

Messages from the Wilderness 13 - Only You Can Ruin Your Testimony

1. A reputation is yours to lose.

Many times you might see a chapter, a piece of a chapter, or even just a verse or two given to describe an event in Biblical history. When an event is given more space, you are wise to wonder about all that is going on in the Bible passage. We are looking in Numbers at the account of Balaam's blessing for Israel which takes *three* chapters to lay out. There is a very straightforward message about God's protection for Israel, but there is often, if not always, a deeper significance to the miracle than in the miraculous event itself. By giving three chapters to the miracle of Balaam's blessing, there is a lot of context that sets up the occasion of a very special message for us. We are going to read portions of Numbers 22-24 to get the picture God is setting up.

- Balak, king of Israel's cousins, the Moabites, is concerned about the approach of the Israelites.

Num 22:1-41 And the children of Israel set forward, and pitched in the plains of Moab on this side Jordan *by* Jericho.

2And Balak the son of Zippor saw all that Israel had done to the Amorites.

3And Moab was sore afraid of the people, because they *were* many: and Moab was distressed because of the children of Israel.

4And Moab said unto the elders of Midian, Now shall this company lick up all *that are* round about us, as the ox licketh up the grass of the field. And Balak the son of Zippor *was* king of the Moabites at that time.

- Balak calls on Balaam, a pagan prophet, to curse Israel.

As we go to read about Balaam, you should get the idea that, as superstition goes, pagans were aware of Jehovah God. It is really not that much different today where you have a lot of people who claim to believe in the God of the Bible but have many physical idols they hold to as well as devotion to statues and images.

Balak proceeded to call on Balaam to curse Israel.

5He sent messengers therefore unto Balaam the son of Beor to Pethor, which *is* by the river of the land of the children of his people, to call him, saying, Behold, there is a people come out from Egypt: behold, they cover the face of the earth, and they abide over against me:

6Come now therefore, I pray thee, curse me this people; for

they *are* too mighty for me: peradventure I shall prevail, *that* we may smite them, and *that* I may drive them out of the land: for I wot that he whom thou blessest *is* blessed, and he whom thou cursest is cursed.

7And the elders of Moab and the elders of Midian departed with the rewards of divination in their hand; and they came unto Balaam, and spake unto him the words of Balak.

8And he said unto them, Lodge here this night, and I will bring you word again, as the LORD shall speak unto me: and the princes of Moab abode with Balaam.

- Balaam prays to God and God responded:

12And God said unto Balaam, Thou shalt not go with them; thou shalt not curse the people: for they *are* blessed.

- Balaam lets the princes of Balak know that he does not have permission to go with them.

13And Balaam rose up in the morning, and said unto the princes of Balak, Get you into your land: for the LORD refuseth to give me leave to go with you.

- The princes tell Balak what Balaam said and the king puts the pressure on him.

This is only the first of xx times Balak is going to pressure Balaam. Balak really is going to be relentless. This time he is ready to promote Balaam if only he will curse Israel.

18And Balaam answered and said unto the servants of Balak, If Balak would give me his house full of silver and gold, I cannot go beyond the word of the LORD my God, to do less or more.

Balaam would seem to really be moved by the king's offer because he asks the princes to stay overnight so he can have a chance to ask God again.

19Now therefore, I pray you, tarry ye also here this night, that I may know what the LORD will say unto me more.

20And God came unto Balaam at night, and said unto him, If the men come to call thee, rise up, *and* go with them; but yet the word which I shall say unto thee, that shalt thou do.

God is really gracious towards these men. They want to know more from God so God put them to a little test. If they were to come back to Balaam again, then Balaam would be permitted to go with

them. However, he is still constrained by God in his message. Now you might miss what happens next. Remember that God told Balaam he could go with them but it was *only* if they press him to go with them. Balaam runs ahead of God and sets out to go with them without them pressing him.

21And Balaam rose up in the morning, and saddled his ass, and went with the princes of Moab.

22And God's anger was kindled because he went: and the angel of the LORD stood in the way for an adversary against him. Now he was riding upon his ass, and his two servants *were* with him.

- God constrains Balaam further.

As Balaam is riding along, God sends an angel in the way to kill Balaam if he proceeds without permission from God.

