

The Essence of the Gospel Life

Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness.

And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross.

Therefore, God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Philippians 2:5–11 (NRSV)

Jesus' life, death, and resurrection _____ freedom. We are set free to live the life of Christ in our community and in the world.

But what about the fish with the coin?

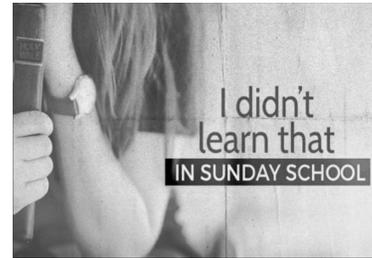
- Notice that the story ends with a command and no confirmation about how it was carried out. It is left for us to interpret.
- Two interpretations:
 - A miracle occurred.
 - Jesus humorously instructed Peter to return to his former trade to earn the money they needed.

Either provision, miraculous or mundane, is possible with God. That isn't the point. The point is that when we give up our rights for the sake of others, the power of the cross transforms lives.

Now what do we do with this?

1. Reflect on the ways in which you are a product of your culture.
2. Recognize that the gospel life is countercultural and actively trust in God to overcome your culture's influence.
3. Be willing to turn stumbling blocks into stepping stones.

Sources: *Tyndale New Testament Commentary* by R.V.G. Tasker, *New Interpreter's Bible Commentary*, and *The Daily Bible Series: Matthew Vol. 2* by William Barclay.



sermon notes

Freedom Redefined
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CHRISTCHURCHVA.ORG/SERMONS

Matthew 17:24–27 (NRSV)

When they reached Capernaum, the collectors of the temple tax came to Peter and said, "Does your teacher not pay the temple tax?" He said, "Yes, he does."

And when he came home, Jesus spoke of it first, asking, "What do you think, Simon? From whom do kings of the earth take toll or tribute? From their children or from others?"

When Peter said, "From others," Jesus said to him, "Then the children are free. However, so that we do not give offense to them, go to the sea and cast a hook; take the first fish that comes up; and when you open its mouth, you will find a coin; take that and give it to them for you and me."

What was the temple tax?

- The tax covered the maintenance of the temple as well as the cost of sacrificial animals, wine, flour, oil, incense, and priestly robes that wore out periodically.
- The tax was the *didrachma*, or double drachma, and was the equivalent of two days' pay. Two people typically combined their tax with a single Roman coin since *didrachma* were out of circulation.
- The tax would be announced on March 1 and collected in booths March 15–25 in all the towns of Palestine. Anyone who didn't pay on time would have to do so at the temple.
- The nature of the tax (whether it was voluntary or obligatory) seemed to be under some debate in the time of Jesus.

Two passages inform the temple tax debate:

Exodus 30:14,16 (NRSV)

Each one who is registered, from twenty years old and upward, shall give the LORD's offering . . . You shall take the atonement money from the Israelites and shall designate it for the service of the tent of meeting; before the LORD it will be a reminder to the Israelites of the ransom given for your lives.

According to Exodus, the tax had two functions:

- _____: to service the tent of meeting.
- _____: a reminder of God's redeeming grace.

The Pharisees argued that this passage from Exodus is the basis for an obligatory temple tax. Members of the Qumran community, however, argue that this was a one-time contribution not to be repeated.

Nehemiah 10:32–33 (NRSV)

We also lay on ourselves the obligation to charge ourselves yearly one-third of a shekel for the service of the house of our God: for the rows of bread, the regular grain offering, the regular burnt offering, the sabbaths, the new moons, the appointed festivals, the sacred donations, and the sin offerings to make atonement for Israel, and for all the work of the house of our God.

According to Nehemiah, the tax was:

- Freely chosen as an ongoing _____.

The Sadducees believed the temple tax ought to be voluntary, citing this passage in Nehemiah as the basis of their argument.

Voluntary or Obligatory?

What became the temple tax evolved over time, likely moving from a one-time contribution in the time of the tabernacle community to an ongoing form of support after exile. By Jesus' time, it was considered an act of loyalty to support the temple in a time of foreign occupation.

Why is this important?

The debate in Jesus' time informs our interpretation of Jesus' actions in response to the encounter between Peter and the tax collectors.

This response can be summed up in two words:

_____ and _____

Offense = Causing somebody to stumble or to fall.

Our Lesson

Jesus exercises his freedom to take on an obligation to do something that is not required of him for the sake of others.

Where else do we find this lesson in Scripture?

1 Corinthians 9:11–12,19,22–23 (NRSV)

If we have sown spiritual good among you, is it too much if we reap your material benefits? If others share this rightful claim on you, do not we still more? Nevertheless, we have not made use of this right, but we endure anything rather than put an obstacle in the way of the gospel of Christ.

For though I am free with respect to all, I have made myself a slave to all, so that I might win more of them . . . I have become all things to all people, that I might by all means save some. I do it all for the sake of the gospel, so that I may share in its blessings.

We are made free for _____.

Romans 14:15–17 (NRSV)

If your brother or sister is being injured by what you eat, you are no longer walking in love. Do not let what you eat cause the ruin of one for whom Christ died. So do not let your good be spoken of as evil. For the kingdom of God is not food and drink but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.

_____ requires _____.