelling on the Ark of the Covenant. It was his throne. [ 8 : 47 ] In other words, the temple equaled the presence of God. And that was what the Israelites lost sight of. Through time, they began to worship the building, rather than the God who inhabited the building.

And that was one of the greatest mistakes that they ever made. In fact, the greatest mistake. Because as soon as you take your eyes off God, then your worshipful eyes fix on something else. And that was why, of course, the children of Israel began to worship other gods, because they took their eye away from the glory of God in his temple. In other words, the temple then, equaled the glory of God. That's what it represented. That was the purpose for which it was built. God dwelling among his people. And here is Jesus making this amazing statement. The sons are free. Now, he's saying a lot more in that statement than just that he is the son of an abstract king. He is saying he is the son of the God who dwelt, whose glory inhabited the holy place. In other words, he is everything that the temple pointed to and represented. He is the temple. [ 10 : 10 ] He is God among his people. You remember what John said about him in John chapter 1. And we beheld his glory. The glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.

You remember one of the names of Jesus is Emmanuel, which means God among us. And here is the same God whose glory filled the most holy place in Solomon's day. And he now comes down as one of us. And whilst it's true to say that he laid his glory aside, there's another sense in which he took his glory with him. Never forget there was something truly remarkably glorious about the very event of God becoming one of us to save us from our sins. Remember just before Jesus was taken and crucified on the cross at Calvary, he described his death like this. Now is the Son of Man glorified and God is glorified in him. [ 11 : 18 ] That's what he meant. That's what he was talking about when he said those words. And so the glory of God here is the glory of God right in front of these men who have the audacity to ask the very God himself to pay the temple tax.

You see how ridiculous it all was. And they were blind. They couldn't see it. And Jesus is saying, stop for a moment and think about all that I have done in your presence. And every evidence that I have given to you of whom I am, you're not listening. You're not paying attention. You're treating me the same as everyone else because for you, your religion is just a routine of ritual and clothing and all the things that you're doing week after week, month after month, in and around the temple. You're not giving thought to the God of the temple. And here he is, he's saying, I am the God of the temple, the Son of God.

That's the first thing in which Jesus is revealed in this little curious passage. The second way in which Jesus is revealed is that he is the Lord of the universe.

[12:44] The Lord of the universe. And here we're asking the question, if this Jesus is who he says he was, the Son of the King, the Lord of glory who appeared in the temple of Solomon way back these hundreds of years ago, how do we know what proof is there?

Well, in actual fact, there's two things. First of all, I would expect that if someone claimed to be God in the flesh, then the very first thing I would expect is for that person to prove it.

But he did prove it. He proved it countless times. He had proved it before. He had raised the dead. He had healed the blind. He had given hearing to the deaf. He had walked on the water. He had done all of these things in the presence and under the noses of hundreds of people.

He had given ample proof. And here, once again, there was going to be the proof that should have convinced everyone of who he was.

[14:16] But he does it in the tiniest of ways. This is not Jesus this time walking on the water. This is not him raising the dead.

This is what you might call a little obscure act of God. It was a miracle insofar as Jesus knew that of all the thousands of fish in the lake of Galilee, that this one fish by his particular providence had happened to eat a shekel.

He knew that. He knew everything that proves that he is the God of the universe. It is utterly amazing.

It's also utterly encouraging for God's people this morning that nothing goes past God. The same Jesus, remember, who knew that this little fish in the middle of the Sea of Galilee had somehow or other, I don't know how the person had lost the coin in the first place, that somehow this fish had seen the glistening of the coin and had opened its mouth and had grabbed the coin and perhaps it had stuck there for days.

I don't know. It doesn't matter. But he knew it was there. He knows every sparrow. He knows every breath that you and I take.

[15:52] He knows every conversation that you and I are involved in. He knows every situation that we are in today. There is nothing that Jesus is not intimately weaved into in our lives.

And Romans chapter 8 tells us something that's even more remarkable, that for those who love God, all things work together for good.

