

Almsgiving as a Formative Practice of Repentance for Christian Discipleship: The Gospel of Luke and Daniel 4:24

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IN LUKE 3:7–9, JOHN THE BAPTIST WARNS THOSE coming to him for the baptism of forgiveness to be fruitful trees that provide evidence of a change of heart instead of the trees that bear no good fruit and thus exhibit no repentance.

He [John the Baptist] said to the crowds who came out to be baptized by him, “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? Produce good fruits as evidence of your repentance [*metanoias*]; and do not begin to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father,’ for I tell you, God can raise up children to Abraham from these stones. Even now the ax lies at the root of the trees. Therefore every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire.”¹

According to Frank Matera, the use of *metanoia* emphasizes “the need for a radically new way of thinking about reality that involves a profound change of mind.”² And this change of mind is evidenced through specific action. “Bearing fruits authenticates and renders visible the change in thinking involved in repentance.”³ Repentance involves a changed mentality which is made visible through concrete actions.

¹ New American Bible Revised Edition (NABRE). All biblical texts are taken from the NABRE unless otherwise noted. For a detailed examination of the role of John the Baptist and conversion in the Gospel of Luke, see Joel B. Green, *Conversion in Luke-Acts: Divine Action, Human Cognition, and the People of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2015), 53–86.

² Frank J. Matera, *New Testament Ethics: The Legacies of Jesus and Paul* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), 69. According to Fitzmyer, in Luke-Acts, the noun *metanoia* appears 11 times; the verb *metanoiein* appears 14 times. Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke I–XI* (New York: Doubleday, 1970), 237. For a detailed consideration of the usage of *metanoia* in the literary milieu prior to Luke-Acts and contemporaneous with it, see Nave, *The Role and Function of Repentance in Luke-Acts*, 39–144.

³ Nave, *The Role and Function of Repentance in Luke-Acts*, 149.

What kinds of fruit (or concrete actions) should those seeking repentance bring about? In his reply, John the Baptist urges the crowds to share their possessions and food with those who do not have clothing and food, the tax collectors to be honest in their collecting, and the soldiers to avoid extorting money, to stop falsely accusing others, and to be satisfied with their income.⁴ Fitzmyer comments that what John the Baptist describes “is not tied up with sacrificial offerings for sins or ascetic practices, such as the use of sackcloth and ashes, or even a flight into the solitude of the desert, such as his own withdrawal had been.”⁵ Instead, John the Baptist commends concrete actions involving possessions, money, and honesty and the like for those coming to his baptism of repentance within the larger community. Indeed, “It is by translating into concrete actions one’s God-orientation or the repentance-baptism within the framework of the human community that one proves one’s identity as part of the covenant people.”⁶ These concrete actions are to be the signs of their changes of heart as proof of undergoing *metanoia*.⁷ Matera, commenting on this passage in the Gospel of Luke, states, “Repentance from sins...is necessary for faith in Christ.”⁸ Additionally, in repenting of one’s sins, a person comes to know one’s status before God. “To enter this kingdom [of God and the age of salvation] and be exalted by God, one must humble oneself.”⁹ What can one do to enter the kingdom of God? John the Baptist, in his reply to the crowds, has already provided one way to do this: to seek repentance through almsgiving.¹⁰

In this paper, I will be treating an idea that is articulated by St. Thomas Aquinas in his *Super Evangelium S. Matthaei Lectura* on almsgiving. St. Thomas, in his discussion of the Our Father prayer in Matthew 6, in response to the question raised “[b]ut what is to be said of those who do not wish to forgive and nevertheless say Our Father?” writes: “It should be said that he does not sin by saying Our Father,

⁴ “Here John’s ethical teaching foreshadows a major theme of Jesus’s preaching: the correct use of possessions.” Matera, *New Testament Ethics*, 69. See also Kiyoshi Mineshige, *Besitzverzicht und Almosen bei Lukas: Wesen und Forderung des lukanischen Vermögensethos* (Tübingen, Germany: J.C.B. Mohr, 2003), 170.

⁵ Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke I–XI*, 469.

⁶ Thomas Malipurathu, “‘Produce Fruits in Keeping with Repentance!’ (Lk 3:8): Following Up the Biblical Trail towards the Ideal of a Poor Church,” *Jeevadharma* 44 (2014): 123.

⁷ Matera points out that Luke 7:29–30 notes “the people and tax collectors accepted John’s baptism of repentance while the Pharisees and lawyers did not.” Matera, *New Testament Ethics*, 70.

⁸ Matera, *New Testament Ethics*, 70.

⁹ Matera, *New Testament Ethics*, 70.

¹⁰ “In other words, the sensitivity to the needs of others, which therefore deliberately eschews all expressions of wanton luxury, is part of the *fundamental convictions linked to the living of the Christian vocation*.” Malipurathu, “‘Produce Fruits in Keeping with Repentance!’” 124. Emphasis added.

however much he may be in rancor and grave sin, for such people should do whatever they can of good, both alms and prayers and such things that dispose one to the recovery of grace.”¹¹ St. Thomas in this passage argues that a person even in a grave sin can dispose oneself to the recovery of grace through almsgiving.

Following St. Thomas’s insight, I argue that almsgiving is not simply a work of charity or justice but serves as an important formative practice of repentance for the Christian disciple that leads the disciple to place one’s faith in God, to seek repentance for one’s sins, and subsequently to dispose oneself to the reception of grace. For the initial scriptural foundations of this argument, I focus on the biblical text of Daniel 4:24, which presents almsgiving as a way of repentance. This is ultimately because in giving to the poor one performs an act of faith in God, a turning to God in seeking the redemption of one’s sins. After a review of Daniel 4:24 and its context in Daniel, I examine how the Gospel of Luke sheds light on the practice of almsgiving in Jesus’s encounters with the Pharisees, his teachings and parables, and his encounters with the rich ruler and Zacchaeus. These different stories in the Gospel of Luke further my argument concerning almsgiving as a formative practice of repentance for Christian discipleship. The Gospel of Luke, in particular, emphasizes the need to bear good fruits worthy of repentance to encounter salvation in Christ whereby in almsgiving a sinner develops an important practice for placing one’s faith in God, in seeking repentance and ultimately salvation. Accordingly, almsgiving as a practice of repentance aims to dispose the disciple to the recovery of grace.

