

The Gospels in First-Century Judaea

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Matthew 19:20: “What Do I Still Lack?” Jesus, Charity, and the Early Rabbis

Jeffrey P. García

Charity and deeds of loving-kindness outweigh all the commandments in the Torah.

T. PEAH 4:19

Caring for the poor plays a distinct role in biblical legislation (e.g., the laws of Peah; Lev 19:9–11; Deut 15:7–8, 24:20–21, 26:12). It is also, as we will show, counted among other laws in Second Temple Jewish literature—within both legal and non-legal contexts (e.g., 2 Esd 2:20; Tob 4:7)—and was considered by the rabbis to be a *mitzvah* (i.e., commandment), which some opined was greater than all other commandments (e.g., *t. Peah* 4:19; *b. Bav. Bat.* 9a; *b. Suk.* 49b).¹ In fact, at some point in Jewish tradition charity begins to be referred to as *ha-mitzvah* (i.e., *the* commandment).² As Joseph Benmaman has astutely noted, “charity (*Sedaká*) is an act of justice in accordance with God’s law. The Talmudic rabbis interpreted charity (*Sedaká*), not only as a helping-hand to those in need, but also as a religious act . . . practicing the mitzvah of charity is to complete a Torah commandment.”³

Yet, the evident status of charity in ancient Judaism has had little effect on how the same subject matter is treated when it appears in the New Testament. That is to say that the pericopes which preserve discussions on charity have not been understood to be part of the larger world of Jewish legal discourse.

* For mom, Evelyn, sister, Lindsay, and niece, Abigail, and the myriad of ways you all have reflected God’s righteousness to us.

1 See also, R. Posner, “Charity,” *EJ* 4:569–571; also, E.P. Sanders, “Charity and Love” in *Judaism: Practice and Belief* 63 BCE–66 CE (London: SCM Press; Philadelphia: Trinity International Press, 2005), 230–5.

2 See S. Lieberman, “Two Lexicographical Notes,” *JBL* 65/1 (Mar., 1946): 69–72.

3 “*Sedaká* es un acto de justicia de acuerdo con la Ley de Dios. Los rabinos del Talmud interpretaban la *Sedaká* no solamente como una ayuda a los necesitados, sino también como un acto religioso . . . practicar la mitzvá es cumplir un mandamiento de la Torah,” (J.D. BenMaman, “El Concepto de ‘*Sedaká*’” *Maguén—Escudo* 101 [1996], 35–36).

More to the point, while Jesus' so-called halakhah⁴ has been of general interest to New Testament scholars,⁵ "giving to the poor" as an integral part of this discussion has been neglected. Even the pioneering studies of Sanders and Meier⁶ have overlooked the manner in which charity functions in Jesus' view of the Law. There are, however, several narratives preserved in the Synoptic gospels that discuss charity in relation to the observance of other commandments. In fact, these discussions at times closely parallel the legal discussions codified in the literature of the early rabbis, especially the Mishnah and Tosefta.⁷ While one must take into account the variances of each Synoptic Gospel and the editorial style of each author, the contemporary Second Temple concerns of giving to the poor as preserved in halakhic texts—or halakhic discussion preserved within narrative texts—suggests that legal concerns underly the occasions where the Gospels refer to giving to the poor. In other words, pericopes which deal primarily with, or refer to, giving charity to the poor, involved matters of Torah observance. Therefore, the purpose of this study will be to explore

4 It should be noted that *halakhah* is a rabbinic term, and is not attested in the Second Temple period. Though anachronistic it appears to be the most appropriate term to describe what it meant to observe the commandments.

5 In regard to the Synoptic Gospels see, E.P. Sanders, *Jewish Law between Jesus and the Mishnah* (Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1990) and J. Neusner's response in *Judaic Law between Jesus and the Mishnah: A Systematic Reply to Prof. E.P. Sanders* (Atlanta: Scholar's Press, 1993); J.D.G. Dunn, *Jesus, Paul and the Law: Studies in Mark and Galatians* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1990); P. Sigal, *The Halakhah of Jesus of Nazareth According to the Gospel of Matthew* (Studies in Biblical Literature 18; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2007); and, more recently, L.H. Schiffman, "Ha-Halakhah be-Sifre Ha-Besorah Shebi-Verit ha-Hadashah uvi-Megillot Midbar Yehudah," in *Meghillot IV: Studies in the Dead Sea Scrolls* (ed. Devorah Dimant and Moshe Bar-Asher; Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 2006), 141–50 (Hebrew). Often, however, it is Paul who seems to figure in discussions of halakhah and the New Testament. See esp. E.P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism: A Comparison of Patterns of Religion* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1977); idem, *Paul, the Law, and the Jewish People* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1983); and more recently, M.D. Nanos, "The myth of the 'law-free' Paul standing between Christians and Jews," *Studies in Christian-Jewish Relationship* 4/1 (2009): 1–21.

6 E.P. Sanders, *Jewish Law*, (43–48, esp. 45). Sanders' section on "Tithes", however, does refer to the third and sixth years of *ma'aser sheni* (the "second tithe"), which is to be given to the poor (i.e., מַעֲשֵׂר שְׁנִי; *m. Ma'as. Š.* 5:10); J.P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew: Law and Love* (Hartford, CT: Yale University Press, 2009), 322–3.

7 Unless otherwise noted Hebrew texts from the Mishnah and Tosefta are from, respectively, H. Albeck, ed., *Shisha Sidrei Mishnah* (6 vols.; Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik; Tel Aviv: Devir, 1952–1959) and S. Lieberman, ed., *Tosefta: according to Codex Vienna, with variants from Codex Erfurt, Genizah mss. and editio princeps* (5 vols.; New York: Jewish Theological Seminary, 1955).

four Synoptic narratives, “The Rich Ruler” (Matt 19:16–22; Mark 10:19–22; Luke 18:18–23), “The Law and Righteousness” (Matt 5:17–20, 6:1–4), “Zacchaeus” (Luke 19:1–10) and “The Widow’s Mite” (Mark 12:41–44; Luke 21:1–4), in light of the legal context of “giving to the poor” in Second Temple texts and early rabbinic literature in order to shed light on a substratum in the Synoptic Gospels that has, to my knowledge, been heretofore unnoticed or ignored.

The Terminology of Charity

Before continuing with the literary context of charity and a comparison of the pertinent texts, the variegated linguistic reality of Second Temple sources warrants a brief treatment. Providing for the poor and the needy, as noted above, is an important commandment in biblical literature, but it is not until the Second Temple period that the feminine form of the noun צדקה (i.e., הַצְדָּקָה; lit. “righteousness”) becomes terminologically synonymous with giving charity. The development which allows הַצְדָּקָה’s lexical range to shift and become equivalent with charity is rooted in the concept and use of this term, as well as מִשְׁפָּט וְצְדָקָה, in the Hebrew Bible. Regarding the biblical phrase מִשְׁפָּט וְצְדָקָה (“justice and righteousness”) Weinfeld has noted, “. . . when the prophets refer to מִשְׁפָּט and צְדָקָה, they do not mean merely that the judges should judge accurately. They mean primarily that the officials and landowners should *act on behalf of the poor* (emphasis added).”⁸ Thus, even in the Bible a “righteous” action, or the “righteous” judge, is involved with taking care of the poor. Moreover, as Schiffman has commented,

From a social point of view, the righteous person in ancient Israel was one who preserved the peace and wholeness of the community, within the wider cosmic order, by fulfilling the demands of life in connection with others. Such a person, like the ancient *tzadik* Job, was a blessing to others, and cared for the poor, orphan and widow, showing *hesed*, loving kindness, to all.⁹

8 M. Weinfeld, “Justice and Righteousness’—מִשְׁפָּט וְצְדָקָה—the Expression and Its Meaning” in *Justice and Righteousness: Biblical Themes and their Influence* (ed. Henning G. Reventlow and Yair Hoffman; JSOTSup 137; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1992), 245. See also L.H. Schiffman, “Foundations of *Tzedek* and *Tzedakah*: Righteousness and Charity in Jewish Tradition” (unpublished study).

