

THE REMARKABLE JOURNEYS OF JESUS II
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(Matthew 17:27)

Simon Peter was worried. He had a cloud on his mind. and a shadow had fallen across his soul. The Master had discovered his problem, and had sent him on a fishing expedition. Peter was glad to get away from the searching eyes of the Lord; but his problem remained. Slowly he went down to the edge of the waves; he baited his hook, and with a dexterous twist of his wrist, sent his sinker skimming over the water. Thoughtfully he watched the splash, and allowing the line to slip through his fingers, waited until its slackness told that the sinker was at the bottom. Slowly he wound in the line until it was moderately taut, and then he waited. Eventually the tell-tale wriggle of the handline informed him that the bait had been attractive, and with long steady pulls he hauled in his fish. Peter gripped it with his free hand, and then prizing the hook from its mouth, he nonchalantly looked at the coin between the jaws of his captive. As he placed it safely in his pocket, he turned and walked up the beach.

The Man with a Cloud on his Mind

His troubles had begun when the income tax officials had asked him, "Doth not your Master pay tribute?" (Matt. 17 :24). Spontaneously, Simon answered, "Yes," but afterward he wondered if he had told the truth; if he were guilty of defrauding the authorities; if they would investigate the matter, and bring punishment upon the disciple band. Finally his countenance shewed evidence of his great concern. When he did not bring his troubles to the Lord, his worry increased. The Lord Jesus recognized the symptoms of anxiety, and realized that something had disturbed His disciple. Easily reading Peter's thoughts, He placed His finger on the cause of the trouble. "What thinkest thou, Simon? of whom do the kings of earth take custom or tribute? of their own children or of strangers? Peter saith unto him, Of strangers. Jesus saith unto him, Then are the children free" (vv. 24-26).

The Fish with a Coin in its Mouth

"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" (v. 27). Peter went to obey his Master, and it was a strange experience when he saw the fulfilment of Christ's prediction. Certain critics have ridiculed the account; yet missionaries from the Holy Land assure us that there was no miracle whatsoever in the fact that the fish had a coin in its mouth. A certain type of fish found in the sea of Galilee carries its young in its mouth, and when these are old enough to begin their separate existence, the parent fish will replace them with a stone or any other suitable object. Even today, fishermen from Galilee can shew coins which they have taken from the mouths of such fish. Nevertheless there was a two-fold miracle in Peter's exploit. The Lord knew that the coin would be in the mouth of the first fish to be caught; and secondly, He knew its value, and said it would be sufficient to pay for both Peter and Himself. "That take and give them for me and thee."

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The Christ with a Charm in His Message

Christ had wonderful ways of imparting truth. (i) How great His claim. If the princes of a royal household are exempt from the taxation demanded by their father, then the Prince of Heaven could not be expected to do as had been suggested. (ii) How great His concern. ". . . lest we should offend them." He knew that if men's hearts were biased against Him, their ears would be closed to His message. He was keen not to erect intellectual barriers which might hinder the proclamation of the Gospel. (iii) How great His care. ". . . for me and thee." We shall never know how many times the Lord met the need of His followers. Yet, here at least is another example of His great kindness. When He paid Peter's debt and delivered him from the requirements of the law, He surely taught, in principle, that in like manner He would soon pay Peter's eternal debt. Christ the Son of God had deliberately chosen to be one with Peter in responsibility, that Peter might become one with Him in freedom. . . for me and thee."

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