All things. Somebody said once of that verse, if it wasn't that that verse was in the Bible, I could never believe it.

That's a verse that sometimes you just have to believe. We will never understand it. We may never even see the result of that verse.

We just have to accept it. All things work together for good to those who love God and who are called according to his purpose.

[17:08] The little things, the disasters, the calamities, the frustrations, the darkness, the confusion, the seeming hopelessness of this world.

God is able to transform them and to weave them all into his great plan. Even the little fish in the sea do his will.

Isn't that amazing how many times in the Bible the animals are used by God? There was Balaam's ass, his donkey. There was the fish that swallowed Jonah.

There were the animals in the ark and they all obeyed God. Isn't that amazing how animals are more willing to obey God than we are? It's a real salutary lesson, isn't it?

The ox knows its master, but my people don't know me, says God. How obedient are we? How do we listen to the voice of God?

[18:19] That's the second thing. The third revelation of Jesus is as Savior. And when I look at him as Savior in this little passage here, the first question that comes to me is, why did Jesus have no money to pay the tax?

He sent Peter to the Lake of Galilee to fish for this fish because he didn't have any money. He didn't have anything in his pocket. What have we said?

We've said, first of all, that this is the Lord of glory, God himself, whose temple reflected in it being the richest, most expensive building in all the world, nothing before it was like it and nothing after it was like it.

And that was to reflect the God who is in himself, nothing but rich.

And we've already seen that Jesus is the Lord of the universe who knows every single detail of life and everything that goes on in this world.

[ 19 : 31 ] How come he has no money? Isn't that the most astonishing fact? If he could raise the dead, surely he could find a shekel coin from somewhere in order to pay this tax.

But once again, we get to see something that is truly remarkable about Jesus, but it's not just remarkable, it's absolutely essential so that we will know why he came into the world.

And the Apostle Paul puts it this way. He says, You know the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ in that though he was rich, yet he became poor so that we, through his poverty, might become rich.

So here is the God of all riches, the God with everything in the universe at his disposal. The God who created all the gold in the world and he has nothing.

He doesn't even have a shekel to pay, half shekel to pay the temple tax with. And we are to see in that one more piece of evidence of the grace and the love of God who came into this world to become a servant and to give himself into the hands of God as the sacrifice ultimately for our sin that would pay completely the price of our sin and so that we could become rich by one day being raised and going forever to be with the Lord.

[ 21 : 16 ] Now, as well as seeing these three revelations of Jesus Christ, we also see something else. we see how Peter discovered that revelation for himself.

And that's just as important for you and I today because all very well talking about Jesus and who he was and what he came in to do. But the question remains, how can I discover him?

How can I know this Jesus for myself? Is there a way? Am I cut off from him? Is there any way in which I can take part in what he came to do and to achieve in this world?

How can I be a Christian? How can I understand what Jesus came into the world to do in such a way that my life will be changed in the way the Bible talks about when it talks about being born again and talks about being raised to newness of life with my sins forgiven and my life made anew, transformed?

How can I have this for myself? Well, the key word is faith. And I want us to see just in the closing few moments here of the simple faith of Peter that listened to Jesus' promise and acted upon it.

[ 22 : 42 ] What was Jesus' promise? He says this. He says, however, verse 27, Go to the sea and cast a hook and take the first fish that comes up and when you open its mouth you will find a shekel.

Now that was the promise. When you open its mouth you will find a shekel. Notice the way that Jesus could have created a shekel out of nothing.

He had created the world out of nothing. But that would not have exercised Peter's faith and it is essential that God's people must discover what faith is and live.

That's the only way that we can live. Faith that first of all believes the promise of God. In this case the promise of Jesus was when you find the fish open its mouth you will find a shekel.

That's it. That's the promise. Now in many ways there could not have been a more ridiculous promise. How in the world do you really Peter must have been his mind must have been doing somersaults.

[ 23 : 55 ] Do you really believe that I am going to go down to the lake of Galilee and I'm going to cast Peter was a fisherman he knew exactly what he was doing when he was cast. He had caught thousands of fish before and he had never found a single coin in any of their mouths.

