

“*Heavenly Treasure*” (Matthew 6:19-21)

Collecting Treasures

Look at Matthew 6:19, “Don’t collect for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal. (20) But collect for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves don’t break in and steal. (21) For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”

I have stuff. I own things. You do too. Have you ever had something expensive get stolen? I had a person pull up into my driveway one night (unknown to me) and cut the fence between me and my neighbor, and then steal my neighbors vintage pick-up truck right out of his driveway. Wayne (my neighbor at the time) told me it made him sick, literally; that someone would do that. He worked and labored hard for that truck. It was a treasure to him.

Moths and rust stand for natural things that happen to destroy or ruin possessions. Thieves refer to sinful actions that take possessions away. And there’s no getting away from it. Any treasure you have right now on this earth can be destroyed or stolen. I’ve known families who’ve had their entire house burn down right before their eyes as they barely escaped the flames in the middle of the night. Praise Yahweh they escaped, but all they had left were the pajamas they were wearing.

This text says not to collect treasures upon the earth, but rather collect treasures in heaven. Now, we’re not single passage Bible believers right? We don’t just read this text and ignore everything else the Bible says. It’s obvious that righteous people had possessions all through Scripture. Job had houses, land, thousands of sheep and cattle. Solomon was blessed with riches by Yahweh himself. Proverbs says a good man leaves an inheritance to his children’s children. Some might say that is speaking of a spiritual inheritance there, but that’s incorrect because the verse goes on to say that the wealth of the sinner is laid up for the righteous. The wealth of the sinner is not spiritual wealth, it’s material wealth. The point in Proverbs is speaking of a man who works hard, has something to show for it, and when he is gone, his children and grandchildren still benefit from his hard work and wise investments.

Balance and Understanding

So we balance all of this together and arrive at what we are going to believe. We know it’s okay to have possessions, and even to be wealthy. At the same time we are told not to collect treasures upon the earth. What is harmony? (1) It’s to not place your trust in riches, and (2) make sure you aren’t *only* working for earthly wealth but *also* working for heavenly wealth.

You can have one person who works their fingers to the bone and obtains great wealth, yet they never give to the poor, pray, fast, spend time studying Torah, or spend time teaching their family or just being with their family. On the other hand you can have a person who works hard, providing for material needs, but at the same time they give to the poor, fast, pray, study Torah, and spend time with and teaching their family. Only one of these persons recognize that the

material will all vanish away one day and they'll only be left with the spiritual. Only one of these persons realize their children will be most blessed by teaching them to serve Yahweh first and foremost. Two texts here to go along with this:

1 Timothy 6:17 Command those who are rich in the things of this life not to be proud, but to place their hope, not in such an uncertain thing as riches, but in [Yahweh], who generously gives us everything for our enjoyment.

1 Timothy 6:18 Command them to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share with others.

1 Timothy 6:19 In this way they will store up for themselves a treasure which will be a solid foundation for the future. And then they will be able to win the life which is true life.

Luke 12:16 Then Yeshua told them this parable: "There was once a rich man who had land which bore good crops.

Luke 12:17 He began to think to himself, 'I don't have a place to keep all my crops. What can I do?

Luke 12:18 This is what I will do,' he told himself; 'I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, where I will store the grain and all my other goods.

Luke 12:19 Then I will say to myself, Lucky man! You have all the good things you need for many years. Take life easy, eat, drink, and enjoy yourself !'

Luke 12:20 But [Yahweh] said to him, 'You fool! This very night you will have to give up your life; then who will get all these things you have kept for yourself ?' "

Luke 12:21 And Yeshua concluded, "This is how it is with those who pile up riches for themselves but are not rich in [Yahweh's] sight."

Investments

I love my house and land. I take care of it, and make sure it's kept up and looks nice. I mend a fence, repair a deck, and cut grass. But one day I will be gone... and if I only spent time doing those things and no time collecting treasures in heaven, all of that other was vanity. I saw this pic yesterday on social media; it's a little rough but it's reality (read).

When you serve Yahweh, when you spend time studying Torah and talking Torah with family and with people. When you pray, fast, give money away to widows, orphans, and poor people... when you do all of these things there will be some who think you are wasting your time, energy, and wealth. They won't understand why you invest in things that have no return. The thing is, **they don't realize that these things produce the greatest return of all.**

We have this thing called investment, where we can invest in a project or business and build a greater return of wealth. I can give a man \$10,000 to build his business, and if the man hits it big I'll get my investment back plus a big return. So when I spend hours and hours studying the Bible each day, or if I work hard for my money yet give some of it away to someone I know cannot repay me (or I give money away not even desiring a repayment), that sounds stupid to a lot of people.

I’m here to remind you that these things, Bible reading/study, prayer, fasting, giving to the poor, keeping the Sabbaths, being kind to your neighbor... all of these things are investments that yield more of return than Warren Buffet or Elon Musk have ever seen or held in their hands. See... moths and rust *do not destroy* the treasures laid up in heaven. A thief cannot steal eternal life from you. The riches and prosperity and health and happiness and eternal bliss that a believer will experience one day in the Kingdom of Heaven is held in the strong-box of Yahweh.

Yeshua tells us that where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. That is so true. Anything you treasure has your heart. If you treasure your house the most, or your car, a pair of shoes or a pretty outfit, a piece of your heart is with those things. If you have a rare item that costs a tremendous amount of money, you insure it, because your heart is with it. You don’t want it damaged, lost, or stolen.

If you spend your life studying the Word of Yahweh, and putting it to practice. If you wake up each day with the goal of being obedient to our Father’s instructions. If you give your money away to the poor, and spend time in prayer, and fast each week, and keep Sabbath, and honor your parents, and be faithful to your spouse, and put other people ahead of yourself... you are collecting treasures in heaven... and that is where your heart will be.

So as I close today... Where is your heart? It’s time for a heart check. Just be honest with yourself. I’m not here to throw stones. I’m here as a gentle shepherd. **Where is your heart?** What are you investing in? Are you more worried about material wealth than spiritual wealth? Do you spend more time chasing after money than chasing after Yahweh? Are you making deposits into your heavenly bank account? Are you spending time in prayer? When is the last time you fasted? Have you given any of your money away this week to someone poor or someone with less than you? Did you study Torah last week to learn more how to be obedient? Where is your heart?

“Good Eyes and Evil Eyes” (Matthew 6:22-24)

Yeshua says in verse 22 (where we begin today) that “if your eye is good, your whole body will be full of light.” He contrasts that with a bad eye, and your whole body being full of darkness. I saw a sister this week say that when she was younger, this verse always troubled her because she had bad eyesight. She worried that the bad eye might be talking about her. I can assure her, and anyone else, not to worry if your eyesight is bad. That’s not the meaning of these verses.

But what is the understanding? Why does Yeshua talk about collecting treasures on earth and heaven (vss. 19-21) and not being a slave to both Yahweh and money (vs. 24), but in the middle (vss. 22-23) talk about a our eye being either good or bad? How do we make sense of this?

IDIOMS

Sometimes we read the Bible, and we misinterpret something because we aren’t familiar with the lingo or speech of ancient times. In language and culture there exists idioms. An idiom, put

basically, is a figure of speech, not literal, but a way of saying one thing that stands for something else.

“He doesn’t have a leg to stand on” - yet the person being spoken of has two legs.

“I call shotgun” - do you look around to see who has a shotgun?

“We’re on the same page” - are you and someone else holding a book?

“Right now it’s up in the air” - is something floating up above you?

“I’m gonna give him a knuckle sandwich” - is this two pieces of bread with knuckles in the middle?

“It’s raining cats and dogs” - do you walk outside and hold a kennel up?

“I’ve got myself in a pickle” - did you just climb inside of a sour cucumber?

We have ways of saying things sometimes to describe situations we find ourselves in, and these idioms we use are particular to the culture in which we live. If an Asian person (who spoke English) but grew up in Japan heard me say “I call shotgun” they would probably wonder why in the world I was talking about a gun before I climbed into the front passenger seat of a car. But they’d also have their cultural idioms that would sound strange to me. Different people and cultures speak in idiomatic ways all the time, and those in the same culture understand each other because it’s part of how we converse.

I believe this “eye is good” comes over to us from a Hebrew idiom. I don’t believe it has anything to do with your physical eye being healthy, and I also don’t think it means having a single purpose in life (as most preachers teach it). It’s rather a figure of speech the Hebrews used to describe someone who was generous with their wealth. On the flip side, a “bad eye” or an “evil eye” describes someone who is stingy or holds onto their money tightly.

