



Matthew Lesson 9

June 2, 2020

Scriptures from TLV

“The *Megillah* of Matthew”

6:1-34

Matthew Chapter 6 opens with Yeshua discussing something called “righteousness.” The Greek word used is *dikaiosuné* (dik-ah-yos-oo'-nay) translated righteousness or justice. 1 “Beware of practicing your righteousness before others to be seen by them; otherwise you have no reward from your Father in heaven” (Matthew 6:1). The TLV translates it into Hebrew for us as *tzedakah*. Yeshua said: 2 So whenever you do tzadakah, do not sound a trumpet before you as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, so that they may be glorified by men. Amen, I tell you, they have their reward in full” (Mathew 6:2)! *Tzedakah*, meaning righteousness, was the Hebrew word used to describe the giving of alms to the poor. It comes from the Hebrew word *tzadiq* which means righteous. But, according to the Jewish Encyclopedia, The word "almsgiving," does not express the full meaning of the Hebrew. Rather than meaning just pity or compassion, both of which are noble things, the meaning behind *Tzedakah* goes even further. It is a *Torah* principle, a spirit of charity in the sense of uprightness or justice commanded by G-d. According to *Torah*, wealth is a loan from G-d and the poor are entitled to a share from the rich while at the same time, the rich are encouraged to share ADONAI’s bountiful supply to them with the poor. While giving to the poor should come from the heart, it also is in obedience to what ADONAI wishes us to do.

In the 1st century, because of the ongoing needs of the poor, collection boxes were present in the Temple and in the synagogues. In the Temple, there were two trumpet-shaped metal containers for collection, small at the top and tapering down to a large bottom. Those who wished to make a show of their giving would put in large amounts of coins at once, which in turn would make a very large noise to be noticed by all who were nearby. Supposedly, making that noise was “sounding the trumpet.” Yeshua was addressing the hypocrisy of those who chose to make a show of their piety. More than likely, He was referring to certain group of hypocritical Scribes and Pharisees. In Matthew chapter 5 when He spoke about their failure to follow *Torah* He also mentioned their *tzedakah*: 20 “For I tell you that unless your righteousness (*tzedakah*) exceeds that of the Pharisees and *Torah* scholars, you shall never enter the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 5:20)! He was essentially saying to His disciples and those sitting around Him on the mountain, “Unless you follow *Torah*’s guide regarding giving from the heart, you cannot follow Me.” Being a part of Yeshua’s movement, the Kingdom of Heaven, required *t’shuvah*, repentance, and those to whom He was speaking were hypocrites. Their repentance wasn’t sincere. But, don’t lump all Pharisees into the bunch. Many people look at all Pharisees as hypocritical and evil, but that is not the case. One case in point was a group of Pharisees who travelled to warn Yeshua that Herod wished to kill Him. And, don’t forget Yeshua’s two disciples, Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea. There were many good-hearted Pharisees.

3 *But when you do tzadakah, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, 4 so that your tzadakah may be in secret; and your Father, who sees in secret, shall reward you*” (Matthew 6:3). This is a reference to false piety, making a show of giving for all to see. It doesn’t mean that no one should know what you give. We are not to make a show for everyone to see how generous we are.

5 *“When you pray, do not be like the hypocrites; for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners, so that they may be seen by others. Amen, I tell you, they have their reward in full”* (Matthew 6:5)! This is a continuation of the same thought of hypocritical piety; those who were showing others how holy they were. It was the same group as before and Yeshua was cautioning His disciples not to be like them.