23And the ass saw the angel of the LORD standing in the way, and his sword drawn in his hand: and the ass turned aside out of the way, and went into the field: and Balaam smote the ass, to turn her into the way.

24But the angel of the LORD stood in a path of the vineyards, a wall *being* on this side, and a wall on that side.

25And when the ass saw the angel of the LORD, she thrust herself unto the wall, and crushed Balaam's foot against the wall: and he smote her again.

26And the angel of the LORD went further, and stood in a narrow place, where *was* no way to turn either to the right hand or to the left.

27And when the ass saw the angel of the LORD, she fell down under Balaam: and Balaam's anger was kindled, and he smote the ass with a staff.

Three times the ass tries to stop, going off the road, running into a wall, and then finally dropping down. Each time Balaam smites the ass until finally God gives the ass a voice:

28And the LORD opened the mouth of the ass, and she said unto Balaam, What have I done unto thee, that thou hast smitten me these three times?

29And Balaam said unto the ass, Because thou hast mocked me: I would there were a sword in mine hand, for now would I kill thee.

30And the ass said unto Balaam, *Am* not I thine ass, upon which thou hast ridden ever since *I was* thine unto this day? was I ever wont to do so unto thee? And he said, Nay.

31Then the LORD opened the eyes of Balaam, and he saw the angel of the LORD standing in the way, and his sword drawn in his hand: and he bowed down his head, and fell flat on his face.

The angel finally reveals himself to Balaam.

32And the angel of the LORD said unto him, Wherefore hast thou smitten thine ass these three times? behold, I went out to withstand thee, because *thy* way is perverse before me:

33And the ass saw me, and turned from me these three times: unless she had turned from me, surely now also I had slain thee, and saved her alive.

34And Balaam said unto the angel of the LORD, I have sinned; for I knew not that thou stoodest in the way against me: now therefore, if it displease thee, I will get me back again.

The angel permits Balaam to go after he reproved him for his perverse intentions that could have caused him to go along with cursing Israel.

35And the angel of the LORD said unto Balaam, Go with the men: but only the word that I shall speak unto thee, that thou shalt speak. So Balaam went with the princes of Balak.

When Balaam arrived before king Balak, Balak puts more pressure on him to do his bidding. Balaam lets the king know that he can only speak the word that God puts in his mouth. Perhaps after witnessing the word put in the ass's mouth, Balaam knows that God is a little particular about what word God puts in *his* mouth.

38And Balaam said unto Balak, Lo, I am come unto thee: have I now any power at all to say any thing? the word that God putteth in my mouth, that shall I speak.

Balak then offered sacrifices to try to secure the curse he wanted Balaam to make. People are funny that way. They often think that they can buy God off with the price *they* think God will be impressed with. The next day, Balaam called for seven altars with seven oxen and seven rams for the sacrifice. The push is on to get the curse for Israel.

Num 23:1-30

7And he took up his parable, and said, Balak the king of Moab hath brought me from Aram, out of the mountains of the east, *saying*, Come, curse me Jacob, and come, defy Israel.

8How shall I curse, whom God hath not cursed? or how shall I defy, *whom* the LORD hath not

defied?

9For from the top of the rocks I see him, and from the hills I behold him: lo, the people shall dwell alone, and shall not be reckoned among the nations.

10Who can count the dust of Jacob, and the number of the fourth *part* of Israel? Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his!

11And Balak said unto Balaam, What hast thou done unto me? I took thee to curse mine enemies, and, behold, thou hast blessed *them* altogether.

12And he answered and said, Must I not take heed to speak that which the LORD hath put in my mouth?

Balak thinks that maybe the power of God in Israel is a little too strong. Maybe if they move a little further away the power signal from Israel will be a little weaker.

13And Balak said unto him, Come, I pray thee, with me unto another place, from whence thou mayest see them: thou shalt see but the utmost part of them, and shalt not see them all: and curse me them from thence.

Balak built seven more altars but the message is the same.

18And he took up his parable, and said, Rise up, Balak, and hear; hearken unto me, thou son of Zippor:

19God *is* not a man, that he should lie; neither the son of man, that he should repent: hath he said, and shall he not do *it*? or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good?

