

Text: Genesis 22:20-23:20

Title: "A Godly Testimony in Money Matters"

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Introduction: We live in times of some financial turmoil, don't we? I am told that over the last two weeks investors in the U.S. stock market have lost roughly 3-4 trillion dollars of their savings. Our government tried to prevent that from happening with a taxpayer bail out of irresponsible financial institutions overseen by irresponsible congressional committees.

As a result, the national debt has reached a level exceeding 10 trillion dollars, an amount equal to about \$100,000 for each of our families. In Times Square in New York City there hangs something called the National Debt Clock. It tracks the amount of debt our nation has incurred and the amount that each family is responsible for, and it turns out that they have to get a new one because the clock they have now no longer has enough digits to keep up.

Our study of Genesis has brought us to the death of Sarah and the last days of the life of Abraham. As Abraham mourns the death of his dear wife, he realizes that he is in need of a place to bury his loved one. And so God uses some space in Holy Writ to tell us about a business transaction of this man of God to secure a burial plot for Sarah.

As we study Abraham's example, we come to understand features of a godly testimony in regard to money matters, a topic that certainly matters to the Lord, and one that is of great concern to the world in which we live. We will organize our study of the passage under this theme.

I. Contentment is part of a godly testimony in money matters (20:20-23:4).

Illustration: Have you ever noticed how happy you can be with what you have until you see what someone else has? Little children often demonstrate how this works at Christmas time. One will open a present and be perfectly happy until he sees his cousin open his present, which happens to be twice as big and three times more colorful, and now the first child is unhappy about the present that he has received, and the battle of the Christmas presents erupts. Grandmas often buy three cousins of the same age the same thing for just this very reason.

Application: Contentment is not something that comes naturally for us, but it is an important part of a godly testimony when it comes to money matters. I want us to see Abraham's contentment displayed in two ways in this passage.

1. We are told that Abraham heard a report about his brother Nahor's circumstances, a man who did not know the Lord as far as we know, but also a man who had twelve sons to Abraham's one. We are given this list of sons to introduce us to Rebekah, Isaac's future wife. In chapter 24 Abraham is going to send his servant to Nahor's family to find a wife for Isaac.

He felt no sadness or grudge against his relatives after learning how God had blessed them. Abraham could hear of the prosperity of others without resenting it, envying it, or getting upset over it. He no doubt rejoiced over the way God had blessed his brother Nahor, even though God's treatment of himself seemed far less generous.

You know, as we contemplate the financial difficulty we are experiencing as a nation right now, many who would lead us out of it operate on the principle of class envy. This is the idea that someone has more than I do, and therefore policies ought to be enacted that disadvantage him and help me. That kind of discontented attitude is never healthy spiritually.

Abraham could rejoice in the greater blessings of others, and we ought to be able to do the same.

2. Abraham did not even have a place to bury his wife after a life lived faithfully in the will of God. We know that in some ways he was a wealthy man, but it would have been easy for him to concentrate on what he did not have, especially in the face of the loss of his dear wife.

He was a stranger and a sojourner so far as the possessions of this world were concerned (23:4). The key to his contentment was the fact that He looked by faith for a city whose builder and maker is God, an everlasting possession that both he and Sarah would enjoy together in the resurrection (Heb. 11:8-16).

In order to maintain a testimony of contentment, we need to be living for the world we cannot yet see. We walk by faith and not by sight. Our investments in eternity will not go up in smoke no matter what Barney Frank and the others do.

II. Humility is part of a godly testimony in money matters (23:5-7, 12).

Illustration: One of the more talented baseball players I coach had some special trouble with humility yesterday at the game. He could not stop talking about how great he was. At one point he asked me flat out, "Coach, I am pretty amazing, aren't I?" I answered "Son, you are made amazingly."

Application: What we are and what we have are gifts from God, not things we have obtained on our own, and so humility is an important part of a godly testimony in money matters.

Abraham allowed others to praise him, not his own lips. He did not boast of his possessions or his accomplishments, even though these blessings from God had a clear impact on his

neighbors. Abraham was a talented business man and a man of means. But it is not important to Abraham to come off as a wealthy expert in the financial arena, and neither should we consider that as something important.

We ought to desire to be known as the servants of Christ and His people. One of the verses that Pastor Taylor shared with us at the NRBFC conference a couple of weeks ago was 1 Cor. 4:1, "Let a man regard us in this manner, as the servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God." Pastor Taylor pointed out to us that the word *servants* here is the *huperetas*, a term that means *under-rower* and refers to the slaves who worked rowing great ships of the ancient world below the deck.

We want that kind of testimony before men: under-rowers for Christ, managers not of money but of the mysteries of God, which are so much more important. Humility is part of a godly testimony in money matters.

