

Miracles of Jesus 12-10-07a

This is Sunday, the 7th of October, 2012. We continue our study of the miracles of the Lord Jesus by looking this morning at the coin in the fish's mouth. This is Genesis.

Ah, Genesis. I just got through talking about Genesis. This is Matthew chapter 17, beginning in verse 24, 24 through 27.

We'll take a moment at the outset to dedicate our time of study and worship to the Lord. Father, we're grateful for another opportunity to gather to spend time together in fellowship and in the study of your Word. We pray that God the Holy Spirit will illuminate the account, will illuminate the truth, and illuminate our hearts so that we can not only understand the substance of these events that took place during Jesus' earthly ministry, but see their pertinence and applicability to ourselves as we live our lives in the time that remains to us before the return of the Lord and the uniting with those who have gone before us, and most importantly with Him and with you when He comes to receive us to Himself.

We pray these things in Jesus' name, Amen. Having turned to Matthew chapter 17, let's read this account and see its context. First of all, we have just looked at the healing of the demon-afflicted boy at the foot of the Mount of Transfiguration.

So we should already have a pretty good idea of the context here, which we have reviewed in great detail over the past few weeks. How did this section begin? Who do men say that I am? Who do you say that I am? Peter gives what's been called the Great Confession, you are the Christ, and Jesus says, well, guess what? The Christ is going to be delivered into the hands of men and crucified, and He'll rise again the third day, and Peter says, Lord, let it not be so. Jesus rebukes him and says, your mind is on the things of men, not on the things of God.

Then, what does Jesus do? He splits the group. He takes the advanced class up the mountain, leaves the rest of the group at the base. On the top of the mountain, Lord Jesus is transfigured, Moses and Elijah down at the base, the remaining disciples get the test of the opposite.

You have heavenly divine glory at the top, you've got demon activity at the bottom. And you have to learn how to move away from and overcome the influence of the world of flesh and the devil before you can climb the mountain and see these glorious things. So they're still learning what Peter, James, and John have already figured out, which is the power of God, greater is He that is in you than he that is in the world.

So they're still getting an education on that lesson, Peter, James, and John have gone to the top to learn about the destination. Here's something to help you remember why Jesus is going to be delivered into the hands of men and crucified and raised the third

day, because this is necessary for Him to enter into His glory and it is witnessed by the law and the prophets, Moses and Elijah. And you'll notice that death had no power over Moses, death had no power over Elijah, because God has them standing here with the Lord Jesus.

So don't be worrying about, people get so wrapped up about death, the worst of all possible things is death, and nothing could be worse than death, and I'll tell you what's worse than death is coming back after death and standing at the judgment seat of Christ to be shamed and humiliated because we were stupid while we were here on earth. I would rather die a victorious saint than live as a crumbling, fading, apathetic, indifferent, fruitless, dead branch, and then die anyway and have to stand before the Lord having failed. That's the horror.

Death is just moving into the next phase. So they're getting that lesson up above. Well, they come back down, we have what we saw last time which is the dealing with this demon, and remember it is for the Father's sake.

We have a picture here which also reminds us of the context of Jesus' work. He is coming as the Messiah. He is the fulfillment of promises to the fathers, and Israel is going to be delivered for the sake of the fathers.

It is the Father who says, Lord, I believe, help thou my unbelief. Jesus converses with the Father. Jesus doesn't have a conversation with the boy, doesn't have a conversation with the demon, converses with the Father.

That's what that story is about. Well, we studied that detail last time. That's the context.

Now, and you can see in verse 20 and 21, Assuredly, I say to you, if you have faith as a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, Move from here to there, and it will move. And we talked about this. If you have faith as a grain of mustard seed, you're only going to be asking those mountains to move that are needing to be moved in the plan and purpose of God.

If you've got faith at all, you're going to understand what is and isn't requestable in God's plan, right? You're not going to be praying foolish prayers. You're not going to be praying self-centered prayers. If you have faith at all, that faith is going to align with the plans and purposes of God, not the plans and purposes of Sam or the plans and purposes of fill-in-your-name-here.

And people think, oh, well, this is carte blanche. I can pray for a new Lexus to show up on the curb with my name on the title, and it will be done for me. Oh, Lord, I pray you'll move that car from the dealership to my curb or my driveway if you don't already have it cluttered up with cars like I do.