Do you am I really expected to believe that on this one occasion that if I go the first fish I catch I'm going to find a shekel. You know there was something ridiculous about it wasn't there?

Imagine he had been going down to the lake of Galilee off he went to the lake of Galilee with his fishing rod and his mates he meets his mates on the road and his mates say to him where are you going Peter? And he's saying I'm going fishing.

Oh yes I'm sure you are. And he says to them I'm going to find a shekel in the mouth of the first fish I come to. They would have thought he was daft.

Completely loopy. Same way as the world thinks that you and I are loopy because we believe in Jesus. There's something utterly it just doesn't make sense to this world what we believe.

[ 25 : 09 ] Even I was thinking the other day you know the Trinity itself God being three persons Father Son and Holy Spirit. how can you explain that to an unbelieving world?

Well you can't in a way that they are going to accept until that same God works in people to take away the blindness from their eyes and gives them to see that this God is the living and the true

God.

He is Father Son and Spirit. The more you go through the Bible the more you understand about God as far as the world outside is concerned as far as the unbelieving world is concerned it is the most ridiculous story that you could ever ever stake your life on and yet to us today it is our very lives.

You see this is where you come down to what Paul says that the natural man cannot receive the things of God until God takes away the scales.

I'm asking you this morning if you are reading this passage and you're saying to yourself I don't even know why I'm here this is so absurd I'm challenging you this morning to go to God and to ask him to take the scales away from your eyes to give you the faith that will see for the first time the truth the marvelous truth because you know in one sense there is something absurd about the Bible to the unbelieving world but you know once you receive the Bible and the gospel by faith it is the most marvelous message that you can ever come across you can't live without it I can't live without it it's what my life consists of I'm not

[ 27 : 16 ] I'm often I fall as a Christian I think things I say things I do things that I know I shouldn't and I say to the Lord sometimes how can you possibly continue to love me as your own son and yet that's the grace of God that continues to love us as his people and that brings his believing people into his own kingdom and I'm asking you today I'm asking you to go to the Lord and ask him to take the scales away from your eyes to take away any obstacle that there is between you and coming to know him and to give you the faith that Peter had that simple faith that simply accepted the promise you will find a fish and you will find it doesn't matter how absurd it is just do it that's faith so off he went he had to go the very promise itself wasn't enough he had to act on the promise a bit like in

John chapter 11 when Mary and Martha their brother had died and where he had been in the tomb for four days Jesus went to the tomb and he said to them take away the stone from the tomb they had to do it Jesus could have raised Lazarus in a different way he could have removed the stone himself miraculously no they had to take away the stone that was them acting upon the command of Jesus and they did so in faith you have to do the same there is no other way to belong to Jesus than faith we are saved says Paul by grace through faith you cannot be a Christian without faith you can't be a Christian you could be the most obedient upright decent respectable person in this town and you cannot be but you cannot be a Christian without faith in Jesus Christ to take away your sins and this is the kind of faith that is so simply displayed here by Peter and he says he says yes I'll do it and off he went acted upon Jesus simple in many ways there's nothing simpler is there than for Peter to take his fishing rod and off go off to the to the Jesus never asks us or commands us to do things which we can't do he commands us to believe he commands us to come in faith and repentance he commands us to take hold and the question is today will you listen and will you act upon that command the last thing I want us to see is that Peter discovered there on that day that Jesus always provides for his every need and I want to leave you with that thought with that truth this morning because I believe that it's the last thing that this little curious incident leaves with us and it's something that we forget and we fret about and worry about and we beat ourselves over because we tell ourselves on the one hand my

God shall supply all your need according to his riches and grace to his riches and mercy let's pray father in heaven once again we come to your word we pray to come to it in faith we ask lord that you will bless your word to us we pray that it will have a profound and lasting impact upon each of us wherever we stand today we ask that you will speak to us and move us and draw us above everything else to

Jesus in his name amen