Now let me show you this from... (drumroll) the Bible. :) ...the Older Testament. Remember, Yeshua didn’t have a NT. Yeshua’s “Bible” was what people call the Old Testament (Hebrew Scriptures). Growing up a Hebrew boy he would have begun learning Torah in formal school at the age of 5, and probably had much of it if not all of it committed to memory as a teenager. It helped being the Son of Yahweh too, lol, but all Hebrew boys in his day were taught Torah.

The first text I’d like to look at is in Deuteronomy 15, and it’s about a wealthy brother loaning a poor brother money when the Sabbatical year is approaching. This law warns the wealthy brother not to withhold money from his poor neighbor who is in need. The warning is given because on the Sabbatical year (which came around approximately every 7th year) all debts were cancelled. So if you loaned your poor neighbor some money, and it was only a few months until the

Sabbatical year, the debt would be cancelled. So we read this in Deuteronomy 15:7-11 (WEB on the screen).

There in verse 9 where the WEB has “your eye be evil” the HCSB says “you are stingy toward your poor brother.” The HCSB gives the meaning, but the literal words are “evil eye.” This is why it’s good to read more than one translation of the Bible. Neither translation is wrong here, it’s just that one gives the literal words (from the Hebrew; which carries over the idiom) and the other translates the meaning of the idiom into English. The main point is that the evil eye is an idiom standing for a stingy person who hoards wealth and doesn’t help the poor.

This next text I want to go to is in Deuteronomy 28 where the curses for disobedience are being described. What we’re going to read here is awful. It speaks of the curse being so bad that a man actually considers eating his own children. I can’t imagine starving that bad, but these are the curses of Yahweh, and in Josephus’ recounting of the siege against Jerusalem in 70 A.D. this actually took place. So... Look at this (Deuteronomy 28:53-55, WEB).

In verse 54, the HCSB has “look grudgingly.” The NLT has “no compassion.” The God’s Word Translation has “become stingy.” All are correct, but the WEB retains the idiom from the Hebrew.

We see this again in Proverbs 28:22 (Read WEB). Now look at it in the KJV (which retains the idiom). Notice how an evil eye is tied with hoarding your wealth.

Here’s Proverbs 23:6-7, first from the GNB. Now from a more word-for-word translation, this is the Darby Bible. The man with an evil eye is stingy; he doesn’t really want you eating his food. He might be saying one thing, but in his heart he’s upset.

Proverbs 22:9, Literal Standard Version. The ESV says here “bountiful eye.” The GNB paraphrases this by saying, “be generous.”

So the meaning behind this idiom (and this “evil eye” and “good eye” is used time and time again in old Hebrew writings and commentary)... it stems from how a person might look upon his neighbor. A stingy person might wince, “Ugh, I don’t want to help them.” A generous person looks with grace, compassion, and pity and says, “Ah, there’s someone I can help!” The eyes portray whether a person is stingy or generous.

With this understanding, Yeshua mentioning the good and evil eye in Matthew 6 fits perfectly. He speaks of storing up treasures in heaven, and he says you can’t serve Yahweh and money, and right in between he says, “If your eye is good your whole body will be full of light, but if your eye is bad (evil), your whole body will be full of darkness.” He’s speaking of a generous, giving person (one who gives to others of his wealth) *verses* a stingy, holding back person (one who hoards and is stingy with his wealth).

If you are a generous giver, it shows that you are not mastered or controlled by wealth, and that will have a positive effect everything else in your life (your whole body will be full of light). You realize that all you own is temporary and fleeting. You know you brought no material wealth into this world and you will take none with you when you die, so you help others because you know that the true treasure comes later, in the Kingdom of Heaven.

Let's look at a parallel Yeshua gave in **Luke 14:12-14 TLV**. When does the true return on your investment come? In the afterlife, at the resurrection. Basically, in heaven! Heaven coming down to earth, but heaven nonetheless. You are collecting treasures in heaven when you have a good or bountiful eye and you give away your money to the less fortunate.

So this leads perfectly into **Matthew 6:24 (GNB)**. Yeshua's point is not that you can't have any money or wealth. He doesn't mean you can't be rich. I mean, obviously this teaching today is about being generous and giving and that's not possible to do unless you have it to give to begin with. Consider our father Abraham; he was very rich in cattle, silver, and gold (**Genesis 13:2**), yet he was called a friend of Elohim (**Isaiah 41**; **James 2**). You think Abraham was generous?

One of the strongest characteristics of Abraham was that he was a generous man, always giving and helping others. There was one time when Lot's herdmen and Abraham's herdmen were arguing about who would take which plot of land (**Genesis 13**). Abraham stopped the quarrel by letting Lot pick first, and he just took the land that was left over. In **Genesis 14** Abraham gave a tenth of the spoils of war to Melchizedek the priest. In **Genesis 21** Abraham was willing to give his beloved son Isaac back to Yahweh. In **Genesis 25** Abraham gave gifts to the sons of his concubines.

In **Genesis 18** three men showed up at his house, three strangers he had never met, and he washed their feet and then he and his wife immediately prepared a meal for them. This brings to my mind what is later written in **Hebrews 13:2**, “Don't forget to show hospitality to strangers, for in doing so, some have entertained angels without knowing it.”

In the book of Jasher it speaks of the generosity of Abraham. I know some people have a problem with the book of Jasher, and I'm not saying it is Holy Scripture, but there is a book of Jasher mentioned twice in our Bible, in the OT. Whether or not the Jasher we have is the same book is debated, but regardless the history is derived from Scripture, and there are good parallels in Jasher that align with Scripture. Listen to this one from **Jasher 22:11-13**:

11 And Abraham planted a large grove in Beersheba, and he made to it four gates facing the four sides of the earth, and he planted a vineyard in it, so that if a traveler came to Abraham he entered any gate which was in his road, and remained there and ate and drank and satisfied himself and then departed.

12 For the house of Abraham was always open to the sons of men that passed and re-passed, who came daily to eat and drink in the house of Abraham.

13 And any man who had hunger and came to Abraham's house, Abraham would give him bread that he might eat and drink and be satisfied, and any one that came naked to his house he would clothe with garments as he might choose, and give him silver and gold and make known to him the Master who had created him in the earth; this did Abraham all his life.

Abraham had... a good eye. He was wealthy, but he was generous. He had silver, gold, many articles of clothing, plenty of food, but he did not serve mammon. Riches were not his master. He served Yahweh over money, and that was shown in his giving away of wealth.

Brothers and sisters... this is the harmony between all the Scriptures that speak of wealth positively, and all the Scriptures that speak of wealth negatively. There are groups that focus only on one set of these Scriptures or the other. You've got the whole prosperity gospel movement that thinks if you're a believer you have to be rich, and if you're poor you must not be doing something right. You've also got groups on the other side of the fence who think you can't have money or nice things because it's all vanity. There's *some* truth in each of these extremes, but the problem is that some truth is not good enough. We want the position of total truth, and that position only comes through not just Scripture alone, but ALL of Scripture. You'll always arrive at lopsided, bad doctrine by only focusing on *part* of what the Bible says.

When we take everything into account, the Bible teaches there are rich righteous people and poor righteous people. Deuteronomy 15 - right in the Torah, speaks of a man loaning money to the poor when the Sabbatical year is drawing near - it says “for there will never cease to be poor people in the land.” So someone wealthy is lending to someone poor. Same with the teaching in Luke 14 about hosting a banquet and inviting the poor, blind, and lame. The host is wealthy, yet those invited are not.

Yeshua is not teaching against having wealth, he is teaching us to make sure our wealth is kept in its proper perspective. Wealth is not to be a master above Yahweh, and it is to be used not just for our human needs, but for the needs of others. If we are truly mastered by Yahweh, we will be generous and giving of our finances. We will help people. We won't have an evil eye.

I just found this rendering today, of Matthew 6:19-24 in the ERV, Easy to Read Version. It brings across the meaning of the idiom beautifully.

Now, as I close (let's balance this out)... this does not mean you have to help everybody that comes along. If I gave to everybody that asks me (or that I saw in need) I wouldn't have anything for my family. And there are some people who are just unfortunately looking for a hand-out to keep up their bad habits.

So we have to be discerning in our giving, but don't use discernment as an excuse to never give. There are genuine poor people in our communities. There are widows. There are orphans. There are poor families. There are families who hit on hard times. Seek out someone. Find someone to

give to. Every time you earn money, a portion of it needs to be given away to someone who needs help. When you do this, along with prayer and fasting... you are storing up treasure in heaven.

The way you will know if money is your master... is if you will not give any of it away.

