

**Genesis 30: 25-43 & 31:1-13; “Jacob’s Labors for Laban”, Sermon # 87 in the series
– “Beginnings”, Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall on June 10th, 2018,
in the Morning Worship Service.**

Jacob has become tired of working for Laban. He has been in a sort of bondage to the man for almost 14 years; caring for his flocks, and paying for Laban’s two daughters. Laban has profited greatly from Jacob’s service, but Laban’s character does not seem to have changed over this period of time. If Laban knew the Lord, he was a man who greatly neglected the issues of his heart, and especially how he viewed other people. He was a man who saw others in terms of their usefulness to himself, rather than loving them and trying to understand their needs, and how they might be prospered in both soul and body.

This is a very dangerous condition for any man to be in, because it is a breeding ground for the sin of covetousness. Everything with Laban was related to his own welfare and well-being. True Christianity is not learned in such a way. Jesus says, “If any man would follow Me, let him deny himself, pick up his cross and follow Me.” This is the way to know the Lord better and better; the way of self-denial. Laban should have been looking out for Jacob, and showering him with benefits for the good work and hard labor that he did for him. And in this passage he does ask what he can do to keep Jacob working for him.

But Jacob sees through his words and he realizes that he will have to make provision for himself, for his family and for his future; without confiding in Laban, because he knew that Laban would try to take advantage of him even in that. What should a person do when their employer is not paying them enough? How can they provide for their household and their future? These are the questions that I would like to try and answer from our text this morning. A person can provide for their household and their future if they will remember the following principles.

1st of all – Remember that it does take time and faithful service to establish your worth in the sight of your employer. (verses 25- 30)

Jacob had been growing in his faith over these 14 years. Much of his sanctification had no doubt come in relation to his working for Laban. This is how it often is, in the Christian life. Our occupation becomes the staging ground for the Lord’s building of our Christian character. Most of the time, when we are looking for a job, we look for a job that has benefits with it; as many as possible. We want, by nature, to be given as much as we can from the company that we work for.

But if this passage teaches us anything, it teaches us that we must work hard and be resourceful at whatever we are doing, so that we might provide for our own needs and not be overly dependent upon others; even the one that we work for. It says in 1st Thessalonians 4: 11 and 12 – “Aspire to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business, and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you, that you may walk properly toward those who are outside, and that you may lack nothing.”

Jacob was now going to learn this in terms of his employer Laban. He was going to come to understand the truth that it was God who was giving him the skill to prosper. If God means you to have wealth and to be blessed in it, it should be obtained by God’s giving you the skill to make it. God would not have Jacob to be dependent upon Laban any longer. He would prosper Jacob in spite of Laban. Jacob says in verse 26, “Give me my wives and my children for whom I have served you, and let me go; for you know my service which I have done for you.”

And he says in verse 29, “So Jacob said to him, ‘You know how I have served you and how your livestock has been with me.’” “For what you had before I came was little, and it has increased to a great amount; the Lord has blessed you since my coming.” Jacob had come to Laban a very poor man, but he had faithfully labored long and hard, not only to care for his

flocks, but also that they would increase as well. He had not only put in his time, but he also improved upon it by his work being the cause of Laban's prosperity. This is surely the Christian way. Be thankful if you have gainful employment, and do everything that you can to prosper the man or the company that you work for. This shows a thankful heart, a heart that is willing to wait for the employer, and your Lord, to recognize that you do your work well.

Ephesians 6: 5 says, "Bondservants, be obedient to those who are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in sincerity of heart, as to Christ; not with eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but as bondservants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, with good-will doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men, knowing that whatever good anyone does, he will receive the same from the Lord, whether he is a slave or free." It is far more important that you realize that you are doing your work to please your Lord in the first place, rather than your employer. You could be pleasing to your boss, but be displeasing to your Lord. Or, you could be pleasing your Lord and displeasing your boss. Or, more hopefully yet, it would be both; pleasing to your Lord first of all, and then knowing that your work pleases your earthly boss.

It is best, when you enter into someone's employ that you have this patient mindset from the start. You may start lower in wages than you want or expect, but if you work hard to see the company or the person that you work for prosper, then God will bless you in that job and, Lord willing, you will make progress. Jacob had worked for Laban for 14 years and since Laban had not increased his wages in the way that would provide for his future, he felt that he was going to have to leave. There is a time for patient waiting and hard work, and there is a time for leaving if you see that you are going to be held indefinitely at the pay level and benefit level that you are at. Jacob felt that it was time to go, but Laban tells him that he wants him to stay. What was he to do?

2nd – You must remember to work according to a contractual agreement.