9 Schiffman, “Foundations of *Tzedek* and *Tzedakah*.”

Psalm 112:9 is perhaps the first place in Scripture where righteousness (צדקה) is verbally paralleled with giving to the poor, "... He gave to the poor, his righteousness stands forever" (פָּזַר צְדָקָתוֹ עַמְדָּתָהּ לְעַד נָתַן לְאֶבְיֹוֹנִים). It is not readily clear whether the Psalmist originally intended "righteousness" to convey the narrowed meaning of "giving to the poor," though one can readily see how the parallelism of the verses would allow for the viability of such an interpretation (cf. 2 Cor 9:6–9).

The Book of Daniel, portions of which were authored in the 2nd century BCE, is perhaps the first time where צדקה refers explicitly to charity: "Therefore, O king, let my counsel be acceptable to you; break off your sins *by practicing righteousness* (הַצְדִּיקָה) 4:27 [MT 4:24]), and your iniquities by showing mercy to the oppressed . . ."10 The Hebrew fragments of Ben-Sira discovered at Cairo Genizah likewise attest to this use of "righteousness."

(A 1r:19) אש לוחטת יכבו מים
(A 1r:20) כן צדקה תכפר חטאת¹¹

πῦρ φλογιζόμενον ἀποσβέσει ὕδωρ,
καὶ ἐλεημοσύνη ἐξιλάσεται ἀμαρτίας.

Water extinguishes a blazing fire:
so almsgiving atones for sin (3:30).

In Greek, the linguistic situation is not so clear. On the occasions where the feminine צדקה occurs the Septuagint (LXX) generally renders it with δικαιοσύνη, but on other occasions, ἐλεημοσύνη¹² ("goodwill, alms;" e.g., Deut 6:25) and εὐφροσύνη ("merriment," only once, Isa 61:10) are employed.

Post-biblical literature is likewise varied. Ben-Sira uses both ἐλεημοσύνη (e.g., 3:30, 7:10; or ἔλεος) and δικαιοσύνη (e.g., 16:20). For instance, "But these were men of mercy (ἐλέους), whose righteous deeds (αἱ δικαιοσύναι) have not been forgotten [44:10; RSV]." The Masada fragment of this text reads, "However, these men of mercy, and th[eir righteousness . . .]"¹³ ([אולם אלה אנשי חסד וצדקתם . . .])

10 See J.J. Collins, *Daniel* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 230.

11 It should be noted that the Daniel passage occurs in Aramaic while the Ben-Sira passage is in Hebrew, indicating that in both languages צדקה functioned as "charity."

12 The LXX translation of Dan 4:27 utilizes ἐλεημοσύνη rather than δικαιοσύνη.

13 See, however, the Cairo Genizah fragment, "אולם אלה אנשי חסד ותקותם ל[] ת[]". And, one the other hand, these men of mercy, and their hope w[ill] not be forgot[ten] (b 13v:14)." See, P.C. Beentjes, *The Book of Ben Sira in Hebrew: a text edition of all extant Hebrew*

ih 7:17).¹⁴ Tobit, on the other hand, presents an interesting linguistic case. In several texts referring to almsgiving *ἐλεημοσύνη* and *δικαιοσύνη* are juxtaposed. For example, Tob 12:8, 9, for which a partial Qumran fragment exists (4Q200 f2:6–8),

Prayer is good when accompanied by fasting, *almsgiving* (*ἐλεημοσύνης*), and *righteousness* (*δικαιοσύνης*). A little with *righteousness* (*δικαιοσύνης*) is better than much with wrongdoing. It is better to *give alms* (*ποιῆσαι ἐλεημοσύνην*) than to store up gold. For *almsgiving* (*ἐλεημοσύνη*) delivers from death, and it will purge away every sin. Those who perform deeds of *charity* (*ἐλεημοσύνας*) and of *righteousness* (*δικαιοσύνας*) will have fullness of life . . .

The synonymous parallelism evident in Tobit is an indication that both Greek terms can function as “almsgiving” (cf. Sir 44:10; perhaps also *Sib. Or.* 6:360); such is the case for *δικαιοσύνη* in Matt 6:1 (see below). It should be noted, however, that in Greek thought *δικαιοσύνη* does not share precisely the same lexical range as *ἡקרῶ*; *δικαιοσύνη* in ancient Greek literature does not mean “charity.”¹⁵ Therefore, it perhaps might stand that the appearance of *δικαιοσύνη* with the meaning of “charity” reflects the translation of a Hebrew/Aramaic original, the direct influence of either language, or a text composed by an author whose native language was either.

Charity Contextualized¹⁶

Charity’s importance in Second Temple and late antique Judaism is corroborated by its appearance in both legal and non-legal contexts. Since an exhaustive treatment is beyond the scope of the present study, a few examples will

manuscripts and a synopsis of all parallel Hebrew Ben Sira Texts (VTSup 68; Leiden: Brill, 1997).

14 This reading is based on the Greek having rendered the Hebrew literally. See Abegg’s reconstruction, [דקתם לא תכרת] וצ, in Ben Sira-Canonical Order, ver. 2.4 [computer software], (Oaktree software, 2009).

15 See *δικαιοσύνη*, *LSJ*, 429.

16 Included in this section are texts from the Tannaitic period. While it remains a point of debate, it is undoubted that what was codified in the Mishnah, Tosefta, and other texts reflect, in part, traditions that existed in the Second Temple period.

suffice to make the point. In Second Temple legal contexts, discussion regarding the poor is found in the Damascus Document (col. 6:8–21),¹⁷

8. The “nobility of the people” are those
9. who come to “dig the well” by following rules that the Rod made
10. to live by during the whole era of wickedness, and without these rules they shall obtain nothing until the appearance of
11. one who teaches the righteous in the last days. . . .
20. . . . to love each his brother
21. as himself, and *to support the poor and needy* (וְלֹאֲחֻזֵיק בִּיד עֵי וְאֲבִיוֹן)¹⁸ and alien and to seek each the welfare of his fellow . . .

Also in 14:11–14,

11. And any matter about which a person may wish to speak, let him address the Examiner
12. whether concerning a dispute or a judgment. And [this (is)] the rule (for) the many to prepare for all their needs: (The) wage of at least
13. two days per month are to be given to the Examiner and the judges.
14. From it they shall be given for their [s]ick, *and from it they shall support the poor, the needy* (וְלֹאֲחֻזֵיק בִּיד עֵי וְאֲבִיוֹן),¹⁹ and the elderly.