“The Power of Almsgiving” (Luke 12:32-34)

That’s some text isn’t it? I want to point out right here at the start that Yeshua didn’t say those words to one person. Most of the time when we hear someone mention “sell your possessions and give to the poor” we think about the “Rich, Young Ruler,” but that’s an entirely different account (Mt. 19; Mk. 10; Lk. 18:18-23). This one here in Luke 12 was spoken to his disciples, and a crowd of many thousands of people. You can reference that by going back to verse 1.

Also in this chapter, someone from the crowd hollered out to Yeshua, “Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me!” (Lk. 12:13). Yeshua responded to this man by saying (Lk. 12:14-15):

“Friend... who appointed me a judge or arbitrator over you?” He then told them, “Watch out and be on guard against all greed because one’s life is not in the abundance of his possessions.”

After this, he went on to tell the parable of the rich, foolish man. The main point is that Yeshua’s words about selling your possessions and giving to the poor were not aimed at one person. He spoke these words to everyone listening to him that day (thousands of people). You might ask, “What do you think his words mean brother Matthew?” Well... I don’t know how he could mean anything other than to sell something you own and give the money away to the poor. We’ll get back to this text at a later time.

What Got Me Thinking

I’ve been wanting to teach on almsgiving, and after teaching last week’s sermons in Matthew 6:19-24 I thought there was no better time than the present. I talked about collecting for ourselves treasures in heaven rather than treasures on the earth. I also talked about how no person can serve both Yahweh and money. Then I talked about the good eye and the evil eye. The good eye is a Hebrew idiom for a person who is generous and giving, while the evil eye refers to a person who is stingy and holds back their wealth. The conclusion I came to in that text is that the way Yeshua is teaching us to collect treasures in heaven is to give away our treasure on the earth.

So, one thing I’m going to suggest, beginning in this sermon, is that the amount of almsgiving: money, time, love, mercy, and compassion that you give away to people who are poor, or in need (hard times) determines how much treasure you will receive in the kingdom of heaven. I believe in levels of hierarchy in the kingdom of heaven. I taught on that when I went through Matthew

5:19 about the greatest and least in the kingdom. **I also now believe in levels of treasure in the kingdom.** The more generous we are with our wealth, the greater treasure we will have in the kingdom. The less generous we are the smaller the treasure we will have in the kingdom. I’ll also be showing in these lessons why I believe that almsgiving, giving to the poor, is a type of sacrifice (equivalent with an animal sacrifice) that brings about atonement or the forgiveness of sin. I know this is a lot to take in, but I just ask you to hear me out.

Protestant Blinding

Now I realize that much of what I’m saying, and will say, in these lessons is going to rub some Protestants the wrong way. I’m going to be agreeing more with the Orthodox and Catholic positions on almsgiving. What I want to do now is ask all the hardcore Protestants to let down their guard and take off those Protestant glasses. Stop rejecting something because a Catholic believes it. That’s not how you determine truth.

I’m going to say something controversial here, so hold on to your pew. **Some people have focused so much on the death, burial, and resurrection of Yeshua that they can’t see anything else the Bible teaches.** Any verse that talks about good works, or how we can gain favor with Yahweh by something we do gets thrown in the trash can, because people think you are trying to add to what Yeshua did for us. Listen... what Yeshua did was perfect. He was the perfect Messiah, and without his life, death, burial, and resurrection to High Priest in heaven, none of us would ever be saved from our sins and gain eternal life. **But that’s not the only thing taught in this book.**

It was Yeshua himself who spoke what I said at the beginning of this sermon: “**Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will not be exhausted, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys.**” That’s what he said, not me, and believing in Yeshua includes believing in what he taught. If you don’t believe what he taught, then you have a deficient belief system.

It’s time we stop worrying about who believes this or that. I had a person tell me the other day that I sounded like a Jehovah’s Witness because of something I believed. They said, “Well, if you believe that, how is that different from a Jehovah’s Witness?” What does it matter if a Jehovah’s Witness gets something right? What does it matter if a Roman Catholic gets something right? Why can’t we just read and study the Bible and believe what it teaches? I don’t pick and choose what I’m going to believe by looking at the different groups that exist. I determine what I will believe by letting Holy Scripture be my guide.

When we talk about justifying works or earning something, people gasp. Yet, the Bible does say, in the NT “**By works a man is justified and not by faith only.**” (James 2) I know there’s nuance and understanding there, but that is what is written. Protestants do a lot of work to make it mean something else, but it doesn’t change what’s there. I’m asking all of us to stop trying to make verses fit a denominational position, or a system of belief that a group has, and just believe all the verses, even if we don’t understand how they harmonize, believe all the verses.

My Study of the Apocrypha

Before I get into the meat of my lessons I want to talk to you about what got me interested in this topic. It was... *the Apocrypha*. I think I just heard a Protestant gasp again, lol. Yes, those books that used to be in the King James Version of the Bible back in 1611 when it was first published (as well as the early Geneva Bible of 1560), and weren't really removed from the Bible until the late 1800's. Those books that all the earliest Christians read and quoted from just as much as the other books in the Older Testament. Those books that were not originally called by the name Apocrypha, but later given that name by those who deemed them to be non-Scripture. Those books that are actually in the Greek Septuagint texts we have, which was the primary text quoted from by the earliest Christians we read about in our NT. Yes, *those books*, books which millions of Orthodox and Catholic Christians have believed to be part of Scripture for almost 2,000 years.

There are actually 11 footnotes in the NT portion of the 1611 KJV (marginal footnotes) that refer you back to the Apocrypha. There are 102 footnotes in the OT that connect texts there to the Apocrypha, so that the reader of that Bible is cross-referencing Scriptural citations and concepts with other like texts.

Some people say, “Well the Jews never considered these books to be Scripture.” Okay... the Jews never considered Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John as Scripture either, but you believe in those books don't you? Furthermore, it's just not true that all Jews rejected these late B.C. period books. There are discussions about Sirach in Jewish literature, and it is quoted authoritatively by some.

The Book of Tobit

I don't want to go into a lengthy defense of these books in this sermon, I'm just pointing out that something I read in these books got me to thinking about almsgiving (giving to the poor). It was in the book of Tobit, a book that was in the 1611 KJV about a man named Tobit, and his family, living as exiles after the Assyrian conquest of Israel. In the book of Tobit there is a lot of talk about the almsgiving.

That word alms is not used as much today as it used to be (we use the word charity), but you've probably heard it before in an older movie or book - “Alms for the poor!” It makes me think about the Robin Hood cartoon movie I watched as a kid.

The word alms actually comes from the Greek word eleemosune (*elaymahsoonay*). We look at that and wonder how we went from that word to alms, but it comes about through the process of transliteration and the shortening down of the word as it travels through various languages. This Greek word is used throughout the NT to refer to pity, mercy, compassion... specifically on poor people or people who have hit hard times. The beginning of the word goes from Greek to Latin to Old English and then to modern English, and it gets shortened (eleemos—alms). So, for example, in Acts 3:1-3 (ESV) we read:

(1) Now Peter and John were going up to the temple at the hour of prayer, the ninth hour. (2) And a man lame from birth was being carried, whom they laid daily at the gate of the temple that is called the Beautiful Gate to ask alms of those entering the temple. (3) Seeing Peter and John about to go into the temple, he asked to receive alms.

When this man was asking for alms (pity, mercy, compassion) he was asking for money, food, kindness, generosity.

In the book of Tobit, he gives his son Tobias some instructions and advice for life in chapter 4, and part of the instructions say (vss. 7-11), “Do almsgiving from your possessions to all who do righteousness. When you do almsgiving, do not let your eye be envious. Do not turn your face away from any poor man, so the face of (the) Almighty will not be turned away from you. Do almsgiving based on the quantity of your possessions. If you possess only a few, do not be afraid to give according to the little you have. You are storing up a good treasure for yourself in the day of necessity. For almsgiving delivers us from death and prevents us from entering into the darkness. Indeed almsgiving is a good gift for all who do it before the Most High.”

Almsgiving delivers us from death. Couple this with Tobit 12:8-9, “Prayer is good with fasting, almsgiving, and righteousness. A few prayers with righteousness are better than many with wrong-doing. It is better to do almsgiving than to lay up gold. For almsgiving rescues one from death, and it will wash away every sin. Those who do almsgiving and are righteous will be full of life.”

Reject it or Study it?

Some Protestants bring this up as error. Some call it heresy to say that giving to the poor washes away sin. So I thought to myself, “That does sound different or strange, but it’s not wise for me to just reject it without studying it. Why not be a Berean and examine the Scriptures (the ones I hold to) to see if this is so?” Does what we read in Tobit about almsgiving have a basis anywhere in the OT books we already accept as Holy Scripture?