(verses 31-43)

When I say that you must remember to work according to a contractual agreement, I mean a contract that will allow you to see that by hard work and developing your skills, that there will be every hope that you will achieve the goals that you set for yourself; the goals that will go beyond even what your employer would expect and require of you. When Jacob told Laban that he was leaving, Laban said to him – "Please stay, if I have found favor in your eyes, for I have found by experience that the Lord has blessed me for your sake."

This was a very kind and thoughtful answer that Laban gave to Jacob, but from what Jacob knew of Laban's past conduct and how stingy that he had been with him, and how he had been used by Laban to make him wealthy, he knows that this gracious answer has to be taken with a grain of salt. I am sure that Laban really did value Jacob's labor because he says to him, "Name me your wages, and I will give it." (verse 28) And again in verse 31 he says, "What shall I give you?" But Jacob realized that he must have a contractual relationship with Laban so that, as it says in verse 33, "his righteousness would answer for him in time to come".

It is righteous to work according to a verbal contract which both you and your employer will understand. A written contract is even better when you can obtain it. With a man like Laban, Jacob had come to see that this was going to be absolutely essential if he was going to continue to work for him. He says in verse 30, "For what you had before I came was little, and it has increased to a great amount; the Lord has blessed you since my coming." "And now when shall I provide for my own house?" This is what Jacob was concerned about; providing for his own house.

Laban lets Jacob define the wages and Jacob acts very wisely in this as well. Verse 31 says, "So he said, 'What shall I give you?'" "And Jacob said, 'You shall not give me anything.'" "Let me pass through all your flock today, removing from there all the speckled and spotted sheep, and all the brown ones among the lambs, and the spotted and speckled among the goats; and these

shall be my wages.” “So my wages will answer for me in time to come, when the subject of my wages comes before you: every one that is not speckled and spotted among the goats, and brown among the lambs, will be considered stolen, if it is with me.” “And Laban said, ‘Oh, that it were according to your word!’” Jacob is going to be so resourceful that he will establish his own flocks apart from Laban’s. He will provide for himself and his family without neglecting the care of Laban’s own flocks. God will give him wisdom to prosper the work with his own greatly, while he will only maintain Laban’s without making him rich.

This appears at first glance to be a selfish and tricky strategy, not righteous at all. But this cannot at all be concluded, if we look ahead to chapter 31, verse 11. It says there – “Then the Angel of God spoke to me in a dream, saying, ‘Jacob.’” “And I said, ‘Here I am.’” “And He said, ‘Lift your eyes now and see, all the rams which leap on the flock are streaked, speckled, and gray-spotted; for I have seen all that Laban is doing to you.’” So we find that Jacob has been shown this whole strategy by God Himself. God had seen all the ways that Laban had taken advantage of Jacob and he was now going to allow Jacob to righteously turn the tables on him.

In verse 35 and following, we find out the specifics of what Jacob did. “Laban removed that day all the male goats that were speckled and spotted, all the female goats that were speckled and spotted, every goat that had some white in it, and all the brown ones among the lambs, and gave them into the hands of his sons.” Then Laban put 3 days journey between himself and Jacob, and Jacob fed the rest of Laban’s flocks.” Jacob seems to be at a very great disadvantage here, but God is going to give him great wisdom in a very unusual method that he will use to increase his own flocks.

Verse 37 says, “Now Jacob took for himself rods of green poplar and of the almond and chestnut trees, peeled white strips in them and exposed the white which was in the rods.” “And the rods which he had peeled, he set before the flocks in the gutters, in the watering troughs where the flocks came to drink, so that they should conceive when they came to drink.” “So the flocks conceived before the rods, and flocks, and the flocks brought forth streaked, speckled, and spotted.”

“Then Jacob separated the lambs, and made the flocks face toward the streaked and all the brown in the flock of Laban; but he put his own flocks by themselves and did not put them with Laban’s flock.” “And it came to pass, whenever the stronger livestock conceived, that Jacob placed the rods before the eyes of the livestock in the gutters, that they might conceive among the rods.” “But when the flocks were feeble, he did not put them in; so the feebler were Laban’s and the stronger Jacob’s.” “Thus,” it says, “the man became very prosperous, and had large flocks, female and male servants, and camels and donkeys.”

We might well ask ourselves at this point, “What is all this?” It appears that at first sight that Jacob had the weaker sheep and goats of the flocks and Laban had the stronger. This was, at that point, falling along lines of color in these animals. Laban’s were evidently a plain white or cream color, and Jacob’s the streaked, speckled and spotted. By means of peeling white strips in the rods of green poplar and of the almond and chestnut trees, Jacob was able to get the stronger rams of the flocks to come and mate with the strongest of the females among his own flocks when they came to be watered.