It is also clear that giving to the poor was and remained an important obligation in the developing halakhic system of the rabbis.²⁰ For instance, the Mishnah’s tractate *peah* (as well as *t. peah*) is dedicated to the laws

17 While extremely fragmentary a parallel likely exists in 6Q15 f4:2; See *DJ DJ* 3, 128–30; also, “Community Rules, Damascus Document (D),” in *The Dead Sea Scrolls Reader Vol. 1: Texts Concerned with Religious Law* (ed. Donald W. Parry and Emmanuel Tov; Leiden: Brill, 2004), 176–77.

18 CD texts from *The Dead Sea Scrolls, Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek Texts with English Translation, vol. 2: Damascus Document, War Scroll, and Related Documents* (ed. James Charlesworth, et al.; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck; Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995), 22–23.

19 Charlesworth, *Dead Sea Scrolls*, 56–57.

20 For an initial presentation of the rabbinic traditions that existed in era of the New Testament, see David Instone Brewer, *Traditions of the Rabbis from the Era of the New Testament: Prayer and Agriculture Vol. 1* (Grand Rapids; Eerdmans, 2004); also, more recently, idem, *Traditions of the Rabbis from the Era of the New Testament, vol. 2A: Feasts and Sabbaths: Passover and Atonement* (Grand Rapids; Eerdmans, 2011).

of giving to the poor.²¹ Its importance is also attested throughout the corpus of *halakhic midrashim*. In *Sifre Devarim* one reads, "...if you have opened [your hand] once, you should open it up to a hundred times for the Torah says 'for you should open your hand to him' [the needy] (אם פתחת פעם אחת פתח אפילו מאה פעמים תלמוד לומר כי פתוח תפתח אתידך לו).²² The *Mekhilta de-Rabbi Ishmael* on Exod 18:13–27 reads,

Something similar you find in the matter of giving charity. How so? ... If the poor man stretches out his hand to the homeowner, and the latter is unwilling to give, then "the Lord is the maker of them all (Ps 22:2)"—He who has made the one poor will in the end make him rich, and he who had made the other rich will in the end make him poor (מי שעשה לזה עני סופו לעשותו עשיר ומי שעשה לזה עשיר סופו לעשות עני).²³

In narrative contexts the presentation of almsgiving is often distinct, and at times presented in terms of a commandment. When speaking to his son Tobiah regarding his death and the money he left with Gabael at Rages Tobit dictates what is, in effect, Tobit's own halakhah, among which charity is included,

Remember the Lord our God all your days, my son, and refuse to sin or to transgress his commandments. Live uprightly all the days of your life, and do not walk in the ways of wrongdoing... *Give alms from your possessions to all who live uprightly* (καὶ πᾶσι τοῖς ποιούσι τὴν δικαιοσύνην ἐκ τῶν ὑπαρχόντων σοι ποίει ἔλεημοσύνην) ... *Do not turn your face away from any poor man* (μὴ ἀποστρέψῃς τὸ πρόσωπόν σου ἀπὸ παντὸς πτωχοῦ), and the face of God will not be turned away from you (4:5–7).

The apparent "halakhic" portion of Tobit's speech (4:5–19) appears to be distinct from the larger context of the book.²⁴ The unique features of this text are the Greek imperatives, "remember" (μνημόνευε), "give" or "do" (ποίη), "pay attention" or "beware" (πρόσεχε), "give" (δίδου), "bring forth" (ἔκχεσον), "seek"

21 See also e.g., *m. Demai* 5; *m. Shev.* 9; *m. Ter.* 1, 4, 6; *m. Ma'as.* S. 5.

22 *Re'eh* 116 (L. Finkelstein, ed., *Sifre on Deuteronomy* [New York: Jewish Theological Seminary, 2001], 175). See also G.F. Moore, "Private and Public Charity", in *Judaism: In the First Centuries of the Christian Era, the Age of the Tannaim* (3 vols.; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1927), 2:162–79, esp. 167–8.

23 J.Z. Lauterbach, ed. and trans., *Mekhilta de-Rabbi Ishmael* (2 vols.; Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2004), 2:288.

24 J.A. Fitzmyer, *Tobit* (CEJL; Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2003), 166.

(ζήτησον), and “bless” (εὐλόγει). Fitzmyer notes the context of this passage is similar to Wisdom literature, especially Proverbs, (Ben Sira, and the Wisdom of Aḥiqar, but suggests that Tobit’s statement originates from a commandment, Deut 8:5–6.²⁵ While the connection to Wisdom literature is clear, Tobit is not simply instructing his son in the ways of Classical virtue, but rather, instructing his son in the commandments and the practical manner in which he should observe them (e.g., giving alms according to the little you have, 4:8–9; and staying away from immorality, 4:12).

A similar importance is placed upon charity in Ben-Sira, “no good will come to the man who persists in evil or to *him who does not give alms*” (τῷ ἐλεημοσύνην μὴ χαριζομένῳ; 12:3).²⁶ In both the testaments of Levi and Naphtali one reads, respectively, “*Work righteousness* (ποιήσατε δικαιοσύνην), therefore, my children, upon the earth, that you may find it in heavens” (13:5)²⁷ and “the Lord shall scatter them upon the face of all the earth, until the compassion of the Lord shall come, a man *working righteousness and working mercy* (ποιῶν δικαιοσύνην καὶ ποιῶν) unto all them that are afar off, and to them that are near” (4:5).²⁸ So we also read in the 2 Enoch,²⁹ “Blessed is the man who does not direct his heart with malice against any man, and helps the injured and condemned, and raises the broken down, and shall do charity to the needy” (44:4).

Charity is also discussed in the *aggadic* (i.e., non-legal) texts, *Pirkei Avot* and *Avot de Rabbi Natan* [ADRN]. The former provides four traits of the person who gives הַקְדִּיף, describing the *hasid* (i.e., pious one) as one *who gives and wants others to give* (וְהָיָה אִתּוֹ אֲחֵרִים יֹאמְרוּ אֵיךְ; 5:13). The latter credits Abraham the patriarch with being the first to practice charity, “. . . it was Abraham our father who practiced charity (הַקְדִּיף); lit. “does righteousness;”) first and after that justice,

25 Fitzmyer, *Tobit*, 166.

26 See parallel from Cairo Genizah ms. A 5r:2; also, 7:10 (mentioned above), 29:8, 35:2.

27 The term “in the heavens” (ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς) is likely related to the phrase “treasure in heaven,” which is used idiomatically for the giving of charity (discussed below).

28 The *Testament of Naphtali* is an allusion to Psalm 112:9. Cf. also, Psalms of Solomon 9:9, “He that does righteousness lays up life for himself with the Lord; and he that does wrongly forfeits his life to destruction,” also depicts another interesting connection between giving charity and the reciprocal response from God. Although “righteousness” in this text likely reflects the Classical Greek meaning, “justice.”

29 Several dates have been posited for this work, and while the entire text is only extant in Slavonic, the overwhelming consensus is that it is both ancient and Jewish. The text quoted here fits well within the world of Second Temple Jewish thought and shares parallels with what appears in Tobit. See M. Stone “Apocalyptic Literature,” in *Jewish Writings of the Second Temple Literature* (ed. Michael Stone; Assen: Van Gorcum; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), 406; F.I. Andersen, “Enoch, Second Book of,” *ABD* 2:517.