Just as a side note, the VW is back on the road again. Hooray. I had to do some work on

it, but it can't stop it.

77 VWs still on the road. People were actually waving at me when I was driving down the road. They were happy as well.

So now we pick up in verse 22, and it says, Now while they were staying in Galilee, Jesus said to them, interestingly enough, The Son of Man is about to be betrayed into the hands of men, and they will kill Him, and the third day He will be raised up. That's where we began this phase, wasn't it? A couple of pages earlier, where Jesus says to the VWs, back in 1621, From that time Jesus began to show His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed and be raised the third day. Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him.

Peter began to rebuke the Lord. Far be it from You, Lord, this shall not happen to You, Jesus turns and says. So now we're full circle.

We have another reminder in the account that this is the prominent teaching point in this phase. The Son of Man is about to be betrayed. And they were exceedingly sorrowful.

Notice Peter doesn't try to take the Lord aside and rebuke Him again. He does learn. And so they're sorrowful.

Now, what did they not learn? Peter and James and John have seen where this is going, right? I suppose you could legitimately be sorrowful, even if you could keep in mind what the purpose is. But it doesn't say anything other than they were sad. Jesus showed them the scene on the mountain to give them the same sustaining truth that He Himself is concentrating on.

He's the one that's going to have to go through it. But He knows where He's going. He knows what its purpose is.

So then, verse 24, when they had come to Capernaum, those who received the temple tax came to Peter and said, Does your teacher not pay the temple tax? He said, Yes. Which in English is somewhat ambiguous. Does your teacher not pay the temple tax? Yes, he does not pay the temple tax.

Or does your teacher not pay the temple tax? Yes, he does pay the temple tax. Which is it? Do you want steak or do you want potatoes? Yes. It doesn't really answer the question.

But in Greek or in the Aramaic, in which this conversation originally, no doubt, took place, he is answering that, Yes, my teacher does pay the temple tax, although they haven't paid it yet. And so, I don't know if this is harking back to earlier years or what. But Peter says, Yes, he does.

Or, Yes, we will. Or he's answering in the affirmative about the tax. We're not refusing to pay the tax, as it's described here.

So when he'd come into the house, Jesus anticipated him. Meaning Jesus knew he was about to ask a question on this issue. And Jesus said, What do you think, Simon? From whom do the kings of the earth take customs or taxes? From their sons or from strangers? Peter said to him, From strangers.

Jesus said to him, Then the sons are free. Nevertheless, lest we offend them, go to the sea, cast in a hook, 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. Well, this is a really fascinating story. There are all kinds of questions.

If you read this and look at it and think about it, it just is so many-tentacled that you wonder if you can ever get through it. I decided that it's going to take both sessions this morning for this little short miracle. I wanted to do it in one and start the blind man that we're going to look at next week, but there's just no way to fit it all in.

So we'll go as efficiently as we can. When they had come to Capernaum, what do we know about Capernaum? What's Peter's residence and dwelling place? Where does he live? Capernaum. So their home.

This isn't somebody wandering up in Jerusalem or in Nazareth or in any other place. They're in a place where the collectors know Peter, known him for years, come around year by year for various things, right? So when they had come to Capernaum, so they're probably at Peter's house. This is the logical place for them to stay.

Why would Peter not stay in his own house? Why would he not host the Lord Jesus where they had stayed before? Remember one of the very first miracles Jesus does is to heal Peter's mother-in-law from a fever in this very house, which we've seen, they believe they have found. We've looked at the excavations of it. So those who receive the temple tax.

Now this word, temple tax, has nothing about tax and nothing about temple in it. This is one word in Greek, didrachma. Didrachma.

Didrachma. What is a drachma? It's a piece of money. What is di? Two.

If you divide something, you make it into two pieces. Didrachma. So this is the two drachma.

And it was well known as this because this was the temple support, sort of a tithe type of thing. So it is an annual requirement and all of the men in Israel, this goes all the way

back to the time of David when he numbered the people, when he numbered the men of Israel. Remember all of the bad things that resulted from that.

David numbered and there was no collection based on that survey. So this is what they're talking about. It is an annual two drachma contribution that every male in Israel is supposed to make.