DANIEL 4 AND ALMSGIVING

In this section, I focus on Daniel 4:1–24, which includes Daniel’s interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar’s dream and Daniel’s subsequent advice, which focuses on almsgiving. I chose this text because of the position that Gary Anderson has articulated regarding the importance of Daniel 4 for understanding the forgiveness of sins in Jewish and Christian thought. As Anderson states, “In the Old Testament, the book of Daniel contains the first fruits of an idea that will come to full harvest in later rabbinic and patristic thought. Indeed, much of both

¹¹ *Super Evangelium S. Matthaei Lectura* Chapter 6, Lecture. 3, #597 (Aquinas Institute translation, Vol. 33). For Aquinas’ mature treatment on almsgiving, see ST II-II, q. 32. For a recent discussion bringing together Aquinas’ teaching on merit and almsgiving in Dan 4:24, see Matthew Levering, *Jesus and the Demise of Death: Resurrection, Afterlife, and the Fate of the Christian* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2012), 89–95. For a modern scholarly consideration of Aquinas’ treatment of almsgiving, see Stephen J. Pope, “Thomas Aquinas on Almsgiving, Justice, and Charity: An Interpretation and Assessment,” *Heythrop Journal* 32 (1991): 167–91.

Jews' and Christians' understanding of the forgiveness of sins will follow from that text."¹² Daniel 4 establishes the importance of almsgiving as a practice of repentance in which the sinner through almsgiving turns to God and repents of his previous way of life. Therefore, Daniel 4 has a special role in helping us understand the relationship between repentance and almsgiving.

Daniel 4 starts with King Nebuchadnezzar recounting his dream.¹³ King Nebuchadnezzar "reigned in Babylon from 605 to 562 BC. He was a powerful and cruel monarch who defeated Assyria and Egypt; in 597 BC he captured Jerusalem" and later "destroyed the Temple and took many of the people to Babylon (586 BC)."¹⁴

I, Nebuchadnezzar, was at home in my palace, content and prosperous. I had a terrifying dream as I lay in bed, and the images and my visions frightened me. . . . "These were the visions I saw while in bed: I saw a tree of great height at the center of the earth. It was large and strong, with its top touching the heavens, and it could be seen to the ends of the earth. Its leaves were beautiful, its fruit abundant, providing food for all. Under it the wild beasts found shade, in its branches the birds of the air nested; all flesh ate of it. In the vision I saw while in bed, a holy watcher came down from heaven and cried aloud in these words: 'Cut down the tree and lop off its branches, strip off its leaves and scatter its fruit; Let the beasts flee from beneath it, and the birds from its branches, but leave its stump in the earth. Bound with iron and bronze, let him be fed with the grass of the field and bathed with the dew of heaven; let his lot be with the beasts in the grass of the earth. Let his mind be changed from a human one; let the mind of a beast be given him, till seven years pass over him. By decree of the watchers is this proclamation, by order of the holy ones, this sentence; That all who live may know that the Most High is sovereign over human kingship, giving it to whom he wills, and setting it over the lowliest of mortals.' This is the dream that I, King Nebuchadnezzar, had. Now, Belteshazzar, tell me its meaning. None of the wise men in my kingdom can tell me the meaning, but you can, because the spirit of the holy gods is in you." Then Daniel, whose name was Belteshazzar, was appalled for a time, dismayed by his thoughts. "Belteshazzar," the king said to him, "do not let the dream or its meaning dismay you."

¹² Gary Anderson, *Sin: A History* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009), 137.

¹³ "That an author in the second century would choose a sixth-century exilic setting to tell his story about how Israel will be restored is significant. It confirms the fact that the exile was thought to be still in effect, despite the efforts of prophets such as Zechariah." Anderson, *Sin*, 82. For the manuscript and textual history surrounding chapter 4, see Carol Newsom and Brennan Breed, *Daniel: A Commentary* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2014), 127–134.

¹⁴ "Nebuchadnezzar," *A Dictionary of the Bible*, www.oxfordbiblicalstudies.com.shsst.ezproxy.switchinc.org/article/opr/t94/e1320.

“My lord,” Belteshazzar replied, “may this dream be for your enemies, and its meaning for your foes. The tree that you saw, large and strong, its top touching the heavens, that could be seen by the whole earth, its leaves beautiful, its fruit abundant, providing food for all, under which the wild beasts lived, and in whose branches the birds of the air dwelt—you are that tree, O king, large and strong! Your majesty has become so great as to touch the heavens, and your rule reaches to the ends of the earth. As for the king’s vision of a holy watcher, who came down from heaven and proclaimed: ‘Cut down the tree and destroy it but leave its stump in the earth. Bound with iron and bronze, let him be fed with the grass of the field, and bathed with the dew of heaven; let his lot be with wild beasts till seven years pass over him’—here is its meaning, O king, here is the sentence that the Most High has passed upon my lord king: You shall be cast out from human society and dwell with wild beasts; you shall be given grass to eat like an ox and be bathed with the dew of heaven; seven years shall pass over you, until you know that the Most High is sovereign over human kingship and gives it to whom he will. The command that the stump of the tree is to be left means that your kingdom shall be preserved for you, once you have learned that heaven is sovereign. Therefore, O King, may my advice be acceptable to you: Redeem your sins by almsgiving [*šidqâ*’] and your iniquities by generosity to the poor [*mihan*’*ănāyîn*]; then your serenity may be extended” (Daniel 4 1–2, 7–24).¹⁵

The narration of a dream by a powerful non-Jewish leader in the Old Testament parallels the dream of Pharaoh in Genesis (41:1–24). Pharaoh’s dream and Nebuchadnezzar’s dream “warn of terrible days ahead...and both require a righteous Israelite...to interpret them.”¹⁶ Yet the dream accounts differ. Pharaoh had two dreams revealing the same famine. According to Joseph’s interpretation, “That Pharaoh had the same dream twice means that the matter has been confirmed by God and that God will soon bring it about (Genesis 4:32).”¹⁷ Nebuchadnezzar, on the other hand, had only one dream. His dream involves a great and mighty tree being cut down and its stump being reduced to a near animal state. This “led Daniel to conclude that this dream could not possess the same degree of certainty as to its fulfillment. In other words, there must be a way to avert or at least ameliorate what was coming.”¹⁸ In order to prevent the looming punishment of God, Daniel tells Nebuchadnezzar: “Redeem your sins by almsgiving [*šidqâ*’] and your iniquities by generosity to the poor [*mihan*

¹⁵ NABRE with the exception of verse 24 which is the translation of Anderson, *Sin*, 138. Newsom and Breed also translate *šidqâ*’ as almsgiving (verse 27 in their translation) and note this is how the Original Greek and the Theodotion Greek texts of Daniel translate *šidqâ*’ in that verse. Newsom and Breed, *Daniel*, 126 and 145.

