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ONLY YOU CAN CURSE YOURSELF!

Today's text: Numbers, Chapters 22-25; Deut. 30: 19-20

Extracts:

1. **“And the children of Israel set forward, and pitched in the plains of Moab on this side Jordan by Jericho...And Balak the son of Zippor was king of the Moabites at that time. He sent messengers therefore unto Balaam, the son of Beor to Pethor, ... saying, Come now therefore, I pray thee, curse me this people; for they are too mighty for me; peradventure I shall prevail, that we may smite them, and that I may drive them out of the land: for I wot that he whom thou blessest is blessed, and he whom thou cursest is cursed...And God said unto Balaam, Thou shalt not go with them; thou shalt not curse the people: for they are blessed”** [Num. 22: 1, 4(b), 5(a), 6,12]
2. **“I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live”** [Deut. 30:19]

Frank and Marilyn Lindh are the parents of John Walker Lindh, the American citizen who was captured in Afghanistan fighting on the side of the Taliban. All the other captured Taliban and Al Qaeda prisoners were transferred to a maximum-security prison in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, and none has been brought to trial. However, John has since been tried and sentenced to 20 years' imprisonment on a lesser charge of “supplying services to the Taliban” and for carrying “a rifle and two hand grenades while fighting against the U.S.-backed Northern Alliance”¹ When his father was interviewed on “Larry King Live” on CNN, he said of his son, “he is a sweet kid, very devout, very religious. John is a good boy. Therefore, I hope he can be debriefed by the government and then (allowed to) come on home!”²In another forum, his mother said of him, “my love for him is unconditional and absolute.”

We see from the above that neither the American government nor John's parents could “curse” their own. It was John that cursed himself by joining the Taliban. In like manner, we can understand why the same God that did not allow Balaam to curse the children of Israel, the subject of today's lesson, was to later allow 24,000 of them to die in a plague, arising out of their own conduct [Num. 25: 1-9]. How do we expose ourselves to such a danger and what can we do to avoid or minimize it? Let us find out in today's lesson.

¹ <http://www.cnn.com/CNN/Programs/people/shows/walker/profile.html>

² <http://www.cnn.com/2001/US/12/03/ret.walker.king.cnn/index.html>

1. Background

A curse is an evil wish that others *expressly* make at us or vice versa. It is pronounced. For example, after Adam and Eve had disobeyed God in the Garden of Eden, He pronounced, “cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life” [Gen. 3:17]. In fact, the physical death of human beings is a curse arising from the same event when God pronounced, “dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return” [v. 19]. Therefore, a curse is not a thought. It is spoken. It is like a vow to hurt others. On vows, scripture says, “that which is *gone out of thy lips* thou shalt keep and perform; ... according as thou hast vowed unto the Lord thy God, which thou hast *promised with thy mouth*” [Deut. 23:23]. So, just as we can pronounce a curse, we can also speak a blessing. That is why we are told, “death (*curse*) and life (*blessing*) are in the power of the tongue” [Prov. 18:21]. Moses told the children, “I have set before you life and death, *blessing and cursing*: therefore choose *life* (blessing), that thou and thy seed may live” [Deut. 30: 19].

The king of Moab, Balak, was familiar with this principle [that a curse must be spoken to be effective]. That is why he sent for an “expert” in the person of Balaam whose *curriculum vitae* [résumé] showed that “he whom thou blessest is blessed, and he whom thou cursest is cursed” [Num. 22:6]. He had a good track record of successfully pronouncing curses on others, which came to pass! Right now, your professed enemies are all over the place hiring “curse experts” (such as spiritualists, witches and magicians) to harm you. Do you know why you cannot even fight back? Here are some reasons:

- a) *You may not even know what your enemies are doing against you!*

You do not even know who your enemies are, not to talk of what they may be planning against you, unless God gives you the privilege to know [2 Kgs 6: 1-12]. Your worst enemies could even be members of your family [Micah 7: 6; Matt. 10: 21, 36].

The Moabites were the descendants of Lot, Abraham’s nephew [Gen. 19:36-38]. The children of Israel were the descendants of Abraham by Isaac and Jacob (whose name was changed to Israel). Of Isaac, God had told Abraham, “I will establish My covenant with him for *an everlasting covenant*, and with his seed after him” [Gen. 17:19]. Who else knew about this covenant of blessing but Abraham’s family members, including Lot? The king of Moab, Balak, a descendant of Lot, should know about it too. That is why he had now gone to hire a curse expert to undo an everlasting covenant of blessing! Meanwhile, the children of Israel did not know that their “cousin” was planning to hurt them.

