

## Matthew: 17:24–27

### From Catena Aurea:

24. And when they were come to Capernaum, they that received tribute money came to Peter, and said, Doth not your master pay tribute?

25. He saith, Yes. And when he was come into the house, Jesus prevented him, saying, What thinkest thou, Simon? of whom do the kings of the earth take custom or tribute? of their own children, or of strangers?

26. Peter saith unto him, Of strangers. Jesus saith unto him, Then are the children free.

27. Notwithstanding, lest we should offend them, go thou to the sea, and cast an hook, and take up the fish that first cometh up; and when thou hast opened his mouth, thou shalt find a piece of money: that take, and give unto them for me and thee.

GLOSS. (non occ.) The disciples were exceeding sorrowful when they heard of the Lord's passion, and therefore that none might ascribe His suffering to compulsion, and not to a voluntary Submission, he adds an incident which instances Christ's power, and is submission; And when they were come to Capernaum, there came to Peter those who received the didrachma, and said unto him, Doth not your Master pay the didrachma?

HILARY. The Lord is called upon to pay the didrachma, (that is, two denarii,) for this the Law had enjoined upon all Israel for the redemption of their body and soul, and the use of those that served in the temple.

CHRYSOSTOM. For when God slew the firstborn of Egypt, He then accepted the tribe of Levi for them. (Numb. 3:44.) But because the numbers of this tribe were less than the number of firstborn among the Jews, it was ordained that redemption money should be paid for the number that came short; and thence sprang the custom of paying this tax. Because then Christ was a firstborn son, and Peter seemed to be the first among the disciples, they came to him. And as it seems to me this was not demanded in every district, they come to Christ in Capernaum, because that was considered His native place.

JEROME. Or otherwise; From the time of Augustus Cæsar Judæa was made tributary, and all the inhabitants were registered, as Joseph with Mary his kinswoman gave in His name at Bethlehem. Again, because the Lord was brought up at Nazareth, which is a town of Galilee subject to Capernaum, it is there that the tribute is asked of Him; but for that His miracles were so great, those who collected it did not dare to ask Himself, but make up to the disciple.

CHRYSOSTOM. And him they address not with boldness, but courteously; for they do not arraign, but ask a question, Doth not your Master pay the didrachma?

JEROME. Or, They enquire with malicious purpose whether He pays tribute, or resists Caesar's will.

CHRYSOSTOM. What then does Peter say? He saith, Yea. To these then he said that He did pay, but to Christ he said not so, blushing perhaps to speak of such matters.

JEROME. Before any hint from Peter, the Lord puts the question to him, that His disciples might not be offended at the demand of tribute, when they, see that He knows even those things that are done in His absence. It follows, But he said, From strangers; Jesus said unto him, Then are the children free.

ORIGEN. This speech has a twofold meaning. First, that the children of the kings of the earth are free with the kings of the earth; but strangers, foreigners in the land, are not free, because of those that oppress them, as the Egyptians did the children of Israel. The second sense is; forasmuch as there be some who are strangers to the sons of the kings of the earth, and are yet sons of God, therefore it is they that abide in the words of Jesus; these are free, for they have known the truth, and the truth has set them free from the service of sin; but the sons of the kings of the earth are not free; for whoso doth sin, he is the servant of sin. (John 8:34.)

JEROME. But our Lord was the son of the king, both according to the flesh, and according to the Spirit; whether as sprung of the seed of David, or as the Word of the Almighty Father; therefore as the king's son He owed no tribute.

AUGUSTINE. (Quæst. Ev. i. 23.) For, saith He, in every kingdom the children are free, that is, not under tax. Much more therefore should they be free in any earthly kingdom, who are children of that very kingdom under which are all the kingdoms of the earth.

CHRYSOSTOM. But this instance were brought to no purpose if He were not a son. But some one may say, He is son indeed, but not an own son. But then He were a stranger; and so this instance would not apply; for He speaks only of own sons, distinct from whom He calls them strangers who are actually born of parents. Mark how here also Christ certifies that relationship which was revealed to Peter from God, Thou art Christ, the Son of the living God.

JEROME. Howsoever free then He was, yet seeing He had taken to Him lowliness of the flesh, He ought to fulfil all righteousness; whence it follows, But that they should not be offended, go to the sea.

ORIGEN. We may hence gather as a consequence of this, that when any come with justice demanding our earthly goods, it is the kings of the earth that send them, to claim of us what is their own; and by His own example the Lord forbids any offence to be given even to these, whether that they should sin no more, or that they should be saved. For the Son of God, who did no servile work, yet as having the form of a slave, which He took on Him for man's sake, gave custom and tribute.

