

What kind of fish was it?

As with several animals in this series, it is impossible to tell with certainty, but many scholars (and restaurants in Galilee!) believe that it was a tilapia. This is in part because tilapia are accustomed to having objects in their mouths especially their own young. On the other hand, a carp-like barbel would have been more likely to bite a hook. Most tilapia are caught in nets. Despite the controversy, the miracle was wonderful and important no matter what kind of fish it may have been.

Is this miracle trivial?

In a way, it is small because there is only one fish, only one coin, and only in one of the four Gospels. When the tremendous number of fish in the lake near Capernaum is considered, however, it's obvious that catching the only one with the coin in its mouth was like finding a needle in a hay stack. Everything had to work together perfectly in order for it to happen. The timing, placement, and provision of the coin were all perfect despite the fact that Peter and the fish were in most ways ordinary.

How was this one-coin miracle important?

Of course it was important to and appropriate for Peter who experienced it directly, but it also must have impacted the devout Jews who collected the temple tax and Matthews' Jewish readers in a positive way. The miracle showed that Jesus and his disciples were not opposed to the temple in Jerusalem.

How is this miracle important theologically?

Some say that it is important because it confirmed Jesus' humanity, since he payed the temple tax like other Jews. The passage as a whole, however, stresses the fact that as God the Son, Jesus did not need to pay. In fact, in some ways, he did not do so since the coin was from the lake rather than Jesus' pocket. Peter directly paid it since he caught the fish and delivered the coin to the collectors, but Jesus did not. His authority as God was much higher than that of those who collected the tax.

How was this miracle like the gospel?

The fish and coin show that the Lord's provision was through grace and God's power rather than human effort. Peter did not need to work all night in order to catch many fish and come up with enough money to pay the tax. He merely needed to believe Jesus and do as he said. (This is comparable with looking at the bronze serpent in Number 28:8-9.) Exactly what was needed was nearby, and this is in line with Paul's teaching regarding God's nearness in Acts 17:27 and salvation through grace in Romans 10:6.

What are the applications?

First, there is practical encouragement for us in how Jesus corrected his disciple. The coin that was needed could have been found on the street if the Lord had so willed, but Jesus instead had Peter discover it in a more fitting, special, and memorable way.

Second, the fish and coin show that needless offense should be avoided, including in creative ways. The goal was to avoid stumbling devote Jews. Yet, through the miracle, an important distinction was still upheld.