

'God's Determination to Bless'

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[0 : 00] Well, in life, we can be determined to do all sorts of things. Like this young guy who's determined to run as fast as possible.

You can tell he's got a look of determination on his face. Or determined not to be messed with like this little guy. Don't mess with me.

Or even determined to score a goal in soccer like this guy. Yes, that's me looking seriously determined. Back in the glory days.

What am I saying? I never scored a goal in my life. I did wreck both of my knees and had reconstructions. But anyway, I guess that's the difference between us and God.

We can be determined to do something but can't always pull it off. But God is when he's determined to do something, he can. And today we'll see that God is determined to bless his people.

[1 : 00] But as Gwyneth said, this is a continuation from last week. And so for those who weren't here last week or have forgotten last week, you might remember that, well, you won't, but others might remember that.

Balak, the king of Moab, hired Balaam, the seer, to curse Israel. A seer is someone who sees the spiritual world by using divination. As I said last week, like a modern day seance.

A bit like a witch doctor, which there still are today in Africa. And Balaam was happy to either bless for bucks or curse for coins. He didn't mind which, as long as he got paid because he loved money. And so Balak, the king, hired Balaam, the seer, to curse Israel for him. But for those who were here last week, you might remember that God told him from the start that you must not put a curse on those people because they are blessed.

It's not going to work, in other words. For God had already promised back in Genesis to Abram these blessings, the blessing of the land of Canaan, the blessing of making them into a great nation, and just purely blessing them by being their God and God walking with them, and all the good things that come with it, including blessing those who bless you and who curses you, God will curse.

[2 : 19] And so God had already started to keep these promises. For they were already a great nation, weren't they? And God was already walking with them.

But despite being told that they couldn't bless them in that verse, chapter 22, Balaam was still planning to try for money. I mean, it looked like he was obeying last week, but looks can be deceiving, can't they?

And God knew his heart and ends up rebuking him with a talking donkey to stop his recklessness, his madness, trying to go against God and curse for money. And we saw one of the verses from 2 Peter.

Here's both of them from last week. The false teachers are like Balaam. They followed his way who loved the wages of wickedness. But verse 16, he was rebuked for his wrongdoing by a donkey, an animal without speech, who spoke with a human voice and restrained the prophet's madness.

His recklessness, trying to go against God to curse for money. And this week, we're told that Balaam the seer has now arrived to Balak the king. But Balaam hasn't told the king that he cannot curse Israel for him.

[3 : 32] He's only told the king he must speak what God tells him. And so what follows are seven messages that God inspires Balaam to speak. But it spans two chapters, which is way too much for us to cover in detail.

And so I'll need to summarize and we'll probably skip point two altogether. But it starts with Balaam's three blessings, point one and verse 41, as Gwyneth read. And so it's the next morning, Balak the king took Balaam the seer up on the mountain.

And so he could see the outskirts of the Israelite camp. Perhaps so he can see the ones he's supposed to curse. And despite what God has already told him, Balaam goes along with the king. It seems he's still hoping to twist God's arm and curse God's people for money. Especially since in chapter 23, verse one, Balaam tells the king to build seven altars and prepare seven bulls and seven rams.

The number seven was often associated with the gods. Like it is for our God in the book of Revelation, for example. And notice both Balak and Balaam take part in these sacrifices.

[4 : 45] The two of them offered a bull and a ram on each altar. And I think this is to try and curry God's favor. Because in verse three and four, Balaam tells the king to save aside the sacrifices.

He goes to a different place to meet God by way of divination. And in verse four, God met with him. And what's the first thing Balaam says? Look what I've done for you, God.

I've prepared these seven altars and made these sacrifices. Why would you point out what you've done for God unless you were hoping God would do something for you?

It seems he's still hoping to twist God's arm and let him curse Israel. Like some other so-called gods who don't really care about their people, who can be bought off.

But God cannot be bought off. He does care about his people. And so in verse five, he doesn't even bother answering Balaam. Instead, he just puts a word in Balaam's mouth and sends him back to speak it.

[5 : 55] I wonder if you've ever had a moment of inspiration where a really good idea just pops into your head. Or this really profound piece of advice comes out of your mouth.

And after you think, yeah, actually, that was pretty good. Surprising myself. Well, that seems to be what happens next. Although Balaam was hoping to curse for coins, he's momentarily inspired by God to bless.

And so as soon as he sees the king standing with his officials, he then speaks his message. And in verse eight, he says, how can I curse those whom God has not cursed?

