

2016

Synod Theme: But now when shall I provide for my own household also? Gen.30:30^c

This theme is a question. It is the reaction of Jacob to Laban who was his Boss and father-in-law. Jacob had requested that he be allowed to go back to his home and country having served Laban for 20 years. He longed to return to his household and also longed to provide for his own household. The Oxford Dictionary defined household 'as the people living together in a house or flat/apartment'. A close study of Jacob's home in this text was the place of his birth. He was born to the home of Isaac and Rebekah. His twin brother was Esau. This Jacob stole the blessing of his brother Esau twice. The first was when he came home from hunting and he was famished. He sold his birthright to Jacob in exchange of red pottage – (Gen.25:29 – 34). The second was when, aided by his mother, Jacob deceived his father Isaac by presenting the kind of tasty food he liked and also covering his hands and the smooth part of his neck with goatskins. Thus, Isaac blessed Jacob with the blessing that was meant for Esau – (Gen.27:1-40). Consequently, Jacob had to run away from home to live with Laban because his brother Esau wanted to revenge the stealing of his blessing. Jacob fled to Laban in Paddan Aram.

Jacob did everything, both right and wrong with great zeal. He deceived his own brother, Esau and his father, Isaac. He wrestled with an angel and worked for 14 years to marry the woman he loved. He served Laban for 20 years. Through Jacob, we learn how a strong leader can also be a servant. We also see how wrong actions will always come back to haunt us.

After Jacob's service of 20 years, he requested that Laban should send him on his way that he could go back to his own homeland. Laban hesitated to send him away because he knew that the Lord had blessed him because of Jacob's presence with him. He was prepared to pay Jacob his wages. Jacob was not interested in wages. Instead he said, 'Don't give me anything'. Jacob replied, 'But if you will do this one thing for me, I will go on tending your flocks and watching over them; let me go through all your flocks today and remove from them every speckled or spotted sheep, every dark coloured lamb and every spotted or speckled goat. They will be my wages. And my honesty will testify for me in the future, whenever you check on the wages you have paid me. Any goat in my possession that is not speckled or spotted or any lamb that is not dark coloured, will be considered stolen – (Gen.30:31 – 33).

Laban agreed with this but that night he removed all the male goats that were streaked or spotted and all speckled or spotted goats (all that had white on them) and all the dark coloured lambs, and placed them in the care of his sons – (Gen. 30:34 – 35).

When Jacob discovered what Laban did to forestall getting robust wages. He devised means of getting wages this way. Jacob 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. Then he placed the peeled branches in all the watering troughs, so that they would be directly in front of the flocks when they came to drink. When the flocks were in heat and came to drink, they mated in front of the branches. And they bore young that were streaked or speckled or spotted. Jacob set apart the young of the flock by themselves, but made the rest face the streaked and dark coloured animals that belonged to Laban. Thus, he made separate flocks for himself and did not put them with Laban's animals. Whenever the stronger females were in heat, Jacob would place the branches in the troughs in front of the animals so they would mate near the branches, but if the animals were weak, he would not place them there. So the weak animals went to Laban and the strong ones to Jacob. In this way, Jacob grew exceedingly prosperous and came to own large flocks, and maidservants and menservants and camels and donkeys – (Gen.30:37 – 43).

The sons of Laban envied Jacob because of his wealth and accused him of gaining all the wealth that belonged to their father. Laban's attitude to Jacob changed because it was not what it had been. In chapter 31 verse 3, I quote "Then the Lord said to Jacob, go back to the land of your fathers and to your relatives, and I will be with you". Hence, Jacob fled with Leah and Rachel together with children. He also fled with Zilpah, Leah's maid and Bildah Rachel's maid with their children. In Gen.31:20 and 21, we have this record.

Moreover, Jacob deceived Laban the Aramean by not telling him he was running away. So he fled with all he had and crossing the river, he headed for the hill country of Gilead. Jacob fled from Laban to Canaan, with his wealth. He was extremely rich to the extent that he was able to send as gifts to pacify Esau the following; Two hundred female goats and twenty male goats, two hundred ewes and twenty rams. Thirty female camels with their young, forty cows and ten bulls, and twenty female donkeys and ten male donkeys. He put them in care of his servants, each herd by itself – (Gen.32:14 – 16).

In the parable of the shrewd manager Jesus Christ concluded it by saying 'The Master commended the dishonest manager because he had acted shrewdly. For the people of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own kind than are the people of the light. I tell you use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourselves, so that when it is gone, you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings – (Luke 16:8-9). The word shrewd

used for the dishonest manager connotes sound judgment and common sense. It connotes decisions carefully made and likely to be effective.

