**GOD BLESSES JACOB TO BUILD HIS WEALTH**

May 13, 2018

Genesis 30:25-31:55 / Key Verse: 31:42

“If the God of my father, the God of Abraham and the Fear of Isaac, had not been with me, you would surely have sent me away empty-handed. But God has seen my hardship and the toil of my hands, and last night he rebuked you.”

Last week, we learned that God blessed Jacob to build his big family with 4 wives and 11 sons and a daughter. Jacob’s family was full of human struggles between his two wives. However, God used Jacob’s family situation for his own good purpose. Later God blessed Jacob’s 12 sons to be the foundations of God’s holy nation Israel eventually to fulfill God’s world salvation work. It is God who makes ordinary and flawed men like Jacob and his family and you and me beautiful and glorious by using them for his good purpose.

In today’s passage, God continues to bless Jacob to build his wealth. Humanly speaking, Jacob’s situation was too hard to build his own wealth due to his wily father-in-law Laban. However, in spite of Laban’s crafty cheating, God protected Jacob and blessed him to build his wealth. Though it was by God’s blessing that he became rich, Jacob also showed his great strength as a servant of God, which is his amazing faithfulness to his human boss; his father-in-law. From Jacob’s example, we can learn how we can serve our worldly boss and task in our work place. Most of all, through today’s passage we can learn how our God is so faithful in keeping what he promised that we can faithfully continue our life journey with God without fear until we get to our true home; our heavenly Father’s house. As Jesus said, in this world we will have many troubles or hardships. But as God was with Jacob faithfully throughout all of his pilgrimage, so he will be with us. As a result, in the end we will overcome all hardships and we will be true victors. May God give us such conviction and hope of glory! Amen.

1. **When may I do something for my own household? (30:25-43)**

Jacob had worked for 14 years for Rachel, the woman he loved. During that time, he did not give any thought to gaining his own material things. He was fully devoted to Rachel whom he had loved and committed to his uncle with whom he had made contract. But after Rachel gave birth to Joseph, his thinking changed. In verses 25-26, Jacob said to Laban, “Send me on my way so I can go back to my own homeland. Give me my wives and children, for whom I have served you, and I will be on my way. You know how much work I’ve done for you.” Until now Jacob had been a hired hand in the house of his father-in-law, though he had been blessed with 4 wives and 11 children. He didn’t have his own property. But now he began to think about how to build up his own household. In verses 29-30, he said to Laban, “You know how I have worked for you and how your livestock has fared under my care. The little you had before I came has increased greatly, and the LORD has blessed you wherever I have been. But now, when may I do something for my own household?” Laban was reluctant to let Jacob leave because he knew that the LORD had blessed him because of Jacob. Laban knew Jacob’s exceptional hard work and God’s blessing on Jacob’s commitment. So, he proposed a new contract to pay Jacob wages from then on. Jacob asked for the inferior sheep and goats that were speckled, or spotted, or dark-colored as his wages. To Laban, it would be a good deal since most of the flock was white. So, Laban agreed to this. Besides, what a stingy man Laban was! Before Jacob had a chance to look over the flocks and claim what Laban promised him, Laban removed all the flocks that were streaked, or spotted, or speckled, or dark-colored and placed them in the care of his sons. Then he sent them a three-day journey away, while Jacob continued to tend the rest of Laban’s flocks.

Jacob could have been daunted and consumed by bitterness or sense of victimhood. But Jacob was not discouraged, nor complained to Laban. He did what he could do. He used all his wits and skills. He took fresh cut branches from poplar, almond and plane trees and made white stripes on them by peeling the bark and exposing the white inner wood of the branches and placed them in all the watering troughs. So, when the flocks were in heat and came to drink, they mated in front of the branches. Jacob believed that if the animals saw spots or strips in mating time, it would influence them and kids they bore. Jacob used this method whenever the stronger females were in heat but if the animals were weak, he did not use this method. As a result, the weak animals went to Laban and the strong ones to Jacob. In this way Jacob grew exceedingly prosperous. We don’t know where Jacob learned such funny genetic engineering. But anyway, God blessed Jacob’s hard work and he prospered.