Every male of age. And so the collectors of this, those who receive it, come around and say, does your teacher not pay the didrachma? The word isn't pay either. We have lots of words that mean pay.

This is actually a form of teleo from which we get the noun telos. I always think of Dan when we're discussing the end of your little DNA molecules and there's a telomere on the end. It's like the cap on a shoelace.

And as every time your cells divide, that little telomere gets shorter and shorter. This is one of the things that causes aging is that your shoelaces come undone over time as it divides. And they think that if they could figure out a way to preserve the telomeres, they could extend human life.

But telo is the end. And teleo means to end. So you say, what, does your teacher not end? Well, this is end in the sense of fulfill or complete.

I have ended my efforts. I have ended my book. I have finished it.

I have fulfilled it. So they're saying, does your teacher not fulfill the didrachma? Fulfill it because this is a requirement under the Levitical code. Does your teacher not fulfill this portion of the law? And Peter says, well, yes, he does fulfill it.

So Peter's going to go in and say, Lord, I mean, he sort of answered for the Lord proactively, preemptively. Well, yes, he does. My teacher does.

But now he's going to go into the Lord and say, Lord, I just told him that you fulfilled the didrachma, so help me out here. But Jesus anticipates him and says, what do you think, Simon? From whom do the kings of the earth take customs or taxes from their sons or from strangers? What is the idea here? The money that is collected from the citizenry is designed to support the government. Those who occupy places in the government, which in this case is a monarchy and it's the royal family, well, they don't tax themselves to support themselves.

This is sort of an accounting issue. I've tried to think of an analogy, but it always gets kind of tangled up. If you say, well, there's somebody who's earning a salary from a company, but he pays into the fund that pays him, it seems kind of pointless to pay into something that's going to pay you right back.

But we don't really have a good analogy to this, because everybody is a citizen and in a democracy and in our representative form of government, even senators and congressmen pay taxes, which go back to support their government checks. People in the military get a check from the government, but they pay their taxes, which goes into the pot that pays their check, pays their salary. At any rate, Jesus says, in that day, when there is a monarchy, do the princes and the daughters of the king get charged taxes to sustain themselves, basically? And of course, Peter says to him, no, they collect it from people outside the household, outside the palace.

Jesus says, then the sons are free. Nevertheless, lest we offend them, go to the sea, cast in a hook, take the fish, get the coin, etc. Well, I'm going to organize this under about four points.

First, there's earthly truth and heavenly truth. There's an earthly issue and a heavenly issue here, because what is the basis that Jesus is suggesting that they really don't owe this didrachma for the support of the temple? He says, well, if I am God, I am the Son of God, I am worshipped in the temple and the temple tax is paid to support that, then do I need to pay it? Does God need to pay the tax so that people have a place to come and worship Him, is the idea. Does your teacher not pay the didrachma, the temple tax? That's the earthly issue.

And the assumption is that Jesus is exactly like everyone else, and He is a man like every other man in Israel and owes the same tax that every other man owes. Well, why do you even need a temple? Why do you need a place to come and meet God? Why do you need a place where God's glory is safely enshrined and walled off from men and priests are there to mediate and to intercede and to bridge the gap? Why do you even need that? Why do these men need to pay this temple tax? Because they are sinful. That's the reason there needs to be a temple.

Why does God not walk in the garden in the cool of the day and men come and converse with Him? There is a separation. There is a need for a temple. There is a need for a meeting place.

There is a need for a place to come and be reconciled to God and to offer sacrifices of thanksgiving and of recognition of sinfulness and so on. And so the men who are party to this problem and have caused this problem are the ones who pay this very minimal tax to support it. So Jesus is saying, well, you know, think about that, Simon.

Does the person on the other side of the gap of mediation need to be paying what the people on this side pay? And of course they don't. The sons are free. Well, so the assumption is that Jesus is just another man.

And of course the tax gatherers have no understanding of this. They're just doing their job. This guy's name is on the rolls.

This Jesus is listed as a citizen of Capernaum. So he's a male over 13. He's been bar mitzvahed.

He needs to pay the tax. But symbolically speaking, this reflects the view of the nation in that day toward Jesus that He's just another guy. He's interesting.

He's fun to watch. But He owes the tax like everybody else. You know, this is the symbolic value of it.

This isn't the thought process. The tax takers are not deity deniers or anything. But it's the symbolism.

