

Balaam – Lessons Learned – Nu 22-24

We're looking at Balaam this weekend, as part of our ongoing series to learn the lessons of those who have gone before us, in order to live the life to which God has called us
And based on the blank stares I received from many of you last week, when I mentioned Balaam's name at the end of the service . . .

I'm going to try to be extra clear about **HIS LIFE**

So why don't you turn with me to Nu 22 and get your pen ready as I give you an overview

You might be surprised to hear, that Balaam, like Elijah last week, is mentioned throughout the Bible . . .

Including Deut, Joshua, Neh, Micah, 2 Peter, Jude, and Rev – 8 books in all

And for our purposes, I've chosen to break his life down into 3 parts – The Person; The Setting; and The Situation

So starting with **The Person**, Balaam was a . . .

• Pagan prophet

He was from Mesopotamia, 400 miles to the east of Israel, and though he sought God in this instance, he wasn't a faithful follower

He's another classic example in the Bible, that God can and does use all kinds of people to accomplish his will

In addition to that, he was a pagan prophet . . .

- **For hire** – for the right price he was available to speak blessings/curses on your behalf
You might say that he was an opportunist in that respect, playing both sides of the fence depending on who was paying, or where his allegiances were
And Israel certainly wasn't at the top of his list

That's the person of Balaam

Next is **The Setting**

The year was 1407 BC, just before the Israelites entered the Promised Land . . .

And they were camped just east of the Jordan river (**map**), across from Jericho

All well and good, except that their next door neighbors, the Moabites, were threatened by them

- (**Moabites threatened**) – the Israelites were enemies to them, vast in number, and they were too close for comfort

In fact, Balak, their king, was downright scared

- (**Balak scared**)

So he sends for Balaam, this “hired gun” prophet he knows about . . .

- (**Balaam called**) – to speak curses on the Israelites, and so bring them to ruin, or at least render them harmless

And at first, Balaam refuses to go b/c God tells him to say no

But on Balak's second try, God tells Balaam to go ahead and go, on the condition that he *not* curse the Israelites

That's the setting – the Moabites were threatened, Balak was scared, & Balaam was called

So **The Situation** unfolds with Balaam setting out on his journey; But on the way, his . . .

• Donkey balks

On 3 occasions, he just stops or leaves the road

And all 3 times Balaam beats him b/c he's clueless as to the cause

Until the donkey starts talking to him, and God opens his eyes – all of which we'll look at in a minute

But eventually they move on, and arrive in Moab

However, instead of cursing the Israelites like Balak wants, he blesses them

• (**Balaam blesses**)

3 times Balak takes him up to 3 different mountains (**map**), to see the Israelites

And despite Balak's best efforts, 3 times Balaam speaks a blessing instead of a curse

Which earns Balaam the boot, as you might imagine . . .

But not before he speaks a 4th blessing and prophecy, indicating Israel's eventual domination and destruction of the surrounding nations

That's the person, and the setting, and the situation for Balaam – written down for our instruction, that we might learn the lessons and live the life

The first of which is . . . (**OUR LESSONS**)

LESSON 1 – Pay attention to the obstacles in your life (22:22-35)

Right after Balaam left to go to Moab, per God's instructions, the very next verse says in (22:22) – *But God's anger was kindled because he went, and the angel of the Lord took his stand in the way as his adversary.*

Apparently, though Balaam obeyed God, his heart wasn't right in doing so

In fact, that's exactly what Peter implies in **2 Pet 2:15-16**

Re false prophets and teachers, he says – *Forsaking the right way, they have gone astray. They have followed the way of Balaam, the son of Beor, who loved gain from wrongdoing, but was rebuked for his own transgression; a speechless donkey spoke with human voice and restrained the prophet's madness. ******

Though Balaam obeyed, his heart wasn't in it – there's a lesson

And it takes a talking donkey to set him straight – look at verse 23

27 – When your heart's not right, neither are your eyes (v28, through 35)