For I have chosen him in order that he should command his sons and his household after him to observe the way of the Lord by doing righteousness and justice” (Gen 18:19; emphasis added).³⁰

The few examples referenced above are an all-to-brief footnote on the subject of charity in both legal and non-legal texts dating from Second Temple to Tannaitic times. What they do afford us is the opportunity to literarily contextualize almsgiving. Undoubtedly, charity was a halakhic matter in both the period prior to the destruction of the temple (70 CE) and after. Even in non-legal narrative contexts, regardless of genre, giving to the poor is presented as an obligation to those who observe the commandments.

Halakhah of Charity in the Synoptic Gospels

There are several narratives in the Synoptic Gospels where giving to the poor is directly related to Torah observance. In fact, the language used to describe charity is, at times, identical language to that preserved in the literature of the *Tannaim*. Pertinent to this study are four narratives: “Rich Young Man;” “The Law and Righteousness;” “The Widow’s Mite;” and “Zacchaeus the Tax Collector.” In conclusion, a final note will be made regarding *gemilut hasidim* (deeds of loving-kindness) and the “Last Judgment” pericope (Matt 25:31–46).

Rich Ruler (Matt 19:16–22; Mark 10:19–22; Luke 18:18–23)

Perhaps the clearest text, which depicts charity as a halakhic matter, is the pericope of the “Rich Ruler” preserved in all three gospels. For the sake of brevity the form of the Matthean passage will be provided (Matt 19:16–22), since where it deviates from the other Synoptics it offers a closer parallel to Tannaitic sources.

And behold, one came up to him, saying, “Teacher, what good deed must I do, to have eternal life?” 17 And he said to him, “Why do you ask me about what is good? One there is who is good. If you would enter life, keep the commandments.” He said to him, “Which?” And Jesus said, “You shall not kill, You shall not commit adultery, You shall not steal, You shall not bear false witness, Honor your father and mother, and, You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” The young man said to him, “All these I have observed; what do I still lack?” Jesus said to him, “If you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure

30 ADRN ver. A33 (S. Schechter, ed., *Avoth de-Rabbi Nathan: Solomon Schechter Edition* [Jerusalem: Jewish Theological Seminary, 1997], 94 [Hebrew]).

in heaven; and come, follow me.” When the young man heard this he went away sorrowful; for he had great possessions (Matt 19:16–22).³¹

There are several features in the Matthean text, which distinguish it from the Markan and Lukan parallels. Luke identifies the figure that questions Jesus as a “ruler” (ἄρχων), a term used elsewhere in his gospel to identify a Pharisee (cf. 8:41, 14:1); this figure remains anonymous in Matthew. Mark heightens the tension of the narrative by describing the person as someone “running and kneeling” (προσδραμών . . . καὶ γονυπετήσας) to stop Jesus who had already made his way to depart. Matthew’s text seems unaffected by either the identification in Luke or the heightened tension in Mark. Secondly, the Matthean form of the question stands in contrast to the other gospels. So much so, that the direction of the discussion is changed. In Mark and Luke the question surrounds what is required to “inherit eternal life” (ζωὴν αἰώνιον κληρονομήσω), but the adjective “good” (ἀγαθὴ) is used attributively with “teacher” (διδάσκαλε) in order to describe Jesus. In Matthew, however, the question of “eternal life” centers on a particular “good deed” (ἀγαθόν). Thus the question in Matthew is concerning what good deed is required in order to inherit eternal life. Jesus’ response also differs in Matthew from Mark and Luke. In Matthew, the “good” is associated with observing the commandments (v. 17), while the other gospels associate it with God. Thus in Matthew, Jesus’ reply is simply: keep the commandments because *they* are good.

The reply, as it is attested in the Gospels³² is partially derived from Exod 20. A minor omission and addition to the Gospel text indicates that we are working with the following composite text: (1) not all the commandments are referenced (e.g., there is no mention of coveting a neighbor’s belongings; Exod 20:17), and (2) Lev 19:18, “love your neighbor as yourself,” is added (only in Matt). In this case Lev 19:18 may stand in as a summary of the omitted portion of the Decalogue but in other contexts functions as a concise summation of all the commandments (cf. Matt 23:39). Additionally, all three gospels preserve the climax of Jesus’ response, “sell what you possess and *give to the poor* (δὸς πτωχοῖς), and you will have treasure in heaven,” which addresses the character’s final concern, “what do I still lack?”³³

The two questions posited to Jesus, coupled with his two responses, can be structured as a halakhic discussion that fits the style of early rabbinic

31 Unless otherwise noted English translations of the New Testament come from the RSV.

32 Mark adds “you should not defraud” (μὴ ἀποστερήσης) to his list where Luke and Matthew do not.

33 This question only appears in Matt.

discourse. For the rabbis, however, the question may have taken the following form, “What good deed attains one life in the “world to come?” (עולם הבא).³⁴ Entrance into the “world to come” is a discussion taken up throughout Tannaitic literature. For the rabbis, it is, in part, based on observing the commandments, “. . . The same as the *fully righteous person* [who] is given a reward in the world to come for commandments that he did in this world (לצדיק גמור שכר מצוה שעשה) (בעולם הזה לעולם הבא), so the completely wicked is given a reward in this world for any easy commandment he did in it . . .”³⁵ *Avot* 2:7 reads, “He [Hillel] would say . . . *he who acquires the words of the Torah, acquires life in the world to come*” (קנה לו דברי תורה, קנה לו חיי העולם הבא). The same is true with *Targum Neofiti* to Gen 3:24,

He established Gehenna for the wicked, which is like a sharp sword, devouring by its two sides. He established in its midst sparks of fire and burning coals for the wicked, to punish them for the world to come, because *they did not keep the commandments of the Torah in this world* (די לא נטרו מצותה דאורייתא בעלמא הדין).

For R. Elazar certain individuals, who reveal aspects of the Torah that are not in accord with the Law, even if they have done good deeds and are educated in the Torah, they *will not have a portion in the world to come* (אין לו חלק לעולם) (*m. Avot* 3:11).³⁶

Jesus’ response, which includes portions of the Decalogue—though not in its entirety—parallels, in part, *m. Peah*, “These are the things which man benefits from (אובל מפירותיהן) in this world and the principal (הקרן)³⁷ is laid up for him in the world to come: honor father and mother, deeds of loving-kindness, making peace between a man and his fellow, but study of the Law [lit. *Torah*] is equal to them all” (1:1).³⁸ Other elements which parallel our pericope are preserved in the *t. Peah*, though in this supplement we are given the deeds for which a man is punished in this world and also for which principal is gained in the world to come, “for idolatry (עבודה זרה), sexual immorality (גלוי עריות),

34 See *t. Sanh.* 13 and the discussion regarding who will have a portion in the “world to come” (reference below).

35 *Ha’azinu* 32 (Finkelstein, *Sifre*, 345).

36 Other manuscripts of the Mishnah, for example Kaufman ms. A, omit “educated in the Torah” (lit. “by the hand of the Torah,” בְּיָדוֹ תוֹרָה).

37 M. Jastrow, *A Dictionary of the Targumim, the Talmud Babli, and Yerushalmi, and the Midrashic Literature* (2 vols.; New York: G. Putnam’s Sons; 1903), 2:1422.