Comparison with Yeshua

Well, first off, in Tobit 4:8-9 it says, “Do almsgiving... You are storing up a good treasure for yourself in the day of necessity.” In Luke 12:33 (Yeshua says) “Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Make money-bags for yourselves that won’t grow old, and inexhaustible treasure in heaven.” Both texts speak of storing up treasure by giving to the poor, and I also believe both texts speak of heaven. The day of necessity in Tobit is the resurrection of the righteous. And think back to my last lesson where I read Luke 14 where Yeshua talks about hosting a banquet and inviting the poor, cripple, and blind - people that cannot repay you. He then says, “You will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.” We’ll look at many more comparisons in later lessons.

Prophet Daniel

To close today I want to show you something in the book of Daniel. We view Daniel as a prophet. We view the book of Daniel as Holy Scripture. We can even look to history and find where some of the things Daniel prophesied have already taken place, validating his prophetic office.

In Daniel 4 King Nebuchadnezzar had a dream where he saw this huge tree grow up out of the middle of the earth, and its top reached the sky until everyone on the earth could see it. It had beautiful leaves, fruit (enough for the whole world to eat), wild animals rested under its shade, and birds built nests in its branches. Then an angel came down and said, “Cut the tree down. Chop off its branches, scatter its fruits, and drive all the animals away. But, leave the stump in the ground and put a band of iron and bronze around it. And then the angel said, “Let the dew fall on this man, and let him live with the animals and the plants. For seven years he will not have a human mind, but the mind of an animal.”

So Daniel listened to and interpreted the king’s dream: “Your majesty... you are the tree. Your kingdom is vast and your power reaches across the earth. But you will be driven from society, lose your mind, and have the mind of an animal. You’ll eat grass like a ox, and then after seven years you’ll admit that the Most High rules in the kingdoms of men. He sets up kings and takes them down. No one can stop His hand.”

Then, in Daniel 4:27 (WEB), Daniel says this: “Therefore, O king, let my counsel be acceptable to you, and break off your sins by righteousness, and your iniquities by showing mercy to the poor; if there may be a lengthening of your tranquility.” Now there’s some Hebrew parallelism in this verse, whereby the same thing is said in two different ways.

- 1) Break off your sins — by righteousness
- 2) And your iniquities — by showing mercy to the poor

Sins and iniquities are parallel, and righteousness and showing mercy to the poor are parallel. Daniel is telling the King that the way to break off his sins, which is a figure of speech very similar to “wash away every sin” (in Tobit 12), he must practice almsgiving.

It’s even more powerful and plain the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the book of Daniel. There it’s found in Daniel 4:24 (Brenton), and reads: “Therefore, O king, let my counsel please thee, and atone for thy sins by alms, and thine iniquities by compassion on the poor; it may be God will be long-suffering to thy trespasses.”

So Daniel is telling the King that the way to atone for his sins - of pride, exaltation, thinking he can’t be touched or brought down - is to humble himself and give alms to the poor. So... if we are going to reject the book of Tobit for teaching this, we are also going to have to reject Daniel.

Well... I haven't rejected either book so far, lol. What I've done is... I've slowed down and re-examined some of my pre-conceived ideas about alms, offerings, and atonement. And this is just part 1. I'll be teaching more on this for the next two weeks. I do promise to share many more Scriptures with you.

“Giving to the Poor = Giving to Yahweh” (Luke 12:32-34)

I decided on opening again with this text, because it's so powerful. Remember again, our beloved Messiah is the one speaking this, and he is speaking it to a crowd of thousands of people (Lk. 12:1). I would encourage you to print out this text and put it on your refrigerator for a while.

Last week I talked about two points on almsgiving. The first one was that giving to the poor is how we lay up treasures in heaven. Heaven has a storehouse, the strongbox of Yahweh, in which each time you show kindness and compassion (in general) but specifically to the poor, or give away your money to someone in need, you place a deposit in “heaven's bank.” When you are in need on this earth, Yahweh can pour out your deposits that you've made; a withdrawal of sorts. Ultimately though, the big repayment comes at the resurrection of the righteous. The more almsgiving you do on earth, the greater your reward will be in the kingdom of heaven.

Foundation in Torah

We find the foundation for giving to the poor bringing upon us the blessing of Yahweh in the Torah, the instruction manual of Yahweh, the law that He gave through prophet Moses.

In Deuteronomy 10:18 we read, “He (Yahweh) executes justice for the fatherless and the widow, and the loves the foreign resident, giving him food and clothing.” These people in the nation of Israel were the needy. They didn't have as much as others, yet Yahweh himself looked out for them, and commanded the more wealthy Israelites to look out for them.

It couldn't be more direct than what we read in Exodus 22:21: “You must not exploit a foreign resident or oppress him, since you were foreigners in the land of Egypt.” Exploit means to make use of unfairly to your advantage. When a non-Israelite would join the community of Israel, it could lead to them being outcasted. “They haven't grown up here or been around us. They don't look like us. They're just not the same.” These are thoughts that would naturally occur in the minds of native-born Israelites. Yahweh reminds Israel that they were once foreigners in the land of Egypt, and they were once oppressed, and it wasn't good. Therefore when a foreigner joins to you, make sure you treat them with kindness.

He goes in verses 22-24 to say, “You must not mistreat any widows or fatherless child. If you do mistreat them, they will no doubt cry to Me, and I will certainly hear their cry. My anger will burn, and I will kill you with the sword; then your wives will be widows and your children fatherless.” No mistreatment of widows or fatherless children is allowed, and I believe this goes for believers and non-believers. As we read through all of Scripture, we find that giving to the poor righteous, giving to the poor ones who serve Yahweh is preferred, but it's

not exclusive. We know this because Yahweh himself helps people who don't love Him. Salvation itself, which comes from Yahweh, is an act of mercy and compassion on someone who doesn't deserve it. So yes, help the poor righteous, but even the poor unrighteous... help them too, because Yahweh lets them breath, gives them rain, gives them sunshine, and other joys in life. If Yahweh can feed someone who doesn't love him then we ought to be able to help that same someone.

Exodus 22:25-27 continues, “If you lend money to My people - to the poor person among you, you must not be like a moneylender to him; you must not charge him interest. If you ever take your neighbor's cloak as collateral, return it to him before sunset. For it is his only covering; it is the clothing for his body. What will he sleep in? And if he cries out to Me, I will listen because I am compassionate.” In all of this, Yahweh is watching out for the poor, and He is also watching to see how we are treating the poor. He is compassionate towards them. If we want to be like Yahweh, we will be compassionate towards them.

Cursing and Blessing

So if the mistreatment of the poor brought about the curse of Yahweh, the flip side has to be true, that the proper treatment of the poor brought about the blessing of Yahweh. If Yahweh punishes those who mistreat the poor, then Yahweh must reward those who take care of the poor.

Proverbs and Psalms

We'll see this in a minute in the book of Deuteronomy, but before we go there I want to show you this from a key verse in Proverbs, 19:17. It reads, “Kindness to the poor is a loan to Yahweh, and He will give a reward to the lender.” The word kindness here refers to any act of charity or alms shown to the poor, both in compassion, mercy, care, and money. The author says that when we do this, it is like loaning something to Yahweh. You think Yahweh pays back His loan?

If I told you that the money you lent someone was going to be co-signed by Warren Buffet, you'd feel pretty secure that you'd get your money back. The more wealthy the co-signer the more comfortable you would feel. When we give to the poor, Yahweh (the One who created all the land, seas, heavens, waters, and everything in them) co-signs their loan. So there is a guarantee that you will be paid back for what you give. Sometimes in this life, but with a surety at the resurrection of the righteous.

Look at Psalm 41:1-3, “Happy is the one who cares for the poor; Yahweh will save him in a day of adversity. Yahweh will keep him and preserve him; he will be blessed in the land. You will not give him over to the desire of his enemies. Yahweh will sustain him on his sickbed; You will heal him on the bed where he lies.” This is the best insurance you could ever buy. The best way for you to plan for the future, for financial stability, is to give your money away to the poor - the widow, fatherless child, or foreign resident.

In Proverbs 3:1-2 we read, “My son, don’t forget my teaching (Torah) but let your heart keep my commands; for they will bring you many days, a full life, and well-being.” I don’t understand how someone can read that and conclude that keeping the Torah brings about bondage or a curse. Why in the world would you not want those promises?