In the episode of Laban and Jacob, we are able to learn how Jacob applied common sense to the extent that he left Paddan Aram extremely wealthy for his father's home base in Canaan. The common sense was applied by the dishonest manager which Jesus said will give him favour in future that the creditors will welcome him into their houses. The eternal truth in this parable is what Jesus said in verse 9, which I repeat for emphasis sake, "I tell you use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourselves so that when it is gone, you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings".

Paul wrote in his first epistle to Timothy chapter 4 verse 8 thus; "For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things; holding promise for both the present life and the life to come".

Jacob's statement, 'But now when shall I provide for my own household' shall be viewed in two different ways. Namely, our temporal household and our eternal dwellings. It is becoming extremely difficult for our youths to provide for their households today because most of them are unemployed. The reason for unemployment is simply because our economy has been on recession and it has led us to economy depression. In Nigeria today, people groan for lack of employment, electricity, water and recently lack of petroleum. The situation was going from worse to worse as petrol was sold for between N200.00 to N500.00 per litre. Many car owners abandoned their cars and settled with trekking to places of works. The groaning in about 31 States in Nigeria today is the inability of state governments to pay salaries and allowances of workers and gratuity and pensions of retirees. The situation is as bad to the extent that some workers get half monthly salaries and worse still the salaries are not regular. Gone were the days when the system was get your salaries, gratuities and pensions as at when due.

Let us view how we get to this stage! From 1960 to the 1970, the growth rate of the economy was higher than the population growth rate; the unemployment rate was low, the school system at all levels was qualitative, health service delivery was generally satisfactory; and electricity supply for those who lived in the cities was never a problem. The provision of social services even at the local government level was adequate (Tell January 2016 p.12).

After 16 years of democratic experiment unemployment and underemployment rates are embarrassingly high; the school system, at all levels has collapsed the provision of health and social services have deteriorated to a disturbing level; the growth of GDP

declined for two consecutive quarters towards the end of 2015. After unbundling the power authority, the electricity supply has not improved and the real sector remains 'dead'. The economy was growing by almost 6 per cent, yet the rate of unemployment was about 28 per cent and higher among youths – (p.13 of Tell January 25, 2016).

The huge gap in the exchange rates is distorting the financial market and stoking the prevailing economic uncertainty (Tell Mach 7, 2016, p.4).

In the face of the downtown government, churches, and community should encourage entrepreneurship. We note with gratitude what the Bank of Industry is doing to encourage our youth corpors to engage their hands in small scale industry and farming. It is encouraging that the Bank is willing to give loan as a kick off of such ventures. Lagos State recently earmarked 256 to fresh graduate entrepreneurship (Guardian April 12, 2016 pg.27). The government at all levels, the church, mosque and community should be vanguard for entrepreneurship so that in due course we shall get out from the present economic mess.

What we need today in order to provide for people of our own household is Investment:

Investment: man works and prays for his daily bread. Yes; daily bread. However, saving for the morrow is a natural investment. Even when the children of Israel were in the wilderness and the Lord God provided manna from heaven, Moses said 'Let no man leave of it till the morning ...' Exodus 16:19. The Israelites were still saving some of the day's portion for the following day – although they did not succeed much. It is part of humanity to want to save. In barter economy, man was saving his surplus: Hear what the rich fool said in Luke 12:18 "...I will pull down my barns and build a bigger ...". If it were a money economy may be, he would not have had much problem carting away surplus.

For the purpose of our charge, let us assume that man has surplus through a lawful means and that man is not foolish as to put his mind in it and to forget his God, then the matter of what he does with the surplus will not arise. There are many options – examine the options. The best is what we called good investment.

Types of Investment:

There are various types of investments. The choice available to man depends on the environ, the stage of development whether in a developed country or developing

country; the geographic location, the political stability, the culture and of course the individual tastes.

Real estate:

Broadly, you can invest in real estate which include buildings and land. The mode of operating in real estate depends on culture; an English man will build and sell and repeat that process again and again. A Nigerian man will build for keep; and he is fully satisfied with collection of rent.