You probably won't see an angel in your lifetime

Or if you do, you'll probably be unaware like Heb 13:2 says

But you *will* encounter donkey after donkey, obstacle after obstacle

And when you do, you'd do well to pay attention, b/c it may very well be the Lord on the other side, like it was for Balaam

- I think we far too often attribute obstacles in our lives to Satan and his devices . . .
And far too seldom attribute them to God

We get some goal in our mind and plow ahead like a bull in a china closet, no matter what

Thinking that anything that gets in our way couldn't possibly be from God

And we end up dismissing the obstacles as *bad*, instead of good

From *Satan*, instead of God

It might even be a path that God has clearly put you on, confirmed every way possible

Maybe to buy a house, or purchase a business, or start a ministry, or whatever . . .

And you may even be well down that path

But that doesn't mean God's done with you

He may very well re-direct your path around the next bend, or after the next step

And do so with an obstacle

- Who knows whether he started you on one path, only to get you to a place where he could put you on *another*?
Who knows whether he set you in one direction, for the sole purpose of *preparing* you for another?
Who knows whether he puts obstacles in your way just to teach you to lean on him more, and yourself less?
It's obvious from Balaam's example that God does that

So instead of dismissing those obstacles, or plowing ahead regardless . . .

You might pay attention to your "donkeys", to discern whether it might be God *himself* on the other side

Now, that's not to say that every obstacle is from God, or that it indicates a change of direction for your life . . .

But I *am* saying that it *could* be; It could be God's way of getting your attention

In fact, that's how I got into *ministry*

- I was trading Treasury Bonds in the late 90's and things were going well, when early in 1999 some of our positions began to move against us
And as the losses began to mount and mount – God had my attention in massive way
I had never been so sensitive to his leading in my entire *life* up to that point

And that's when the compulsion to go into ministry, which had been building for years, was so strong . . .

That I got down on my knees for the first time in my life, and prayed – "God, I'll do anything you want me to do, just show me what it is"

And within a week and a half, I knew beyond a shadow of a doubt it was full time, vocational ministry

And though we eventually recovered from those losses as the months went by, my new course was set – I could do no other; p/l didn't matter any more
But had I not paid attention to that obstacle in the first place . . .
Or dismissed it like all the other losses we ever incurred . . .
I wouldn't be standing here today

- Pay attention to the obstacles in your life
They may be God's way of getting *your* attention
Or they may be God's way of refining you; Or preparing you for something yet future . .
Or re-directing your path completely, like it was for me

LESSON 2 – Be careful to do no more and no less than what God wants (22:18; 23:26; 24:12-13)

We often think about disobedience in terms of doing *less* than what God wants
But we can also be disobedient in doing *more* than what he wants

It's a recurring theme in this account of Balaam

The first instance of which is found in 22:18

Balak's people have come a second time with a sweetened offer of honor for Balaam, if he'll only curse the Israelites

And it says in v18 – *But Balaam answered and said to the servants of Balak, "Though Balak were to give me his house full of silver and gold, I could not go beyond the command of the Lord my God to do less or more."*

And then again in 23:25-26, where Balak, exasperated with Balaam's *blessing* of the Israelites instead of cursing, throws up his proverbial hands and says . . .

"Do not curse them at all, and do not bless them at all."

He's like – fine! If you're not going to curse them for crying out loud, then at the very least, don't *bless* them

26 – *But Balaam answered Balak, "Did I not tell you, 'All that the Lord says, that I must do'?"*

No more *and* no less

And then a third time in ch24, after Balaam's 3rd blessing, it says in v10 . . . (read 10-13)

11b – by the way, better to have honor withheld by God for the *right* reasons, than lavished by man for the wrong ones (read v12-13)

Didn't I tell you I wouldn't go beyond what God wants, no matter *what* you offered?

Didn't I tell you it was *God's* will I would do, and not my own – no more and no less?