¹⁶ Anderson, *Sin*, 138. See also Newsom and Breed, *Daniel*, 135–136.

¹⁷ Anderson, *Sin*, 138.

¹⁸ Anderson, *Sin*, 138.

‘*ānāyīn*]; then your serenity may be extended.”¹⁹ Daniel advises almsgiving as a way to prevent the outcome of the dream, thereby instructing Nebuchadnezzar to atone for his sins through acts of mercy.

But how do almsgiving and generosity to the poor enable a person to have one’s sins and iniquities redeemed? To answer this question requires that one understand the nature of sin as a debt. Gary Anderson has argued persuasively that the notion of sin in the Old Testament shifted from viewing sin as a “weight” to sin as a “debt.” This first arose due to the influence of Aramaic, as the language of the Persian empire during 538–333 BC.²⁰ It was the vocabulary of Aramaic that understood sin as “debt,” and this influenced Jews who were bilingual in Hebrew and Aramaic.²¹ Additionally, during the development of the Israelite language in the Persian period, the Israelites “were also experiencing exile and enslavement.”²² This centered around the punishment of being sold into slavery for Israel’s sinfulness. Physical punishment served as a way to pay the debt of sin. This idea of paying for sins is encapsulated well in Isaiah 40 (dating to the sixth century BC): “Comfort, comfort my people says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that her penal service is ended, that her sin has been paid off, that she has received from the Lord’s hand double for all her sins (Isaiah 40 1–2).”²³ The idea of using physical punishment

¹⁹ In the scholarly literature, there is a debate as to whether Daniel 4:24 (or 27) is referring to almsgiving. *šidqâ* ‘normally is translated as “righteousness.” See “Justice, Justification, and Righteousness,” *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Bible and Theology*, www.oxfordbiblicalstudies.com.shsst.ezproxy.switchinc.org/article/opr/t467/e132. Most English translations of this text render the term as “doing good deeds” or “doing righteousness.” Additionally, most scholars agree that the term *šidqâ* ‘means “generosity” or “almsgiving” in rabbinical literature. See “Righteousness,” *The Oxford Companion to the Bible*, www.oxfordbiblicalstudies.com.shsst.ezproxy.switchinc.org/article/opr/t120/e0629. What did *šidqâ* ‘mean when the Book of Daniel was composed? I follow Anderson’s view as outlined in *Sin*, 139, which argues that *šidqâ* should be translated as almsgiving. For opposition to Anderson’s view, see David J. Downs, *Alms: Charity, Reward, and Atonement in Early Christianity* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2016), 50–56, in which Downs disagrees with Anderson’s argument concerning Dan 4 and prefers to translate *šidqâ* ‘and *eleēmosynē* as acts of mercy and not specifically almsgiving. Additionally, Christopher Hays argues that the use of Daniel 4 as a text for redemptive almsgiving “could be seen as misguided.” See Christopher M. Hays, “By Almsgiving and Faith Sins Are Purged? The Theological Underpinnings of Early Christian Care for the Poor,” in *Engaging Economics: New Testament Scenarios and Early Christian Reception*, ed. Bruce W. Longenecker and Kelly D. Liebengood (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009), 273.

²⁰ Anderson, *Sin*, 7.

²¹ Anderson, *Sin*, 8.

²² Anderson, *Sin*, 8.

²³ (Anderson’s translation); *Sin*, 8. Also, Anderson makes the point of how significant the imagery of God redeeming Israel from slavery is. “For our purposes, however, it is important to understand the typological interpretation Second Isaiah has given to Israel’s experience of captivity. For this prophet, Israel’s exile in Babylon called to

as a form to pay one's debt "comes directly from the experience of debt-slavery.... In this tradition, anyone unable to repay a loan could work as a debt-slave for the creditor until the loan was paid off. Similarly, if a sinner committed a serious error and so incurred a 'great debt,' the penalty imposed upon him was thought to 'raise currency' in order to pay down what was owed."²⁴

Once the nature of sin as "debt" appeared, its natural opposite appears – a "credit." As Anderson notes:

The very idiom of rabbinic Hebrew supports this, because the antonym for the term *hōb* (debt) is *zekūt* (credit). No such antinomy existed in the First Temple period—the idiom of 'bearing the weight of one's sin' did not have a natural opposite.... [I]n Second Temple Jewish texts, it becomes common to speak of persons whose moral virtuosity was so remarkable that they were able to deposit the proceeds of their good deeds in a heavenly bank.²⁵

An example of storing up treasure (in the heavenly storehouse) appears in the Book of Tobit (dated to the third or second century BC). Tobit tells his son Tobias:

Give alms from your possessions. Do not turn your face away from any of the poor, so that God's face will not be turned away from you. Give in proportion to what you own. If you have great wealth, give alms out of your abundance; if you have but little, do not be afraid to give alms even of that little. You will be storing up a goodly treasure for yourself against the day of adversity. For almsgiving delivers from death and keeps one from entering into Darkness (Tobit 4:7–10).²⁶

Anderson acknowledges this development of "credit" as "a doctrine of merit" which "leads to an increased role for the agency of human beings in counteracting the ravages of sin."²⁷ This development of a doctrine of merit does not go unrecognized in rabbinical writings. For

mind the slavery Israel had experienced in Egypt many centuries before." This point is made time and again by the writer when he declares that God's saving act should be characterized as an act of redemption (*gē'ullāh*), that is, a release of individuals from their bondage in slavery. Indeed, this word in its nominal and verbal forms occurs some twenty-two times within the book. Anderson, *Sin*, 46.

²⁴ Anderson, *Sin*, 8. Leviticus 25 describes well this concern of debt and debt-slaves and how one or one's family member can redeem a debt-slave.

²⁵ Anderson, *Sin*, 9.

²⁶ This Tobit text, according to Anderson, is an interpretation of Proverbs 10:2 and 11:4. See Anderson, *Sin*, 145–6. For a lengthier examination of the Book of Tobit and almsgiving, see Gary Anderson, *Charity: The Place of the Poor in the Biblical Tradition* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2013), 70–103. See also Roman Garrison, *Redemptive Almsgiving in Early Christianity* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 1993), 53–54.

²⁷ Anderson, *Sin*, 10.

example, in Exodus 32, after the golden calf incident, Moses appeals to God to change his mind about the punishment of the Israelites by saying: “Remember your servants Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, and how you swore to them by your own self, saying, ‘I will make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky; and all this land that I promised, I will give your descendants as their perpetual heritage’” (Exodus 32:13). In commenting on this text, rabbinical writings did not focus on what God had promised. “[R]ather, Moses asks God to remember *what* these men had done. By this was meant the great acts of piety they had once accomplished that generated a vast surplus of credit in heaven, credit that was more than sufficient to counterbalance the debt Israel now owed.”²⁸ Thus, human agents through particular acts could generate credit towards the debt of sin.

