

Text: Genesis 30:25 – 31:16

Title: "Receiving Wages from the God of Bethel"

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Place: NBBC

Introduction: This past Tuesday our new president addressed a joint session of Congress in order to promote The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act that he had just signed into law. In that speech he described the genesis of the new law as follows: "As soon as I took office, I asked this Congress to send me a recovery plan by President's Day that would put people back to work and put money in their pockets."

The final version of the bill contains 1100 pages, 185,000 words, and 485 amendments, and it authorizes \$787 billion dollars of government spending that will go on until the year 2019.

To my ear, there is something about all this that has the ring of a claim to omnipotence. In roughly three weeks our federal government has worked such a miracle that money will be in our pockets again. This claim to an omnipotent ability to put money in peoples pockets evidently stems from the federal government's ability to print money. The idea seems to be that because the federal government can print money, it has the power to put people back to work and put money in their pockets.

The Bible term for putting money in the pockets of people is *wages*, and it is a term that is used repeatedly throughout our passage. Wages are *given*, and this term is also used repeatedly. This is a section of the Bible about giving and receiving wages, about putting money in peoples' pockets.

But what we notice here from the life of Jacob is not that a man must know the blessing of a president, a Congress, or a 185,000 word law in order to receive wages. Instead, Jacob demonstrates what it is like to live with reliance on One he knew personally as the God of Bethel.

Nobody in Washington D.C. knows my name; but the God of Bethel knew Jacob's name, remembered the pillar he had set up, and also the vow that he had vowed (31:13, 28:10-15). Bethel was the place where Jacob personally met God in a new way and personally learned of God's commitment to meet his needs. From the life of Jacob this morning, I want us to learn some principles about what it is like to receive wages from the God of Bethel.

I. God tests his servant's faithfulness as He gives him his wages (vv. 25-26, 29-31a).

Illustration: Benjamin Franklin was one of our founding fathers, and he was also someone who lived the American dream. He ran away from home with the shirt on his back as a teenager, yet eventually became a very wealthy business owner. In 1748, he wrote a four page pamphlet containing a few words of advice on the matter of financial success called "Advice to a Young Tradesman, Written by an Old One." The article concludes as follows: "In short, the Way to Wealth, if you desire it, is as plain as the Way to Market. It depends chiefly on two Words, Industry and Frugality; i.e., Waste neither Time nor Money, but make the best Use of both. He that gets all he can honestly, and saves all he gets (necessary Expences [sic] excepted) will certainly become Rich; If that Being who governs the World, to whom all should look for a Blessing on their Honest Endeavours [sic], doth not in his wise Providence otherwise determine."

Application: Franklin seems to recognize as he concludes his article that sometimes honest industry and wise frugality fail to make a man rich. Jacob's life testifies to this truth. And Franklin also understood that when this is the case, the difficulty of our situation is under the jurisprudence of the Lord of Heaven, "that Being who governs the World, to whom all should look for a blessing on their honest endeavors," the One who "in his wise Providence" may "otherwise determine."

God will "determine otherwise" in the life of Jacob for some time. He asks Jacob to demonstrate faithfulness in a difficult context, and he did so. We need to be faithfully industrious and frugal even in difficult contexts as God's people. We should not be known as those who become quickly discontented and eager to move on to something better. God often wants us to learn faithfulness before He blesses us with something better. Let's be patient and pass the test the way Jacob did.

Did you notice that Jacob was not interested in a handout from Laban? (v. 31a). An awful lot of Americans listened to the president's speech last week asking the question, "What will you give me?" Will you give me an education, healthcare, a job, a house, a mortgage payment? We need the conviction of Joseph in response to our government today, which will say, "You shall not give me anything."

II. God vindicates his servant's integrity as He gives him his wages (vv. 27-28, 31b-36; 31:1-10).

Illustration: There are a lot of things that can cause an economic downturn: drought, famine, disease, war. Now while there are many differences of opinion about how to address the economic woes of our nation, it is universally

understood that dishonesty and cheating were major causes of the financial destruction we recently have experienced.

Our president said in his speech: "People bought homes they knew they couldn't afford from banks and lenders who pushed those bad loans anyway." It is somewhat ironic he also told us that buying government programs that the government can't afford is the way you solve this problem, but still, we agree on the cause. Our country is plagued with a destructive lack of business integrity, and we ought to have no part in it as believers.

Application: I want us to see three lessons as we think about how God vindicates his servant's integrity as He gives him his wages.

1. A lesson from Jacob's integrity: God can change the life (30:33).

"Jacob, man of integrity" is not a phrase that his father would have used back in the days of Beersheba. With trembling voice Isaac had to tell Esau, "Your brother came deceitfully and has taken away your blessing." Esau responded, "Is he not rightly named Jacob, for he has supplanted me these two times? He took away my birthright, and behold, now he has taken away my blessing" (27:35-36).

