

A Hard Pill To Swallow

“...the collectors of the two-drachma temple tax came to Peter and asked, “Doesn’t your teacher pay the temple tax?” “Yes, he does,” he replied.

When Peter came into the house, Jesus was the first to speak. “What do you think, Simon?” he asked. “From whom do the kings of the earth collect duty and taxes---from their own children or from others?” “From others,” Peter answered. “Then the children are exempt,” Jesus said to him. “But so that we may not cause offense, go to the lake and throw out your line. Take the first fish you catch; open its mouth and you will find a four-drachma coin. Take it and give it to them for my tax and yours.” Matthew 17:24-27 (NIV)

In my youth adults would sometimes talk about something being a hard pill to swallow. For example, I recall a dear man with a young family weeping as he sat at my parents’ kitchen table. He had just lost his job because his employer suddenly went out of business. He said, “This is a hard pill to swallow.”

The hard pill was the loss of his job. Swallowing it was referring to the hardship that would come from unemployment.

In our story today Peter was apparently out walking when the

tax collectors asked him about the temple tax payment. Jesus had not yet paid this annual fee. Peter answered immediately that his master did indeed pay the tax. Then he went to Jesus to ask why He had not yet paid the tax.

Before Peter could ask his question, Jesus had a question for him. Peter quickly answered that it was not the ones living in the temple who paid tax but the citizens of the kingdom outside the temple. Jesus was making the point that the temple spoke about Him. He was the reason for the temple.

The temple was His home on earth through the centuries, and the temple was also where sacrifice was made for sin. He was the Lamb of God Who was to take away the sin of the world. So Jesus should not have to pay the tax to maintain His home. The ones who benefitted from the temple should pay the tax.

Jesus did not wish to offend those who did not understand He should not pay the tax and so He arranged for Peter to pay it for Peter and Himself.

Why have I told this story?

Well, there are many people who sorrow and should rightly expect the Christian community to weep with those who weep (Romans 12:15), to visit the widows and fatherless in their affliction (James 1:27). Yet, sometimes the church does not understand who should receive blessings in the Christian community.

Jesus should have expected exemption from the tax. Those in the church should expect comfort, comfort and tears from fellow Christians. Instead many fine Christians weep alone, go home from church to prepare a meal for one, and visit the cemetery alone.

If you are in such a sad situation today look at how Jesus handled the misunderstanding of His time. If you should receive visits but do not, go and visit someone else in their time of pain. Give when you should receive and you will be like Jesus. Your service to others will not go unnoticed by the Master and He shall reward you in His time and way.

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