In this way he bred sheep and goats that were very hearty and good animals, while Laban’s were feebler. He was using a form of genetic selection and encouraging the conception of these animals through the visual stimulus of the peeled bark of the rods of poplar, almond, and chestnut. Thus the animals associated these peeled rods with the outcome of what kind of offspring that they would have. God must have worked together with these means, so that all his efforts prospered. Verse 43 says, “Thus the man became exceedingly prosperous, and had large flocks, female and male servants, and camels and donkeys.”

What we learn from all this is simply that we must be resourceful in regard to all that we are taught in our line of work and all that we know of God's word. We must not be content to let our employer use our labor as some sort of machine that runs down until it wears us out. We must serve with "all our might", as it says Jacob did in Genesis 31: 7, and yet we should not allow the employer to "change our wages" indefinitely so that we have no provision for our family's future. Let us seek God in prayer, and trust in His providential watchcare over our lives. The person that delights in God's holy word will "prosper in whatever he does", it says in Psalm 1.

And God knows how to deliver us from employers that will take advantage of us. He knows how to give us wisdom so that we can prosper in spite of what an employer might do to attempt to hold us down. We must work, however, within contractual boundaries. If we sign something to do something for another, and to be paid a certain amount, we must hold to that contract. If we can be honestly resourceful and prosper within that contractual boundary, we should also attempt to do so, remembering to love our neighbor as our self. We should treat others as we ourselves should want to be treated.

3rd – Remember to keep a clear conscience in matters of business. (Chapter 31: 1-13)

When you are working hard to attain to righteous goals that you set for yourself, you must, at the same time, trust that the Lord will protect and establish your long range goals and interests. Jacob now hears unfavorable comments about himself from Laban's sons. They said, "Jacob has taken away all that was our father's, and from what was our father's he has acquired all this wealth." And he saw that "the countenance of Laban was not favorable toward him as before". Laban's sons knew how to safeguard their father's interests.

Laban now knows that he, the one who had taken advantage of Jacob in the past, and had in the past profited in a selfish way from Jacob's labors, was now getting a taste of his own medicine, and he does not like it. It showed on his face. A man's countenance reveals the thoughts of his heart often. It shows us what he thinks of us, unless he hides it. This is where a clear conscience is of great value to us, when others disapprove of something that we have done which affects their interests, and they think that it is not right. We must do our best to maintain a clear conscience, a conscience which is void of offense in regard to God and men, in that order.

The Lord knew that this would be a good time to send Jacob back to Canaan and to the land of his fathers. He spoke to him about this, and Jacob calls Rachel and Leah to the field, to him, and he says: "I see that your father's countenance is not favorable toward me as before; but the God of my father has been with me." "And you know that with all my might I have served your father." "Yet your father has deceived me and changed my wages ten times, but God did not allow him to hurt me." "If he said thus: 'The speckled shall be your wages,' then all the flocks bore speckled." "And if he said: 'The streaked shall be your wages,' then all the flocks bore streaked." "So God has taken away the livestock of your father and given them to me."

You see that Jacob has a perfectly clear conscience because he worked hard and he did establish Laban's interests even though his employer deceived him and changed his wages ten times. He believes with a clear conscience, that all that he had done, and even the way that he acquired wealth while in Laban's employ, was done righteously. It was done according to contract and within those bounds, but what was more important it was done in conjunction with the word of the Lord.

Verse 10 says, "And it happened, at the time when the flocks conceived, that I lifted my eyes and saw in a dream, and behold, the rams which leaped upon the flocks were streaked, speckled, and gray-spotted." "Then the Angel of God spoke to me in a dream, saying, 'Jacob.'" "And I said, 'Here I am.'" "And He said, 'Lift your eyes now and see, all the rams which leap on the flocks were streaked, speckled and gray-spotted; for I have seen all that Laban is doing to you.'" What could have given him a clearer conscience at this point, than this? God Himself is looking out for the establishment of his goals and his long ranged interests. God says to him in verse 13,

“I am the God of Bethel, where you anointed the pillar and where you made a vow to Me.” “Now arise, get out of this land, and return to the land of your family.”

What great progress, that Jacob was making in sanctification. Much of it was being learned in the crucible of the difficulties that he experienced in the employ of Laban. But God, having begun a good work in Jacob, would continue it, and perfect it until the day of Christ. I hope that having heard this sermon that you will receive the lessons of it to yourself. Will your righteousness answer for you, when God looks at your life? It will, if Christ is in your heart, and if you will conduct yourself uprightly in relation to your employer. Will you not trust in the God of Jacob today; even now, at this time, if you never have?

If you do not trust in Christ to save you, to lead you, and to guide you into all the truth, you may become like Laban who was selfish and grasping of everything that he could get from other people; but he himself was unable to give, and to love, and to provide benefits for even his own family members when they worked for him. This is the sad end of unbelief. But faith in Christ will change the stoutest heart and make it over, in time, into the image of Christ.