

Session 4 · A Father's Testament

Tobit 4

What We Found

The chapter runs on a fruitful mistake: Tobit, sure his prayer to die will be granted, remembers ten talents deposited long ago with Gabael in Rages and gives his son a testament. The reader watches providence assemble itself out of spare parts: an old deposit, a wrong assumption, and a line of marriage advice together aim Tobias at the road that runs through Ecbatana, where a prayer is waiting. Providence usually drives ordinary life from the inside, which is why it is so easy to miss while it is happening to you.

The testament begins with a mother: honor her, remember the dangers she faced for you before you could remember, bury us together. Then its center: the most complete theology of almsgiving in the Old Testament. Give without a grudging eye; give in proportion, from much or from little without fear; do not turn your face away from any poor man, and the face of God will not be turned away from you; you are laying up good treasure, and charity delivers from death.

With our own hands we found the Sermon on the Mount's quiet sources: Tobit 4:15's Golden Rule before Matthew 7:12, and Tobit's treasure laid up before Matthew 6:19-21 and Luke 12:33. For the second time in this study, one of the Bible's supposedly optional books turns out to be load-bearing. We also kept justice welded to charity: wages paid the same day (with Deuteronomy 24 and James 5), because you cannot lay up treasure with God using money owed to your workers.

And we pressed the wary reading, that all this treasure-talk sounds like doing business with heaven. We conceded the healthy instinct (God cannot be bought), then noticed that Jesus uses the treasure language more freely than Tobit does, and drew the real line: not reward versus no reward, but transaction versus covenant. A covenant child gives because of who his Father is, and the Father is not outgiven. The sharper question, whether charity delivers from death crosses into salvation by works, was deliberately left open; the study will return to it later.

Voices of the Church

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. John Chrysostom · *Homilies on Lazarus and the Rich Man 2* (c. AD 388)

Not to share our own wealth with the poor is theft from the poor and deprivation of their life, for what we hold belongs not to us but to them. The Catechism cites this teaching of Chrysostom (CCC 2446). The goods of creation carry a mortgage in favor of the poor; almsgiving is not heroism but honesty.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Basil the Great · *Homily on 'I will pull down my barns'* (c. AD 368)

Preaching during a famine, Basil delivers the lines that never stop stinging: the bread you are holding back belongs to the hungry, the coat in your closet to the naked, the money in your vault to the destitute. The measure of giving is what you have, and the sin is the closed hand at any income.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Gregory Nazianzen · *Oration 14, On Love of the Poor (c. AD 369)*

Gregory calls mercy to the poor the surest imitation of God, for nothing is so godlike as doing good: become a god to the unfortunate by imitating the mercy of God. Tobit's promise that God's face stays turned toward the generous is this oration in one clause: in the poor man's face, the giver and God exchange a look.

Live It This Week

1. Give one proportionate alms this week: an amount or an act that is real at your income, decided in advance, given without a grudging eye. If money is genuinely short, remember 4:8: do not be afraid to give according to the little you have.
2. Honor a parent or the person who raised you: a call, a visit, a written thank-you for a danger they faced for you before you could remember it. If they have died, have a Mass offered or pray for them by name at a cemetery.
3. Read Tobit 5 before next session. A stranger is about to apply for a job. Pay close attention to the interview, and to what the reader knows that the interviewer does not.

Scripture Memory · Tobit 4:7 (RSV2CE)

"Do not turn your face away from any poor man, and the face of God will not be turned away from you."

Before Next Session. Read Tobit 5.

Catechism CCC 1434 · CCC 2218 · CCC 2446 · CCC 2447