Having considered sin as debt and the possibility of human merit as credit, one final etymological consideration is necessary. This concerns the term for “redeem,” which in Aramaic is *praq*.²⁹ The Aramaic term originally meant “to buy oneself out of slavery.”³⁰ In Hebrew the word for “redeem” is *gā'al*. This term appears in Leviticus 25 when discussing how a person can become a debt-slave.³¹ “When your kindred, having been so reduced to poverty, sell themselves to a resident alien who has become wealthy or to descendants of a resident alien’s family, even after having sold themselves, they still may be redeemed by one of their kindred, by an uncle or cousin, or by some other relative from their family; or, having acquired the means, they may pay the redemption price themselves” (Leviticus 25:47–49). The English words “redeemed” and “redemption” are translated from the Hebrew root *gā'al*.³² Leviticus 25 provides an understanding of how one “redeems” oneself, through one’s own means or the means from one’s family, from being a debt-slave.

This last etymological consideration provides the final clue to reading Daniel 4:24 as an instruction of almsgiving for the redemption of one’s sins. Analogous to the debt slave of Leviticus 25, King Nebuchadnezzar’s “horrible sins” have “turned him into a debt-slave in the eyes of God. One way out of debt is physical punishment [as the dream portends], but Daniel informs us that there is a second option: giving away one’s money to the poor.”³³ There is no “get out of jail free card,” but there are two ways to repay a debt: to offer sacrifice voluntarily or

²⁸ Anderson, *Sin*, 10.

²⁹ Anderson, *Sin*, 143.

³⁰ Anderson, *Sin*, 10.

³¹ See Matthew 18:23ff for Jesus’s use of the debt-slave imagery in a parable. For a detailed historical consideration of debt slavery and release, see David L. Baker, *Tight Fists or Open Hands? Wealth and Poverty in the Old Testament Law* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009), 161–174, 275–285.

³² Anderson, *Sin*, 143.

³³ Anderson, *Sin*, 10.

to suffer punishment forcibly. As Anderson notes, “In rabbinic Judaism and early Christianity, Daniel’s advice will become commonplace. Repentance without the giving of alms, in some sources, is unimaginable.”³⁴ Almsgiving becomes a kind of “spiritual currency,” to use the phrase of Anderson.³⁵ Thus, Daniel’s advice to King Nebuchadnezzar finally can be appreciated. King Nebuchadnezzar is in the debt of sin and to redeem himself (to buy himself out of slavery to debt-sin) he either has to endure the physical punishment that will come about as predicted in the dream, similar to Israel’s experience of exile and physical punishment for its sinfulness, or he can redeem his sins through almsgiving to the poor. By giving alms, King Nebuchadnezzar gains a kind of spiritual currency to pay down his sin-debts. Additionally, by turning to and caring for the poor “God’s face will not be turned away from” King Nebuchadnezzar. This story from the book of Daniel points to almsgiving as a practice of repentance, in that a sinner has accumulated a debt due to sin and in order for the sinner to alleviate this sin-debt one must practice almsgiving. In this understanding, almsgiving serves as a powerful way for a sinner to turn towards God and away from sin.

ALMSGIVING, THE REDEMPTION OF SINS, AND DISCIPLESHIP IN THE GOSPEL OF LUKE

In returning to the opening passage of this paper, Luke 3, John the Baptist’s instruction to the crowds coming to him for the baptism of repentance describes one concrete practice that leads to salvation and the redemption of one’s sins: almsgiving. John the Baptist’s recommendation of almsgiving for the atonement of one’s sins does not prove to be shocking considering the examination of Daniel 4 since Second Temple Judaism practices offer ways for understanding salvation through the mercy of God through specific activity like almsgiving. This focus on almsgiving in Luke’s Gospel is due to the Lukan focus on salvation and the requisite repentance and turning away from sin in concrete practices that is necessary for the Christian disciple. “In the wider context of Luke’s narratives, the human response to divine mercy can be best described as *μετάνοια* (*ἐπιστρέφω*). This is not an abstract concept but is expressed in transformative and practical

³⁴ Anderson, *Sin*, 143.

³⁵ Anderson, *Sin*, 143.

deeds in interpersonal relations, namely showing mercy and doing justice.”³⁶ And as Anthony Giambrone notes, “Luke unoriginally envisions charity as an act of atoning repentance, somehow critical for fulfilling Israel’s covenantal destiny.”³⁷

In the following discussion, I examine several key Lukan Gospel texts that argue the importance of almsgiving for the redemption of sins as a pathway towards discipleship in Christ.³⁸ In particular, these texts underscore the role of almsgiving as a sign of repentance and a pathway of turning to God and investing one’s faith in God so that one can find salvation in Christ.³⁹ To put it another way, “Almsgiving...represents a concrete manifestation of repentance (*metanoia*), so that to live a life of almsgiving, or to divest oneself and give to the poor in conjunction with following Jesus, is a holistic participation in God’s ways.”⁴⁰ Indeed, almsgiving is not simply a practice of charitable giving for those in need of material goods but serves as a concrete sign of repentance for the almsgiver on the journey of salvation in Christ.

Before turning to specific Lukan texts that treat almsgiving, it is important briefly to link the Gospel of Luke with the sin-debt metaphor that is central to understanding Daniel 4 and the use of almsgiving as a practice of repentance. In *Sacramental Charity, Creditor Christology, and the Economy of Salvation in Luke’s Gospel*, Anthony Giambrone has argued that the Gospel of Luke maintains and utilizes the sin as debt understanding and that the Lukan Gospel develops an

³⁶ MiJa Wi, *The Path to Salvation in Luke’s Gospel: What Must We Do?* (New York: T&T Clark, 2019), 63.

³⁷ Anthony Giambrone, O.P., “‘Friends in Heavenly Habitations’ (Luke 16:9): Charity, Repentance, and Luke’s Resurrection Reversal,” *Revue Biblique* 120, no. 4 (2013): 535.

