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TIME TO WALK THE TALK!

Today's text: Numbers Chapters 10-12; James 1: 19-23

Extracts:

1. “**And Moses said unto Hobab, the son of Raguel the Midianite, Moses’ father-in-law, We are journeying unto the place of which the Lord said, I will give it to you: come thou with us, and we will do thee good: for the Lord hath spoken good concerning Israel. And he said unto him, I will not go; but I will depart to mine own land, and to my kindred**” [Num. 10: 29-30]
2. “**But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves**” [James 1:22]

Osama bin Laden is reportedly the leader of the Al-Qaeda Islamic movement that masterminded the attacks on the United States on 11 September 2001. Osama teaches his followers that they will go straight to heaven when they die during their suicidal missions against their perceived enemies. Therefore, when some of his young followers hijacked and crashed American planes into the World Trade Center twin towers in New York and the Pentagon in Washington, D.C., Osama bin Ladin was the first person to hail them as martyrs. One would expect that a man like that would lead by example and offer himself to die when the slightest opportunity came. But what happened when American bombs started to land around his hideout in Afghanistan? Osama bin Ladin ran way! To date, his whereabouts remain unknown. Why did he not walk his talk?

The church does not lack faith preachers. They know the best-practice case studies on faith in the Bible. But, when it is their turn to walk their talk, it is something else. It is like the story of a famous African gynaecologist who divorced his wife because she could not give him a son! Why do believers preach faith and walk by sight [2 Cor. 5:7]? Why do we find it so hard to practise what we preach?

*In today's lesson, we shall study **Numbers Chapters 10-12** to gain some insights into the matter and to find out how we can deal with the challenge. As we have seen in so many of the previous lessons, walking the faith-talk is the key to God's blessings [Deut. 28: 1-14] and to our salvation [James 2: 17-24].*

1. Background

We have followed the journey of the children of Israel since they left Egypt. They have miraculously crossed the Red Sea on foot [Ex. 14: 13-31]. When they were hungry, God fed them with heavenly food, *manna* [Ex. 16: 1-18]. When they were thirsty, He caused water to gush out of a rock [Ex. 17: 5-6]. He has given them the Ten Commandments, which cover every aspect of human conduct [Ex. 20: 1-17]. He has taught them ceremonial rituals to guide their worship of the true God [Ex. Chaps. 21-40; Lev. Chaps. 1-27]. As they depart from the foot of Mount Sinai, thirteen months since their departure from Egypt, God has taken pains to select the army [Num. Chaps. 1-2], the priests and the church workers (the Levites) [Num. Chaps. 3-6 & 8]. Finally, he has prepared the whole nation on how to support the church workers [Num. Chaps. 7] and worship Him [Num. Chap. 9]. By now, they can no longer claim not to have heard the word of God, for “faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” [Rom. 10: 17].

Today’s believers are even in a better position. In those days, scripture had not been published into a book, as we have the Bible today. Even though God’s presence was demonstrated to them in the cloud, and by “the thunderings and the lightnings, and the noise of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking” [Ex. 20: 18], it was through Moses that He spoke to them. Today, we have the written word, the truth of God [Jn 17:17], the word, which is a lamp to our feet and a light to our paths [Ps. 119:105]. Above all, we have the Holy Spirit, the “Spirit of truth” [Jn 16:13] to guide us all the time because Jesus Christ lives in us [Jn 14:23; 2 Cor. 13:5].

Our Promised Land is both general [such as God’s promises to those who love and serve Him] and specific [such as when God ministers a specific promise to individuals]. Right now, God has promised you a husband or wife or child, a new job or home or business. He has assured you of healing even when the doctors have given up hope. There may be political and economic uncertainties and a high crime rate around you, but God has assured you that all shall be well. We are not talking of a mere presumption. He has spoken very clearly to you- through prophets, in your dreams or visions, or through revelation knowledge by quickening your spirit when you were reading a passage in the Bible, or when you were thinking of something else. When God speaks to you, you will know!

Like the children of Israel, the time has come to move in the direction of that Promised Land for, “faith without works [acting on it] is dead” [Jam. 2:26]. Moses’ brother-in-law, Hobah, has refused to go along with the children of Israel to the Promised Land. Remember that Moses was married to an Ethiopian woman [Num. 12:1]. However, by marriage, she had become grafted into the nation of Israel. In like manner, we are the brides of Jesus [Eph. 5: 30-32]! Therefore, in spirit, we are like Hobah making that critical decision to move forward by faith or go back by sight.