It's the value of it. So the earthly issue, does your teacher not pay the temple tax like all the rest of us do, because all of us need to, because we all need to support this place where we can go meet God. This tax, by the way, this didrachma goes all the way back, you can turn real quickly, to Exodus chapter 30 verse 13 for the legitimacy of this collection.

And start at verse 11, 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 my reference to David. People say, why did God get so angry when David numbered the people? Well, is there any record in there that they followed the law on that? It's not the only reason, but one of several.

When you number them, that there may be no plague among them when you number them. What happened when David numbered the people and nobody paid the tax? There was a plague. Remember stopping the angel over the threshing floor of Arona and so on? This is what everyone among those who are numbered shall give, half a shekel according to the shekel of the sanctuary.

A shekel is 20 geras. The half shekel shall be an offering to the Lord. Well, of course, in Jesus' day, they're not operating on the shekel system anymore.

They're using Roman money. And the equivalent is two drachmas. Two drachmas equate to half a shekel.

Everyone included among those who are numbered from 20 years old and above, I think I said 13 a minute ago, but this says 20, 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 and meeting that it may be a memorial for the children of Israel before the Lord to make atonement for yourselves.

How many times did you see the word atonement in there? So does this help explain why in principle, if people really knew what was going on, it's pretty silly for Jesus to pay atonement money in Israel. He is going to be paying a massively greater atonement than this. Right? But that helps illuminate it a little bit.

So in order to communicate this to Peter, what does Jesus do? He gives an earthly example. It's an earthly question. It's an earthly issue.

It's based on the law of Moses, which is grounded here in earthly worship. From whom do the kings of the earth take taxes? Peter acknowledges that in an earthly kingdom the royal family is not expected to pay the tax which is levied for the support of that royal family. And interestingly, Jesus does not bring up atonement per se.

He says, even from an earthly perspective, would this be right? Jesus says, well, because it is collected from those who are strange, who are outside the house. And it doesn't say the citizens, it says strangers. And you notice in your New King James they put it in quotes.

Do they collect it from their sons or from quote strangers? Well, there are no quotes in the Greek. They are strangers. Strangers to what? Strangers in terms of personal relationship to the king.

Sons are personally related. Everybody else by that standard is a stranger. Peter says, well, they collect it from strangers.

Jesus says, then the sons are free. This is interesting because Jesus has condensed the whole atonement idea into the result of the atonement, which is relationship, familial relationship. What does atonement accomplish? I will be their God.

They will be my people. They are all sons of God in that sense. That's what atonement accomplishes.

The atonement money makes it possible for God to be related to Israel as His people. And if not, there's going to be a plague. Plagues happen to people that have no relationship with God.

Plagues happen to Egyptians. Plagues happen to Canaanites. Plagues happen to those who oppose and resist God.

They don't happen to God's people when God's people have atonement settled. Remember, plagues do happen to Israel. Remember the curses.

If you do not obey, if you are not atoned for, this is what will happen. Well, we have the heavenly implication is that the sons are free. Christ is the Messiah, the Son of God, the King of Israel, and the Redeemer, the one who brings atonement.

What is our context? Why is context important? The Son of Man is going to suffer at the hands of men. He's going to be crucified and rise again. We've had a whole entire section centered around that preceding this, and we have it reviewed right before this episode.

The Son of Man is about to be betrayed into the hands of men. They will kill Him, and the third day He will rise again. Why? This is the means of securing atonement.

Does it make sense to you, Peter, Jesus says, that the one that is about to do this should come up with the half-shekel tax for atonement? It's sort of an absurdity, isn't it? But is this really about the tax? The center of this story, the center of the whole episode here is at the end of verse, well, it's actually right in the middle of verse 25. What do you think, Simon? You notice that it says, Jesus anticipated him. Peter is out on the economy, and something challenges him.

Something from the outside. These tax takers come and ask him a question about the Lord Jesus, and five minutes before that, Peter didn't have any concerns. They ask this question.

Now he's got a concern. What's his reaction? I've got to go ask Jesus. I've just given a response.

I've kind of made a commitment here. I've given an affirmative. I need to go get Jesus to back me up on this.

And so he goes in to his own house, probably, to find the Lord Jesus. Jesus already knows what the question is and says, what do you think? First words out of Jesus' mouth. What do you think, Simon? A, did you think before you spoke? And B, did you think before you decided to run in here and ask me? This is our point of application for this first session.