³⁸ In my selection of Lukan texts, my study complements other relevant Lukan studies on related topics. For example, Anthony Giambrone, O.P., *Sacramental Charity, Creditor Christology, and the Economy of Salvation in Luke’s Gospel* (Tübingen, Germany: Mohr Siebeck, 2017); Zacharias Mattam, “The Cost of Discipleship: Lk 14:25–35,” *Bible Bhashyam* 25 (1999): 104–116; Timothy W. Reardon, “Cleansing Through Almsgiving in Luke-Acts: Purity, Cornelius, and the Translation of Acts 15:9,” *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 78 (2016): 463–482. There are other monographs that touch on related themes which only limitedly apply to the scope of my own project. For example, see Kyoung-Jin Kim, *Stewardship and Almsgiving in Luke’s Theology* (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998). Kim uses the idea of stewardship as the guiding thread to understanding almsgiving in Luke and thus does not touch on key themes I elaborate in this section of the paper. Lastly, for a monograph dedicated to discipleship in Luke-Acts, see Holly Beers, *The Followers of Jesus as the ‘Servant’: Luke’s Model from Isaiah for the Disciples in Luke-Acts* (New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2015).

³⁹ See Giambrone’s “‘Friends in Heavenly Habitations’ (Luke 16:9),” 536–538 for broader consideration of this purity-almsgiving thread in Luke-Acts.

⁴⁰ Reardon, “Cleansing Through Almsgiving in Luke-Acts: Purity, Cornelius, and the Translation of Acts 15:9,” 477.

image of Christ as Israel's creditor. The sin-debt metaphor can be found in an examination of the Our Father in Luke's Gospel, in the distinction of human beings seeking God's forgiveness of sins and human beings seeking forgiveness of debts from others.⁴¹ In addition, Giambrone examines in detail the story of the sinful woman in the house of the Pharisee (Luke 7:36–50) such that Giambrone argues in a rather novel way that the story of the sinful woman represents Christ rewarding her charity (her generous love) by forgiving her sins.⁴² Similarly, MiJa Wi agrees that

[t]he parable in Lk. 7:36–50 juxtaposes the moneylender's gracious act of cancelling debts (χαρίζομαι) with Jesus' forgiving (ἀφίημι) sins. It sheds further light on the response which is described as tangible acts of love (ἀγαπάω). Hence Luke's juxtaposition of ἄφεσις of sin and debt strengthens the mutual relationship of religious and economic matters while debt retains its financial meaning. *All of these points elaborate the sin-debt metaphor with the Gospel of Luke.*⁴³

With an understanding of the sin-debt metaphor in the background of the Gospel of Luke, one then can see in Luke 11 a consideration of an almsgiving-repentance connection in Jesus's encounter with the Pharisees.

Near the end of Luke 11, a Pharisee invites Jesus to eat a meal at the house of the Pharisee.⁴⁴ The Pharisee is scandalized that Jesus did not perform the ritual washing prior to eating.⁴⁵ Jesus responds to the Pharisee's sense of scandal: "The Lord said to him, 'Oh you Pharisees! Although you cleanse the outside of the cup and the dish, inside you are filled with plunder and evil. You fools! Did not the maker of the outside also make the inside? But as to what is within, give alms, and behold, everything will be clean for you'" (Luke 11:39–41).⁴⁶ This response of Jesus begins a series of chastising statements of Pharisaic

⁴¹ See Giambrone, *Sacramental Charity*, 66–126.

⁴² See Giambrone, *Sacramental Charity*, 95–126.

⁴³ Wi, *The Path to Salvation in Luke's Gospel*, 63. Emphasis added.

⁴⁴ For a discussion of the role of the Pharisees in Luke, see Halvor Moxnes, *The Economy of the Kingdom: Social Conflict and Economic Relations in Luke's Gospel* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1988), 1–21.

⁴⁵ This is the second of two Pharisee meal incidents that turn on being clean. In the first, Luke 7:36–50, it is the sinful woman who bathes Jesus's feet with tears and provides him with hospitality because of the neglect of the Pharisee host.

⁴⁶ This is paralleled in Matthew 23:25–26 without a reference to almsgiving. For a brief discussion of the Matthean parallel, see Nathan Eubank, *Wages of Cross-Bearing and Debt of Sin: The Economy of Heaven in Matthew's Gospel* (Boston, MA: de Gruyter, 2013), 63–70. Giambrone contrasts Luke 11:42 with 1 Enoch 95:4 and 98:10, which speaks of the impossibility of the wealthy being saved. Giambrone, *Sacramental Charity*, 261. Jesus leaves open a path for the atonement of sin, where 1 Enoch has no such path.

behavior. Jesus accuses the Pharisees of being concerned with cleaning the outside of the body (the outside of the cup and dish) by ritual washings but inside the body (in the heart of the person) there is greed (*harpagēs*) and evil.⁴⁷ Jesus calls the Pharisees fools or unwise (*aphrones*) for behaving in a way that ignores the fact that it is God who made both the outside and the inside of the body and that there is a correlation between what is inside the person and what is outside the person. Having ritual exterior purity and interior sinfulness cannot be a coherent position for someone who understands the God who makes all things. Jesus addressed this incoherency earlier in the Lukan Gospel during the Sermon on the Plain.

In the Sermon on the Plain in Luke 6:43–45, Jesus says, “A good tree does not bear rotten fruit, nor does a rotten tree bear good fruit. For every tree is known by its own fruit. For people do not pick figs from thorn bushes, nor do they gather grapes from brambles. A good person out of the store of goodness in his heart produces good, but an evil person out of a store of evil produces evil; for from the fullness of the heart the mouth speaks.”⁴⁸ Bovon notes that sin “springs up from inside.”⁴⁹ In using this terminology, Jesus explains that the exteriority of the body does not produce the evil; rather the evil is stored inside the person and then produces such evil fruits with the exterior of the body. So ritual purity or impurity would not coincide with interior purity. How, then, does one make pure the interiority of the body if it is impure or evil?

Returning to the end of Luke 11 with Jesus’s eating with the Pharisee, verse 41 provides Jesus’s answer for rectifying the interior impurity of the Pharisees. They are told to “give alms (*eleēmosynēn*)” and “everything will be clean for you.” One should note the initiative required here on the part of the Pharisees to be made clean in their hearts from the greed and evil that exist there. Jesus instructs the Pharisees to give alms and through giving alms, “everything” will be made clean, both the interior and the exterior of the body. In this encounter, almsgiving acts as a concrete practice of repentance for those seeking

⁴⁷ The term *harpagēs* can mean plundering but in this context the term is singular feminine genitive, and referring to one’s inside being full of plunder does not make much sense. The term in this context makes better sense as the inside being full of or filled with greed.

