

Episode #830 Matthew 17 Part 4-The Lord and the Temple Tax

I. The purpose of the gospel of Matthew is to present Jesus as the Christ, the King of Israel. It is another grand treatise like John to prove to Israel Who Jesus really is. It is the book of being “in Israel,” in contrast to believers today who are “in Christ.”

II. The Lord on coming down from the mount of transfiguration found His disciples unable to cast out a demon from a man’s son. The Lord cast him out, but then the disciples were curious.

III. The Disciples Fail to Cast Out a Demon. Matthew 17:14-21.

A. Verse 20. The answer.

1. Impossible is *adunateo*, nothing shall be beyond your inherent power. This is explained by the one other place “impossible” occurs, Luke 1:37, “For with God nothing shall be impossible.” No one can move a mountain alone. But with God, this is possible.

B. Verse 21. (Some manuscripts omit this verse, though it is contained in the Syriac.) Does this indicate different kinds of spirits? Yet if they had been on the mission when they had the Lord’s power to cast out demons, they doubtless would have been able to do it. The way one would go about attempting to cast out a demon without Christ’s power is entirely different than when one has it. Prayer has to do with seeking God and fasting has to do with denying yourself. If they had denied themselves and sought communion with God about this then perhaps they could have relieved this boy’s condition, but they didn’t. Fasting is mentioned 8 times in the New Testament, and never after the Acts period. Fasts are connected with Israel’s religious observance.

IV. The Lord Predicts His Death a Second Time. Matthew 17:22-23.

A. Verse 22. Galilee is where the Lord lived. He had been forced out of Nazareth, Luke 4:29-30; and so had come to dwell in Capernaum, Matthew 4:13. This is the second prediction of His coming suffering and death. The first was in Matthew 16:21. The details here are He shall be betrayed, men shall kill him, and the third day He shall be raised again. The second and third were announced the first time, but the fact that He is going to be betrayed is a new fact first mentioned here. “Betrayed” is the same word as is used for what Judas did, and is a direct reference to it.

B. Verse 23. It makes sense that they would be sorry He had to go through this. Of course they should not have wanted Him to have to suffer such things. It seems the final, glorious fact never quite sunk in. No wonder, since death is generally so final.

V. Money in the Fish’s Mouth. Matthew 17:24-27.

A. Verse 24. Greek *Kapharnaoum* means “Village of Comfort.” It is on the western shore of the Sea of Galilee, near where the Jordan flows into it. “Temple tax” in Greek is *didrachmon*, meaning a double drachma, about half a shekel. “The didrachmon” was a well-known term for the temple tax. They implied that they think He does not. Being associated with the temple, they probably had the negative view of the Lord that the religious leaders there had. Or else they were used to popular teachers acting like they should be above paying this tax.

B. Verse 25. It seems doubtful Peter had actual knowledge of whether or not the Lord would do this, considering the Lord’s statement to him when he got back home. He probably said this because he felt put on the spot and wanted to defend his Lord. The Lord anticipated him, answering his question before he asked it. “Sons” is the Greek *huios*. Not necessarily their children, but their representatives. The kings would

support their followers from the taxes, not collect taxes from their own followers. How else would they maintain their courts? Strangers are outsiders, those not part of a king's court.

- C. Verse 26. Notice what the Lord's words imply. This tax was to support the temple. The Lord implies that this was His Own taxes, being collected for His Own purposes. But how could that possibly be true, unless the Lord Himself was the Owner of the temple? He is saying that the temple is His. He is the King of it! So all taxes collected to support it are being collected for His benefit.
- D. Verse 27. Offend is *skandalizo*, cause them to stumble. The "piece of money" is a Greek *stater*, a coin equal to a shekel, which is two didrachmon, this coin being enough for the two of them. Here we see the Lord using His power, both of all knowledge, and over nature. We could imagine how a coin could be dropped in the water and then swallowed by a fish. But what led the fish right to Peter's hook? The Lord ordered it to go there, perhaps even to find and take up the coin. The Lord provides for Himself and Peter. Where were the other disciples? Consider the symbolism of this. Remember Matthew 4:19. Peter fishes, catches a fish, and finds the provision he needs in the fish's mouth. This teaches Peter that, when the time comes and he fishes and catches men, they will provide him with all the living he needs. He will not then have to worry about providing for himself. Paul in I Corinthians 9:4-5 mentions that Peter and his wife both ate and drank using their authority as apostles. The Lord continued to take care of His servants.

VII. Conclusion: The Lord told His disciples they ought to have prayed and fasted over the boy whom they could not save from a demon, which may mean seeking God's will and denying themselves. He returned home to Galilee, where He again predicted His coming death and resurrection. When Peter was questioned about the temple tax, the Lord revealed that He is the King of the temple, yet in order not to offend the tax collectors, He told Peter to get the money for both of them from a fish. Later, Peter would fish for men, and get his support from those he caught for God. Let us trust God as we serve Him that He will watch out for us, even as He did His disciples.