38 H. Danby’s, *The Mishnah* (London: Oxford University, 1933), 10–11.

for murder (שפיכות דמים), and for slander (לשון הרע) ... (1:2).” The tosefta adds, “doing good (זכות) creates principal (קרן) [for the world to come] and bears interest (פרות) [in this world],³⁹ as it says [in Scripture], ‘Tell the righteous that it is good, for they will ‘benefit’ (lit: eat) of the fruit of their deeds’” (1:2).

Drawing together the Mishnah and Tosefta along with Jesus’ response in Matthew indicate how close the discussions are in content (see chart below).

“The Rich Ruler”

Jesus’ Response: Deeds in order to inherit eternal life

- Do not kill.
- Do commit adultery.
- Do not steal.
- Bear false witness.

- Honor father and mother.
- Love your neighbor as yourself.

- Give to the Poor.

Mishnah/Tosefta Peah

Deeds to which one receives punishment in this world and principal in the world to come

- Idolatry
- Sexual Immorality
- Murder (T).
- Sexual Immorality (T).

- Slander⁴⁰

Deeds to which one receives reward in this world and principal in the world to come

- Honor father and mother (M).
- Making peace between a man and his fellow (M).
- 1. Deeds of Loving-kindness (M).
- 2. Doing good [related to the righteous person] (T).

Precise parallels on each occasion are not necessary to show that the Synoptics preserve a similar discussion to what is found in both Rabbinic texts. And the parallel nicely illustrates those points of Jewish law that one should practice in order to have a place in the “World to Come.” Furthermore, bearing in mind that it is unlikely that a later editor of the Gospels would have inserted a Rabbinic-styled discussion here, this triple Synoptic tradition reflects a point of Jesus’ own halakhah.

³⁹ “Peah,” in *The Tosefta from the Hebrew with a New Introduction* (trans. R. Brook; ed. J. Neusner; 2 vols.; Peabody, Mass: Hendrickson, 2002), 1:47.

⁴⁰ There is likely no parallel between “slander” and “bearing false witness” since the two infractions, לשון הרע (*t. Peah* 1:2; *t. Avod. Zar.* 1:10, 13, 14) and זוממים (זמם, “perjurers,” *m. Mak.* 1) are treated differently.

The second response/question to Jesus' first response, "all these I have observed (ἐφύλαξα, Matt and Luke; ἐφύλαξάμην, Mark),⁴¹ what do I still lack," is intended to confirm his own halakhic observance. Jesus' *halakhic* viewpoint is punctuated in his final reply, "go, sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven." The phrase "treasure of heaven" (θησαυρὸν ἐν οὐρανοῖς, Matt 19:21) is significant phrase and likely entered Jewish thought as a result of Persian influence.⁴² A similar phraseology is attested in Tob 4, "If you have many possessions, make your gift from them in proportion; if few, do not be afraid to give according to the little you have. So you will be *laying up a good treasure* for yourself against the day of necessity" (vv. 8–9).⁴³

In a *baraita* the convert Monobases, the king of Adiabene, is depicted giving the poor of Jerusalem his treasures during years of famine (*t. Peah* 4:18). Josephus also preserves this story but in his account it is Queen Helene and her son Izates who perform charity for the poor in Jerusalem (*Ant.* 20.49–53). Schiffman contends that the Josephus account is likely the story of Izates, not Helene, and that Monobases is transformed into the righteous hero in the Tosefta.⁴⁴ After giving away his wealth, Monobases' brothers come and accuse him of giving not only his money but also the money of his ancestors. His response is particularly germane to our discussion,

41 Note the Synoptic's use of φυλάσσω, which is often the Greek equivalent for the Hebrew רָמַר. Both words have a similar lexical range.

42 A. Hintze, "Treasure in Heaven: A Theme in Comparative Religion," in *Irano-Judaica VI: Studies Relating to Jewish Contacts with Persian Culture throughout the Ages* (ed. Shaul Shaked and Amnon Netzer; Jerusalem: Ben-Zvi, 2008), 9–36. Hintze surveys Persian and Jewish literature that deal with heavenly account-keeping which developed first from Zoroastrianism and then was borrowed by Judaism in the Persian period (11). See also Gary Anderson, "A Treasury in Heaven: The Exegesis of Proverbs 10:2 in the Second Temple Period," *Hebrew Bible and Ancient Israel* 1/3 (2012): 351–67. Anderson has argued that the initial impetus for this derives from a Second Temple understanding of Proverb 10:2, "Treasures gained by wickedness do not profit, but righteousness delivers from death;" idem, "A Treasury in Heaven," in *Sin: A History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 164–188; and more recently, idem, *Charity: The Place of the Poor in Biblical Tradition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013).

43 The "day of necessity" (ἡμέραν ἀνάγκης) appears to have an apocalyptic character in 1 Enoch (cf. 1:1, 100:7).

44 L.H. Schiffman, "The Conversion of the Royal House of Adiabene in Josephus and Rabbinic Sources," in *Josephus, Judaism and Christianity* (ed. Louis Feldman and Göhe Hata; Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1987), 293–314.

My ancestors stored treasures for this lower [part], but I have stored up treasures above... my ancestors stored up treasures where [human] hand can reach, but I have stored up treasures where [human], hand cannot reach, as it says [in Scripture], Righteousness and justice are the foundation of your throne (Psalm 89:14)... My ancestors stored up treasures in this world, but I have stored treasures in the world to come (ואני גנזתי לעולם הבא אבותי גנזו אוצרות בעולם הזה),⁴⁵ as it says [in Scripture], And your righteousness shall go before you (Is 58:8).

Not only is Monbases' statement particularly pertinent to examining our pericope but also to Jesus' ethical dictum found elsewhere, "sell your possessions, and give alms; provide yourselves with purses that do not grow old, with a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also" (Luke 12:33, 34; Matt 6:19–21). The "Rich Young Man" pericope offers an explanation for this saying that is otherwise lacking, namely, that charity on earth results in "treasure(s) in heaven." It appears that "treasure(s) in heaven" parallels not only the Monobases account but also the "principal" spoken of earlier in the Tosefta.

In the halakhic discussion referenced above, the Mishnah and Tosefta provide a list of commandments—both negative and positive—that will gain someone either credit or punishment in the world to come. Interestingly, in both Rabbinic texts the final points on both lists are considered more important than the rest. For the Mishnah, this is Torah study and for the Tosefta, slander. The manner in which the pericopes are structured in the Gospels depict "giving to the poor" as a separate and distinct point, a crescendo, if you will. In other words, something crucial, in the words of the Matthean passage, is in fact "lacking." Anderson suggests, "Jesus believes that keeping the specified commandments is not sufficient." So, charity which provided "treasure in heaven" was a necessary impetus for the man's true love for God to be put into action.⁴⁶ Yet, in light of the aforementioned Rabbinic texts it might then be posited that Jesus' final response to what the person lacks implicitly elevates charity to the most important commandment—an opinion shared by some of the early rabbis, as already noted above. Indeed, all of the interpersonal commandments noted by Jesus are a way for the ruler to show his love for God (and humanity) but in this case, charity is equal to all.