Well, in verses 3-4 it reads (HCSB) “Never let loyalty and faithfulness leave you, tie them around your neck; write them on the tablet of your heart. Then you will find favor and high regard in the sight of the Almighty and man.” In the KJV that word loyalty is mercy. The Hebrew is *chesed* meaning goodness, kindness, faithfulness. But in the Greek Septuagint, the word is *elaymosunay*, the Greek word from where we get the word alms. So, for example, in my OSB, Proverbs 3:3 reads, “Do not let almsgiving and faithfulness forsake you.” In my NETS it reads, “Let acts of charity and loyalty not fail you.” Almsgiving, charity, giving to the poor, brings about the favor of Yahweh in your life.

The Tithes, Third Year

Back to the law of Moses... in Deuteronomy 14 we have commandment in regards to tithing. Tithing was done about 3 times a year, at the major festivals in ancient Israel, and was on livestock and produce in their agrarian society. So they would bring a tenth of all their produce, as well as 1 out of every 10 animals they had born on their farm, and they would rejoice at the feast, and actually eat some of the tithe themselves, but there were strict commands on not to forsake the Levite (the priests) or the poor (widow, fatherless, and foreign resident).

In Deuteronomy 14:28-29 (GNB) we read, “At the end of every third year bring the tithe of all your crops and store it in your towns. This food is for the Levites, since they own no property, and for the foreigners, orphans, and widows who live in your towns. They are to come and get all they need. Do this, and Yahweh your Mighty One will bless you in everything you do.”

So, it looks like to me that this was a *special* year for the tithe. Deuteronomy 14:22 (just a few verses before this) says, “Each year you are to set aside a tenth of all the produce grown in your fields.” So that’s every year. Then verse 28 mentions “at the end of every third year” there is something different done with the tithe. Deuteronomy 15:1 mentions, “At the end of seven years you must cancel debt,” and we know from the Torah that the seven year cycle is called the sabbatical. So this “at the end of three years” could be understood as the third year in the sabbatical cycle, or the third and sixth years (3+3) in the sabbatical cycle, I’m not sure on that, it could go either way.

The point I want to make here is **the care that Yahweh takes for the poor**. Notice in verse 28 that the tithe for this third year is not taken on a pilgrimage to the place Yahweh puts his name, but rather stored within your town, so that all the poor in your town can come and eat and be satisfied. And then it says that Yahweh will bless you. Once again, giving to the poor brings about a repayment or blessing from Yahweh.

The same thing is said in Deuteronomy 26:12-15 (GNB), “Every third year give the tithe—a tenth of your crops—to the Levites, the foreigners, the orphans, and the widows, so that in every community they will have all they need to eat. When you have done this, say to Yahweh, ‘None of the sacred tithe is left in my house; I have given it to the Levites, the foreigners, the orphans, and the widows, as you commanded me to do. I have not disobeyed or forgotten any of your commands concerning the tithe. I have not eaten any of it when I was mourning; I have not taken any of it out of my house when I was ritually unclean; and I have not given any of it as an offering for the dead. I have obeyed you, O Yahweh; I have done everything you commanded concerning the tithe. Look down from your holy place in heaven and bless your people Israel; bless also the rich and fertile land that you have given us, as you promised our ancestors.’”

Notice carefully that there’s a command in here that teaches after an Israelite would obey the tithe to the poor they were to tell Yahweh what they had done and then ask Him to look down upon them from heaven, and bless them and their land. Again, giving to the poor secures a reward or payment from Yahweh.

Cornelius the Devout

This is why the Italian, Centurion Cornelius was blessed to hear and receive the good news about Yeshua. In Acts 10 we read about him, and we read that he was a devout man that feared the Almighty. Devout means reverent and pious, holy before Yahweh. His holiness is defined at the end of verse 2 like this (KJV): “He gave much alms to the people, and prayed to the Mighty One always.” The word alms there is our Greek word *elaymahsunay*, and so we read in the ERV, “He gave much of his money to help the poor people, and always prayed to the Mighty One.”

An angel came to visit Cornelius, at about 3 o’clock one day, and that angel told him this (Acts 10:4, ERV) “The Mighty One has heard your prayers and has seen your gifts to the poor. He remembers you and all you have done.” Yahweh was keeping a record or remembrance. All of Cornelius’ prayers and alms for the poor were recorded in heaven, and therefore Yahweh sent this angel to tell Cornelius that something special was going to happen to him and his household. Yahweh rewarded Cornelius.

Sirach Lines Up

In the Wisdom of Sirach, a book in the Apocrypha (that used to be in the KJV), it says it 7:10 (GNB), “Never get tired of praying, and never miss a chance to give to the poor.” Later in that same chapter, in verses 32-35 it says, “Give your help to the poor, and the Lord will give you his perfect blessing. Be generous to every living soul, and be gracious to the memory of the dead. Show sympathy to those who have lost a loved one, and mourn with them. Do not hesitate to visit the sick. You will be loved for things like these.”

When Sirach says to mourn with those who have lost a loved one, it makes me think of what Paul wrote in Romans 12:15, “Weep with those who weep.”

Sirach 29:9-13 (OSB) says, “Because of the commandment help a poor man, and in his need, do not turn him away empty. (10) Lose your money for the sake of a brother and friend; do not let it rust under a stone and be lost. (11) Lay up your treasure [think about Mt. 6:19-21] according to the commandments of the Most High [Ex. 22:22-27; Deut. 14; 15; 26], for this will profit you more than gold [Prov. 19:17]. Store alms in your storerooms, and they will deliver you from all affliction [remember Psalm 41:1-3]. More than a mighty shield and better than a strong spear, almsgiving will fight for you against your enemy.”

There is a heavenly storehouse brothers and sisters, and you store up treasures there when you give to the poor, visit the sick, and even when you show kindness to someone who has died. Think about when Nicodemus and the Mary Magdalene and the other women who prepared spices and ointments to anoint Yeshua’s dead body. Yoseph of Arimathea (a rich man) wrapped Yeshua’s body in a clean, linen cloth and laid him in his new tomb that he had hewn out of a rock.

Sheep on the Right

There’s so much more, but I will share with you one last text as I close. It’s a text many of you know well, but maybe you’ve never thought about it in this light. It’s found in Matthew 25 when the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, and he’ll put the sheep on his right hand. The King will say to those on his right hand, “C’mon down brothers and sisters, you who are blessed by My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.

“For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat; I was thirsty and you gave Me something to drink. I was a stranger and you took Me in; I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you took care of Me; I was in prison and you visited Me.” Then the righteous will answer Him, “Master, when did we do all these things for You?” And the King will answer them back, “I assure you: Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of Mine, you did for Me.”

Kindness to the poor is a loan to Yahweh. And He will repay the lender. Don’t store up treasures for yourself on the earth. Sell your possessions and give to the poor, make money-bags for yourself that won’t wear out, an inexhaustible treasure in heaven.

“Is Almsgiving the Prosperity Gospel?” (Mark 10:17-22)

I initially thought that today I’d talk about the atoning aspect of almsgiving, that giving to the poor in some sense atones or covers over sin, but... that will have to wait for a future sermon. I do promise to cover it, Yah’s will, but as I study this subject out, there is so much more I want to bring to the forefront, so I don’t want to rush myself.

I decided to focus this lesson on Mark 10 and the account of the “Rich Young Ruler” coming up to Yeshua. I want to focus on the part in this text that is pertinent to our studies about giving to

the poor. Towards the end of the sermon I will talk some about this text in relation to the whole modern day “Prosperity Gospel Movement.”

The Rich Man’s Question

This young man comes up to Yeshua and asks, “What must I do to inherit eternal life?” A lot of preachers today would get upset about even being asked such a question. They would say: “There’s nothing you can do! Don’t you know it’s all been done?! It’s all by grace, just believe!” - and by believe they mean believe something in your mind; that’s where belief starts and stops with many preachers today who think that faith is the absence of law.

But Yeshua doesn’t get upset, or tell the man that he’s asking the wrong question. He says to him, “You know the commandments” and then he begins to cite some of the commandments in the law.

Now, both Matthew and Luke also record this account for us, so when we look at Luke, he records Yeshua as saying the same thing: “You know the commandments,” but Matthew records Yeshua as answering by saying, “If you want to enter into life, keep the commandments.” I don’t think the gospel of Matthew contradicts Mark or Luke. “You know the commandments” is basically saying to the Rich Young Ruler, “You know the answer to this question: keep the commandments.”