6 *“But you, when you pray, go into your inner room; and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father, who sees in secret, shall reward you”* (Matthew 6:6). Prayer in our day is much different than in the 1st century. They didn’t have prayer meetings back then. Now, they are very ordinary in our congregations and I believe that Yeshua approves of this kind of prayer. He is not saying that we shouldn’t pray together. His words, here again, are again addressed to those with false piety who made a show of their prayers. In the 1st century as today, we have two general kinds of prayer; individual and corporate. Today, our liturgical prayers are corporate, and no less important than our individual prayers. The important thing during corporate prayer, as we sometime point out, is *kavanah*, intention. Where are our hearts and our minds when we pray the *Shema* or the *V’ahavta* or the *Amidah*? If they’re focused on ADONAI, they’re right where they’re supposed to be. The other kind of prayer, individual prayer, can take place in a group or in our own prayer closet, or even while we are out and about. *Sha’ul* said: 16 *“Rejoice always, 17 pray constantly, 18 in everything give thanks; for this is God’s will for you in Messiah Yeshua”* (1Thessalonians 5:16-18). We can pray constantly by always having an attitude of prayer and gratitude. *Kavanah*, our focus on G-d, should be with us all the time. Our modern definition of this word might be: “always seeking to be guided by the *Ruach*.” The bottom line is that we are not to make a show of praying.

7 *“And when you are praying, do not babble on and on like the pagans; for they think they will be heard because of their many words. 8 Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask Him”* (Matthew 6:7-8). We don’t really know what kind of prayers went on in the pagan temples outside of Israel in Yeshua’s day, but we do have one very good earlier example in *Torah*. When Elijah was on Mount *Karmel* with the prophets of *Ba’al*, they prayed in this way: 26 *So they took the bull that he gave them, prepared it, and called on the name of Baal from morning till noon, crying, “O Baal, answer us!” But there was no voice—no one was answering. They also danced leaping around the altar that was made. 27 Now when it was about noon, Elijah mocked them and said, “Shout louder! After all, he is a god! Maybe he’s deep in thought, or he’s relieving himself, or he’s off on a journey, or perhaps he’s asleep and must wake up!” 28 So they shouted even louder and cut themselves with swords and spears, as was their custom, until the blood gushed over them. 29 When midday was past, they kept prophesying ecstatically until the time of offering up the evening sacrifice. But there was no voice, no one answering, no one paying attention.* (1Kings 18:26-29). Those pagan’s, followers of *Ba’al*, shouted and prayed from morning until the time of the evening sacrifice, many hour and many words. But, it’s not just the number of words we pray, it’s the intent of our heart which ADONAI hears. Sometimes today, our prayers to a large part are telling Him what He already knows rather than asking for what we need. In my opinion, this type of prayer is much more appropriate for our own personal and conversational prayer

with ADONAI in our prayer closet rather than when we are praying together. Since our Father already knows what we need, at those times we simply need to ask Him for it.

9 *“Therefore, pray in this way: ‘Our Father in heaven, sanctified be Your name. 10 Your kingdom come, Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. 11 Give us this day our daily bread. 12 And forgive us our debts as we also have forgiven our debtors. 13 And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one”* (Matthew 6:9-13). Beginning a couple of generations before Yeshua, the Pharisees developed a series of prayers to be prayed every day. As far as we know, this prayer was fairly well developed during the 1st century, consisting of 18 different prayers or benedictions. Named for the Hebrew words for the number 18, it was called the *Shemoneh Esreh*. Its other names were *HaTefillah*, “The Prayer” and the *Amidah*, meaning “the Standing.” According to Dr. Brad Young, one of the founders of the Jerusalem School of Synoptic Research, by the time of Yeshua’s day, some set minimum for prayer was already in place. In the 1st century, there were fixed prayers in the early form of the *Amidah*. There is Scriptural evidence that even many years before this time, the Israelites prayed a number of times per day. Psalms 55:18 speaks about praying evening, morning and noon and Daniel 6:11 tells of Daniel praying toward Jerusalem three times per day.