We are challenged. We face things that put pressure on us in all different areas. But we are related to the Lord Jesus Christ.

We are believers headed for the eternal future. This life is a series of story problems teaching us principles, teaching us skills, teaching us ways of thinking that will serve us. When you go to school and you take math and they give you a story problem, two trains leave the station, one in Chicago and one in Detroit, and they're headed for each other at such-and-such miles per hour.

Where will they meet? It's a story problem. Is this so that we can go out and predict the arrival time for trains? Is that why they gave us the story problem? No, it is to teach us the rate-time-distance formula that we can use in any one of a number of real-life contexts, way above and beyond the two trains of the story problem. That's what this life is.

Peter, not accidentally, is asked about this tax in his hometown, and what's his reaction? I give an answer to stave these guys off and I'm going to go run to the Lord. Jesus says, Peter, what do you think? What do you think? Maybe proceed this with, did you think? And we, when we face challenges and decisions, before we run to the Lord in prayer, before we run in with appeal, before we abdicate our responsibility to meditate, we need to stop and think. What does Peter have to work with here? What has he seen in recent days? He got rebuked by the Lord for having his mind on the things of men.

He got taken to the Mount of Transfiguration and saw the future, saw the past, saw the testimony of the law and the prophets prefiguring the glory of Jesus Christ. He saw all of that. He came down from the mountain and saw that Jesus has power over all of the opposition that stands in its way, the demon world and Satan behind it.

Jesus reiterated to him, this is coming. The Son of Man is going to be betrayed. There is going to be this, well, why? Why would God allow this? They were receding sorrowful.

It doesn't say any of them said, well, why, Lord? Why must this come to pass? They're just very sad. Well, now this atonement tax comes up, and Peter doesn't think, he doesn't take, he doesn't weave together any of the things that he has just learned and apply it to this situation. So God in the person of Jesus Christ leads Peter into this inductive mode.

Peter, what do you think? Let's have an earthly example here. This is like priming the pump. Let's get the suction going here so that your brain will start operating and thinking.

This is what God wants to do with us. Before we run to the Lord in prayer, before we prostrate ourselves and say, oh, Lord, I've got this problem, please help. What do you think, Simon? Notice he doesn't say, what do you think, Peter? What do you think, Shimon? What do you think, man who's not using everything that comes with his new name? What do you think, Shimon, my pre-disciple man? This is our challenge.

Have we not learned copious amounts of the Word of God? Have we not seen God's grace, God's faithfulness, God's provision? Do we not understand the power of God's Spirit, the guiding light of God's Word? God doesn't want us to just run to Him and fall at His feet like the demoniac. He wants us to think. What do you think? He is teaching us to be self-sufficient, to feed ourselves, to guide ourselves, to nourish ourselves with what He has provided.

So let's stop and think. Yes, this is a challenge. Yes, this is a question.

Yes, this is a problem for which I don't have a good solution. Maybe I have talked out of turn. Maybe I have spoken.

Maybe I've sort of made a commitment that I'm not sure I should have made. Maybe I'm

a little uncertain. I may be a little wobbly here.

Let me run to the Lord. Well, no, let me think for a moment. Let me stop and reflect.

What is actually the right answer based on what I know from Scripture? Let's think. It is our minds that define us. It is our hearts and the thoughts and intents that will be judged at the Great Bema.

So it behooves us to slow down. Wouldn't it be great if Peter had started into the house and said, wait a minute. Let me see if I can anticipate the Lord's answer instead of him anticipating my question.

What is Jesus going to tell me when I go in there? I don't think he would have seen the fish with the coin coming, but he could have solved the problem of, what is this tax anyway? Well, Exodus says it's atonement. We know from day one when John the Baptist said, behold what? Behold the Lamb of God that does what? Accomplishes atonement. It's the very first thing Peter learned about the Lord Jesus.

He's the Lamb. He's the atonement. Does the atonement with his blood have to also pay the atonement tax with a coin? Well, maybe not.

But Jesus is going to give a very interesting further answer, because they do end up paying the tax, don't they? Why is that? We're going to pause here and take our break. When we come back, we'll see the conclusion of this great episode, teaching point for Peter.