

**“Frankl’s Find”**  
**September 09, 2018**  
**Deuteronomy 30:19-20**

[In regard to Moses’ teaching in the book of Deuteronomy]

He talks about the wonders that took place in the wilderness, reminds them of their persistent rebellion and the blessing of obedience, that when they are faithful, God blessed them greatly. He lists various ordinances and feasts, and then reminds them. In chapter 28 he says this:

*“If you fully obey the Lord your God and carefully keep all his commands that I am giving you today, the Lord your God will set you high above all the nations of the world. You will experience all these blessings if you obey the Lord your God...”*

If you obey the Lord your God you will receive all of these blessings, and he lists them:

*“Your towns and your fields will be blessed. Your children and your crops will be blessed. The offspring of your herds and flocks will be blessed. Your fruit baskets and breadboards will be blessed. Wherever you go and whatever you do, you will be blessed.”*<sup>1</sup>

He reminds them, if they are obedient, if they are faithful, you will be blessed. After all this, he then presents this covenant, if you will, of Deuteronomy, so that the people might metaphorically sign on the dotted line. Yes, agree to be God’s people. He says in chapter 30:19-20, our reading for today:

*“Today I have given you the choice between life and death, between blessings and curses. Now I call on heaven and earth to witness the choice you make. Oh, that you would choose life, so that you and your descendants might live! You can make this choice by loving the Lord your God, obeying him, and committing yourself firmly to him. This is the key to your life. And if you love and obey the Lord, you will live long in the land the Lord swore to give your ancestors Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.”*<sup>2</sup>

So, after all God had done, all those years wandering in the desert, all these things in which he revealed to them who he was and his sovereignty. Think about it, what did he do? He parted the Red Sea, and they walked through on dry ground. And then they turned and they watched as Pharaoh’s army followed them into the gap, and then he released the oceans and destroyed Pharaoh’s army. He fed them, miraculously, with manna. And then when they wanted some meat, he gave them quail. He led them, guided them, with a pillar of smoke and a pillar of fire. During the day it was a pillar of smoke, and at night it was a pillar of fire right above the tabernacle, the tent which they erected to worship; and it was basically...

Being an old mailman, what does it mean when you put the flag up? You’ve got mail! Well, when that pillar of smoke or that pillar of fire was there, it was saying, “I’m in the house. God is here.” And sometimes that pillar of fire or pillar of smoke would start to move, and the Israelites would pack up, would break camp, and follow. For years I used to say to myself, “Man, wouldn’t that be awesome, to come driving to church one day and to look up at our steeple, and above our steeple is a pillar of smoke, or a pillar of fire! That would be awesome! It would be awesome to find something to guide us and to lead us!” I’m embarrassed to tell you how many years it took me to realize they didn’t have the Torah. It hadn’t been written yet. We DO have a pillar of smoke and a pillar of fire to guide us and to lead us [The Bible]. It’s just a matter of if you’re going to follow! Are you going to follow the pillar of smoke or the pillar of fire or not?

So, anyway, he did all these things miraculously. He got water from a rock. He took care of his folks, he showed them how much he loved them, he took care of them, and yet, still, God honors the gift, his gift of freewill, and he leaves the final choice, the final decision, to them. “Oh, that you would choose life.” Blessings, not curses. “Oh that you would choose to be my people.

See, we are not machines. We are not robots. I know technology nowadays is fascinating. They’re getting more and more humanlike. But that’s not us! I know machines today are just awe-inspiring. I’ve mentioned this before, but it’s hard to believe the computing power you hold in your hand when you have a smartphone. It’s ten times the computing power they

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<sup>1</sup> Deuteronomy 28:1-6

<sup>2</sup> Deuteronomy 30:19-20

had on the Apollo spaceship that guided astronauts to the moon! I mean, it's unbelievable technology. But technology can only give you what you tell it to give you.