But, what kind of prayer was acceptable in an emergency when you didn’t have the time to pray the 18 benedictions of the *Amidah*? Yeshua’s disciples more than likely knew of the several opinions of the rabbinic schools of Hillel and Shammai regarding prayer and were asking Yeshua, “How are we supposed to pray?” The prayer which we call *Tefillat HaTalmidim*, the Disciples Prayer, was Yeshua’s answer. I believe that the TLV is a very good rendering of it. Here is a slightly wordier version of what Yeshua might have said: “*Avinu Malkeinu* (Our Father in heaven), may Your name be kept *kadosh* (holy; may we not act in any way as to dishonor it). May the day come when Your kingdom rules on the earth and Your will is being carried out on earth just as it is in heaven right now. Give us the food which we need for today. Forgive us our sins as we have also forgiven those who have sinned against us. May we not be tempted to sin and may we be kept from *HaSatan*’s (the Adversary) temptations.

The next two verses have to do with forgiving sins: 14 *“For if you forgive others their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. 15 But if you do not forgive others, neither will your Father forgive your transgressions”* (Matthew 6:14-15). This is a major problem in the body of Messiah today; so much unforgiveness between those who claim to follow Yeshua. But, we must forgive or face the reality that there is no need for us to ask the Father to forgive us. Forgiving a brother or sister means that we pardon them and then stop feeling resentment or having a grudge against them. We are not always able to completely forget what happened, but ADONAI requires of us that we let go of anger and resentment and seek to be reconciled with the other person. And, there should be no limit to our willingness to forgive the same person. In Matthew 18, Yeshua also told us that we must be willing to forgive him up to 70 times 7, in other words, as many times as necessary; an unlimited number of times. Along this same line, He also said: 25 *“Whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive him, so that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your transgressions”* (Mark 11:25). In Matthew chapter 5, Yeshua spoke about anger and how it can lead to much more serious offenses. Anger is frequently a part of unforgiveness. We have to wish and to will to let it go and to forgive.

16 *“And whenever you fast, do not become sad-faced like the hypocrites, for they neglect their faces to make their fasting evident to men. Amen, I tell you, they have their reward in full! 17 But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, 18 so that your fasting won’t be evident to men, but to your Father who is in secret. And your Father, who sees in secret, will reward you”* (Matthew 6:16-18). These words of Yeshua’s seem to continue to be directed to certain Scribes and Pharisees who wanted to be noticed in their piety. Speaking of some of the same people, Yeshua said: 5 *“All their works they do to be noticed by men. They make their tefillin wide and their tzitziyot long. 6 They love the place of honor at feasts, the best seats in the synagogues, 7 greetings in the marketplaces, and to be called rabbi by men* (Matthew 23:5-7). And, they seemed to have the same attitude during the fasts, to want to be noticed. But, Yeshua’s warning comes across the centuries to us as well. Don’t try to parade your spirituality before others. He said, *“when you fast,”* because we are expected to fast. It’s a normal part of being in the Kingdom of Heaven. But, when we fast, don’t do it for show.

In the 1st century, there were a number of fixed fast days. *Tzom*, צוֹם, is the Hebrew word meaning a time of refraining from food. There were certain fixed fast days which occurred each year. Zechariah speaks these particular ones: 19 *“Thus says Adonai-Tzva’ot, “The fast of the fourth, the fast of the fifth, the fast of the seventh and the fast of the tenth month will become joy, gladness and cheerful moadim. Therefore, love truth and shalom”* (Zechariah 8:19)! These fast days were associated with the events surrounding the first Temple and its destruction. The beginning of the siege of Jerusalem is marked on the 10th of Tevet, the fast of the 10th month. The 17th of Tammuz, the fast of the 4th month, was for the breaching of the walls. The 9th of Av, the fast of the 5th month, was for the actual destruction of the Temple. And, the 3rd of Tishrei, the fast of the 7th month, was a fast for Gedaliah, the governor of Judah who was assassinated. During that time, there were also the Fast of Esther and the fast of *Yom Kippur*. And, there were also called fasts from time to time, fasts called by the elders in a particular location to address a local situation. And, then there were the individual fasts. A person could choose to refrain from food and sometimes water, for a personal reason; possibly a wish to draw nearer to ADONAI. As Yeshua said, if our fast is sincere and done in the proper way, ADONAI will reward us.