⁴⁸ “Fruit as a figure for deeds, good or bad, is used in the OT (Hos 10:13; Isa 3:10, Jer 17:10; 21:14).” Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke I–XI*, 643. In Luke 7:33–35, Jesus raises the concern about exterior things when discussing John the Baptist and himself. People focused on John’s lack of eating and drinking as John being possessed by a demon and then focused on Jesus’s eating and drinking with sinners and Jesus is accused of being a glutton and a drunk. Exterior behaviors can only reveal so much. Thus, the need to be attentive to the fruits that such actions bear.

⁴⁹ François Bovon, Donald S. Deer, and Helmut Koester, *Luke 2: A Commentary on the Gospel of Luke 9:51–19:27* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2013), 299.

interior purity. “It would be a mistake, however, to see this [almsgiving] as emphasizing exterior works over inner faith. That would only reinforce the bifurcation of inner and outer. Almsgiving is a representation of the whole self. One’s actions are part of one’s being, so that almsgiving embodies one’s existence, not simply exterior works.”⁵⁰ By giving alms as Jesus instructed, the Pharisees produce good fruit by this act of repentance for the sin-debt they have accrued, and thereby they are made clean. This instruction of Jesus to the Pharisees is reminiscent of Daniel’s advice to Nebuchadnezzar in which Daniel instructs Nebuchadnezzar to redeem his sins through almsgiving and of John the Baptist’s admonition to bear fruits worthy of repentance by caring for the poor. This intersection of repentance, greed, and caring for the poor gets put into the specific context of discipleship in Jesus’s encounter with the rich ruler in Luke 18:18–23:

And a ruler asked him, “Good Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?” And Jesus said to him, “Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone. You know the commandments: Do not commit adultery, Do not kill, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Honor your father and mother.” And he said, “All these I have observed from my youth.” And when Jesus heard it, he said to him, “One thing you still lack. Sell all that you have and distribute it to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.” But when he heard this he became sad, for he was very rich.⁵¹

In this story, a rich ruler has come to Jesus seeking what the rich ruler must do to inherit eternal life, or, in other words, salvation.⁵² Jesus, in response, notes that the rich ruler knows the “commandments (*entolas*)”. And Jesus proceeds to list many of the commandments that belong to the second tablet of the ten commandments that concern proper behavior toward one’s neighbor. The rich ruler responds that he has observed all of these commandments from his youth. Then Jesus tells the rich ruler that the rich ruler lacks one thing and that he should sell *all* of his possessions and give the proceeds to the poor for treasure in heaven, and to follow after Jesus. Instead of following Jesus, the rich ruler leaves sad because he was “very rich.” This passage and its parallels in Mark and Matthew have elicited much commentary. What exactly is lacking in the rich ruler? What will be the reward for the rich ruler if he follows through with Jesus’s instruction? And does this encounter provide a way to understanding an integral link between

⁵⁰ Reardon, “Cleansing Through Almsgiving in Luke-Acts: Purity, Cornelius, and the Translation of Acts 15:9,” 474.

⁵¹ Text taken from the Ignatius Catholic Study Bible New Testament, Second Catholic Edition (RSV).

⁵² This story contains the common refrain again from St. Luke, “What shall I/we do?”

almsgiving and Christian discipleship? Each of these questions deserves a response.

What is lacking in the rich ruler is a detachment from material wealth that shows a lack of interior purity. He suffers from what ails the Pharisees in Luke's Gospel: the debt of sin due to greed. As a privileged and wealthy person among the Israelites, he is too attached to his own wealth to follow through with Jesus's instruction by emptying himself of his possessions and using the proceeds for the poor. This story should make one recall what Jesus said in Luke 16:13: "No servant can serve two masters. He will either hate one and love the other or be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon." The rich ruler can only serve one master and has chosen to put his faith in wealth instead of in Christ. There is at least one silver lining here in the rich ruler's reaction. One should feel at least pity for the rich ruler since he went away sad instead of sneering at what Jesus said concerning mammon like the Pharisees in Luke 16:14. If the rich ruler had been able to let go of his possessions through his act of repentance, he would have gained three rewards: interior purity and release from the sin-debt of greed and attachment to material things; a treasure in heaven, a kind spiritual credit/currency set aside in heaven; and becoming a disciple/follower at Jesus's invitation. These connections are noteworthy because of this parable's concerns regarding the use of possessions/wealth with notions of bearing/harvesting fruit and the storing of treasures.

In the parable of Luke 12, the rich man has an abundant fruitful harvest. In an interior monologue, he asks himself: "What shall I do...?" He replies to himself that he will tear down his old barns and build new and larger barns to store his harvest and goods so that he can "have so many good things stored up for many years, rest, eat, drink, be merry!" And yet God, speaking to the rich man in Luke 12, says, "You fool (*Aphrōn*), this night your life will be demanded of you; and the things you have prepared, to whom will they belong?" Jesus ends the parable saying, "Thus will it be for the one who stores up treasure for himself but is not rich in God."⁵³ The unwise or foolish rich man has placed his faith and future in the things of the earth and when death comes upon him, what good will these earthly treasures have for him? These earthly treasures (or credits) will not matter when one is in the debt of sin because of the rich man's faith in the power of wealth and possessions. He will not be rich in God but only rich in himself with no heavenly treasures available to him in his time of need.

Three minor features of this story are worth attending to because of their repetition in the Lukan Gospel. First, the land of the rich man

⁵³ I have modified the NABRE translation to conform to Bovon's translation which is a more literal rendering of the text.

has produced an abundant/fruitful harvest. This should remind one of John the Baptist in Luke 3 and his discussion of producing good fruit and the saying from the Sermon on the Plain about where good fruit comes from. Second, the rich man asking himself, “What shall I do?” echoes the crowds in Luke 3:10: “What then shall we do?”⁵⁴ To which John the Baptist urged the crowd to share their possessions. And third, this desire for more and larger barns expresses the deep-seated greed and impurity present in the Pharisees of Luke 11 and how such greed makes them “fools” and “unclean” from within. The earthly wealth sought for by the rich barn owner and the Pharisees represents an earthly credit for which there is no heavenly return when they live lives filled with greed and impurity. For Bovon, “The failure of the human project [of the rich man] confirms the guilty intention” in that the rich man’s life will be taken away and his desire for new larger storehouses was not only misguided but sinful. The rich man, in this parable, “symbolizes the attitude that should not be adopted ... he should have been making donations to others rather than hoarding. God gave, but this person refused to share.”⁵⁵ Jesus’s concern for greed, impurity, and misplaced faith does not end in verse 21.