See, back in the old days, when I was in high school, our computer class consisted of this typewriter keyboard, and you couldn't walk up to it and hit one plus one equals, and stand there and wait for an answer. That's not how computing works! You had to go up to this thing and tell it, "A = 1, enter. B = 1, enter. A + B = C, enter. Print C." Then it would tell you one plus one is two. Machines won't do anything that you won't tell it to!

We are not machines. We are not puppets that God controls by strings. We have the gift of freewill. God gave us all the gift of freewill, of choice. And for him, that really came with a risk. For example, in some denominations, in some churches, in some faith organizations, they have different customs than ours. In the Fundamental Ladder Day Saints, or the FLDS, offshoot of the Mormon church, and the Unification Church, or what we call the Moonies, your spouse is chosen for you! I remember back in the 80s when Reverend Moon used to have these huge wedding ceremonies. Everyone would just show up at the XL Center, and you'd wear your tux, and she would wear her wedding dress, and then Reverend Moon would walk around and say, "You... and you," and you'd get married. "You... and you." He'd match you up. He got to make the decision. FLDS is the same way. Somebody in charge decides who's going to marry who. It's all arranged. I guess you're just expected afterwards to love this person. You think that really works? I don't know, I have my doubts.

I mean, think about it. When you were a kid and your mother told you to tell your sister that you're sorry, what did you say? You said, "I'm sorry," right? Because your mother told you to! Are you really sorry? Well, love is the same way. Love is choice. If there is no choice, there is no love. You can't force someone to love someone else. If there is no choice, there is no love. Think about that. If there is no choice, there is no love.

God wants us to love him. But if there is no choice, there is no love. So, if he wants us to love him, he needs to give us – and he does – he gift of freewill, in hopes that we will choose to love him. Now, that is a significant risk, is it not? Because we're not machines. So, now, when God says to a human, "What's 1 + 1?" We can choose to take the knowledge that we have and say, "2!" Or, we can choose to say, "3!" You see, if we have the ability to choose God, we also then have the ability not to! Anybody heard of Adam and Eve? They had the ability to choose. They only had one rule. Just one. They chose not to obey, and that is why there is so much evil in the world today. I'm sorry to say, but it's because some people choose immorality over morality; vice over virtue; wrong over right; wickedness over righteousness; evil over good.

Is there any more powerful illustration of evil than the Holocaust? I mean, if you spend any amount of time reading about it, watching films about it, you can't wrap your mind around this level of evil. Six million people, at minimum, perished in the Holocaust. And they weren't all Jews. They were Jews, they were gypsies, they were homosexuals, they were Jehovah's Witnesses, they were Poles, they were handicapped people, the mentally challenged. Six million! That's the same as every person – man, woman, and child – in the state of Connecticut wiped out... TWICE. There's only three million people in Connecticut. Six million people died in the Holocaust. Why? How long have we been asking that question? Why? Because God gave us all freewill, and some people choose evil over good. The power of freewill cannot be overemphasized. You can choose evil, you can choose good. But you always get to choose.

I'll give you another example. Victor Frankl. Victor Frankl was a famous Viennese psychiatrist, a younger contemporary of Sigmund Freud. Dr. Frankl was lucky, blessed, to have survived the Auschwitz Death Camp in Poland. His mother Elsa, his brother Walter, were killed at Auschwitz. His wife was transferred to Bergen Belsen, and she too was murdered. The only other survivor of the Holocaust amongst Frankl's immediate family was his sister Stella, who escaped and was able to flee to Australia. Everyone else was dead, victims of the freewill choice of the National Socialist German Workers' Party, otherwise known as the Nazis. (I think the inevitable conclusion of Socialism, period.)

But, while Dr. Frankl was in prison, he discovered something completely unexpected to him. You see, all of Dr. Frankl's training taught him that people in such a horrific surrounding, atmosphere, as a concentration camp, they should all turn into groveling animals; and yet he discovered that even in a place like Auschwitz, a few rare souls rose above their circumstances. This was quite literally hell on earth, and yet there were some people that chose to comfort others, to love the loveless, to share the meager scraps of their rations. How? Why? Frankl was blown away! What could possibly make someone do such a thing in the midst of such unimaginable suffering?