- b) *Your enemies are more determined to get you than you can imagine!*

Balak was not ready to take failure for an answer. Let us see what he was ready to spend to get Balaam to curse the children of Israel:

- He was ready to pay any fee to Balaam, no matter how high. The king told Balaam, “I will promote thee unto very great honour, and I will do *whatsoever* thou sayest unto me: come therefore, I pray thee, curse me this people” [Num. 22:17]. Balaam performed four unsuccessful oracles for the king [Num. Chaps. 23-24]. The king would have continued if Balaam had not started to bless instead of cursing the children of Israel [Num. 24: 10-11]! Even if all our enemies were to stop attacking us, the chief of them, Satan, “the accuser of our brethren ... which *accuseth them before our God day and night*” [Rev. 12:10] will not..
- For each of the first three oracles, Balak built *seven altars* and Balaam offered a bullock and a ram on each altar [Num. 23:1-2; 14; 29-30]. In all, the king built 21 altars on which were offered 147 bullocks and 147 rams! Can you imagine the cost of all that in terms of money, time and effort? In case you do not know the spiritual significance of numbers, the number 7 is the number of God and it signifies “divine perfection”³ On each altar, two animals were offered. The number 1(one) signifies absolute singleness, such as the One True God [Deut. 6:4; Eph. 4: 4-6], while the number 2 is the number of witness and agreement, such as Jesus sending out His disciples two by two [Lk 10:1]. There were four oracles in all, except that a new altar was not built in the last case [Num. 24:14-15]. The number 4 is an earth-related number, such as the four directions: north, south, east and west, and the four-fold earthly ministry of Jesus Christ, represented by the four Gospels of Matthew (King), Mark (Servant), Luke (the Perfect Man) and John (the Mighty God). Certainly, our enemies are not ignorant of spiritual things and their impact on their ability to curse us!

2. Why does God fight for us?

You will agree with me that, given the commitment of our enemies to get us and our ignorance in most cases of what they are doing against us, only God can deliver us from evil [Matt. 6: 13]. Why then does He fight for us? Here are some of the reasons:

a) *Father’s love*

No matter how bad children are, their parents will hardly ever give them up to an enemy. We saw the wonderful words that Frank and Marilyn

³ Information used in this paragraph is taken from H.L. Willmington, *Willmington’s Book of Bible Lists* [Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.; 1987; pp. 217-221]

Lindh had for their son, John, the American Taliban fighter, even when most Americans wanted him treated like any other Taliban or Al Qaeda supporter. Adam was the son of God [Lk 3:38]. Even after driving him and his wife out of the Garden of Eden, God still made them “coats of skins” to clothe them [Gen. 3: 21], and promised them a Messiah to deliver them from the clutches of Satan [v. 15]. For us who are the descendants of Adam, “while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” [Rom. 5:8]. So, as “the children of your Father which is in heaven... He maketh His sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth His rain on the just and on the unjust” [Matt. 5: 45]. That was a grace that the children of Israel enjoyed.

b) *Reward for obedience*

In his final discourse before his death, Moses made it clear to the people that blessings go with obedience and curses with disobedience [Deut. 11: 26-28]. For example, blessings of *economic prosperity* [Deut. 28: 1-5, 8,11-12], *security of life and property* [vv. 6-7], and *honour and power* among nations [vv. 9-10, 13] are tied to obedience. On the other hand, curses in the form of economic hardship [vv. 16-18, 23-33, 38-40], fear, pestilence and destruction [vv. 19-22, 42, 59], incurable diseases [vv. 35-61] and national disgrace [vv. 36-37,41, 43-44, 48-57, 64-68] come with disobedience. For the sake of the few among the children of Israel who feared and obeyed God, He spared the whole nation from the curses of Balak.

c) *Simply for His own honour!*

God values His word above His name [Ps. 138:2]. Way back in time, God had sworn to Abraham, “in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore; *and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies* [Gen. 22:16-18]. This is the point that God made to Balaam when He said, “thou shalt not curse the people; for they are blessed” [Num. 22: 12]. To underline His promise to Abraham, God gave Balaam the privilege to see the future of this great nation. Balaam prophesied when the Spirit of God came upon him, “I shall see him, but not now: I shall behold him, but not nigh: *there shall come a Star out of Jacob, and a Sceptre shall rise out of Israel*, and shall smite the corners of Moab, and destroy all the children of Sheth” [Num. 24: 17]. He was talking about the coming of Jesus Christ in flesh [Matt. 1: 1-2]! Therefore, for His own sake, God will not allow His anointed to be harmed or maligned [Ps. 2: 1-7].