JEROME. I am at a loss what first to admire in this passage; whether the foreknowledge, or the mighty power of the Saviour. His foreknowledge, in that He knew that a fish had a stater in its mouth, and that that fish should be the first taken; His mighty power, if the stater were created in the fish's mouth at His word, and if by His command that which was to happen was ordered. Christ then, for His eminent love, endured the cross, and paid tribute; how wretched we who are called by the name of Christ, though we do nothing worthy of so great dignity, yet in respect of His majesty, pay no tribute, but are exempt from tax as the King's sons. But even in its literal import it edifies the hearer to learn, that so great was the Lord's poverty, that He had not whence to pay the tribute for Himself and His Apostle. Should any object that Judas bore money in a bag, we shall answer, Jesus held it a fraud to divert that which was the poor's to His own use, and left us an example therein.

CHRYSOSTOM. Or He does not direct it to be paid out of that they had at hand, that He might shew that He was Lord also of the sea and the fish.

GLOSS. (non occ.) Or because Jesus had not any image of Cæsar, (for the prince of this world had nothing in Him,) therefore He furnished an image of Cæsar, not out of their own stock, but out of the sea. But He takes not the stater into His own possession, that there should never be found an image of Cæsar upon the Image of the invisible God.

CHRYSOSTOM. Observe also the wisdom of Christ; He neither refuses the tribute, nor merely commands that it be paid, but first proves that He is of right exempt, and then bids to give the money; the money was paid to avoid offence to the collectors; the vindication of His exemption was to avoid the offence to the disciples. Indeed in another place He disregards the offence of the Pharisees, in disputing of meats; teaching us herein to know the seasons in which we must attend to, and those in which we must slight the thoughts of, those who are like to be scandalized.

CHRYSOSTOM. As you wonder at Christ's power, so admire Peter's faith, who was obedient in no easy matter. In reward of his faith he was joined with his Lord in the payment. An abundant honour! Thou shalt find a stater, that take and give unto them for thee and for me.

ORIGEN. Mystically; In the field of comfort, (for so is Capernaum expounded,) He comforts each one of His disciples, and pronounces him to be a son and free, and gives him the power of taking the first fish, that after His ascension Peter may have comfort over that which he has caught.

HILARY. When Peter is instructed to take the first fish, it is shewn therein that he shall catch more than one. The blessed first martyr Stephen was the first that came up, having in his mouth a stater, which contained the didrachma of the new preaching, divided as two denarii, for he preached as he beheld in his passion the glory of God, and Christ the Lord.

JEROME. Or; That fish which was first taken is the first Adam, who is set free by the second Adam; and that which is found in his mouth, that is, in his confession, is given for Peter and for the Lord.

ORIGEN. And when you see any miser rebuked by some Peter who takes the speech of his money out of his mouth, you may say that he is risen out of the sea of covetousness to the hook of reason, and is caught and saved by some Peter, who has taught him the truth, that he should change his stater for the image of God, that is for the oracles of God.

JEROME. And beautifully is this very stater given for the tribute; but it is divided; for Peter as for a sinner a ransom is to be paid, but the Lord had not sin. Yet herein is shewn the likeness of their flesh, when the Lord and His servants are redeemed with the same price.

## **From Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture:**

### **17:24 Does Not Your Teacher Pay the Tax?**

#### **A Symbol Foreshadowing Our Redemption.**

Hilary of Poitiers: The Lord is asked to pay a half-shekel. For this was the amount that the law had established for those serving in the temple for the redemption of soul and body. But the law, as we know, is the foreshadowing of the future (for it was not the value of the coin that God desired so that with such a small expense redemption of soul and body might be granted for sins). Therefore the offering of this half-shekel was established so that we might offer ourselves certified and professed and enrolled in the name of Christ, in Christ who is the true temple of God, and it was established as testimony of the Son of God. On Matthew 17.10.

#### **Not Paying the Tax?**

Jerome: After Caesar Augustus, Judea was made a tributary state and all the people were registered in the census. So Joseph and his kinswoman Mary had set off for Bethlehem. Once again, since Jesus had been brought up in Nazareth, which is a town of Galilee lying close to Capernaum, he is asked to pay taxes. Because of the magnitude of the miracles he had done, those who demanded this tax do not dare to ask him. Instead, they meet a disciple and maliciously ask whether he should pay taxes or defy Caesar's will. Commentary on Matthew 3.17.24.