Do you know how mad it will make some people today to hear us answer someone with the exact same answer Yeshua gave? There are some people, if they were within ear-shot of me, and a person came up to me and asked me, “Matthew, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” If I looked at that person and answered, “If you want to enter into life, keep the commandments,” they would say I was preaching a false gospel and denying the work of Messiah. Then if I turned over to the Gospel of Matthew, and read them Yeshua’s response in Matthew 19:17, they would weasel their way out of it, and end up saying that Yeshua didn’t really mean what he said. “He was just trying to trick the young ruler, or make him think,” they say.

I think Yeshua meant exactly what he said: “If you want to enter into life - eternal life (the life that he was just asked about), then keep the commandments.” Commandment keepers inherit eternal life, commandment breakers do not.

Which Commandments?

Now, in Matthew’s account, the Rich Young Ruler responds by saying, “Which ones?” That’s some question isn’t it? When I read that, I think, “Now that’s someone who’s heart isn’t in the right place.” When Yeshua said, “Keep the commandments” to me it’s obvious that he meant, “Any commandment that you can keep - any commandment that applies to you - keep it.” I think this man was trying to figure out the bare minimum of what he needed to do.

Just the Bare Minimum

In life, some people can be given a task, and they will do just barely enough to get by. They'll move slow, they'll work with a frown, they'll grumble and complain, but they'll do just enough as to not get fired. You have other people who will work heartily as unto the Lord and not men. They'll do everything they are required to do, and do it joy and to the very best of their ability... and then they'll go above and beyond and do something extra.

If we apply this to the spiritual there are people who ask “Which commandments?” when they hear the answer “Keep the commandments,” and then there are people who immediately start thinking, “I need to go read and study the commandments so I can do what the Master has said.”

Yeshua Cites 6 Commandments

So if we go back to Mark's account of the Rich Young Ruler, Yeshua says, “You know the commandments” and then starts citing some of the commandments. He gives 6 of them in Mark 10:19 - do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not bear false witness, do not defraud, and honor your father and mother. It's interesting that 5 out of these 6 are found in the 10 commandment list in both Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5. But the commandment “do not defraud” is NOT in the 10 commandment list. That command comes from Leviticus 19:13 (KJV) - “Thou shalt not defraud thy neighbor, neither rob him: the wages of him that is hired shall not abide with thee all night until the morning.”

My Sons and “Payday”

My sons have pulled this verse on me after working for a day and asking for pay (even though it's not “pay-day”). And... I pay them. In our society we have pay-days that generally come at the end of a week's work, or some people get paid every two weeks. That may be an agreement we make today, but it's not Scriptural. What I say is that it's okay to have that agreement between two people, but with the agreement comes the caveat that if a worker comes up at the end of a day wanting their day's labor (even though there's been a weekly agreement for pay), it's a commandment that you give it to them. I'm sure that some of the people today who work for an unbelieving employer, and only get paid every two weeks, have a hard time stretching their money. It ought not be. It's not Yahweh's way.

More than the 10

So defrauding your neighbor (other translations say oppress, exploit, cheat, take advantage of) means withholding pay from someone who has worked for you. It's important that we make note of this, because it shows us that Yeshua wasn't just telling the Rich Young Ruler to keep the 10 commandments. Now, the 10 commandments shouldn't be seen as exhaustive in themselves to begin with. They should be looked at as headings under which hundreds of other commandments find their place, but it's important because we have some people today teaching to just keep the 10 commandments - it's okay to ignore the rest of the law and commandments, so long as you obey the big 10. Well, when Yeshua cites the commandments that should be kept to this young man here, he cites one from Leviticus 19:13 - outside of the verbatim 10 commandments in

Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5. Take note of that and show it to someone the next time you hear a person say you only have to keep the 10.

The Young Man’s Response

So, what happened next? The Rich Young Ruler responded (Mark 10:20) by saying, “Teacher, I have kept all these from my youth.” Now... I’m going to speculate a little bit here, because the text doesn’t tell us something. Why did Yeshua just cite 6 commandments? Here’s two possibilities: (1) As Yeshua was citing some of the commandments, the young man interrupted him like, “I know, I know, I’ve been hearing this since I was a little boy.” That’s a possibility. Or, (2) Yeshua cited commandments that dealt with person-to-person relationships, because these were the commands this young man needed to hear the most. Yeshua knew the young man’s heart and life, and he hit it where it needed to be hit.

We all have commandments we struggle with, don’t we? I mean, there are those commandments we don’t struggle with at all, and we like to focus on those because it makes us feel pretty good about ourself. But... each one of us struggles in some area of the commandments, and we don’t really like to dwell on that very much... but those are the ones we need to dwell on.

Yeshua’s Response

After this young man told Yeshua he’d been keeping all of these commandments since he was little, Mark 10:21 says, “Then, looking at him, Yeshua loved him and said to him, ‘You lack one thing: Go, sell all you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow Me.’”

What did the rich man lack? It had something to do with his treatment of the poor. It is possible that although he *believed* he had followed the commandments to love his neighbor, he had actually deceived himself. As we went over last week, there are many commandments in the Torah that speak of giving to the poor - the widows, orphans, and foreigners that had joined to the nation of Israel. An Israelite wasn’t even allowed to harvest the borders of his garden, but leave them for the poor (Lev. 19:9-10). Even when knocking down olives from a tree, or gathering grapes from a vineyard, the Israelite was commanded to make only one pass, and anything that they overlooked or forgot to harvest was to be left for the poor (Deut. 24:19-22).

So for Yeshua to tell this man to give to the poor, wasn’t out of line with keeping the commandments. But... ***sell all his possessions?*** That sounds a bit extreme... yet don’t forget that Yeshua said something similar to a crowd of many thousands of people in Luke 12:33 - “**Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Make money-bags for yourselves that won’t grow old, an inexhaustible treasure in heaven, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys.**” Yet, Yeshua doesn’t tell the crowd to sell ALL their possessions, but he does tell the Rich Young Ruler that (“sell all you have”).

Why Sell Everything?

There are two schools of thought here. One is that the Rich Young Ruler had acquired his riches by exploiting and defrauding others. One of the “early church fathers” named Origen (185-254 A.D.) in his commentary on Matthew cites a writing called the “Gospel of the Nazarenes” that speaks of the Rich Young Ruler’s mistreatment of the poor. It says, “And the Lord said to him: how can you say, I have fulfilled the law and the prophets? For it stands written in the law: Love thy neighbor as thyself; and behold, many of thy brethren, sons of Abraham, are begrimed with dirt and die of hunger - and thy house is full of many good things and nothing at all comes forth from it to them!”

If this is the case then the Rich Young Ruler may have accumulated his wealth sinfully, and furthermore wasn’t using any of it to help the poor as Yahweh commands in Torah. Thus there was a requirement to him, to sell everything he owned and give the money away to the poor. Yeshua knew that’s what it would take to pay back all the wrong he had done.

The other school of thought here is that Yeshua was hitting the man with the first table of the law - not having other gods before Yahweh. This interpretation says that the man loved and served his wealth over Yahweh, so Yeshua challenged him on that. I’m more inclined to go with the previous understanding.

Treasure in Heaven

Whichever thought you go with, I want you to notice what Yeshua says here. This is the point I’ve been building up to: “GO, **sell all you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven.**” Yeshua links up the giving away of money (to the poor) with the treasure one has in heaven. There is a direct connection between the two. In order to store up treasure in heaven a person must be willing to give alms to those who are in need.

Mark 10:22 tells us that the young man was stunned, sad, or gloomy at Yeshua’s statement, and “he went away grieving, because he had many possessions.”

Do We Believe This?

I’ve been thinking about what I’ve been teaching on for the past few weeks: selling possessions, giving to the poor, treasure in heaven, and all that goes along with this. It’s hard to wrap your mind around it, because what feels **most real** is what is **right now**. Right now, in this moment you are in, feels the most real. You could die in a car wreck on the way home tonight, but you don’t know that, so it’s not real. You could lose your job next week, but right now it’s not real. You could be stolen from a month from now, or any kind of calamity, but it’s not real to you until it happens.

So when I preach about selling possessions and giving the money away to the poor, so that you can have great treasure in heaven... it just doesn’t seem real because you cannot see it, it’s not something tangible, you can’t reach out and touch it. But yet it’s true. We just read it. It’s hard, but it’s true.

Hard for a Rich Man

Look at what Yeshua said next, after this guy went away grieving:

Mark 10:23-25 “Yeshua looked around and said to his disciples, ‘How hard it is for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of the Almighty!’ (24) But the disciples were astonished at his words. Again Yeshua said to them, ‘Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of the Almighty! (25) It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle (*explain various views*) than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of the Almighty.’”