Goods:

You can invest in goods. Buying and keeping gold is a very common form of investment in India. The farmer in a remote village buys cocoa beans, keeps for a while and when the price is higher, he sells and makes profit; this is an investment. The ordinary trader buying and selling, shall we say he knows when cement is in low demand; he buys and he keeps in his store, and when the demand is high, he sells at better price. Here, there is a clash of interest, to the trader, this is genuine business, you buy, you store, you insure, and you sell when it is profitable to do so. It is an investment. To the user of cement, the amounts of hoarding, so it is a clash of interest, it is not only in politics that there is a clash; it is also in economics. There are more clashes in economics than there are in politics and they could be more violent than you witness in our various elections. Sufficient to say that turning money into goods and selling the goods later at higher price is a type of investment.

Financial Market:

Putting investments into broad classification the last I would like to deal with is the investment in the financial market. The financial market constitutes a very large area of investment which is further divided into segments or sub-areas. Within the financial market we have the money market where you can place your money for a period of time and collect interest called over-night lending. There are seven days, thirty days, ninety days, one hundred and eighty days, one year or longer periods of lending - This is called fixed deposit. The price for leaving your money with somebody to use for a time is called interest; the owner of the money collects interest, the user of the money pays the interest. At the end of the contract the owner takes his money back or reinvest and becomes entitled to another – interest.

Still in the financial market, the owner of the funds – money –can go into the second market called the capital market. Here also, he has a lot of variety to contend with. There is

one factor here; the owner of the money, the investor is going deeper into the business of the user of the money; he is opting for a higher risk. So, he collects his interest or dividend as the case may be and also shares in the fortune or misfortune of the businesses.

As at now, classes of investment available on the capital market are:

- (a) Federal Government Development Stocks
- (b) Industrial Loans
- (c) Preference Stocks
- (d) Debenture Stock
- (e) Equities – Ordinary Shares
- (f) Unit Trust
- (g) (Treasury Bills).

Here, over a period of time, the investor in addition to the dividend he collects on his shares, gathers increase in his amount of money; this is called capital appreciation. To demonstrate capital appreciation and show practical capital loss from Stock Exchange List.

Attributes of the financial market: buying and selling prices are uniform, pricing is open and known to all participators. Prices change very frequently.

Notwithstanding the complication and technicalities involved in the financial market, it still remains the most perfect market subject to the inter-play of supply and demands, it is a profitable market, it constitutes a good avenue for investment.

OTHERS: Agriculture, Animal Husbandry, Small Scale Industry, Cooperative, etc.

Jacob actually provided for the people of his own household. In the parable of the dishonest manager, Jesus Christ went further by saying “I tell you use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourselves so that when it is gone, you will be welcome into eternal dwellings. Jesus Christ had earlier said in his comment on the behavior of the dishonest manager, that ‘The people of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own kind than the people of the Light.

Christians are the people of the Light, Jesus Christ said concerning Christians, ‘You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven’-(Matt.5:14 – 16). Apostle Peter

refers to Christians in this way, "But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light".

Jesus Christ challenged us as the people of light to be proactive and shrewd with resources in our charge in order to earn us our eternal dwellings. Hence, all Christians must be shrewd managers of the resources and wealth of the present world so that we may possess our eternal dwellings.

Jacob said, but now when shall I provide for my own household also. For us Christians earthly household is temporal. The Bible made it clear that our eternal dwelling is in heaven. This is our ultimate dwelling. The Bible in several places refers to heaven as our eternal dwelling. Heaven is described as a place of eternal bliss; pertaining to God in the highest.

In the epistle to the Philippians chapter 3 verse 20, Paul said; "But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Saviour from there, the Lord Jesus Christ".

In the letter to the Hebrews chapter 13:14, "For here we do not have an enduring city but we are looking for the city that is to come" In I Peter 2:11, Peter said; "Dear friends, I urge you as aliens and strangers in the world to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul".

Our theme for this Synod directs our attention to focus on things which will make us comfortable after our retirement and at our old age, which refers to the later part of our lives. All Christians and all people of the world should endeavour to invest certain aspects of our earning so that it will sustain us at the close of our age. The time to start to invest is the first month we start work. Certain part of our investment should be set apart and saved in a separate account. Such saving should be invested on credible venture that will bring profit at our later years. Like we mentioned earlier it could be invested in fixed Deposit, real estate, on lands or profit yielding trade or small scale industry. In investment, the slogan is 'Nothing ventured, nothing gained'. One philosopher once said, "Write your vision for your life and look around your current job for opportunities that can support that vision. If you have no plan for your life, life will toss you around you". Hence, planning for your retirement starts on the day you start your job or business venture.