Yet now in Genesis 30-31, Jacob is a man who believes that his integrity is his most precious possession as a business man (30:33). Something radically changed here, and this change is the work of God's salvation. It is the difference that comes to a man when he meets the God of Bethel. This happened to Zaccheus in Luke 19:1-10. Are you a hopeless cheat who is so entangled in the deception of your business dealings that you see no way out? Jacob and Zaccheus found the way out. They met the God of Bethel who is the

Son of Man, who came to seek and to save those who are lost, and they repented of their sin and asked for His saving blessing. Perhaps someone here needs to learn the lesson from Jacob's integrity: God can change your life.

2. A lessons from Laban's lack of integrity: honest people do not finish last (31:6-9).

Laban was notoriously dishonest because he calculated the causes and effects of life without accounting for God. Remember Ben Franklin's advice? He remembered to account for "that Being who governs the World, to whom all should look for a Blessing on their Honest Endeavours." This calculation never entered Laban's business decisions. He calculated that sheep were typically white and goats were typically black, and that his chances for success were even better if he were first to cheat Joseph by separating out the spotted and speckled sheep from his flock giving them to his sons, and that he would be guaranteed success if he put 3 days journey between these animals and Joseph.

What he missed in making all these decisions is that Jacob had a relationship with the God of Bethel, and that Jacob had a dream (31:10 - note, I see two dreams, one in v. 10 at the beginning of the agreement; and vv. 11-13 at the end). The world we do business in no longer accounts for the God of Bethel, but we still can. With Him as part of the equation, honest people do not finish last.

3. A lessons from the sons' lack of integrity: the politics of class envy are not for the believer (31:1-9).

Illustration: We have heard a lot recently about how evil corporate jets are. Our president made reference to his conviction in this regard in the speech he gave last week. On February 11, Cessna, a manufacture of corporate jets, issued

a news release defending their industry. It said in part: "We think it's time the other side of the story be told, and that support be given to those businesses with the good judgment and courage to use business aviation to not only help their businesses survive the current financial crisis, but more quickly forge a path toward an economic upturn."

"Today, we are demanding business leaders and managers work at their absolute peak to turn their companies, and our economy, around. Business aviation provides the means to do just that. A business aircraft is a tool of industry, and one that should see its highest and best use during times of fiscal crisis. Anyone who has ever seen managers board a business aircraft at dawn and return well after dark, having visited multiple cities and attended countless meetings in one day, can attest to the fact that business aviation allows companies to get the most out of every minute of every day - exactly what is needed to work our way toward economic recovery."

Cessna said the reality of business aviation is that some 85 percent of aircraft used by businesses are used by small or medium-sized companies, and that the large majority of the passengers are middle managers and technicians. The aircraft, for the most part, are single- and twin-engine propeller and turboprop aircraft or small or medium sized jets.

"The reality of business aviation is a far cry from the misconception of CEOs flying in large luxurious airplanes. Most of these aircraft are fairly Spartan, designed for business, with a cabin about the size of a minivan or SUV."

Application: The demagogues of Washington are telling the American people to despise business managers who use corporate jets. These are the politics of class envy, the belief

that the successful achiever is the key to the problem of society. It is also the attitude of Laban's sons. It is not the attitude of Jacob, nor should it be the attitude of the people of God. That kind of political manipulation is Marxist, and it is the kind that gives birth to tyrants.

III. God corrects his servant's failures as He gives him his wages (30:37-43, 31:11-16).

Application: God is doing so much more than putting money in our pockets as He gives us our wages. He certainly corrects Jacob's financial condition from penniless in 30:30 to very wealthy in 30:43. But He also corrects much more than Jacob's bank account in this passage. As God pays us our wages, He is making us the people he wants us to be. We have already noticed that Jacob is corrected from a cheat into a man of integrity.

He is also corrected from a man of superstitions to a man of dependence on God. What we know today about DNA and genetics makes Jacob's use of the sticks seem very odd to us, as it should. It should also make us wonder at the incredibly amazing creative power of the God of Bethel in a way that Jacob could not appreciate in his day.

We must say, of course, that God blessed these practices with successful outcomes, yet successful outcomes in Scripture often stop short of validating the means used to reach those outcomes. Remember that water came out of the rock when Moses struck it, yet Moses was prohibited from crossing over into the Promised Land for that act. I think we have the same kind of relationship between means utilized and outcome with the sticks of Jacob, that we had with the mandrakes of Rachel in the previous chapter. At best there is a misguided reliance on inept technology here,

and at worse some superstition. But notice that in the end, Jacob credits God, not his sticks, for his success (31:9). He learns that in the end it was not his inventions and expertise that brought him his wealth, it was the kind God of Bethel. We all need that correction from time to time.

Conclusion: Finally, notice that important shortcomings of Jacob's family are corrected in this whole process. To accumulate a fortune ought never cost us our family if God is in it. In Jacob's case, God works to give his family a unity that prepared it for a return to the promise land together.

Let's remember, like Franklin did, that it is the God of Bethel who puts money in our pockets, and that as He does so, He gives us so much more, including tests of faithfulness, vindication of integrity, and correction of failure. Let's learn the lessons of His testing, trust His validation, and accept His correction in humble repentance and faith.

“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