In 31:4-12, Jacob explained to his wives how Laban repeated his cheating. Laban cheated him by changing his wages ten times. When the flocks began to bear speckled young, he said that only the streaked young would be Jacob’s. When they bore streaked young, then Laban changed his mind and said that the spotted ones would belong to Jacob. But whatever he changed, God made the young belong to Jacob not to Laban. In this way, God did not allow Laban’s cheating to succeed and blessed Jacob to prosper.

In spite of Laban’s mean behavior and cheating, Jacob proved his faithfulness to his human boss Laban. In 31:38-42, he testified how he served his father-in-law. Jacob had worked hard for Laban for 20 years though Laban was not a nice uncle. He cared for his flock day and night, in blazing sun in daytime and in cold weather at night time with many sleepless nights. During his care, the sheep and goat did not miscarry. He did not eat anything from his uncle’s flocks. He did not bring him any animals torn by wild beasts. He himself bore the loss of his flock. However, Jacob knew that his success was primarily due to God’s blessing.

1. **Jacob flees from Paddan Aram (31:1-55)**

Six more years passed. Jacob realized that Laban and his son’s attitude toward him was not what it had been. They were not happy to see Jacob grow more and more wealthy. It was the very time that the LORD appeared to Jacob again. 31:3 says, “Then the LORD said to Jacob, ‘Go back to the land of your fathers and to your relatives, and I will be with you.’” In 31:13, in a dream, God reminded Jacob of his vow at Bethel. 31:13 says, “I am the God of Bethel, where you anointed a pillar and where you made a vow to me. Now leave this land at once and go back to your native land.” God was closing the door in Paddan Aram. He wanted Jacob to return to the land of God’s covenant promise. Jacob had promised God that if God would be with him and would provide him with his needs and bring him back to his father’s house safely, God would be his God and he would worship God at Bethel and give him a tenth of all his possessions. (28:20-22) God had been with Jacob in Paddan Aram indeed. He had protected him from his wily uncle. He had blessed him abundantly. Now it was time for him to return and keep his vow.

Jacob had a family council meeting. He explained his situation to his wives and they agreed with him and supported his decision to leave. Jacob was still afraid of Laban though he had experienced God’s protection and provision until now because he knew that Laban would do everything possible to prevent his leaving. So, he waited until Laban was out of town, and one day seized the opportunity and fled with his wives and children and all his possessions. He crossed the Euphrates River and headed for the hill country of Gilead. On the third day Laban was told that Jacob had fled. Taking his relatives with him, he pursued Jacob for seven days and caught up with him in the hill country of Gilead. At that very night, God showed his protecting love once again toward Jacob. God came to Laban in a dream and said to him, “Be careful not to say anything to Jacob, either good or bad.” Laban tried to find some handle to take hold of to keep Jacob from leaving. He searched through everything that Jacob had, using the excuse that he was looking for his missing idols. Actually, Rachel had stolen the idols, but she cleverly concealed them and Laban failed to find them. After Laban had failed to find anything of which to accuse Jacob, Jacob confidently rebuked Laban and reminded him of his own hard work. Jacob concluded his speech to Laban with these words: “If the God of my father, the God of Abraham and the Fear of Isaac, had not been with me, you would surely have sent me away empty-handed. But God has seen my hardship and the toil of my hands, and last night he rebuked you.” (31:42) Indeed it was God who had protected Jacob and blessed him in spite of Laban’s all crafty deceiving and exploitation of Jacob’s hard work.

Laban knew that he had nothing to do to Jacob except sending him safely as God warned. So, Laban and Jacob agreed to part. They ate a covenant meal together and agreed not to trespass on the other’s land and not to harm each other. Laban kissed his grandchildren and his daughters and blessed them and left, and Jacob continued his journey home.