In Paul's letter to the Thessalonians in I Thess.4:11-12, he said, "Make it your ambition to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business and to work with your hands, just as we told you, so that your daily life may win the respect of outsiders and so that you will

not be dependent on anybody". Let us consider the words of another philosopher as he said concerning our attitude to work thus, "Don't be afraid to start small. Get that job, serve, prove you are a co-business owner and partner, that you are much more than an employee who just collects and rarely really contributes".

The comments of Jesus on the parable of the shrewd manager has a lot to bear on the above quotation, Jesus Christ 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 – (Luke 16:10 – 12).

Here we are admonished to cherish dignity of labour and to be honest and trustworthy in the vocation and profession God endowed to us.

The true riches which Jesus Christ mentioned in this quotation is eternal life. This is what Jesus Christ intended when he said, "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Matt.6:19-21).

The most credible investment which Jesus Christ called true riches is eternal life. The time to provide for our eternal dwelling is the day we accept Jesus Christ as our personal Lord and Saviour. The Bible makes it clear to us that what we do with our present life shall be testimonial for eternal life or eternal condemnation. This is clear in Matthew 25:31 – 46 where he speaks of eternal judgment. In verse 46, He concludes; "Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life".

The time to start providing for eternal life is now. Jesus Christ said in John 5:24, "I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes in him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned, he has crossed over from death to life.

The fullness of the goal itself is eternal life. Let it be crystal clear to us that man was not made by God for a passing day, nor for a few passing years, then to vanish into oblivion. We are not denizens of this world, only to live, toil, eat, and be merry, we

have a destination, because man was made for everlasting life, man was made to live with God forever.

When man forfeited that everlasting life, God restored that life to man through his plan of salvation, restoring life to man by having His Son died in the stead of man. It was to this work of Christ, that the Lord Jesus Himself adds the unbreakable promise – ***“He that believes on the Son has everlasting life”, “He that believes in Me has eternal life”***.

The alluring things of this world are making us to lose sight of this important aspect of the Christian life. Some so called Christians are even asking for proof, looking for evidence, and I boldly want to say to the skeptics that there is evidence, there is proof of the everlasting life. The proof and the evidence can only be treasured by all those who have received the gift of faith from God. The proof or evidence centres in our Lord Jesus Christ, who rose from the dead and ascended into heaven, dwelling there now in everlasting life with the Father.

His resurrection from the dead and ascension into heaven forever are irrefutably prove that there is an everlasting life. We have this promise from Christ Himself who is in possession of the everlasting life – ***“In my father’s house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you, I go to prepare a place for you, and if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you unto Myself, that where I am, there you may be also”***.

This then, is the Christian’s goal – the everlasting life. Therefore, my Brethren in the Lord, let us start afresh doing things with this everlasting life in view, bearing in mind that the Christian religion is a religion of hope, that some day we shall be translated into the fullness of life for which we had hoped.

Brethren in the Lord, what are we doing with Jesus Christ now? The one who says, ***“I am the way, the truth and the life”***. The one who says, ***“No one comes to the father except through Me”***.

For now, what are you doing with your life and all the gifts, talents, opportunities, energy, relationships and resources God has granted unto you?

Let us remember that you and I are no accidents, (Isaiah 44:21ff), you and I are created for a purpose here and beyond (Isaiah 26:3). You and I are planned for God’s pleasure (Rev.4:11). You and I are created to become like Christ (Rom.8:29, Colossians 1:15). You and I are shaped for serving God (Eph.2:10), (John 17:3).

I like to conclude with what Paul the Apostle said in 2 Corinthians 5:1 – 5:

For we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.

Here indeed we groan, and long to put on our heavenly dwelling, so that by putting it on we may not be found naked.

For while we are still in this tent, we sigh with anxiety; not that we would be unclothed, but that we would be further clothed, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life..

He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who has given us the Spirit as a guarantee.

Here Paul referred to two tents, the temporal earthly tent which groan, it is besetted with limitation, weakness, sickness, diseases, disability, sorrows and shortfalls and sins. Whereas the heavenly tent is immortal, strong and eternal and full of bliss, it is a perfect tent. I charge you, dear brethren to be shrewd in investing on this eternal tent. The efforts we placed on providing for our eternal tent should be ten times of the efforts we invest on our earthly tent. I know we can spend fortunes on our earthly tent for it to be sound. I admonish you all to spend all fortunes or more than ten times of what we invest on our earthly tent on our eternal tent.

**Your Bishop and Friend,
+Olubayo Ilesa.**