III. Accountability is part of a godly testimony in money matters (23:8-10, 18).

Illustration: American history remembers our President Abraham Lincoln as "Honest Old Abe." Lincoln's honesty is legendary. As a boy he worked in a mercantile store, and on one occasion walked over two miles to correct an overcharge of six and $\frac{3}{4}$ cents. On another occasion, Lincoln realized that he had used the wrong set of weights the previous evening when weighing out a half-pound of tea for a customer. Lincoln closed the store to deliver the correct amount of tea immediately. Honesty makes for great men, and great men make for great presidents.

Application: Our economy is in an economic maelstrom today in part because of a lack of honesty, openness, and accountability. Our testimony as Christians needs to be far different

from this. Abraham ensured that his business transaction was done in the light of day. Nothing had to happen under the table. There was going to be no cutting corners, nothing that needed to be hidden. It was all above board.

We need to be honest and open in our financial dealings as God's people. This is an important part of our testimony on the personal level and as a church. As difficult as it is to get up for a business meeting sometimes, those meetings are important to the integrity of our ministry and the health of our testimony. You can go downstairs and read the procedures we use for counting the offering around here. We have budgeted money this year to do an outside review of our books and procedures, and we do so to make sure that we have a testimony that is open, one that is "in the hearing of the sons of Heth" as it were.

IV. Industry is a part of a godly testimony in money matters (23:11-16).

Illustration: When my mom and dad were visiting we had the chance to visit the Shaker Village in Canterbury together. It was a fascinating time. There is a lot not to like about the Shakers, especially when it comes to God's design for the family, but in the day before governmental social programs that cared for orphans, the Shakers were especially good at raising kids who had no parents and no place else to go.

They were a great place for this because they knew how to teach the kids principles of industry and hard work. There were no computer games at the Shaker Village. When I was a kid we used to love to play sports, but there is a hard-work side to sports. It takes practice and work to get better and to win. We did not have a gym at our Christian school, but we still loved to play. Today, the Christian school I graduated from has a wonderful gym, but they can't always put a team on the floor because the kids don't have any interest in play-

ing. My brother attributes this to computer games and the laziness they perpetuate in the lives of kids.

Application: Abraham was a man of industry, not someone looking for a handout. Abraham was unwilling to receive welfare, even in a time of great need. He did not want anything that he had not paid a fair price for. He even refused to bury Sarah until he had paid for the cave to put her in (v. 19).

V. Personal ownership and responsibility are part of a godly testimony in money matters (23:17-20).

Application: Did you notice that Abraham became the private owner of this land and personally responsible for it? Today, people look to the government for things that they ought to take personal responsibility for. People who believe in personal ownership and responsibility are not going to be advocates of state ownership of our mortgages and government-sponsored bail outs of our real estate decisions. We need to be a people who are willing to take personal responsibility for the financial decisions we make and the property we own by the grace of God.

If God has called us to this church, we need to take that responsibility very personally and very seriously, don't we? It is a great privilege to be a part of the New Boston Baptist Church family in Christ, but it is also a great responsibility. We reviewed many of those responsibilities last night at the Roll Call Supper as we read our covenant together. God will hold us personally accountable as stewards, so we need to be personally responsible and take personal ownership of our calling before Him. These responsibilities are not for others to do. They belong to us.

Conclusion: Money certainly matters on the pages of newspapers today, but we need to see too that the right approach to money matters to the Lord, because money is a dangerous

idol and our approach to money is an important part of our testimony that must demonstrate how we have been freed from this and other idols to serve the living and true God.

In the end, our salvation from sin was a kind of financial transaction. The debt we owed having offended our holy God was one no sinner could ever pay on his own. All we can do is borrow more and more and sink further and further in our sins. And it is in this condition that our Redeemer found us.

He paid the ransom of our redemption on the cross of Calvary. His blood was shed to pay the sin-debt before God that you and I owed. Having taken our sin and death, having nailed them to the cross and triumphing over them in His resurrection, the Lord Jesus now offers us the free gift of eternal life. Forgiveness is a simple transaction, an exchange. We give Christ our sin and death, and we receive from Him freely His forgiveness, His righteousness, and His eternal life. This is the saving wonder of redemption. Have you been redeemed?

“A man came—I think it was actually in Philadelphia—on one occasion to the great George Whitefield and asked if he might print his sermons. Whitefield gave this reply; he said, ‘Well, I have no inherent objection, if you like, but you will never be able to put on the printed page the lightning and the thunder.’ That is the distinction—the sermon, and the ‘lightning and the thunder.’ To Whitefield this was of very great importance, and it should be of very great importance to all preachers, as I hope to show. You can put the sermon into print, but not the lightning and the thunder. That comes into the act of preaching and cannot be conveyed by cold print. Indeed it almost baffles the descriptive powers of the best reporters.”

—David Martin Lloyd-Jones,

Preachers and Preaching