How can I denounce those whom the Lord has not denounced? You see, Balaam cannot curse Israel or Jacob. Same things, just two different names for the same nation.

Because God has refused to curse and denounce them. For instead, God is determined to bless them. And so that's what Balaam does by praising their greatness as a nation.

[7 : 01] In verse nine and ten. And ten, verse nine, he talks about how he can see them from the top of the mountain. And then verse ten, talks about their greatness in terms of number to start with. Who can count the dust of Jacob?

Who can number even a quarter of Israel? And then praises their greatness in terms of righteousness. Let me die the death of the righteous. And may my final end be like theirs.

Balaam blesses them by praising them. Declaring Israel is indeed a great nation. So great in number you cannot count them. And so great in righteousness he wants to die among them or like them.

Of course, their righteousness is only compared to the other nations around them, not compared to God. And later we'll see that Balaam actually betrays Israel.

And so this desire to die the death of the righteous and had his end like them is not a permanent desire. It's a bit like how I've seen people who over the years they've heard about Jesus and they want to become a Christian.

[8 : 09] And sometimes they've been baptized. And yet sadly, after a little while they decide, no, it's not for them. And they walk away. That seems to be Balaam here.

He's inspired for a moment, but it's sadly not permanent. And so we'll have to face the judgment for his own sins. Well, despite what he was hoping to do, Balaam momentarily blesses Israel, praising their greatness in terms of numbers and righteousness.

For God is determined to bless his people. And we know it's a blessing because Balak the king says to him in verse 11, what have you done to me? I brought you to curse my enemies, but you've done nothing but bless them.

Before our websites were invented and businesses use websites to advertise their businesses, they used to advertise them in a book. Do you remember the book called The Yellow Pages?

And one of the most famous ads was this one. Jan? Jan? Jan? Where's our ad in the Yellow Pages directory? Keep calm. Count to 10. One, two, three, eight, nine, ten. Not happy, Jan!

[9 : 15] And that became a famous line. Now of course, that Jan is not our Jan Nichols here, just for the record. Our Jan Nichols is very reliable.

But that's the King Balak here. Not happy Balak here. Not happy Balak here. Not happy Balak. And that became a famous line.

Now of course, that Jan is not our Jan Nichols here, just for the record. That's the King Balak here. Not happy Balak here. Not happy Balak because he hired him to curse. And Balak's done nothing but bless.

But like most people today, Balak claims he's innocent. It's not his fault. And so in verse 12, he answered, must I speak what the Lord puts in my mouth? I'm innocent.

Don't blame me. Of course, Balak is a slippery seer. And what he says is technically true, but it's not the whole truth. Balak never told the king that God said from the start, he won't be able to curse Israel.

[10 : 17] Instead, he went along with the plan, didn't he? Hoping to change God's mind even with those sacrifices. He even lets Balak the king try again in verse 13.

Balak says, come with me to another place where you can see them and curse them for me. It seems King Balak thinks a change of location with a different angle of the people might help Balaam curse them.

I don't know if this illustration works. It's a bit like a sniper who changes location to get a better angle for his shot. Only it's a curse here. Yet it seems Balak knows better.

For this time, he doesn't tell the king to build altars in this different location. Balak does it all by himself. And in verse 15, yes, he stays by the altars and Balaam goes to meet with the Lord by way of divination.

But we're again told in verse 16 that the Lord put a word in his mouth and said, go back to Balak and give him this word, which he does.

[11 : 25] And so in verse 17 to 18, he firstly begins in verse 18 by saying, listen, hear me, which parents often have to say to their kids. And then in verse 19, he says, God is not human, that he should lie, not a human being, that he should change his mind.

Does he speak and then not act? Does he promise and not fulfill? And so Balaam has no choice. He must bless Israel. Here again, we see God's determination to bless his people, even if he has to use this slippery seer to do it.

And so in verse 21, he blesses them by saying, no misfortune or misery will come upon them at the hands of their enemies, that is. Next week, we'll see that they cause their own misfortune and misery by their own sin, but not from other nations.

Why? Well, the Lord, their God is with them. And so they can shout in victory because their king is among them, he says. And then he goes on to say in verse 22 and following that just as God brought them out of Egypt, giving them the strength of an ox, which Egypt could not stop.

So Israel will continue to be victorious. And so verse 23, there's no divination against Jacob or Israel, no evil omens and can stop them, he says.

[12 : 50] Indeed, people will see their victories and say, see what God has done for them. They're undefeatable. Verse 24 puts it in different language. They will rise like a lioness or a lion and kind of gets a bit graphic at the end there.

