

Text: Exod. 20:15

Title: "You shall not steal"

Time: 7/11/2021 am

Place: NBBC

Introduction: In 1623 the Pilgrims of the settlement in Plymouth were experiencing famine. William Bradford writes of some who cut wood and fetched water as slaves to Indians to receive from them a cupful of corn. One poor neighbor, looking for shellfish on the seashore, became so weak that his neighbors found him stuck in the mud having starved to death.

Bradford attributed their plight to socialism, what he called the "taking away of property and bringing [it] into a commonwealth." Fit and able men thought it an injustice that they were paid the same as others who could not do 25% of the work they did. Women considered themselves enslaved because their communal chore assignments came from the centralized authority.

To forestall extinction their leaders decided to dump socialism in favor of free-market capitalism. Each family was given a parcel of land to have as their own private property. Bradford described the result this way: "This had very good success, for it made all hands very industrious." He reported that "much more corn was planted than otherwise would have been" and that even "women went willingly into the field and took their little ones with them to set corn."

Bradford explained their renewed economic blessings biblically. He said, "[This change] may well evince the vanity of that conceit . . . that the taking away of property . . . would make [people] happy and flourishing; as if they were wiser

than God.” Bradford gave the Lord credit for the blessings of their free enterprise. He said, “God in His wisdom saw a fitter course for them.”

This wisdom of God dates to the Garden of Eden, which the Lord gave man to till and keep as his own. This wisdom is also at the core of the 8th of the Ten Commandments – “Thou shalt not steal.” Simply put, the pilgrims came to understand that their socialism was a form of stealing, and God says, “Thou shalt not steal.”

The first time this word *steal* occurs in Scripture is in Gen. 30:33, “So shall my righteousness answer for me in time to come, when it shall come for my hire before thy face: every one that is not speckled and spotted among the goats, and brown among the sheep, that shall be counted *stolen* with me.” Genesis 30 and 31 give the account of Jacob’s departure from Laban and the discussion about private ownership and stealing that occurred between them at that time. It is a very instructive passage about God’s wisdom, Bradford’s “fitter course” of obedience to the demands of the 8th commandments. We are going to read through the passage and glean from it five tenets of God’s wisdom related to the commandment, “Thou shalt not steal.”

I. Private ownership is a right reward for labor (30:25-30).

Application: Jacob asks a question about the fruits of his hard work and labor here. He asks, “When shall I provide for my own house also?” The problem his question confronts is simple – Jacob did the work but did not own anything from the results of his work. He got a family in the deal, and Laban made sure he had a roof over his head and food on his table, but something was still very wrong with this picture. His point is one that God honors in this pas-

sage, that hard work should have a reward of ownership. When Jacob works hard and Laban owns what Jacob produces, this transference of wealth is a form of stealing in violation of the 8th Commandment. Private ownership is a right reward for labor. Paul put this principle this way: "The husbandman that laboureth must be first partaker of the fruits" (2 Tim. 2:6).

II. Free handouts are tools of manipulation and spiritually damaging (30:31).

Illustration: Popular socialists today like Bernie Sanders like to tell college students that free education is a basic human right. He also likes to tell sick people that free health care is a basic human right. What he is really saying in making those socialist claims, though, is this: "It is a basic human right for you to have someone else pay for your college tuition and your doctors bills." These pseudo-"human rights" defined by socialists come from the power of the mob to steal what they want from what belongs to others. Our founders understood that real human rights come from the God who commanded, "Thou shalt not steal."

Application: Laban has spent years using and controlling Jacob, and he thinks he can continue doing so with a sinister offer, "What shall I give thee?" Every time we have an election in this country, politicians pose Laban's socialist question to the voters: "What shall I give thee?" Then people vote for the Labanite who will give them the most, all the while forgetting that the Labans of the world attach strings of manipulation and control to their gifts.

Did you notice Jacob's answer? "You shall give me nothing." As God's people we need Jacob's answer in our hearts as the carrots of socialism are dangled before us. It used to

be that the corrupting and manipulative effects of governmental handouts reached only lobbyists in Washington and the desperately poor in cities controlled by Democratic programs. After this past year, we all know what it is like to receive a government handout, at least in the form of stimulus checks if not also in the form of unemployment checks. Our nation has lost the wisdom of Jacob's answer – "you shall give me nothing; I must earn what I receive."

Illustration: I heard a news report last week that in our country there are over 9 million open jobs, which employers are having trouble filling, while at the same time there were over 300,000 additional filings for unemployment compensation from the government last week. With the weekly \$300 that the federal government gives out added to state benefits, people are being paid by the government to not do an honest day's work.

Free handouts are not only politically manipulative. They are also spiritually damaging, and as believers we need Jacob's resolve to resist the temptation to fall into this trap. We need to know how to say, "You shall give me nothing."

Paul put it this way, "Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us. For yourselves know how ye ought to follow us: for we behaved not ourselves disorderly among you; Neither did we eat any man's bread for nought; but wrought with labour and travail night and day, that we might not be chargeable to any of you: Not because we have not power, but to make ourselves an example unto you to follow us. For even when we were with you, this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat. For we hear that there are some which walk among you disorderly, working not at all, but

are busybodies. Now them that are such we command and exhort by our Lord Jesus Christ, that with quietness they work, and eat their own bread. But ye, brethren, be not weary in well doing" (2 Thess. 3:6-13). Eating other people's bread because you are too lazy to earn your own is stealing, whether it comes from a government program or not. Paul is clear – free handouts are both tools of manipulation and spiritually damaging. Jacob said, "Give me nothing."