What Frankl discovered was that the one freedom which cannot be taken away was the freedom of choice. We can choose good or we can choose evil. But we get to choose. In the midst of an environment of mass death, Victor Frankl saw a divinely inspired trait that makes humanity unique from animals. God gave us freewill. And that means we have the freedom to choose our responses, our attitude, no matter the circumstances. Even in a death camp, you have the ability to choose your attitude, your response. We have the power, the blessing, to choose at all times, in all things.

That means when life is not going as planned for you, or for me, God has given us the power to choose our response. I can let this crisis overwhelm me or not, it's up to me. I didn't get that job I really wanted. I don't know how I'm going to pay my bills this month. I lost my job because my company downsized me or moved or went out of business. I didn't score high enough on the SAT's to get into that college that I really wanted to get into. My marriage is struggling. Or my parents' marriage is struggling. Or my child's marriage is struggling. My child is struggling with drugs, or I'm struggling with drugs or alcohol. Or my parents are getting older and they're starting to have some issues. Or maybe one of them is sick, a loved one, maybe even your child is sick. Maybe near death. Circumstances can get pretty grim, ask anyone who's spent time at Auschwitz.

I'm not saying we shouldn't be sad. I'm not saying that tragedy isn't real or doesn't hurt. Of course it does. I'm not saying we should be statues of stone without feelings. Jesus wept when his friend Lazarus died. But, remember, we were given the great, God-given gift of freewill, and that means we have the freedom to choose our response, no matter the circumstances. Because if we don't, we need to be careful. 1 Peter 5:8 says:

*Stay alert! Watch out for your great enemy, the devil. He prowls around like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour.*<sup>3</sup>

When you're going through a tough time, that's when he's going to pounce. I've used this illustration before: the wildebeest on an African safari. The lion is hungry. Who's he going to attack? The alpha, strong male at the front? No! The lions let all the wildebeest go by, and then at the back of the column – the weak, the sick, the infirmed, the old – that's the target the lion goes after. Satan is the same way. He's waiting until you're going through a difficult time, whatever it may be, that's when he's going to attack. When you're vulnerable. Not when you're walking strong in the faith! When things are going tough. Stay alert. The evil one is on the prowl.

So, when a crisis hits your life, yes, I understand, my heart is broken. My loved one just died. We had two examples of that this morning. I will always miss them, but I refuse – I choose to refuse – to allow Satan to use this tragedy in my life in order to take me down as well. No sir. God gave me freewill and I will choose my response. My loved one is in heaven with God. I am thankful to him for it, and I will live my life to its absolute fullest to show the devil that he's not going to get a two-fer. Not with me.

Frankl found that we have the freedom to choose our response, our attitude, no matter the circumstances. He discovered that in a concentration camp. You think the things we are facing are tough?

So, I don't mean to offend anyone, but the truth is the phrase, "I can't help it!" is a lie! Satan's getting you to say that. "I can't help it, it's just how it is..." No. You have the power to choose. Your response. Your attitude. Regardless of the circumstances. I mean, have you ever met someone who is just miserable all the time? I know you have. They're like Eeyore, in the little Winnie the Pooh story. "Nothing's going right." It doesn't matter what you say to them! "Gosh, that's a nice new car you have there." "Oh, you should see the insurance bill now." "You know, it's supposed to be a beautiful day today." "Well, it's going to rain tomorrow." I know you know people like that. There are people HERE like that! I've met them over the past twelve years. I'm not naming any names, but if you think I'm talking about you, I probably am. And I'm not going to look at anybody either!

No matter the predicament we find ourselves in, our response, our attitude is really our choice. We can take lemons and make lemonade, or we can let the evil one have his way with us, use the situation that we're in and take us down as well, steal our joy.