Our first, fleshly inclination is - let me figure out some way to explain this away. Hahaha... Now I don't see myself as a rich man... at least not by some standards. But it's relative. By some standards in the world, I'm a rich man. To many people even in America, I would be looked upon as a rich man, to others I'd look like a middle class or even poor man. But I do have many possessions, and most of them are paid for. So, I have riches. Is it hard for me (or you) to enter the Kingdom of the Almighty?

Why were the disciples astonished at his words here? It's likely because of the association of wealth with the righteous in Torah. The very blessings of Deuteronomy 28:1-14 came to the nation and people of Israel when they were obedient to the commandments. So how then could wealth and riches be something that keeps a person away from the kingdom? I believe the answer to this lies in what I've been teaching in this sermon series: a wealthy person is often a stingy person who doesn't help the poor but just accumulates more and more riches for himself. I believe **this is why** Yeshua says what he says here about it being hard for a rich person to enter the kingdom. If you don't give to the poor, you aren't using your wealth in the way the Torah commands.

Now when he told his disciples this, they said (10:26), “Then who can be saved?” Yeshua responded to them by saying (10:27) , “With men it is impossible, but not with the Almighty, because all things are possible with the Almighty.” Why did he say that? Because a rich person who doesn't truly believe in or follow the Almighty will not have concern for the poor. But, a person who truly believes in and serves the Almighty, will be obedient to all the commandments that have to do with helping the poor. That's what it means by it being possible “with the Almighty.”

The Hundred-Fold Blessing

Then in verse 28 Peter speaks up and says, “Look we have left everything and followed you.” And Yeshua says (vss. 29-31), “I assure you, there is no one who has left house, brothers or sisters, mother or father, children, or fields because of Me and the gospel, (30) who will not receive 100 times more, now at this time - houses, brothers and sisters, mothers and children, and fields, with persecutions - and eternal life in the age to come. (31) But many who are first will be last, and the last first.”

I said I would talk about the Prosperity Gospel at the close of this sermon. This is a favorite text of the P.G. Preachers. They say this is the “hundred fold blessing,” and they stress “now at this time” in verse 30. They shout that you can receive 100 houses if you just give your money to them; sow your seed into their ministry. Gloria Copeland says, “You give \$1 for the Gospel’s sake and \$100 belongs to you; give \$10 and receive \$1,000; give \$1,000 and receive \$100,000... Give one airplane and receive one hundred times the value of the airplane. Give one car and the return would furnish you a lifetime of cars. In short, Mark 10:30 is a very good deal.”

What’s the difference between what the P.G. teaches and what the Bible teaches? I’ve been teaching you that you can store up treasures in heaven by giving, and Yahweh will provide for your needs, so how is this different than the Prosperity Gospel?

Here are two key differences:

- (1) The P.G. teaches you to give to the preacher, church, or a religious group. (Now I believe we should support genuine ministers and ministries, but I do not believe a paid minister should live a lavish lifestyle above the members of the church.) The Bible teaches that **giving to the poor** stores up treasures. Oftentimes people in these P.G. Churches remain the same or grow poorer and the ministry grows richer, yet the preachers say “Just keep giving and trusting.”
- (2) The P.G. focuses all on the here and now, whereas the Bible teaches that our primary focus is on the Kingdom of Heaven to come at the resurrection. So that our gifts now might make us poorer now, but richer later (in something we can’t see or touch now). And if we grow more wealthy now, we shouldn’t just use it for our needs/wants, we should look at it as more to give away.

Manipulating Mark

So what about Mark 10:30 and that hundred fold blessing or return? Well, it shouldn’t surprise you that the P.G. Preachers misinterpret it. The 100 fold in Mark 10:30 is not speaking of you as an individual receiving 100 personal houses because gave away 1 house (or the equivalent in money). It has to do with losing relationships for the sake of the gospel, yet gaining relationships with the family of Yahweh. Let’s look at it again (Mark 10:29-30):

Yeshua says, “I assure you, there is no one who has left house, brothers or sisters, mother or father, children, or fields because of Me and the gospel...”

Stop right there. Yeshua isn’t even speaking about giving to a church or sowing your money into a ministry. He is talking about you having to give up these relationships: homes, jobs (fields) due to your commitment to Him and gospel of the kingdom. Think about a person who loses their job because of their beliefs or practice. A person whose family disowns them because they’re looked upon as a “religious fanatic.” This person loves their family, and their job, but they love Yeshua and the Kingdom more, so they lose a house (household) or job.

Then, in Mark 10:30, Yeshua says that there is no one who has left these things for Me and the gospel “who will not receive 100 times more, now at this time (here on the earth) - houses (the homes of other believers welcome you to stay), brothers and sisters, mothers and children (you gain family members, because those who do the will of Yahweh are your family), and fields (you will be provided work and a way to make a living), WITH PERSECUTIONS (the P.G. does not like to mention that part) - and eternal life in the age to come.”

So the point about this hundred fold return is not that you will be rich by the world’s standards. It’s that you will be rich with the family of Yahweh, both now and most importantly in the Kingdom.

Closing

So this entire text does teach that giving away your money equals receiving a great treasure, BUT... the great treasure is stored in heaven, and the giving away of your money is to the poor, not to a preacher whose already wearing 10k in clothes and jewelry up on a stage. The blessings you receive for giving to the poor come in both having your needs met now, and most importantly and primarily your reward at the resurrection of the righteous. And if you have to lose a home, family, or job due to your dedication to Yahweh, He will provide for you through the other believers you will meet who are just as dedicated.

“Atoning Almsgiving”

When I first began teaching on almsgiving, I explained that my reason for teaching these lessons was that I was told that the “Apocryphal book” of Tobit taught that giving alms atoned for sin, so there’s no way it could be a book of Holy Scripture. Instead of just accepting that, I thought about it and began testing it. I started asking myself if there was anywhere in the books Christians in our culture already accept as Scripture that teach the same thing?

That question led me on an in-depth study about almsgiving: the practice of helping others, showing acts of kindness and mercy, and giving monetarily to the poor and needy. I’ve shown you all much of what I’ve learned in my studies, but today I’m going to focus on this idea that almsgiving atones for sin.

It’s an odd thought at first, because when we think of atonement and forgiveness of sin we automatically think: the Messiah. The word atonement means forgiveness, reconciliation, or restoration to favor. Through Yeshua’s life, death, resurrection, and ascension into heaven as our high priest we are forgiven of our sin and reconciled to Yahweh, our Heavenly Father, the One we sinned against. So why in the world would anyone say that almsgiving atones for sin?

Sometimes we think we know all the truth on a particular subject, and then all of a sudden (through Scripture reading/study, and discussing with other people who study Scripture) we find another piece to the puzzle that was there the whole time, but we couldn’t see it before. Then we have to rework the puzzle to see where and how the piece fits. Growth is a good thing. Growth

doesn't always mean you didn't have salvation before and now you do, it's the reality that we don't know everything, and we don't learn everything all at once.

So, in studying this I've found verses in both the OT and NT (that we are accustomed to in our upbringing) that teach the exact same thing that the book of Tobit teaches, that almsgiving atones for sin. I also found that another book in the so-called “Apocrypha” teaches this heavily, and that is the book of Sirach. I say so-called Apocrypha, because I'm personally convinced that the word Apocrypha is a name given to certain books of Scripture by Jerome, the man who produced the Latin Vulgate late 4th century early 5th century A.D.

The name Apocrypha was given to these books by Jerome because he was persuaded that they were NOT Scripture. Prior to him the earliest Christians all accepted them as Scripture, and they remained in the Bible even as far as the 1611 KJV. I used to be under the impression that the Catholics added these books to Scripture, but through study I've found that Protestants *removed* them from Scripture. I now believe Tobit and Sirach are books of the Bible, and I wish I had understood this more when my children were little, so I could train them more with these books, but such is life. I plan on teaching on this in more detail at a later time, but I just wanted to point that out before I move on.

Daniel Says It

What are the verses I found that teach this about almsgiving? Well, I gave you one of them in my first lesson on almsgiving, and that's Daniel 4:27 (or Daniel 4:24 in some versions). This is where Daniel interprets King Nebuchadnezzar's dream and gives him counsel on how to atone for his sin of pride. The Greek Septuagint is the clearest version of this, and I'm reading from the Brenton Translation (4:24), where Daniel says: “Therefore, O king, let my counsel please thee, and atone for thy sins by alms, and thine iniquities by compassion on the poor: it may be God will be long-suffering to thy trespasses.”