45 Lieberman, "Seder Zeraim," in *Tosefta*, 60.

46 Anderson, *Charity*, 154–8.

Admittedly, the pedagogical purpose of the narrative, at least as it has been incorporated by the Evangelists, deals with the difficulties with entering the “kingdom of heaven” (cf. Matt 19:23–24; Mark 10:23–24; Luke 18:24–25). The concept of the “kingdom of heaven” is not precisely synonymous, however, with “eternal life,” as we have in the beginning of Matthew, or the “world to come.” As noted by Flusser regarding the present “kingdom of heaven,” “. . . [it] emerges, indeed, out of God’s might, but is realized upon earth by men.”⁴⁷ Thus, a close reading of the “Ruler’s Question” pericope indicates that it may have originated as a discussion regarding appropriate halakic/ethical observance by which the “kingdom of heaven” is realized on earth which by extension accrues benefit in the form of “eternal life”—or that it accrues benefit in the world to come.

The Law and Righteousness (Matt 5:17–20, 6:1–4)

Think not that I have come to abolish the law and the prophets; I have come not to abolish them but to fulfil them. For truly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the law until all is accomplished. Whoever then relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but he who does them and teaches them shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven (Matt 5:17–20).

Beware of practicing your piety before men in order to be seen by them; for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven. Thus, when you give alms, sound no trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be praised by men. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your alms may be in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you (Matt 6:1–4).

The block of text, which contains Matt 5:17–20, has often been referred to as the so-called “Six Antitheses,”⁴⁸ namely, murder (vv. 21–26), adultery (vv. 27–30), divorce (vv. 31–32), oaths (vv. 33–37), justice (vv. 38–42), and

47 D. Flusser and R.S. Notley, *The Sage from Galilee: Rediscovering Jesus’ Genius* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 79.

48 R. Bultmann refers to this section of Matt as a “complex of antitheses on legal piety,” *The History of the Synoptic Tradition* (trans. John Marsh; New York: Harper & Row, 1963), 325.

love (43–48),⁴⁹ while Matthew 6:1–4 comprises what appears to be the first of three ethical maxims, alms, prayer (vv. 5–15), fasting/repentance (vv. 16–18).⁵⁰ These “Antitheses” have become an unfortunate moniker, which has become part of the parlance of New Testament commentators, when in fact the “antithetical terminology does not represent a refutation but *an interpretation* of the Law (emphasis added).”⁵¹ What is thought to be a section of prescriptions antithetical to Torah-law is in fact normal halakhic interpretation in line with common rabbinic discourse. Prefacing this section is the statement that Jesus does not intend “to abolish” (καταλῶσαι) but “to fulfill” (πληρῶσαι) the law (and the prophets). “Fulfill,” however, should not be understood as an attempt to abrogate or undo the tenets of Mosaic Law but rather “to uphold” them.⁵² Moreover, the Greek πληρῶω can be utilized to mean “to give true meaning to,”⁵³ which fits the juxtaposition between those who observe and those who do not observe the commandments in v. 19, as well as the halakhic interpretations that follow throughout Matt 5. One should also note the similarity of Jesus’ statement with the Talmudic saying, “I came not to destroy the Law of Moses, nor add to the Law of Moses” (*b. Shabb.* 116b).⁵⁴ The questions remains, however, what does righteousness in v. 20, “for I tell you, unless your righteousness (δικαιοσύνη) exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven,” indicate?

Matt 6:1–4 presents what is likely the first of three ethical maxims, alms. Such lists are not foreign to rabbinic literature. Simon the righteous, for instance, is attributed as saying, “on three things does the world stand, on the Torah, on Temple service, and on deeds of loving-kindness” (*m. Avot* 1:3). The Matthean passage differs from the Mishnah since the contents of the list in Matthew have been explicated, and we are not given the order of importance of the three—though it is likely that the manner in which they appear indicates such. Thus, giving charity is the most important of them all and thereby closely parallels

49 J. Nolland, *The Gospels of Matthew* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 215–70.

50 This was suggested to me in a private conversation with R. Steven Notley.

51 H. van de Sandt and D. Flusser, *The Didache: Its Jewish Sources and its Place in Early Judaism and Christianity* (CRINT; Assen: Royal Van Gorcum; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002), 214. Both Flusser and Van de Sandt note that the Greek formulation “but I say” (ἐγὼ δὲ λέγω) may have originally represented the rabbinic אומר ואני אומר or אמרת אמרת which has not only been used in aggadic exegesis but also “introduces halakhic innovations . . .” 212, n. 60.

52 Van de Sandt and Flusser have noted that the terminology parallels לבטל and לקיי (Didache, 217–8).

53 L&N 33:144.

54 See S. Tobias Lachs, *A Rabbinic Commentary on the New Testament: The Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke* (New York: KTAV Publishing, 1987), 87; and W.C. Allen, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. Matthew* (ICC; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1957), 46.

rabbinic speculation. Furthermore, the use of *δικαιοσύνη* here may provide an interpretive grid to understand v. 20; namely, that the *δικαιοσύνη* of the scribes and the Pharisees refers here to charity.

The structure of Matt 6:1–4 bear similarities to Rabbinic legal discourse.

<u>Rabbinic Discourse</u>	<u>Matt 6:1–4</u>
1. How to give charity	1. Beware of practicing charity (5:20)
2. [How so?; כִּי־צַד]	2. <i>Not in the text.</i>
3. Not in public	3. Not Before men (6:1)
3A. Consequence	3A. If so, no reward in heaven [the world to come] (1)
4. Without pomp	4. No trumpet should be sounded to be praised by men. (2)
4A. Consequence	4A. If so, those have received their reward [this world] (2)
5. In secret	5. Right hand should not know the left (3)
5A. Consequence	5A. If so, God will reward you (4)

Number one reflects the primary halakhic teaching: “Beware of practicing your piety.” In Rabbinic discourse one might expect the refrain “How so?” (כִּי־צַד). The manner in which a person is to give charity in secret is then expounded in numbers 3 through 5 with the expected rewards, or lack thereof. Interestingly, the composition and content of Matthew shares similarities with *m. Avot* 2:1.

Be careful in a light commandment as in a stringent one, for you do not know what sort of reward is coming for any of the various commandments, and reckon with the loss [required] in carrying out a commandment against the reward for doing it, and the reward for committing a transgression against the loss for doing it . . .

Avot/Matt Comparison

1. Be careful in a light commandment as in a large one	1. Be careful of giving alms before men (6:1)
1A. You don't know the reward	1A. No reward (v. 1)
2. Observing the commandment	2. Observing commandment inappropriately w/ pomp
2A. Loss vs. Reward	2A. Reward (which has already been received, v. 2)
3. Transgressing the commandment	3. Observing commandment in secret (v. 3)
3A. Loss vs. Reward	3A. Reward (from God, v. 4)

The saying attributed to Rabbi Yehudah ha-Nasi concerns the importance of observing even the smallest commandment in light of not knowing its reward and comparing the reward and loss of either completing or transgressing it. Such a structure for observing a commandment is not unlike what is preserved here in Matt.⁵⁵ Yet, in a Rabbinic context one might expect the different elements of the Gospel sayings to be associated with different rabbis or their students. For instance, Rabbi A says (in regards to charity) “it should be given in private and not before men, so that he will have a reward in heaven,” and Rabbi B says “it should be done without drawing attention to oneself, or else his reward is in this world.” While differences remain, the parallels regarding Torah observance are clear. Furthermore, the expectation of a reward for giving charity in the Matthean text is paralleled as well in Mishnah and Tosefta *Peah* where commensurate rewards are associated with observing specific commandments.