3. So how then do we curse ourselves?

An important conclusion from our analysis so far is that our enemies cannot curse us when God has blessed us for “if God be for us, who can be against us?” [**Rom. 8: 31**]. However, there are certain conditions attached to God’s blessings. In other words, any curse without any cause cannot reach us [**Prov. 26:2**]. How then do we predispose ourselves to be affected by the curses of our enemies? Here are some circumstances:

a) *When we refuse to accept Jesus as the Son of God*

Many people have no problem regarding Jesus as a great prophet and world leader of all times, especially when He is compared with the founders of the world’s other great religions. However, as God or even the Son of God, that is too hard for billions of people today to swallow. Yet, Jesus was sent to this world out of His Father’s love for us, to save us from eternal damnation [**Jn 3: 16-17**]. “He that believeth on Him is not condemned: *but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of **the only begotten Son of God***” [**v.18**].

Without accepting Jesus as our Lord and Saviour, we lose His protection because “the Father loveth the Son, and *hath given all things into His hand*. He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life, and *he that believeth not the Son shall not see life* [blessings], *but the wrath* [judgment] *of God abideth in him* [**Jn 3: 35-36**].

b) *When we are disobedient*

Having saved the children of Israel from the curses of Balak, one would have expected them to behave wisely when they arrived in Moab. Instead, “the people began to commit whoredom [i.e., illicit sexual relations] with the daughters of Moab. And they called the people unto the sacrifices of their gods, and the people did eat, and bowed down to their gods” [**Num. 25: 1-2**]. God became angry with them and sent a plague that killed 24,000 of the people [**vv. 3-9**], the same purpose for which Balak had hired Balaam!

God has protected many of us against the evil machinations of our enemies. Now that we have become successful, what is our relationship with Him? We spend our blessings on adulterous and riotous living. We cheat on taxes and tithes. We give up on prayers and church going so as to have more time for golf and other worldly interests. Are we surprised that trouble comes sooner than later? Health problems, divorces, bankruptcies, etc., begin to feature because the curses have started hitting home runs! Certainly, our enemies are not responsible.

c) *When we avenge or refuse to forgive*

This is a hard one for most of us! Yet, if we do not forgive others, God *cannot forgive us our own sins* [Matt.6: 15]. Jesus has commanded us to “bless them that curse you, and pray for them which spitefully use you” [Lk 6: 28]. That is the only way that we can brush off the evil designs of our enemies.

d) *What we confess with our mouths*

When you ask an average person who is passing through some hardship how he or she is doing, the answer you get is likely to be, “it’s tough” or “life is hard.” In deed, life becomes hard for them because “death and life are in the power of the tongue, and they that love it shall eat the fruit thereof” [Prov. 18:21]. When the only child of the Shunammite woman died, she did not cry or tell her husband. She put her dead son on Elisha’s bed and went looking for the prophet. When her husband, and later, the prophet’s servant asked her about her situation, she answered, “all is well.” In deed, all became well when the prophet prayed for the dead son and God revived him [2 Kgs 4: 8-37]. Therefore, watch what you call your spouse, children, sibling, friend or colleague when you are angry with them, “for by thy words thou shalt be justified, and *by thy words thou shalt be condemned*” [Matt. 12: 37].

4. Conclusion

Your enemies will never stop cursing you because, like their master the devil, they walk about like roaring lions seeking whom to devour [1 Pet. 5: 8]. Every blessing that you receive (such as success in marriage, career or business) will attract more curses from enemies far and near, physical and spiritual, and they will never stop until the day you are called home to heaven. The only way their curses can affect you is when your relationship with God and His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, is flawed because nobody can curse whom God has blessed.

Today, God has placed before you life or death, blessings or curses. Stop cursing yourself. Choose life. Choose blessings. All is well. All shall be well.