

## Matthew 17b

**When they returned from the mountain, what did a man who approached Jesus request of Him (vv. 14-16)?** When Jesus and the inner circle returned to the other disciples, a crowd was gathered because a distraught father with an epileptic son had sought healing help from the nine disciples. They, however, had not been able to drive out the demon that possessed the boy and caused his epilepsy. The father appealed to Jesus, kneeling before Him and addressing Him as Lord. The boy's epilepsy had caused him much suffering and physical danger; the convulsions even caused him to fall uncontrollably into the fire and into the water.<sup>1</sup> He was a classic example of the suffering caused by Satan, the cruelest of all taskmasters.<sup>2</sup>

**How did Jesus reply (v. 17)?** Jesus asked for the boy to be brought to Him, and He rebuked not only the disciples but also the entire crowd for their lack of faith.

**What did Jesus do next (v. 18)?** He immediately drove the demon out of the boy and restored him back to health.

**What did the disciples ask Jesus to explain (v. 19)?** Puzzled by their powerlessness, the disciples privately asked the Lord for an explanation of why they couldn't drive the demon out.

**How did Jesus answer their questions (vv. 20-21)?** His answer was straightforward: unbelief. If they had faith the size of a mustard seed (the smallest of seeds), they could command a mountain to be cast into the sea and it would happen,<sup>3</sup> assuming, of course, that the "move" is in God's will. Nothing is impossible with God (cf. 19:26; Luke 1:37).

Removing mountains is a proverbial and hyperbolic figure of speech for overcoming great difficulties (cf. Isaiah 40:4; 49:11; 54:10; Matthew 21:21-22; Mark 11:23; 1 Corinthians 13:2).

This was a teaching moment. Jesus was instructing the disciples about their future ministries. Their problem often would be a lack of faith and a failure to seek the Lord's direction. His Word would be sufficient to produce the desired healing.....but their actions would necessitate great faith and constant contact with the Lord through prayer. When these elements are combined, there is no limit to the works the disciples could accomplish, following His will.<sup>4</sup>

The problem, as Jesus explained, was their weak faith. It was not the quantity of their faith that was deficient but its object. They were apparently relying on themselves and their power rather than on Jesus.<sup>5</sup>

**When they all gathered in Galilee, what did Jesus tell them (vv. 22-23)?** Again, without drama or fanfare, the Lord Jesus forewarned His disciples that He would be betrayed and wicked men would kill Him (16:21). One could never say that death took Jesus by surprise. But again, there was that word of vindication and victory—He would be raised up on the third day. If He had not told them of His death in advance, they would doubtless have been completely disillusioned when it happened. A death of shame and suffering was not consistent with their expectation of the Messiah.

**What was the reaction of the disciples?** They were filled with grief over the Lord's words that He was going to leave them and that He would be killed. One wonders if they heard the complete message or simply the part about His death. They heard the prediction of His passion but seemed to have missed the promise of His resurrection.<sup>6</sup>

**When they arrived in Capernaum, who approached Peter (v. 24)?** The tax collectors were waiting for them. According to custom, every Jew 20 years old and above was required to pay a temple tax of half a shekel, or two drachmas, each year to help support the costly temple service (cf. Exodus 30:13–15).

**What did the tax collectors ask Peter (v. 24)?** *“Doesn’t your teacher pay the temple tax?”* Both Peter and Jesus had apparently not yet paid their tax (Matthew 17:27b) for that year, so the collectors sought Peter out and asked if it was His policy not to pay it. Their question about the Lord’s not paying His tax implied that He was not keeping the Law.

**Why do you think they approached Peter instead of Jesus?** Evidently they recognized that he was the chief disciple of Jesus. Perhaps he was less intimidating to confront than Jesus.

**How did Peter respond (v. 25)?** The Lord would pay the tax in compliance with the Law.<sup>7</sup>

Note: There was no two-drachma coin in circulation at this time, so two adults often went together and paid one shekel, which was worth four drachmas.<sup>8</sup>

**What did Jesus ask Peter (v. 25)?** Jesus asked him if kings ... collect duty and taxes from their own sons or from others.

Jesus’ point was that as the sons of kings are exempt from the taxes that their fathers impose, so He was exempt from the taxes His Father imposed. He meant the temple tax. The temple really belonged to God (Malachi 3:1). Jesus was teaching Peter the implications of His deity. He was not teaching Peter to fulfill his civic responsibility.<sup>9</sup>

**What was Peter’s answer (v. 26)?** Peter replied that kings do not collect taxes from family members, for they were exempt, but they do collect from others.

**How did Jesus respond to Peter’s answer (vv. 26-27)?** Even though He was exempt (v. 26), Jesus would pay the tax, because He did not want to offend anyone needlessly (cf. 5:29). But what would He do for money? It is never recorded that Jesus personally carried money around with Him. He sent Peter to the Sea of Galilee and told him to bring up the first fish he caught. In the mouth of that fish was a one-shekel coin that would be the exact amount Peter needed to pay the tax for himself and for the Lord. The Lord thereby demonstrated His submission to ruling authority.

What an impression this miracle must have made on Peter—as a fisherman—and on his fellow fishermen disciples. Imagine, not only catching a fish but a fish with money in its mouth! And the exact amount needed to pay the tax!<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Louis A. Barbieri Jr., “Matthew,” *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*: J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 1 (Victor Books, 1985), 60.

<sup>2</sup> William MacDonald, *Believer’s Bible Commentary*: Old and New Testaments, ed. Arthur Farstad (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1995), 1270.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 1271.

<sup>4</sup> Louis A. Barbieri Jr., “Matthew,” *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*: J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 1 (Victor Books, 1985), 60–61.

<sup>5</sup> Dr. Thomas L. Constable, *Notes on Matthew*, 2025 Edition (published by Sonic Light), 464.

<sup>6</sup> William MacDonald, *Believer’s Bible Commentary*: Old and New Testaments, ed. Arthur Farstad (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1995), 1271.

<sup>7</sup> Louis A. Barbieri Jr., “Matthew,” *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*: J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 1 (Victor Books, 1985), 61.

<sup>8</sup> Dr. Thomas L. Constable, *Notes on Matthew*, 2025 Edition (published by Sonic Light), 467.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 468.