III. Contractual commitments are binding (30:32-34, 31:7).

Illustration: Abraham Lincoln is remembered by history as a great American president. Before becoming known as a great president, Lincoln was known to be a man of great character. While working as a young store clerk in Salem, IL, his neighbors gave Lincoln the nickname, "Honest Abe." He earned that respect, because whenever he realized that he had made a mistake and shortchanged a customer, Abraham would close the store, walk as far as he had to, and return the outstanding amount.

Application: No one ever called Laban, "Honest Labe." He had changed the terms of his agreement with Jacob many times (31:7). He failed to abide by the original contractual agreement he made with his son-in-law. Contractual commitments are binding, even when what we have agreed to is to our disadvantage. Psalm 15:1 asks the question, "Lord, who shall abide in thy tabernacle? who shall dwell in thy holy hill?" Verse 4 mentions faithfulness to commitments as an important answer: "He sweareth to his own hurt, and changeth not." To violate an agreement like this is to steal according to Jacob (v. 33). God says, "Thou shalt not steal," so our contractual commitments are binding.

IV. Class envy is thankless (30:35-31:2).

Illustration: One of the jobs I had for the bottle company I still do some work for was as a direct report to the Director of Business Planning. It was my job to perform analyses of new business opportunities to help senior management make decisions. When you do that you deal with many unknown variables, and I asked my boss once to give me his thoughts on the percentage of decisions our company made that were based on fully accurate data. He laughed, and we agreed that the percentage was pretty low. Many times in my business career, the Lord allowed things to come out better than our decisions deserved.

Application: In our passage, Jacob comes up with a plan that works, but it does so not because it was a great plan, but because the Lord chose to bless it. James 1:17 is clear that "every good and perfect gift comes from above." And so when we get to chapter 31 and read of the envy of those less successful, who resented the good gifts Jacob had, we know that we are reading about the sin of the human heart.

The paradigm of the victim's envy toward his oppressor is the lens through which socialists see the world today. This is not the lens of our nation's forefathers; it is the lens of Marxism. Laban's sons were Marxists. They felt victimized by Jacob's success, and in bondage to that feeling they had no ability see all that the Lord had provided for them, for which they should have been thankful. Again, Paul has some advice for us when we are tempted by the envy and self-pity of victimhood: "In everything give thanks, for this is the will of God in Christ concerning you" (1 Thess. 5:18).

V. We have broken the 8th commandment (31:30-35).

Application: It is easy to see in Laban someone who is not very much like us. But then, we read about Rachel's thiev-

ery and idolatry, and we get a sense that this problem of stealing runs a bit deeper than political debates about economic theory. People like Laban are not the only thieves in the world today. Jacob too knew what it was to steal the blessing from Esau. At root, our human hearts are deceitful and desperately wicked, and we do not understand the condition of our own hearts if we fail to see that just like Laban we have broken the 8th commandment.

The Israelites who failed to tithe thought that they had done nothing wrong, but God calls their neglect stealing (Mal. 3:8-12). In the New Testament era, Paul finds the same sin in Corinthian believers who failed to support the gospel ministry of their local church (2 Cor. 11:7-9). He robbed other churches, he says, to minister to them.

James not only tells us that all our good gifts come from above; he also tells us that we have not shared enough of them with brothers and sisters in Christ who are experiencing times of need (Jam. 2:15-16). Paul tells believers in Rome to pay their taxes (Rom. 13:6-7), undoubtedly because they were tempted like we are to cheat on our taxes and pay employees under the table. He even calls the IRS of his day "God's ministers." We have often failed to affirm this truth, have we not?

And then, worse of all, we often have stolen the obedience and service our Lord deserves as we have greedily made money our master instead (Matt. 6:24). So, yes, you and I, along with Rachel and Laban and Jacob, have broken the 8th commandment.

Conclusion: So, what is to be done with thieves like you and me? God in His love for sinners and lawbreakers knew what had to be done. His sinless law-keeping Son would go

to Calvary and die between two thieves. One would turn to Jesus, hanging there at the end of his life of thievery, and make a simple request: "Lord, remember me when you come into your kingdom." Jesus responds - "Today, you shall be with Me in paradise." That thief, unlike the other, saw his sin, his need for forgiveness, the truth that Jesus had done nothing amiss, that Jesus died unjustly but he justly, and that Jesus, in dying there as God's spotless Lamb, would soon be enthroned as King of a kingdom not of this world. He asked to be let into that kingdom, though he knew he could never deserve to be, and when asked this way, Jesus always says "Yes" with great joy (Heb. 12:2).

Which thief are we this morning? That we have broken the 8th commandment, we cannot deny. Each of us is one thief or the other. We are condemned by our violations of this commandment to die. What will we believe about Jesus on the cross? What will we ask the Savior in light of our sin? He is listening for your request this morning.

"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