A comparison of Matthew and Luke with the appropriate rabbinic discussions in the Mishnah and Tosefta indicate that charity, while being an ethical maxim, is a halakhic concern as well, a righteous obligation for those who live within God’s covenant. The textual block dealt with in Matt 5 and 6 is not simply a list of commandments, but offers practical halakhah on how one is expected to observe them.

Secondary Narratives

The two final pericopes under consideration, “Zacchaeus the Tax Collector” and “The Widow’s Mite,” are only minor in that they lack direct literary parallels to Tannaitic halakhah. What these texts afford us, however, are the halakhah of charity in a narrative context, even when Torah observance may not be the overall thrust of the pericope. In other words, each pericope presumes the normal *halakhic* practice of almsgiving.

55 Davies and Allison have suggested that the “sounding of the trumpet” mentioned in 6:2 to be possibly a polemical barb against the giver of charity who makes noise when depositing their offering in one of the thirteen shofars said to be in the sanctuary (*m. Sheq.* 6:5), in Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 1:579. But the shofars mentioned in *m. Sheqalim* don’t appear to be used for alms (cf. 6:5–6; *t. Sheq.* 3:1–7). There is, however, a chamber in the temple in which secret donations were placed for the poor (5:6), but it does not seem that Matt or the mishnaic passage are referring to this chamber. See S. Safrai, *The Jewish People in the First Century: Historical Geography, Political History, Social, Cultural and Religious Life and Institutions* (CRINT 2; 2 vols.; Assen: Van Gorcum, 1976), 2:879.

Zacchaeus the Tax Collector (Luke 19:1–10, no par.)

He entered Jericho and was passing through. And there was a man named Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector, and rich. And he sought to see who Jesus was, but could not, on account of the crowd, because he was small of stature. So he ran on ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see him, for he was to pass that way. And when Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, “Zacchaeus, make haste and come down; for I must stay at your house today.” So he made haste and came down, and received him joyfully. And when they saw it they all murmured, “He has gone in to be the guest of a man who is a sinner.” And Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, “Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have defrauded any one of anything, I restore it four-fold.” And Jesus said to him, “Today salvation has come to this house, since he also is a son of Abraham. For the Son of man came to seek and to save the lost” (Luke 19:1–10).

Several scholars have noted the edited nature of the Zacchaeus narrative which only appears in Luke.⁵⁶ Yet, this editing has not been such that ascertaining possible points of origin have been lost. Zacchaeus the “tax-collector” (ἀρχιτελώνης) desired to have an audience with Jesus which is thwarted by the crowds. A “murmur” (διαγογγύζω) from the crowd arises as a result of Jesus’ desire to stay with Zacchaeus. Concerned with the rising clamor Zacchaeus stands and assures Jesus of his innocence, “Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have defrauded any one of anything, I restore it four-fold” (ἰδοὺ τὰ ἡμίσιά μου τῶν ὑπαρχόντων, κύριε, τοῖς πτωχοῖς δίδωμι, καὶ εἰ τινός τι ἐσυκοφάντησα ἀποδίδωμι τετραπλοῦν). Deduced from his immediate response, Zacchaeus is primarily concerned with two transgressions, (1) having failed to give to the poor, and (2) falsely accusing another. Zacchaeus’ willingness to pay restitution indicates that his concern is halakhic, and that which made him a “sinner” (ἁμαρτωλός) was some form of transgression of these commandments.⁵⁷

Although there is some limitation to what can be said definitively regarding specific halakhah and precise Tannaitic parallels are lacking, the context of

56 See J. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke x–xxiv* (AB 28A; 2 vols.; New York: Doubleday, 1985), 2:1219.

57 It was noted to me in a private conversation with R. Steven Notley that each occasion where Jesus is accused of being with “sinners” involves eating meals. In fact, that which makes someone a “sinner” on these occasions may involve some indication that the people Jesus ate with were not scrupulous with matters of purity, thus signalling a legal transgression.

Zacchaeus' response to Jesus is surely halakhic. Further, Zacchaeus' two-point response reflects what he perceived to be Jesus' more critical halakhic points,⁵⁸ namely, giving charity and dealing honestly with one's neighbor. Additionally, although Jesus' reference to Zacchaeus as a "son of Abraham" is thought to be secondary, it may in fact reflect contemporary interpretations of Abraham.⁵⁹ In the Second Temple period, Abraham was viewed as a figure of heightened virtue and piety, one whom observed all of the commandments (*Ant* 1:25; *CD* 3:2–3; *m. Qidd.* 4:14). Even more to the point, Abraham is described in *m. Avot* as having a generous, that is charitable spirit, whose disciples will inherit the "world to come" (5:19).

The Widow's Mite (Mark 12:41–44; Luke 21:1–4)

And he sat down opposite the treasury, and watched the multitude putting money into the treasury. Many rich people put in large sums. And a poor widow came, and put in two copper coins, which make a penny. And he called his disciples to him, and said to them, "Truly, I say to you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the treasury. For they all contributed out of their abundance; but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, her whole living." (Mark 12:41–44).

He looked up and saw the rich putting their gifts into the treasury; and he saw a poor widow put in two copper coins. And he said, "Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all of them; for they all contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty put in all the living that she had (Luke 21:1–4).

Both Luke and Mark preserve the short narrative of the Widow's Mites amidst a larger critique of the Temple's authorities. Some scholars have read the thrust of the small pericope to be negative, suggesting that Jesus' statement is a condemnation of the system that encouraged the widow "to give all the living she

58 It is then not surprising that the Evangelist closes the Zacchaeus account with Jesus' statement, "today salvation has come to this house, since he also is a *son of Abraham*." One may be drawn to consider whether the phrase "son of Abraham" is here connected to the midrashic expansion of Abraham's story in *ADRN*, where the patriarch is credited with first giving charity, and secondly, acting justly (ver. A33) or in the *Mishnah* where the disciples of Abraham are those who have a charitable spirit (*m. Avot* 5:19).

59 Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 2:1221.

had”⁶⁰ Fitzmyer notes, “She has been taught and encouraged by religious leaders to donate as she does, and Jesus condemns the value system that motivates her action. In short Jesus’s comment contain words of lament, not of praise.”⁶¹ Such an explanation, however, militates against the simple reading of the text.

Before continuing, however, it must be noted that it is difficult to determine the location of the widow’s charitable gift based solely on the Gospel text. It seems that the “treasury” (γαζοφυλάκιον) referred to in this text is the Temple’s treasury. Several scholars have attempted to suggest that the Treasury here is a reference to the thirteen shofar-shaped chests on the Temple Mount (*m. Sheq.* 6:5) which were intended for different kinds of donations.⁶² Yet, as the Tosefta and Mishnah indicate, neither of these chests were intended for charity nor were any of them called a Treasury (*m. Sheq.* 6:5; *t. Sheq.* 3:1). Rather, in rabbinic literature these thirteen chests are referred to as שופרות, instead of the expected Hebrew term for treasury, אוצר or even לשכה. In his description of the temple “treasury,” Safrai has noted that it was made of several rooms or chambers, one of which, the לְשֵׁכֶת הַשְּׁמֵיִם (the “chamber” or “treasury of secrets”), was for giving charity in secret (cf. *m. Sheq.* 5:6).⁶³ Thus, our closest location for the situation depicted in Luke and Mark is likely the secret chamber intended for charity.