2. The temptations

In Eddie Murphy's hilarious movie, *Coming to America* (1988), the young African prince had returned from New York, disappointed that his father had not allowed him to marry the woman that he loved. However, on the wedding day, and to his surprise, the bride chosen for him turned out to be his love. Before they could be pronounced husband and wife, the prince was already in a passionate kiss with his bride-to-be. His father's aide-de-camp came close to him and whispered, "Your Majesty, we haven't reached that part yet!"

When God makes us a promise, we are usually anxious to get to "that part" sooner than later, but God has His own perfect timing, which He does not reveal to us. Between the Egypt of our past and the Promised Land of our future, there are going to be slips and temptations that we must face in the present. Always remember that Satan does not want you to have the Promised Land. Just as he did to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, he will strive to also deprive you of God's promise. He does it through his knowledge of our love of the world, for "all that is in the world, *the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life*, is not of the Father, but is of the world" [1 Jn 2: 16], of which Satan is the prince [Jn 12:31]. Let us see the temptations that the children of Israel faced.

a) *Sensual lusts*

Since the children of Israel left Egypt, God had sustained them on *manna* from heaven. Now, they had become tired of it and "fell a lusting" and complaining, saying,

Who shall give us flesh to eat? We remember the fish, which we did eat in Egypt freely; the cucumbers and the melons and the leeks and the onions and the garlick: but now our soul is dried away: there is nothing at all, beside this manna, before our eyes [Num. 11: 4-6]

Speaking to the leaders of the Jews some 1,500 years later, Jesus told them, "Moses gave you not that bread from heaven (i.e., *manna*) but My Father giveth you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is He which cometh down from heaven, and giveth life unto the world... *I am the bread of life: he that cometh to Me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on Me shall never thirst*" [Jn 6:32-33,35]. From that, we know that the *manna*, which was to sustain the children of Israel in the wilderness for 40 years, was a figure of Jesus Christ. The people preferred the inferior and earthly foods of their past that they worked for to the life-sustaining heavenly food they now freely received from God.

That is the temptation that also confronts us. God says that that person in a coma will recover. The next morning, the medical experts tell you that there is no hope. They even want your head examined for not seeing the

obvious! You have been divorced for ten years. Your partner does not even want to hear anything about you. Yet, each time you kneel down, you get God's assurance that you and your spouse will soon be reconciled. That is what you have been told these past 10 years! You are unemployed and your landlady has just sent you an eviction (quit) notice. Yet, God says this is going to be your year of blessing! The good news is that God's way is superior to everything else that you may want to try!

Following a siege by the Syrian army, there was famine in Israel, to the extent that mothers were feeding on their children [2 Kgs 6: 25-29]. Through Prophet Elisha, God assured the people thus, "Tomorrow, *about this time* shall a measure of fine flour be sold for a shekel and two measures of barley for a shekel in the gate of Samaria" [2 Kgs 7: 1]. The king's bodyguard who heard the prophecy was so skeptical that he asked sarcastically, "behold if the Lord would make windows in heaven, might this thing be?" In response, the man of God assured him that it would happen but that the king's bodyguard would not live to benefit [v. 2].

Four lepers at the gate of Samaria found themselves being starved to death. They considered their options: remain there or walk into the enemy (Syrian) camp. In both cases, death awaited them. So, they chose to die in the Syrian camp where they were sure there would be food and supplies. As their eight weak legs came in contact with the dry grass in the mountainous region, God caused the Syrians to "hear a noise" of chariots, horses, "even of a great host." Fearing that the king of Israel had hired Hittite and Egyptian troops against them, they fled, leaving food and supplies behind! The lepers ate, and went back to Samaria to tell the good news. The people of Israel rushed in to cart away so much that prices dropped drastically because there were now more sellers than buyers! As the king's bodyguard tried to control the crowds, he was crushed to death. In every way, God's word came to pass [2 Kgs 7: 3-20].

The road that God will require us to take does not make sense to our senses. For example, why should I be required to take an unpaved lane when there is a ten-lane freeway (expressway) to the same place? Why should I be asked to wait for an ex-husband who has since remarried and does not care about my children or me? Why should I marry that girl or that boy that I do not love at all instead of the other one that I cannot do without? Why should I apologise when I was the one wronged? Why should I pray for my ex-boss who denied me my due promotion? In each of these cases, Satan will play on our sensual lusts to tempt us to choose the obvious! He will come in the form of "wise counsel" from trusted friends and loved ones or experts: "a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush;" "don't count your chickens until they are hatched;" "once bitten, twice shy." Such "good advice" can flow endlessly! But God cannot lie. He delivers on His promises [Num. 23:19].

b) *The pride of life*

Miriam and Aaron were respectively the younger sister and elder brother of Moses [Num. 26: 59]. God made Aaron the priest and Miriam was a prophetess [Ex. 15:20]. Therefore, both of them were well placed in the church of the wilderness. Apparently, both of them had advised Moses against marrying an Ethiopian woman [Num. 12:1].