Prophet Daniel, one of the most righteous men in all of Scripture, gives this king instructions on how to atone for his sin, and that instruction is: *give alms to* and *show compassion on* the poor. So there it is, almsgiving somehow atones for sin, but that's not the only verse that teaches this in the Older Testament.

Proverbs 15:27 & 16:6

In my studies I ran across Proverbs 15:27. Now, let me read that to you from my personal Bible, the 2004 HCSB. It says, “The one who profits dishonestly troubles his household, but the one who hates bribes will live.” In reading that you don't see anything that speaks of atoning for sin or giving alms. But look at how this reads in the Septuagint (again from Brenton's translation): “A receiver of bribes destroys himself; but he that hates the receiving of bribes is safe. By alms and by faithful dealings sins are purged away; but by the fear of [Yahweh] every one departs from evil.” It's very straightforward here, and let me remind you that the Greek Septuagint was the primary OT for the early Christians. We know this by looking at the quotations of the the OT in the NT. Over 90% of the quotations align with the LXX.

But why the difference here between the Greek Proverb and the Hebrew Proverb? Well, it's actually not that different when we realize that the longer verse in Proverbs 15:27 LXX is found in the next chapter in the Hebrew, Proverbs 16:6. In other words, the Hebrew and the Greek contain this verse, it's just in Proverbs 15:27 in the Greek and 16:6 in the Hebrew.

Proverbs 16:6 reads (WEB): “By mercy and truth iniquity is atoned for. By the fear of Yahweh men depart from evil.” So you see the parallel. “Mercy and truth” in the Hebrew are “Alms and faithful dealings” in the Greek. Mercy was understood by the Hebrews as being compassionate towards others. As a matter of fact the Greek word *elamosunay* is often translated as “mercy” from the Septuagint, in reference to Yahweh's dealings with mankind. In that sense Yahweh is rich and we are poor, yet He gives alms to us (kindness, long-suffering).

So you get the same idea in Proverbs 16:6 (translated from the Hebrew), it's just clearer in the Greek Proverbs, and the LXX is what the majority of early Christians were reading and studying.

Sirach Background

Now to the book of Sirach, written by a Hebrew around 180 B.C. and very similar in it's scope to the book of Proverbs. If you love Proverbs you will love Sirach. It is contained in the oldest copies of the Greek Septuagint available to us today.

Let me show you a little nugget here before we see what Sirach says about alms... in the 1611 KJV there's a footnote at Matthew 6:7 where Yeshua says “When ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do. For they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking.” The footnote right beside the verse stands for “Ecclesiasticus 7:16.” Now that's not Ecclesiastes but Ecclesiasticus, which is another name for the book of Sirach. The reason this book was surnamed Ecclesiasticus is because this book was read out loud (in Latin) frequently in some churches, and Ecclesiasticus is Latin for “church (reading) book.”

In Sirach 7:14 (I assume 7:16 is a misprint or the verse numbering could have varied in some Bibles) it says, “Use not many words in a multitude of elders, and make not much babbling when thou prayest.” Yeshua the Messiah was pulling from Sirach in the Sermon on the Mount.

I bring up this (and there are others) to show you that the book of Sirach was known by the translators and readers of the 1611 KJV. We would know it too if a group of people wouldn't have decided to remove it from the Bible. I'm 40 years old, and I just started learning Sirach a few years ago. It saddens me that I didn't grow up with it like I did Proverbs.

Sirach on Almsgiving

What does Sirach say about atoning almsgiving? Sirach 3:30 (28 in some) says, “Water will quench a flaming fire, and alms maketh an atonement for sins.” As water puts out a fire, almsgiving takes away sin. What's also interesting here is that in the 1611 KJV there is a footnote at Sirach 3:30 referring the reader to Daniel 4:24 (which we covered) and also to

Matthew 5:7 which says, “Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.” Giving out mercy brings back mercy, and mercy is often understood to mean almsgiving. The Greek words for merciful and mercy in Matthew 5:7 are not *elamosunay*, but they are related words: *elaymon* (G1655) and *elay-ah* (G1653). *Elamosunay* is G1654.

Also, in Sirach 35:1-2 we read, “The man who keeps the law will abound in offerings; He who heeds the commandments sacrifices a peace offering. (2) He who returns a kindness offers fine wheat flour, and he who does alms sacrifices a praise offering.” What’s interesting here is that giving to the poor is viewed as a type of sacrifice, and we know that one of the purposes of the sacrifices in the Torah were to make atonement. So somehow the giving of alms is equivalent with that, here in the book of Sirach.

Yeshua Taught This

Let’s look now to the words of Yeshua the Messiah when he was invited to dinner by a Pharisee. I’ll read from Luke 11:37-41, HCSB:

As He was speaking, a Pharisee asked Him to dine with him. So He went in and reclined at the table. (38) When the Pharisee saw this, he was amazed that He did not first perform the ritual washing before dinner [this parallels with Matthew 15 and Mark 7, where the Pharisees asked Yeshua why his disciples didn’t wash their hands before eating bread]. (39) But the Master said to him: “Now you Pharisees clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside you are full of greed and evil. (40) Fools! Didn’t He who made the outside make the inside to? (41) But give to charity what is within, and then everything is clean for you.”

That last verse is what I want to center in on here. Most people read this and think Yeshua is saying all meats are clean to eat, contradicting Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14. That’s not the context at all here. There would never be pig or camel meat at a Pharisee’s house for dinner.

Yeshua is referencing the Pharisee’s outward appearance, how they look, and what they do to and on their body just to be showy. Then he says (and listen carefully) that **inside they are full of GREED and evil**. He uses the word *greed* which is a word denoting stinginess or the evil eye, cheating or robbery. So this is what he says they are full of on the inside, but He who made them (Yahweh) made both their outside and inside, so they needed to be concerned with keeping both clean.

In verse 41 when this Bible has Yeshua saying, “But give to charity what is within” other versions use the word alms (KJV, ESV, YLT), and the Greek word is *elamosunay*. Many translators struggle with this phrase, probably because they don’t want it to sound like almsgiving atones for sin, because the next thing out of Yeshua’s mouth after he speaks about giving alms is “and then everything is clean for you.”

The problem with translating it as “but give to charity what is within (HCSB)” is that Yeshua has just said that the Pharisees inside is full of greed and evil. So he’s NOT telling them to give what they have inside of them as alms.

This is a little technical, but some scholars say the sentence is an *accusative of respect* (meaning it) should be rendered as “give alms with respect to (or *in consideration of*) the things within,” so the meaning is that the practice of giving alms helps to get rid of the greed and the evil inside a person. The inside of the Pharisee will be cleaned through the giving of alms. This may help us with answering “HOW does almsgiving atone for sin?” It could be that through giving to the poor (regularly, as a habit) it cleanses the greed and stinginess in our natural hearts. Our natural man wants to hoard the wealth we have, but Scripture teaches that when we have abundance and are blessed, we need to build a bigger table so others can join in.

Peter’s Statement

Have you ever heard someone use the phrase “Love covers a multitude of sins”? That phrase comes from the book of 1 Peter, but what does it mean? Is it speaking about Yahweh’s love toward us or could it be speaking of our loving actions towards others? And if it is speaking of our actions toward others, does the love we have cover someone else’s sin or our own sin?

One way this verse was interpreted in early Christianity is as a reference to performing acts of charity towards others, and through that love our sins are atoned for. You’ll find this in the writings of the Didache, Polycarp, Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, Cyprian, and others. These early authors do not prove this is what Peter spoke of, but it does show that the verse has been interpreted this way.

I think it’s a good interpretation, because of the context of 1 Peter 4:8. Many scholars today view this as a phrase expressing how we forgive others through love, and it covers over another person’s sins against us. I agree with that in concept, but I don’t think that’s the context of this verse.

Above all, keep your love for one another at full strength, since love covers a multitude of sins. (9) Be hospitable to one another without complaining. (10) Based on the gift they have received, everyone should use it to serve others, as good managers of the varied grace of (the Almighty).

The context is about almsgiving: serving others with your gifts and being hospitable (*philoxenos* = kindness/love to strangers). There’s nothing here about forgiving someone for a sin done to you, it’s about each person giving out alms and thereby covering over sin. I’m suggesting it’s our own sins that are covered over by our showing kindness, mercy, and charity.

Conclusion

So I took a step back after being shown what was in Tobit, and all of this is what I discovered. I’m not exactly sure how almsgiving atones for sin, but I believe it does based on Scripture. I

don't believe it takes the place of Messiah - nothing takes the place of Messiah - but that doesn't mean other things can't *accompany* the Messiah in some way. I hope this message, and all of the other sermons I've given on alms, has been a blessing to you.