In todays’ passage there are two remarkable things which we can learn. Firstly, Jacob’s faithfulness. Jacob was deceived by his uncle from the beginning of his marriage life in Paddan Aram and in order to get Rachel whom he loved, he had to serve Laban for 14 years. Though Jacob could have complained to Laban and worked for him in half-hearted way, he did not do so. Instead he served Laban with all his strength enduring many years of toil and hardships. After 14 years of his hard work for Laban, for six years, Laban had changed the wages for Jacob 10 times. However, Jacob did not change in his attitude of serving Laban. He did his best for his own business but at the same time he also did his best for his uncle’s business, too. God saw Jacob’s hard work, honesty, and faithfulness and blessed him abundantly and because of Jacob’s hard work, God blessed ungodly Laban as well. Jacob’s faithfulness as a hired hand in Laban’s house can be a good example for anyone who is entrusted by God for his mission whether it is small or big. In 1 Corinthians 4:2, Apostle Paul said, “Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful.” In Luke 16:10-12, Jesus also said, “Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much, and whoever is dishonest with very little will also be dishonest with much. So if you have not been trustworthy in handling worldly wealth, who will trust you with true riches? And if you have not been trustworthy with someone else’s property, who will give you property of your own?” So the men and women of God who truly believe in God must prove faithful to their job or task for which they were entrusted either by his worldly boss or by their heavenly master God. In fact, in God there is no ungodly or insignificant work whether it is at work place or at home or at church because whatever we do, we work at it with all our heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters. In work place, around for 1 year I have been working in 12-hour shift at night. As people know, night shift is hard because of up-side down sleeping cycle. But because of company policy, I have endured until now working hard consistently. As a result, supervisor recognized my hard working and when I talked to him about moving to regular shift day or afternoon shift in coming summer, he positively responded about it. In work place my favorite motto is to work before God not before men so that I can be a trustworthy person and have opportunity to share the gospel with people not by just my word of preaching but by my faithful deeds and behavior at work place.

Secondly, God’s faithfulness. Jacob’s human faithfulness was great because it gives a good example of trustworthiness of a servant. However, God’s faithfulness is far greater than any human faithfulness. Jacob’s faithfulness definitely pleased God and brought the glory of God to even ungodly man like Laban. But Jacob knew and Laban knew that it was God’s blessing and God’s faithfulness that ultimately brought abundant blessing in Laban’s household and Jacob’s family. Though Jacob was faithful to his uncle, he alone could not do anything to defeat Laban’s cheating or any possible harm to him. But God had been with him for 20 years and as he had promised Jacob, he provided him with all his needs and protected him from all hardships and now he was leading him to go back to his father’s land safely as he had promised to continue his pilgrimage with God and inherit the blessing that God had given to his forefather Abraham. Jacob’s life’s trial did not end yet. It would have continual hardships and challenges though he was returning to his father’s land. But whatever problems he meets, God’s faithfulness would never leave him nor forsake him until he has done what he has promised him. Jacob indeed learned God’s awesome faithfulness throughout his life time and later at the end of his life; when he blessed Joseph’s two sons; Manasseh and Ephraim, he confessed about his God like this; the God who has been my shepherd all my life to this day,…”(Gen48:15b)

In conclusion, in today’s passage, we learn that God is faithful. God keeps what he promised. God is faithful to us even when we are too weak to keep our promise. He helps us to keep our vows, as he helped Jacob. In such faithful God, anyone who depends on him can be faithful to God and to men to the end in spite of our outer hardships or our inner weaknesses and become true victors and the source of blessing for others. May God bless each one of us to depend on God’s faithfulness rather than our own hard work or wealth so that we too can be truly faithful to God and to others and be a blessing for others and to bring the glory to God through our life of faith. Amen.