Furthermore, though it might seem odd that a person who is herself in need of charity is depicted giving it, non-halakhic evidence for this practice is discussed in Tobit, “If you have many possessions, make your gift from them in proportion; if few, do not be afraid to give according to the little you have” (ἐὰν ὀλίγον σοι ὑπάρχη, κατὰ τὸ ὀλίγον μὴ φοβοῦ ποιεῖν ἐλεημοσύνην, 4:8). It should be noted that after this exhortation Tobit makes reference to both him and his son becoming poor (4:21; cf. also 4Q200 f2:6)—a situation which apparently does not dissuade Tobit from continually instructing his son to extend his hand to the poor.⁶⁴ Moreover, the Tosefta rules that a poor person’s charitable donation, to either the “communal fund” (קיפה) or the “soup kitchen”

60 A.G. Wright, “The Widow’s Mites: Praise or Lament?—A Matter of Context,” *CBQ* 44 (1982): 256–65. Fitzmyer also follows Wright’s reading (*Luke*, 2:1321).

61 Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 2:1321.

62 Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 2:1322; Alfred Plummer, *The Gospel According to Luke* (1CC; Edinburgh; T&T Clark, 1981), 475.

63 Safrai, *Jewish People*, 879.

64 As Littman has noted, the Greek πολλά is not intended to mean material wealth but “good things” (Robert J. Littman, *Tobit: The Book of Tobit in Codex Sinaiticus* [Septuagint Commentary Series; Leiden: Brill, 2008], 95).

(תמחוי), should be readily accepted though not forced.⁶⁵ Thus, Second Temple and rabbinic sources indicate the poor widow's offering, if in fact charity, was an accepted voluntary practice. So, the brief narrative is not intended as a critique against the temple system or its authorities for requiring such an act, as thought by Fitzmyer, but rather a practice that was considerably augmented by the poor widow going above and beyond what was expected, communicating, in hyperbolic fashion, the distinct halakhic/ethical importance of giving charity in Jesus' teaching.

A Brief Note on Deeds of Loving-Kindness (גמילות חסדים) and the Last Judgment Pericope (Matt 25:31–46, no par.)

When the Son of man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate them one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will place the sheep at his right hand, but the goats at the left. Then the King will say to those at his right hand, "Come, O blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me." Then the righteous will answer him, "Lord, when did we see thee hungry and feed thee, or thirsty and give thee drink. And when did we see thee a stranger and welcome thee, or naked and clothe thee?" And when did we see thee sick or in prison and visit thee?" And the King will answer them, "Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me." Then he will say to those at his left hand, "Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not clothe me, sick and in prison and you did not visit me." Then they also will answer, "Lord, when did we see thee hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to thee?" Then he will answer them, "Truly, I say to you, as you did it not to one of the least of these, you did it not to me. And they will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life (Matt 25:31–46).

65 Later Talmudic tradition attests to the expectation that a poor person, that is one that has less than 200 zuz, should give charity as well, "Even a poor man who himself subsists on charity should give charity" (*b. Gitt. 7b*).

What has not been discussed in this study are “deeds of loving-kindness” (גְּמִילוּת חֶסֶדִים) and their relation to both the Gospels and Tannaitic literature. Matt 25:31–46 contains the one striking example of what one might call “deeds of loving-kindness” and marks their importance vis-à-vis final judgment and eternal life. The pericope, which is unique to Matthew’s gospel, portrays the Day of Judgment with the nations standing before a heavenly throne. The apocalyptic figure, the Son of Man,⁶⁶ is said to sit on the throne as a shepherd separating the sheep and goats (i.e., the nations) to either the right or left side of the throne. Those on the right will be rewarded with eternal life and the goats on the left with eternal punishment. The reward is directly related to these so called deeds of loving-kindness. Those who neglected the stranger, the hungry, the naked, the sick, and the incarcerated are directed to the left side. On the other hand, to use rabbinic parlance, those who performed deeds of loving-kindness are rewarded with life in the “world to come.” There appears in the Tosefta, however, a slight difference between what we have defined as “charity” (צדקה) and “deeds of loving-kindness” (גְּמִילוּת חֶסֶדִים); it is not simply a linguistic matter but one of practice and purpose.

Charity and righteous deeds outweigh all other commandments in the Torah (צדקה וגמילות חסדים שקולין כנגד כל מצות שבתורה). Nevertheless charity is for the living, [while] deeds of loving-kindness are for the living and the dead (שהצדקה בחיים וגמילות חסדים בחיים ובמתים).⁶⁷ Charity is

66 Anderson follows Bultmann who suggests that this passage is thoroughly Jewish and that in its connection to Jewish tradition the text originally read “God” rather than “Son of Man.” Connected with Anderson’s concept regarding the sacrificial nature of almsgiving, he answers Davie’s and Allison’s question regarding the implicit divine identity of Matthew’s high Christology, with a “yes” (cf. *Charity*, 160). The problem with this reading is that another viable Jewish reading, at least a more Second Temple reading, would not necessarily have God on the throne as the final judge, but rather a human (e.g., Abel in the *Testament of Abraham A*; Moses in *Ezekiel the Tragedian*). The most striking text in this regard is the “Son of Man” on 1En 69:29, a text that has been argued by Stone to be of Jewish origin [M. Stone, “The Book of Enoch and Judaism in the Third Century BCE,” *CBQ* 40/4 (1978): 479–492], “and from henceforth there shall be nothing corruptible, for that Son of Man has appeared, and has seated himself on the throne of his glory, and all evil shall pass away before his face, and the word of that Son of Man shall go forth and be strong before the Lord of Spirits.” The Son of Man in Enoch is of course revealed to none other than Enoch, a human being. In fact, this parallels Matt 25 if the Son of Man is understood as it might have been employed in ancient Hebrew, בן אדם = human, the every man.

67 Lieberman, “Seder Zeraim,” in *Tosefta*, 60–61.

for the poor, [while] deeds of loving-kindness are for the poor and the rich. Charity [assists] with one's wealth, [while] deeds of loving-kindness [assists] one's financial and physical [needs] (*t. Peah* 4:19).

Charity here appears to be a subset of deeds of loving-kindness, and more importantly to our study both sets of deeds are part of halakhic discourse; deeds of loving-kindness and charity move beyond the pale of voluntary ethical behavior, and are integral to observing the commandments.

In summary, Matt 25 is an eschatological narrative that revolves around how the nations are rewarded with “eternal life” based on those who perform “deeds of loving-kindness.” Matthew’s text also dovetails nicely with the supplement to *m. Sanh.* 10:3 found in *t. Sanh.* 13:9–11, which deals with those who will receive no place in the “world to come” and the reason for such, “R. Joshua B. Qorḥa says, ‘These things were spoken only regarding generations to come, as it is said ‘Gather my saints together to me’—because they did deeds of loving-kindness to me” (שום שעשו לי גמילות חסד). Furthermore, while strictly not halakhic, the narrative reflects the eternal significance that surrounds proper observance of the commandments to care for those in need.

Conclusion

As noted at the outset of this study, halakhah, in general, has not lacked attention among scholars but the occasions where “charity” is mentioned in the Gospels—though contextually halakhic where it appears in early Rabbinic literature—has not been afforded the same attention. This modest study has attempted to address this lack. A comparison of the Synoptic gospels and the Tannaitic corpora, specifically the Mishnah and Tosefta, indicate that charity was an integral aspect of Jesus’s halakhic pedagogy and an expected obligation for his followers.