

“Temple Tax”

A brief look at the Gospel in Matthew 17:24-27 as a part of a series of studies on the explicit parables of the Lord Jesus

By [Zin Yi](#)

The word “tribute” of verses Matthew 17:24 & 25 is the Greek word meaning “two pieces of silver.” In the first instance, this refers to the church,

- 1) due to the concept of the number two; and
- 2) the idea of money always points to people (e.g., 10 lost coins). But the question here is, what does this have to do with Christ (“Master” of verses 24) “paying” it?

The passage seems simple at first, especially for those of us familiar with the parable of the steward, with the particular idea of payment. But upon close inspection, this proves to be not so. The Greek for “pay” is *teleo*, Strong’s #5055, most predominantly rendered “fulfilled” (If our memory serves us, let us recall that the primary word is #5056, most predominantly rendered “end,” as in Romans 6:21, studied for the Prodigal Son parable, and whose alternate translation “custom” appears in the 25th verse of our passage in Matthew). Does Christ then “fulfill/end” (“pay”) the “church” (tribute)?

Slightly more complicated way to understand “pay” is presented. The antonym of “pay” is “receive,” or “take.” This word, “receive/take,” does happen to appear in our passage, in verses 24 (“received”), 25 (“take”) and 27 (“take”). The Greek for “receive” is *lambano*, Strong’s #2983. It has numerous renderings, but when one considers its usage, it is not a very passive word - rather, it has *everything to do with work*. No, it is not that the work of “taking” or “receiving” itself is where the labor is. Rather, it is that which is taken, that which is received that is work. In other words, what is “taken” is work, another’s work. In 2 Corinthians 11, we see Paul speaking as Christ, yet again. Verse 8 declares that Paul “robbed other churches, *taking* wages....” In verse 9 he goes on to say that this was so that he would be “chargeable to no man,” that he would not be “burdensome unto [the Corinthians].” How is Christ NOT burdensome to one? He is not burdensome, because He “taketh” NO wages, NO work, from man He plans to redeem. No work of man can be taken for Christ to save - It must be His work alone. But the false prophets of vs. 20? They took (*lambanei*) of the Corinthians. They received works, those of the Corinthian Christians.

Conversely, if what is “received/taken” is work, then what is “paid” must also be work. If then Christ is to “pay” “tribute,” then this must mean that Christ “fulfills” the work of the church (2 pieces). Does He, that is, fulfill the work necessary to redeem the church? We are NOT referring to the work of the church in evangelism. We are talking about the work required for the church to become the eternal body of Christ. The work that those outside the elect body would have to undergo in hell for eternity. The answer? Apostle Peter, the “I have lots of answers, and many times they are used of God to teach a much deeper spiritual meaning” fisherman, declares, “Yes.” Of course Christ does fulfill the work for, on behalf of, the 2 pieces, the “tribute.” Verse 25 reiterates this truth. As the kings of the earth “take custom or tribute” from “strangers,” so God, as in I Corinthians 11 above, robs other

churches so that the His “own children” are “free” - from the demands of the law to work eternally, from the wages required.

The pieces fit together in the last verse. The “sea” is hell. The “hook” “cast” is, of course, Christ Himself. The word “cast,” studied when Luke 22:4 1 was studied, is #906, from which #1000 is derived, used in Luke 22 as stone’s “cast.” “Hook,” is #44, from the word meaning “arm” (#43, i.e., “The Arm of the Lord”). The “fish” which “first cometh up” is also Christ, the resurrected Lord. Notice the word “first” also studied in the Prodigal Son parable. Christ is the “First Fish,” if you would. The first fruits from the sea, coming up out of hell by the arm of the Lord. Exciting, yes? It gets *better*. The mouth of the fish is opened, or should we say, Peter is commanded to open the mouth of the “first fish.” Please recall Matthew 4:4 & 5:2, among many others. The mouth of God has to do with the very Word of God. We, the church, as typified by Peter, open the fish’s mouth by proclaiming with our mouths, the Word (this is exactly equivalent to “writing” His Word. The two concepts are interchangeable, as per Psalms 45:1 - see notes on Psalms 45:1). What then comes out of the fish’s mouth? A “piece of money.” The temple tax, called the “shekel of the sanctuary,” was to be given according to the Old Testament law. This was the amount of half a shekel, equal to 10 gerahs, also called “bekah” (Exodus 30:13, 38:26). This is the “tribute” we have in view in our passage. But the piece of money found, *stater*, is equivalent to a shekel, thereby fulfilling the need for 2 half shekels, one for Peter, one for the Lord Jesus. Half a shekel, let us remember, is 0.5, in decimal form. The number 5 is again emphasized as *coming forth from God’s mouth*, as grace which redeems, which buys back, and here, that which fulfills the work of the elect. That is the Gospel in its essence, and it is this which proceeds from the mouth of the fish, This is what Peter is commanded to “take.” It is Christ’s work (Romans 3:21, 22; Galatians 2:16) which Peter takes in the form of a Gospel which tells of redemption purchased by Christ, Who alone has paid the 1/2 shekel temple tax for each of the elect by going to the sea, or hell, that His beloved children may be allowed in the eternal temple.

Finally, why “give” (#1325), *didomi*, and not the *apodidomi* (#591) with which we are more familiar? Because *apodidomi* focuses on payment of debt, whereas *didomi* is the plainer word for transference of things from one possession to another - and here the declaration of the Gospel by the church, typified by Peter (John 6:27, 31, 32, etc.). Nevertheless, to be absolutely honest, we must note that *didomi* is used in Romans 14:12 in the context of judgment day, in the same usual sense of *apodidomi*. Nobody said this was easy.

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