Ethiopia is first mentioned in Gen. 2:13 as an integral part of the Garden of Eden, encompassed by the Gihon river (modern River Nile). Ethiopia was the home of the descendants of Ham, one of the three sons of Noah [Gen. 10:6-7]. Moses' father-in-law, Reuel or Raguel (also called Jethro) was a priest of Midian, which was close to Egypt [Ex. 2:16; 18:1-2]. Ethiopians were people of colour, as can be deduced from Jeremiah's rhetorical question, "can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard his spots?" [Jer. 13:23]. So, Zipporah, Moses' wife was a woman of colour whereas the children of Israel were descendants of Abram by Shem, also one of Noah's three sons [Gen. 11:10-26].

Aaron and his sister envied their brother's superior spiritual prominence over them. Using their positions as priest and prophetess, respectively, they might have advised their brother to drop his "alien" wife, which Moses might have turned down. Their open complaint suggests that line of reasoning, "hath the Lord indeed spoken *only by Moses? Hath He not spoken also by us?*" [Num. 12:1-2]. This is an example of pride. When we refuse to acknowledge other people's strengths for fear that they could overshadow us, we are being tempted with pride.

In the process of reaching the Promised Land, many of us have missed the road just because our pride has not allowed us to hear the word of God. We look down on God's messages through others because we cannot accept why He should send others to us when He could jolly well have spoken to us directly. Zedekiah, the head of the 400 prophets who had assured King Ahab of victory should he go to war against Syria, slapped the young prophet, Micaiah, for daring to give a contrary message. With pride, the older prophet asked the younger one, "Which way went the Spirit of the Lord from me to speak unto thee?" In the end, the young prophet turned out to be right [1 Kgs 22:1-24].

3. How to successfully walk the talk

As we have seen in Chapters 11 and 12 of Numbers, any walk that deviates from the talk attracts severe punishment because, in the sight of God, disobedience means that we do not trust Him. He regards disobedience as rebellion, which is "as the sin of witchcraft", and stubbornness, which is "as iniquity and idolatry" [1 Sam. 15: 23]. He gave

the people food and beef in place of *manna* and they were struck with an epidemic, which killed a great number of them [Num. 11: 31-35]. Miriam was struck with leprosy and she was put out of the camp for seven days [Num. 12: 4-15]. Without faith, it is *impossible* to please God [Heb. 11:6]. So, how can we successfully walk the talk? Here are my suggestions:

a) *Ask for the Holy Spirit*

When Moses complained about his workload, following the people's constant complaints, God asked him to choose 70 elders and bring them before the tabernacle of the congregation. God took part of the Spirit on Moses and put it on the 70 elders and "it came to pass that, when the Spirit rested upon them, they *prophesied, and did not cease*" [Num. 11: 14-25].

When the Holy Spirit leads us, we can see what those around us cannot see. Elisha was surrounded by Syrian troops who had come to kill him. When his servant saw them, he cried, "master, what shall we do?" The prophet told him not to worry because "they that be with us are more than they that be with them." He prayed for God to open his servant's eyes. When his spiritual eyes were opened, the servant saw God's troops encircling the human troops! [2 Kgs 6: 13-17]. That is why Jesus has assured us that His Father will give us the Holy Spirit if we ask Him [Lk 11: 13].

b) *Testify before it happens!*

Most of us are scared to tell people in advance what God has assured us for various reasons. The main reason, of course, is that we still have some doubts! If you are not sure of what you are waiting for, anybody can push you around. It is no wonder that we no longer hear many life-changing testimonies these days!

Moses promised a good piece of the Promised Land to his brother-in-law even when he himself had not seen it [Num. 10:29]! Jesus challenged the Jewish leaders, "search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life; *and they are they which testify of Me*" [Jn 5:39]. The scripture He is referring to here is the Old Testament, which foretold the coming of Jesus, His earthly ministry and His death and resurrection. In the gospels, Jesus Himself told of what was going to happen to Him and His Second Coming to judge the world. So, when what He had said happened, His disciples became *witnesses* [Acts 2: 1-41].

True faith lies in walking the talk. If you cannot do that, stop talking!