Be careful, like Balaam, to do no more and no less than what God wants

No more – no matter how much money is in it; Or prestige; Or influence

And no less – no matter how hard, or what the cost

- How many times have you run head-long into a job, solely for the money you could make? Or how many people do you know who have done that?
That's the Great American way, right?
If you can make more money, it must be God's will

While the idea of pursuing a business opp b/c you could improve the services offered, or increase the company's productivity, or make a better product – is lost on us

Not to mention considerations like the good of your family . . .

Or the value of being a part of a thriving church, where you're growing and making an impact for the kingdom of God

Far too many make poor decisions in that regard

Intent on gaining the whole world, while at risk of losing their own soul

Be careful of that

That doesn't mean making more money is wrong

It simply means that it should be a secondary consideration

Do what *God* wants – no more and no less

Be obedient to *his* word, *this* Word, and you'll be happy/blessed as the old hymn says
Otherwise you act at your own peril, like Balaam did when he first set out for Moab

- I've read this passage numerous times in my life, but it was only recently that these lessons jumped off the page at me – especially this one

I think that's b/c of the ministry decisions we're facing, and the opp's in front of us these next few years as a church

Like hiring new staff; And which ministries require more investment
And when to begin phase 2 of our build-out
We've never really stopped talking and praying about that as elders . . .
But recently the discussions are getting more and more frequent, as we look ahead and consider the state of some of our ministries as they relate to our facilities

In fact, I told the elders a few weeks back that I think we're approaching a significant faith-stretching time in our church, given all these decisions
And I want to make sure we're careful to do no less, and no more, than what God wants
And so should you

LESSON 3 – Take care to speak only what the Lord puts in your mouth (22:38; 23:12)

In 22:37 – Balaam has just arrived in Moab, and Balak says to Balaam – “*Did I not send to you to call you? Why did you not come to me? Am I not able to honor you?*” Balaam said to Balak, “*Behold, I have come to you! Have I now any power of my own to speak anything? The word that God puts in my mouth, that must I speak.*”
Would that we would learn that lesson and live accordingly, huh?

To accept the fact that we are powerless to speak anything of any value apart from God
And, that when he does give us a thought, we need to speak it

That's what Balaam did
23:5 says – *the Lord put a word in Balaam's mouth*
And in v7 *he took up his discourse*; he started talking

But instead of cursing the Israelites, he blessed them
Saying in v8 – *How can I curse whom God has not cursed? How can I denounce whom the Lord has not denounced?*
And in v11 – *Balak said to Balaam, “What have you done to me? I took you to curse my enemies, and behold, you have done nothing but bless them.” And he answered and said, “Must I not take care to speak what the Lord puts in my mouth?”*

- That's lesson #3 – take care to speak only what the Lord puts in your mouth
If you're not compelled, don't say it
If it's not in line with Scripture, don't speak it
If you have no thoughts, don't manufacture them
Speak only what the *Lord* puts in your mouth

But if you *do* have something to say – speak up
Withholding it does *nobody* any good
Especially if they're words of encouragement and blessing like Balaam's

- Speak up, and do so *despite* the consequences – Balaam did
Having no power of his own, let alone the strength to defend himself in a foreign country, he spoke anyway and let the chips fall where they may

The backlash didn't sway him

The guilt-trip Balak tired to lay on him, didn't sway him
The threat of reprisal didn't sway him; The “honorarium” didn't sway him
He spoke only what the *Lord* put in his mouth – no more and no less; popular or not
And we should too

- That sure would save us a lot of grief, wouldn't it?
But it could also *cause* us more grief as well, like it did for Balaam
And who wants that unless God is totally in it and behind it? I don't

If I'm going to suffer for what I say, or incur backlash, or strife – I want to make sure it's true, and that it's from the Lord, and that the timing is right
Otherwise, I'm not saying it – and neither should you

Take care to speak only what the *Lord* puts in your mouth
Be careful to do no more and no less than what God wants
And pay attention to the obstacles in your life – you never know who's behind them