But that's what lions do. But it's picture language to say that they will win. In other words, Balaam blesses them with victory because God is with them to strengthen them and give it to them.

Now, can you imagine being King Balak at this point? You hired this witch doctor to curse these people so you could defeat them in battle. And here he blesses them saying that they're undefeatable.

It would be like your kids or grandkids, nieces or nephews, inviting you to come to their sports match so that you could cheer them or bless them. But when you arrive, you end up cheering for the opposition.

And they're going, what are you doing? So much so that Balak says in verse 25, neither curse them at all nor bless them.

[13 : 55] My mother taught me when I was growing up, if you can't say anything nice, then don't say anything at all. Well, King Balak says, if you can't say any curse, then don't say anything at all.

Don't curse or bless. Just stop talking. But this slippery seer again says it's not his fault. Verse 26. Verse 26. And this time he even blames the king.

Did I not tell you? In other words, I told you so. No, not my fault. Even though he didn't tell the king what God told him right at the start.

Have you ever heard the other expression? A third time's a charm? Or one more time for the dummies? That seems to be King Balak's philosophy here because he tries one more time. A third time. Only this time in verse 27, he takes Balaam to another place. Not to give Balaam a better view of the people like that sniper kind of thing, but hopes to give God a better place to make him happy.

[14:57] You know, perhaps it'll please God to let you curse them from there. And so that's what happens. But Balaam knows it's not going to work.

Even though he says build seven altars and sacrifice them, and Balak did, he knows that God is going to bless them.

Because in chapter 24, verse 1, Balaam saw that it pleased the Lord to bless Israel. And so this time he doesn't even kind of do a seance or divination to find out what God will say, whether it's curse or blessing.

He knows it's going to be blessing. And so this time he just turns his face towards Israel and waits. And he doesn't have to wait long. Verse 2, the Spirit of God came upon him and he spoke this message of a vision that he sees.

It seems like the Spirit comes on him and he falls to his knees and he sees this vision of blessing. And that's what he speaks. It's a bit like Pentecost Sunday, really, where God's Spirit came upon the apostles to speak God's word in different languages to those gathered.

[16:10] Only God's Spirit comes momentarily onto this bad guy to speak a blessing. And so that's what he does in verse 5, saying how beautiful Israel is and how numerous they are, like spread out like a valley.

And then he goes on to bless them, to say that their water will flow from their buckets, their seed will have abundant water. Water in the ancient world was a symbol of life. They're going to have an abundant life.

And even their seed, their descendants will have an abundant life. And their king will be greater than Agag, who was a great king of that time. And that their kingdom will be exalted among the nations.

Here is Balaam's blessing upon them. And he goes on to say in verse 8 and 9 that they'll continue to have strength like a powerful ox and defeat hostile nations. They'll be so powerful that like a lion or a lioness, verse 9, who lies down, you just don't want to rouse them, okay?

You don't want to go near them. That's how powerful they are. And then he ends the same way he ends with Abraham. May those who bless you be blessed and those who curse you be cursed.

[17:20] That's quite a blessing, isn't it? All that. So no wonder it's the straw that breaks the camel, or in this case the king's back. For in verse 10, he burns with anger against Balaam.

He struck his hand together like a boxer, you know. I've had enough with this guy. And tells them, verse 11, to get lost and go home. And Balaam, in verse 12 and 13, again acts innocent and says, I told you so even more.

You know, I told you way back when you sent the messages to me. It's not my fault. But before he leaves for home, in verse 14, it seems like the spirit again comes upon him.

And he issues forewarnings about the defeat of Israel's enemies by Israel's distant king. And we don't have time to look at them. And so we're going to skip point two and go to point three, which is God's lesson for us.

And the lesson, I think, is pretty clear. God is determined to bless his people. No one can stop him. Not an opposing king or a slippery seer.

[18:30] We see this even in the first blessing of Balaam, where he says, how can I curse those whom God has not cursed? Because God is determined to bless, you see.

In the second blessing, he says, God is not human, that he should lie or change his mind. No, no. He promised blessing and he's going to fulfill it. God is determined to bless.

Even by the way we see God put a word in Balaam's mouth twice. And then the third time, sending his spirit upon Balaam to speak blessing.

Even the fact that Balaam blesses not once, not twice, but three times. It all shows that God is determined to bless his people. And unlike me trying to score a goal in soccer, God can make it happen.

In fact, he does. As I said, no opposing king like Balak, no slippery seer like Balaam can stop him. Knowing all things, he works for the good of Israel to bless them.