### **17:25–26 From Whom Do Earthly Kings Take Tribute?**

#### **The Sons Are Free.**

Chrysostom: So that Peter should not think that he said it after hearing it from others, he forestalls him by showing this very thing and giving Peter, a man who up to now shrank from speaking about these things, freedom to speak about it. What he says is something like this: "I am free from paying tribute. For if the kings of the earth do not take it from their sons but from their subjects, much more ought I to be free of this demand, being the Son not of an earthly king but of the king of heaven and myself a king as well." Do you see how he has distinguished the sons from them that are not sons? And if he were not a son, he brought in the example of the kings without purpose. Someone may say, "Yes, he is a son but not trueborn." Then he is not a son, and if he is not a son or trueborn he does not belong to God but to someone else. But if he belongs to someone else, then the comparison does not have its proper strength. For he is speaking not of sons generally but of truly begotten sons, their very own sons, of sons who share the kingdom with their parents. And so by way of contrast he mentioned "the sons of others," calling those that are born of themselves "their own" and those not born of themselves "of others." The Gospel of Matthew, Homily 58.2.

### **Immunity from Taxes.**

Jerome: Our Lord was the son of a king both according to the flesh and according to the spirit, begotten either from the stock of David or from the Word of the almighty Father. Therefore as the son of a king he did not owe tax, but as one who had assumed the humility of the flesh he has to fulfill all justice. We unfortunates, who are enrolled under Christ's name and do nothing worthy of such great majesty, for us he both underwent the cross and paid our tax. But we do not pay him tribute in return for his honor and like the sons of a king we are immune from taxes. Commentary on Matthew 3.17.26.

Do Kings Take Tribute from Their Sons? Hilary of Poitiers: Is it not clear that the sons of kings are not subject to tax and those who are the heirs of a kingdom are free from service? But his words have inner meaning. A drachma was demanded of the people. Now the law moves toward that faith which was to be revealed through Christ. Therefore by the custom of the law this same drachma was demanded from Christ as though from an ordinary citizen. But to show that he was not subject to the law and to demonstrate the glory of his Father's dignity in himself, he offered as an example of earthly privilege the fact that kings' sons are not subject to census and tax. He is the Redeemer of our soul and body. Nothing should be demanded of him for his redemption, because it was necessary that a king's son be distinguished from the common lot. Therefore the king's son offers a stumbling block to the tax law in order to do away with it, he being free from the duty of the law. On Matthew 17.11.

### **17:27 Fishing for a Shekel**

#### **Find a Shekel in the Fish's Mouth and Give It.**

Chrysostom: Elsewhere, however, he despises the offense, when he was talking about foods, teaching us to know the times when we must take account of those being offended and when to disregard them. And in the manner of giving or paying the tax, he discloses himself again. Why does he not tell Peter to give of what they have laid up? So that, as I said, in this too he might show that he is God of all and that he rules even the sea. He had already demonstrated this when he rebuked it and by his commanding Peter to walk on the waves. Now again he signifies the same thing, though in another way, yet so as to cause great amazement. For it was not a small thing to predict that the fish carrying the tribute would be the first one caught in those depths or that the net thrown into the deep would obey his command and would bring in the fish carrying the coin. Thus it is an act of divine and unutterable power. The Gospel of Matthew, Homily 58.2.

#### **Give It to Them for Me and for Yourself.**

Origen: This coin was not in Jesus' house but happened to be in the mouth of a fish in the sea. This too, I think, was a result of God's kindness. It was caught and came up on the hook belonging to Peter, who was

the fisher of men. That which is figuratively called a fish was caught in order that the coin with the image of Caesar might be taken from it, that it might take its place among those which were caught by them who have learned to become fishers of men. Let him, then, who has the things of Caesar render them to Caesar, that afterwards he may be able to render to God the things of God. But since Jesus is the image of God the unseen and did not have the image of Caesar (for there was nothing in him that had anything to do with the prince of this world), he therefore took the image of Caesar from a suitable place in the sea, so as to pay it to the kings of the earth as the contribution of himself and his disciple. Jesus did this so that those taking the half-shekel might not suppose Jesus to be in debt either to them or to the kings of the earth. For he paid the debt, one he had never taken on or possessed or used to buy anything or made his personal possession, to prevent the image of Caesar ever being alongside the image of the invisible God. Commentary on Matthew 13.10.

**Go to the Sea.**

Cyril of Alexandria: He was also able to take the coin out of the earth, but he did not do so. [Instead he] made the miracle out of the sea, so that he might teach us the mystery rich in contemplation. For we are the fish snatched from the bitter disturbances of life. It is just as if we have been caught out of the sea on the apostles' hooks. In their mouths the fish have Christ the royal coin, which was rendered in payment of debt for two things, for our soul and for our body. Also for two peoples, the Jews and the Gentiles. Also in the same way for the poor and the wealthy, since the old law clearly demanded the payment of the half-shekel from both rich and poor alike. Fragment 212.