In Luke 12:22–34, Jesus launches into an explanation that the disciples need to be dependent on God who provides all things in the right manner for each person and not be anxious about material/earthly things.⁵⁶ The disciples must place their belief and faith in God first and foremost above all things. And it should be noted that Jesus’s instruction to the disciples is not limited to those who are wealthy but also to those who are poor.⁵⁷ Sin and impurity affect both the rich and poor alike, thus causing the need for repentance, a turning away from sin and a turning towards God. Jesus concludes his explanation with the following verses: “Sell your belongings and give alms (*eleēmōsynēn*). Provide money bags for yourselves that do not wear out, an inexhaustible treasure in heaven that no thief can reach nor moth destroy. For where your treasure is, there also will your heart (*kardia*) be.” Instead of building newer and bigger earthly barns for themselves to store up earthly treasures which have no real credit in the Kingdom of God, the disciples are urged to store the inexhaustible treasure and credit in heaven that will not decay or be stolen in the moneybags of those who need alms, like the poor, the widows, and the orphans. And Jesus’s

⁵⁴ Bovon notes the connection of Luke 12:16 with the parable of the sower in Luke 8:14–15. Bovon, *Luke 2*, 199.

⁵⁵ Bovon, *Luke 2*, 200. Bovon rightly calls attention to how the text refers to “my crops,” “my goods,” “my grain,” and “my soul.”

⁵⁶ For an argument that explores the plan of God that underlies all things as the central guide for reading Luke, see Nave, *The Role and Function of Repentance in Luke-Acts*, 11–29.

⁵⁷ See Mineshige, *Besitzverzicht und Almosen bei Lukas: Wesen und Forderung des lukanischen Vermögensethos*, 167–168.

final sentence in this explanation highlights the placement of one's treasure and the placement of one's heart, which indicates the center of one's existence. Is one's heart filled with the sin of greed and ultimately evil and impurity? Is one's heart concerned with one's own fruit? One's own earthly treasures? Then one's treasure is earthly-bound and will not bear good fruit in what really matters – eternal life and heavenly treasure.⁵⁸ Is one's heart rich in God? Is one's heart filled with care for the poor?⁵⁹ Then one's treasure is a heavenly inheritance that cannot be destroyed or stolen, and one's treasure will bear good fruit. And with a heavenly treasury, one finds a purity of the heart that cannot be found in exterior things and that can only be found in a lasting faith in the mercy of God. As Jesus reminded his disciples: "Be merciful, just as [also] your Father is merciful" (Luke 6:36). The mercy one bestows on others is the measure of the mercy one will receive from God.

Having dealt with the heavenly inheritance in giving alms, the last question remains for this encounter with the rich ruler in Luke 18: does this encounter provide a way to understanding a link between almsgiving and Christian discipleship? I argue the rich ruler story in Luke 18 helps illuminate a concern that the Lukan Gospel raises concerning the sin of greed and subsequent impurity as destructive of the pathway to discipleship because the sin of greed fosters one's faith in material wealth and possessions. This kind of faith is misplaced since these earthly treasures will not provide salvation. For some on the way to following Jesus, the demands of Luke 18 to give away everything in almsgiving will be necessary because of the way in which a person has faith in mammon over God. The corrective to such a wrong-headed impurity is through almsgiving-repentance, placing one's faith in God, and then following Christ. For others on the way to following Jesus, one does not need to sell all of one's possessions to gain repentance and purity and to follow after Christ.⁶⁰ This latter approach is typified in the encounter of Jesus with the tax collector Zacchaeus.

⁵⁸ "[Wealth] tends to foster in the rich a feeling of self-sufficiency incompatible with the trust in him alone which God asks of us." Wilfrid Harrington, OP, "Property and Wealth in the New Testament," *Scripture in Church* 20 (1990): 236.

⁵⁹ In this story, one finds the heart of Luke's ethics which encompasses love of God (being rich in God) and love of neighbor (giving to the poor). Christopher Hays, *Renounce Everything: Money and Discipleship in Luke* (New York: Paulist Press, 2016), 26–27.

⁶⁰ The view I have articulated here finds resonance in other scholars. See for example Peter Liu, "Did the Lucan Jesus Desire Voluntary Poverty of his Followers?" *Evangelical Quarterly* 64 (1992): 291–317. See also Luke Timothy Johnson, *Sharing Possessions: What Faith Demands*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2011), 11–28, in which Johnson unpacks the complicated picture regarding the use of possessions especially in Luke-Acts. Johnson, though, would differentiate radical dispossession and almsgiving where I would find continuity between the two acts depending upon the individuals involved. See *Prophetic Jesus, Prophetic Church: The Challenge of*

Luke 19 begins with the story of Zacchaeus, a very wealthy chief tax-collector in Jericho, who wants to see Jesus passing along the way but is unable to see Jesus along with the crowds due to his short stature. Zacchaeus climbs a tree to see Jesus and when Jesus sees Zacchaeus, Jesus invites himself to Zacchaeus's house. Filled with joy, Zacchaeus climbs down to greet Jesus. The grumbling of the crowd commences about Jesus visiting the house of a sinner. "But Zacchaeus stood there and said to the Lord, 'Behold, half of my possessions, Lord, I shall give to the poor, and if I have extorted anything from anyone, I shall repay it four times over.' And Jesus said to him, 'Today salvation has come to this house because this man too is a descendant of Abraham. For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save what was lost'" (Luke 19:8–10).⁶¹ Zacchaeus, like the rich ruler, comes in search of Jesus. The reader is not told why Zacchaeus has come to look for Jesus, nor does Zacchaeus ask Jesus "what shall I do?" The short Zacchaeus climbs a tree to encounter Jesus. Jesus takes note of Zacchaeus and calls upon the hospitality of Zacchaeus and his house. And in return, Zacchaeus receives Jesus with joy, not sadness like the rich ruler. Spontaneously, Zacchaeus promises acts of almsgiving from his wealth and restitution for his extortion. He does not wait for any instruction from Jesus. In his joy, Zacchaeus manifests fruits worthy of repentance through almsgiving and restitution and thereby shows the interiority of his body, his heart. Zacchaeus places his faith in Jesus and finds his heavenly treasury.

Zacchaeus's response is indeed a response of repentance considering John's instructions (and ultimately Jesus's to the rich ruler). Zacchaeus pledges to give half of his possessions to the poor. John advises the crowds to give a tunic if one has two—so half of one's possessions. Zacchaeus also pledges to repay any extortion four times over. John advises tax-collectors to stop collecting more tax than necessary. This pledge of repayment goes beyond John's instructions. And in light of these pledges, Jesus announces that "salvation has come to this house." Jesus has brokered the return of Zacchaeus who comes to salvation through his pledge to assist the poor and repay the victims of extortion. Indeed, Zacchaeus becomes a new disciple who has recognized his need for redemption, repentance, and purity, and he enacts almsgiving and restitution to turn to God and to follow Christ. Zacchaeus's story represents the culmination of one thread in the Gospel of Luke of how to find purity through repentance and almsgiving. In

Luke-Acts to Contemporary Christians (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2011), 99.