[19 : 32] But God is determined to bless his people. And it's the same for us. In fact, God is so determined to bless us, he even gave his only son, Jesus, to die for us.

I mean, how determined to bless must you have to be to be willing to give up your only son for them? That's pretty determined, isn't it?

And what blessings does he give us through Jesus? Well, we read in Ephesians 1, for example, every spiritual blessing in Christ, like forgiveness, such that we can start enjoying life with God now. That's a blessing God gives us through Jesus. And it is a blessing because we still sin, don't we? Or is that just me? Is that me? No? We still need forgiveness. It is a blessing.

As is adopting us into his family or a great nation like Balaam's first blessing. For Christianity is great in number. It's still the largest religion in the world.

[20 : 36] And it's great in righteousness. Not ours. No. Not ours. But Christ. Jesus gives us his perfect righteousness.

And to clothe ourselves like a jacket we can put on. So that when God looks at us, he doesn't see the sin underneath. He sees the righteousness on Christ, on top. He even shows us the right way to live in life, like loving one another.

These are all blessings. As well as the gift of God's spirit. Such that God is always with us to strengthen us, you know, like an ox perhaps. Like Balaam's second and third blessings.

As Paul wrote, I can do all this through him who gives me strength. That's a blessing. God even gives us some physical blessings too.

Like things we enjoy in life. And as Christians, like one another. Where we can encourage and help one another. I still often hear stories of people sending encouraging messages to those who are unwell.

[21 : 38] And providing meals for others and giving lifts to people. You don't get that in other communities. But you get it in church family. That's a blessing.

Of course, we want every physical blessing now too, don't we? You know, like a perfect healthy body and a rich and comfortable life.

Especially with the cost of everything going up and up. The kind of abundant water or life that Balaam mentioned in his third blessing. You know, the kind of wealth, health and happiness that everyone wants.

And plus, as Christians, we want the blessing of our King, Jesus. And his kingdom being recognized by our world as the greatest.

Rather than being persecuted by our world. As many Christians are today. Or ridiculed as we might be today. But here's the thing. God may give us some of those physical blessings now.

[22 : 41] But like Israel, they'll only all come later. God does not guarantee them now. Only later.

And that's why God is bringing them into the promised land. Their true home. The land he has waiting for them. So that he can then give them all the blessings he's promised them.

It's why he's bringing us to our true home. The world to come he has waiting for us. To give us all the blessings he's promised us. Not just every spiritual blessing and some physical we have now.

But every one of those blessings. Like it says in Revelation. You know, I saw a new heaven and a new earth. The world to come. And there'll be no more death or mourning or crying or pain.

The old order of things has passed away. It's only going to be abundant life. With God. And every physical blessing for eternity. Of course, like Israel, before we get there, we're still going to have to face battles in life, aren't we?

[23 : 43] For Israel, it was facing enemies. But for us, it's facing temptation and suffering. And yet for all God's people, hearing God is determined to bless us or to encourage us to keep trusting him.

To bring us through those battles to the home he has waiting for us. And even to trust him to work in all things, even hard things, for our good.

You know, to bless us by conforming us to be more like Jesus. That's our second reading. Where it talked about, we know in all things God works for the good of those who love him.

And that good is to be conformed to the image of his son. And give us everything we need along with Christ to bring us home. But notice all this is only for those who love God.

By believing in Jesus. After all, how can you love God if you refuse to believe in the son of God? It just doesn't work, does it? And so can I ask you, do you believe in Jesus?

[24 : 51] Whether you're in the room or online. Do you believe in Jesus? And for us who do, then do you realize how determined God is to bless you? Such that you really can keep trusting him to do so.

We can trust he'll bring us through our battles of temptation and suffering to our true home. The world he has waiting for us. With every blessing he promised us.

And we can trust in the meantime that he's working for our good to bless us. By making us more like Jesus in all things. Even hard things.

It's like our next hymn says, When through the deep waters he calls you to go, The rivers of trouble shall not overflow. The Lord will be with you to help and to bless and work for your good through your deepest distress.

Let's pray. Our gracious heavenly Father, we do thank you for your determination to bless us. So much so that you gave your only son Jesus to die for us.

[25 : 59] We thank you for the many blessings you've already given us. Like every spiritual blessing in Christ. And many physical ones in this life. But help us to remember your determination to bless us.

So that we might keep trusting you in life. Even when we face hard things. And battles like suffering and temptation. Help us to trust you're still working for our good.

And will bring us home to enjoy all your blessings. This we ask in Jesus name. Amen. Amen.