Once upon a time, the Söderbergs went on vacation. Now, we had a Rockwood Popup trailer years ago, pulled it with our minivan (Frank). We were going to Florida. It was used, but it was functional. We were going to Florida and we got about halfway down and my popup trailer blew a tire. I said, "okay," so I got out and changed the tire – went to an AutoZone or

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<sup>3</sup> 1 Peter 5:8

whatever and bought a spare, just to make sure we had a spare. So we go maybe two-thirds of the way down – and we’re only three hours away. Where am I going? Disney! So, we’re about three hours away from Orlando, and I look in my rearview mirror, and the camper goes BOOM! Ah I’ve got another flat tire! But praise God, I have a spare! So, I pull over to the side of the road, get out the jack, and I’m jacking that sucker up. And the camper’s going up, and the tire’s still on the ground. This ain’t right. I didn’t just have a flat tire. My leaf spring, that holds up my axle, was snapped. I don’t have one of those. Didn’t think to buy one when I was at AutoZone!

So, we stick the kids with our friends, because we were just a few hours away, said, “You take the kids, you go on, and we’ll catch up.” We called PepBoys. They told me they had leaf springs. Great! So we get towed to the PepBoys, they come to tell us that they don’t have leaf springs. They have leaf spring helpers, to make good leaf springs stronger, but they don’t have leaf springs themselves. So, we had to wait until the next day. We had to get a motel room for the night and just as an aside, I didn’t bring my clothes in with me – we were just staying overnight, sleep get up the next morning – Next morning there’s a woman sitting in the lobby having breakfast and she says, “I just want to tell you how much I like your tee-shirt!” Because it was the same one I had on yesterday. I was so embarrassed!

But anyway, we go, we get our leaf spring, we’re back on the road, we’re going! So, we’re pulling over a bridge – I don’t know what the name of the bridge was, but it was really long, over a river – and all of a sudden I hear POP! And I look in my rearview mirror, and the tire of my popup trailer goes bounce, bounce, over the bridge and into the river. You see, when they wheeled the trailer into the garage to change the leaf spring, they just hand-tightened the lug nuts. Nobody thought to check it. So, I’ve been driving all this time, and the tire’s going back and forth...

That one [Renee] is gone – crying, screaming, whatever. This guy, I swear to God, I swear to God, I am laughing. “What are you laughing at?!” Come on, if this was a sitcom, that’s funny! That’s funny, I watched my tire go boom, boom, over the edge into the river! Luckily I had a spare, and we eventually got there. But the point was, I got to choose my reaction. It was funny!

Now, I don’t want to give anyone the impression that I have this licked, because I do not. Please don’t ever think that because I stand here and you sit there that I’ve got it all figured out, because that is so not true. Look, in May, I’m going to finish ten years of school, three degrees. I still haven’t figured it out! Anybody who stands in front of – whether it’s on TV, on the radio, on a podcast, or right there – and gives you the impression that they have the answers and they have it figured out is lying. It is the height of arrogance for me to stand there and say, “You know what you gotta do?” I’m figuring it out just like you guys, okay? I need to hear these things that I preach just as much as you guys. What I like to think of myself as is like a hunting guide. We’re all on a hunting trip. We’re searching for the truth, okay? Now, yes, I have some training where I can spot animal tracks, or I can tell where they might have went. You know, I have a little bit more education towards what path we might want to take. But I have just as much chance of stepping in a bear trap or getting eaten by a mountain lion or a grizzly bear as anybody else. I’m figuring it out, just like you guys.

That time, I got it right. But I’m still trying hard not to be negative, not to be cynical, always expecting the worst to come. I have to remember, God gave me freewill and I can choose my response! So, when we find ourselves in a tough situation, in bad circumstances; when adversity comes knocking at your door – and it will, I guarantee it – I just pray that we will find what Victor Frankl found. We have freewill, the ability to choose. And as Moses said to his folks in the wilderness, I say to you in this promised land we call America: “Oh, that you would choose to be God’s people; that you would choose life and not death; that you would choose blessings and not curses; that you would choose victory and not defeat. It’s up to you to choose.” So, choose. Would you stand and pray with me?