The next six verses have to do with money and its effect in our lives. We begin with these three. 19 *“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal. 20 But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in or steal. 21 For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also”* (Matthew 6:19-21). Treasures refer to any kind of monetary wealth. It can include money, jewels and many of every kind of possessions. The key words here, are “don’t store up.” These words convey a sense of greed, of having more and more possessions that one wants to keep for themselves. Storing up treasure in heaven is a Hebrew idiom which means “to give to the poor.” When we give *tzedakah*, we are storing up treasure in heaven. If our hearts are totally attuned to the things of G-d, we will wish to be generous. We will wish to give to the poor.

22 *“The eye is the lamp of the body. Therefore if your eye is good, your whole body will be full of light. 23 But if your eye is bad, your body will be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in you is darkness, how great is the darkness”* (Matthew 6:22-23)! This is probably one of the most recognizable Hebrew idioms in the Gospels. But, without realizing its Hebrew background, it can’t be understood. If we try and understand what it might mean in English, we are shooting in the dark. What is a good eye and a bad eye? Is it someone who has spiritual vision and someone who lacks it? I’ve heard that before and some other Bible

versions essentially say that. It's a good guess, but the truth is that a person with a good eye is a generous person. A person with a bad eye is a stingy person. This is Yeshua's continuation of His discussion about what we should do with our money. A person with a bad eye, or in some versions, a person with an evil eye, is a person whose righteousness regarding *tzedakah* is like that of the Pharisees and whose treasure in heaven is small. *If therefore the light that is in you (which should be generosity) is darkness (stinginess), how great is the darkness (stinginess).*"

24 *"No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will stick by one and look down on the other. You cannot serve God and money"* (Matthew 6:24). The two masters are G-d and the love of money. *Sha'ul* picked up on Yeshua's words when he said: 9 *"But those who want to be rich fall into temptation and a trap and many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. 10 For the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil—some, longing for it, have gone astray from the faith and pierced themselves through with many sorrows"* (1Timothy 6:9-10). If the goal of our heart is treasure on earth, we cannot serve ADONAI because we already have a master. There is nothing wrong with being wealthy. G-d gives some that power. The problem arises when they think what they have is theirs. No, it's not ours. It is all His and we are just stewards of it. May each of us be wise stewards, wise managers of our Father's money.

25 *"So I say to you, do not worry about your life—what you will eat or drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Isn't life more than food and the body more than clothing? 26 "Look at the birds of the air. They do not sow or reap or gather into barns; yet your Father in heaven feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? 27 And which of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life? 28 And why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow. They neither toil nor spin. 29 Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his glory clothed himself like one of these. 30 Now if in this way God clothes the grass—which is here today and thrown into the furnace tomorrow—will He not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? 31 "Therefore do not worry, saying, 'What will we eat?' or 'What will we drink?' or 'What will we wear?' 32 For the pagans eagerly pursue all these things; yet your Father in heaven knows that you need all these"* (Matthew 25-32). Yeshua is not saying that we should not work to provide our food because ADONAI will provide it for us. Certainly, we must work to eat, but we are not to focus on fancy clothing beyond what we need and food beyond our needs. Our focus should be on our relationship with Him. Yeshua is continuing to encourage those of us who are a part of the Kingdom of Heaven.

33 *"But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you. 34 Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own"* (Matthew 6:33-34). If our heart's desire is for ADONAI and for His kingdom and for Yeshua our Messiah and we are seeking a righteous relationship with our Creator rather than worldly things, we have done what Yeshua has been teaching us in every verse of Matthew chapter 6. We are seeking above all things, the Kingdom of G-d. Yeshua said "And while you are seeking the Kingdom of G-d, take one day at the time. May we let ADONAI be our focus today without worry and looking ahead to tomorrow." *Shalom aleichem!*