

Date : 16 July 2023

Theme : Understanding the journey of faith

Topic : Balaam's self-deception

Passage : Numbers 22-25

Key Verse : *Balaam said to the angel of the LORD, "I have sinned. I did not realize you were standing in the road to oppose me. Now if you are displeased, I will go back."*
Numbers 22:34

Introduction

Who is Balaam? It's hard figuring out this man; is he with God or is he not? He is a man following God. He even sounded pious at times. But on one occasion, even his donkey seems more discerning. So, is this donkey-riding prophet genuine? What can we learn from this prophet with a talking donkey?

Peter referred to Balaam as one who "loved the wages of wickedness" (2 Peter 2:15).

What can we learn to avoid loving the wages of wickedness?

1. What is the wickedness portrait by Balaam?

They have left the straight way and wandered off to follow the way of Balaam son of Beor, who loved the wages of wickedness. (2 Peter 2:15)

a) Following the way of Balaam is to love the wages of wickedness and that is greed.

- The way of Balaam is GREED
 - Greed is to turn your back on the way of God for the sake of monetary gain. Examples of this in our life will include: If you pour out all your time and energy to making money and climbing the ladder of success at the expense of not devoting any time at all for your God given responsibilities, like:
 - (a) to be the spiritual head of your family; or
 - (b) leaving no time to lead a cell group because of your job, or
 - (c) skipping church weekly for that overtime job, and
 - (d) leaving no time at all to please Jesus.
 - Balaam is a man who professed obedience to the Lord, but has sold himself to greed.
 - In **Numbers 22**, Balak, king of Moab offered him a fee for cursing Israel. God protected His people and God said: "***Do not go with them. You must not put a curse on those people, because they are blessed.***" (vs12). And so, Balaam sounded spiritual and said: "***I can't go. God has forbidden me to go. I won't go. You can return to your master and tell him.***" (vs 13).
 - Then Balak re-sent a top-level delegation with the message: "***I will reward you handsomely.***" (vs15).
 - Balaam wanted the best of both worlds, namely God's approval as well as Balak's handsome reward. This is the bait of Satan. Satan pays very little compared to the price we must pay in the end.
 - When Balaam keeps asking God to allow him to go, it seemed like God has given him permission. This is to get him to see what kind of man he really is.

- The point to note is:
 - Don't keep asking God for something He has already spelt out in His word. Balaam's hypocrisy of appearing to obey God was just a form of righteousness but he didn't mean it at all.

b) When greed becomes an idol, even a donkey cannot teach him

“But 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.” 2 Peter 2:16

- God used a donkey to rebuke Balaam
 - but it was also to provide him with an opportunity to turn around from his ‘madness’.
- Balaam was rebuked for his stubborn greed – through a talking donkey
- But with his mind on the coveted reward, he was blinded to the way of God (***Numbers 22:21-23***).
- Finally, the Lord opened Balaam’s eyes to see the angel of the Lord with sword drawn. He admitted wrongdoing (***vs 34-35***) and was willing to turn back, but the angel of the LORD said, ***“Go with the men, but speak only what I tell you.”***. So, the Lord was giving him another opportunity to change his heart. But did he?

c) God shielded the Israelites from Balaam’s evil scheme

- God was patient with Balaam
 - Balaam submitted to Balak’s 3 attempts to change God’s word, by viewing the Israelite camp from different mountaintop vantage points.
 - But on each occasion, God made Balaam bless instead of curse the Israelites.
 - Sure, Balaam uttered a blessing instead of a curse, but only because God gave him no option. What would be the point in Balaam pronouncing a curse, if God was going to give a blessing? Balaam would look stupid and his reputation would be damaged.

❖ What lessons can we learn from this?

- Keep out of “the way of Balaam”
 - We should know what God wants. He has stated through His word. Don’t even ask God for permission to seek the rewards the world offers because the hidden cost will be too heavy. Balaam eventually paid the price of premature death.

2. The error of Balaam is in his compromise

“Woe to them! They have taken the way of Cain; they have rushed for profit into Balaam’s error; they have been destroyed in Korah’s rebellion.” Jude 1:11

a) Balaam’s error is to COMPROMISE his morality so as to appease a pagan king.

- What is compromise? In what way did he compromise?

- Compromise is to dilute God's clear commandments with changing the approach to make allowance for immorality, finding some way to justify your actions.
- Balaam's life is one of compromise
- A true prophet is not motivated by wealth and riches, but Balaam was. He willingly rushed into this error: "***Balaam got up in the morning, saddled his donkey and went with the Moabite officials.***" (***Numbers 22:21***).
- He appeared to be devoted to God, but when confronted by God, he admitted he had been sinning (***Numbers 22:34-35***).
- He could not curse the Israelites because God did not permit him (not because of his obedience). However he later taught the Moabites how to seduce Israel (***Numbers 31:16***), and caused the Israelites to stumble (***Numbers 25***) and commit an abomination unto the Lord (***Revelation 2:14***).
- Although he expressed a desire to die the "death of the righteous" (***Numbers 23:10***) he ended up dying the death of the wicked, for he ended up getting killed along with the Medianites (***Numbers 31:8***).

b) The Bible clearly instructs us not to compromise God's standards.

- Be warned against the temptation to compromise on godly values with worldly values. Keep God's commandments.
"If you love me, keep my commands." ***John 14:15***

As we go through this world, there will be many situations to succumb to the "***fleeting pleasures of sin***" (***Hebrews 11:25***), "***the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life***" (***1 John 2:16***).

- How do we keep ourselves from sinning?
 - Live by the word of God (***Psalms 119:9***). Put God's word in our heart to live by it.
 - Usually, the temptation to compromise is heightened by some type of fear (fear of being rejected or criticized). Do not succumb to these for to be in the delight of God is better than to be in the delight of men.
 - Be careful of situations where your integrity might be compromised
 - anticipate compromising situations, eg bosses may ask you to use deception to make a sale, and be prepared to stand firm to moral values.
 - Be watchful
 - on the kind of words we allow to come out of our mouths.
 - on what movies and shows we watch, the books we read.
 - resolve never to lie (or even telling white lies) to get out of a tight situation.

Application

1. Can you identify a situation where you struggle with the attraction of great rewards with you having to violate some biblical principles?

2. Based on the lesson learnt today, what steps will you take to prevent getting into the slippery road of compromise (eg overstating your product performance; 'cutting corners' to maximise profits; cheating on employer's time) in your work situation?