⁶¹ The translation of verse 8 is not without controversy. Bovon notes how the verbs can be futuristic, iterative, or durative presents. Bovon translates the terms as futuristic presents along with other scholars, like the NABRE version of the text, due to verses 9 and 10 suggesting that Zacchaeus was lost and needed to be saved. See Bovon, *Luke 2*, 598–599.

doing so, Zaccheus models a disciple who, though sinful due to greed and extortion, now bears good fruit of repentance through concrete acts of almsgiving and restitution.⁶²

The stories in the Gospel of Luke centered around almsgiving, wealth, and repentance build a case for understanding the importance of almsgiving as a practice for the Christian disciple. Almsgiving for the sinner becomes a way of repentance whereby the sinner turns to God and away from his faith in his own wealth and possessions. In this turning to God, the sinner places his faith in God and repents for his sin-debt that he has accrued due to his misplaced concern for wealth and possessions. And subsequently, the sinner finds salvation in Christ and thereby accrues a heavenly treasure. The sinner who was once lost has been found: “For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save what was lost” (Luke 19:10).

CONCLUSION

I have argued in this paper that almsgiving is an important formative practice of repentance for the Christian disciple in that the disciple turns away from sin and from faith in one’s wealth and possessions and turns instead toward God. With a new faith in God, the disciple thereby finds salvation and a heavenly treasury. And it is in this turning towards God that the Christian disciple disposes oneself to the recovery/reception of grace.

Daniel 4 provides a substantial Jewish point of reference to late Second Temple Judaism that begins to see sin as a debt and the need to exercise a credit to be released from such a debt. Almsgiving acts as the means of credit for the wiping away of sins. Daniel advises King Nebuchadnezzar to use almsgiving as a way of redeeming one’s sins. In the Book of Daniel, almsgiving serves as the *metanoia* whereby the king is instructed to place his faith in God and not in his wealth and possessions and find salvation in God.

The Gospel of Luke, using the sin-debt theology of Second Temple Judaism, likewise counsels almsgiving as a practice of repentance. This emphasis on almsgiving finds its first articulation in the words of John the Baptist’s preaching to the crowds that they need to bear wor-

⁶² “Zacchaeus, who, both welcoming and welcomed, bore the fruit of repentance, that is, showed by what he did that he had repented. In this way, the Gospel writer confirmed what he had John the Baptist say: ‘Bear fruits worthy of repentance.’” Bovon, *Luke 2*, 600. See how this culmination was anticipated in the description of John the Baptist and his ministry: Luke 1:76–77 (“And you, child, will be called prophet of the Most High, for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways, to give his people knowledge of *salvation* through the forgiveness of their sins”) and Luke 3:5–6 (“Every valley shall be filled and every mountain and hill shall be made low. The winding roads shall be made straight, and the rough ways made smooth, and all flesh shall see the *salvation* of God”). Emphasis added.

thy fruits of repentance through almsgiving. By this practice of almsgiving, those seeking repentance can find salvation. The Gospel of Luke describes this mission of John the Baptist and in a certain way the mission of Jesus Christ using the words of Isaiah: "The winding roads shall be made straight, and the rough ways made smooth, and all flesh shall see the salvation of God" (Luke 3:5–6 which refers to Isaiah 40:4–5). This focus on almsgiving as an important practice of repentance is further elaborated through several key Lukan texts, including the Pharisees, the rich ruler, the disciples, and Zacchaeus. These different texts relate almsgiving as an act of repentance in which the Christian disciple is urged to turn away from sin and from faith in material possessions and instead put one's faith in God through almsgiving. As Bovon argues, "The Gospel [of Luke] proposes a lifestyle in which happiness is lived out in relationships, and in which giving, usually counted as a loss, becomes the best way to succeed and to be on the receiving end of things. Any possessions we might have at our disposal do not, in the last resort, belong to us."⁶³ The giving sought after in the Lukan Gospel is almsgiving as a way of repenting of one's sins and turning towards God.

One finds a high point of the Lukan Gospel in the story of Zacchaeus, a chief tax collector, who upon Jesus's invitation to dine at Zacchaeus's house, freely vows to give alms and make restitution for his extortion. He has performed acts that bring about the good fruit of repentance. He has placed his faith in God, and indeed, salvation has come to his house. Almsgiving then represents an important practice of repentance for the Christian disciple. Sometimes it may be demanded that one be like the rich ruler and give away all of one's possessions for the poor. Other times it may be like the story of Zacchaeus in which one gives away a good portion of one's possessions for the poor. These stories in the Gospel of Luke lead one to ask: does sin cause one to place one's trust in wealth and possessions? If so, then these earthly treasures will rot and pass away. Instead of placing one's faith in material things, the Christian disciple is urged to give alms as a way of repenting of one's sins and as a way of turning to and placing one's faith in God. The instruction to give alms for repentance is meant for both wealthy and poor alike since the attachment to wealth and possessions indicates what is in the heart of the person.⁶⁴ Both the Book of Daniel and Gospel of Luke remind us that it is only in God

⁶³ Bovon, *Luke 2*, 206. "The response of the believer is to share what has been received as a gift with those who are deprived of such benefits." John Gillman, *Possessions and the Life of Faith: A Reading of Luke-Acts* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1991), 95.

⁶⁴ Johnson, *Prophetic Jesus, Prophetic Church*, 114: "Consistent with the Gospel narrative, Luke uses a character's disposition of possessions as a character indicator." For other examples, see Luke 7:5; Acts 9:36 and 10:2.

whereby one finds salvation from sin. And it is in this turning [*metanoia*] to God in almsgiving whereby the disciple is disposed to the recovery of grace. As the words of Tobit remind us:

Give alms from your possessions. Do not turn your face away from any of the poor, so that God's face will not be turned away from you. Give in proportion to what you own. If you have great wealth, give alms out of your abundance; if you have but little, do not be afraid to give alms even of that little. You will be storing up a goodly treasure for yourself against the day of adversity. *For almsgiving delivers from death and keeps one from entering into Darkness. Almsgiving is a worthy offering in the sight of the Most High for all who practice it* (Tobit 4:7–11). **M**

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