20Behold, I have received *commandment* to bless: and he hath blessed; and I cannot reverse it.

Balak complains and says to Balaam if you can't curse them, the least you can do is not bless them. Balak makes a *third* attempt to get a curse from Balaam. He takes him even *further* away and makes seven *more* altars and offers sacrifices again.

Num 24:1-9 And when Balaam saw that it pleased the LORD to bless Israel, he went not, as at other times, to seek for enchantments, but he set his face toward the wilderness.

2And Balaam lifted up his eyes, and he saw Israel abiding *in his tents* according to their tribes; and the spirit of God came upon him.

3And he took up his parable, and said, Balaam the son of Beor hath

said, and the man whose eyes are open hath said:

4He hath said, which heard the words of God, which saw the vision of the Almighty, falling *into a trance*, but having his eyes open:

5How goodly are thy tents, O Jacob, *and* thy tabernacles, O Israel!

Balaam continued his blessing of Israel and then the next chapter ends with Balak's anger toward Balaam and Balaam revealing a curse against Moab.

Num 24:17 I shall see him, but not now: I shall behold him, but not nigh: there shall come a Star out of Jacob, and a Sceptre shall rise out of Israel, and shall smite the corners of Moab, and destroy all the children of Sheth.

This is a prophecy of the time when Jesus, the Star out of Jacob, holding His scepter, will rule over not only Moab, but as the rest of the verses reveal, over all the earth.

Wow! What a great testimony. No matter what pressures were put on Balaam, either by the ass, the sacrifices, the promises of riches, time after time after time trying to find a way to make the curse work, the message of God is still the same and ends with a Messianic prophecy.

However, if you stop reading at the end of those three chapters you will miss a very important lesson. Just read a little further into the next chapter and you will find that Balaam, *does* find a way to curse Israel. He is not allowed to *pronounce* a curse upon them, but there is something that he could do to get them to curse themselves.

Num 25:1-3 And Israel abode in Shittim, and the people began to commit whoredom with the daughters of Moab.

2And they called the people unto the sacrifices of their gods: and the people did eat, and bowed down to their gods.

3And Israel joined himself unto Baalpeor: and the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel.

You don't see Balaam's name mentioned here, but you find out that he was the inspiration for this temptation a few chapters later.

Num 31:16 Behold, these caused the children of Israel, through the counsel of Balaam, to commit trespass against the LORD in the matter of Peor, and there was a plague among the congregation of the LORD.

Balaam didn't get to curse the

Israelites, but he got them to bring a curse on themselves. How did Balaam get to the Israelites? He threw a party for them. They had a feast. He brought in the women, which in a pagan setting like that meant they were there for immoral purposes. You face the same kind of situation. The world cannot truly touch you and separate you from God.

Rom 8:38-39 For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come,
39Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

The world cannot truly touch you and separate you from God, but the devil can tempt you and *you* can do the job for them. Here, I want to assure you that you cannot lose your salvation, but you *can* give up your power and lose your testimony.

John 10:27-28 My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me:
28And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any *man* pluck them out of my hand.

You have a testimony in the world from God's Word that you are His forever, but you alone can bring damage to your testimony *before* the world. The world might defame you, they might libel you, but they cannot take away your reputation, only *you* can do that.

1Cor 9:26-27 I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air:
27But I keep under my body, and bring *it* into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway.

Paul's concern was that he should be set aside after having spent so much time serving God.

So much time was spent in those three chapters to set up the contrast for what was to follow. After so much was done to provide for the blessing of Israel, Israel trashed it. Oh, they were still to be blessed. So much of the time I am called upon to encourage people that they can get back up after they stumble and fall, but this time I want to admonish you: *Take measures not to stumble in the first place!*

So much time was spent to make sure that Balak got the message that Israel was blessed. Similarly, there is so much time spent in the Bible taken to speak of the blessedness we have in Christ.

Eph 1:3-4 Blessed *be* the God

and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly *places* in Christ:

4According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love:

There is no excuse for blowing our testimony. We need to have the desire that Paul had in 2 Tim 4:6-7.

2Tim 4:6-7 For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand.

7I have fought a good fight, I have finished *my* course, I have kept the faith:

2. Keep a holy conversation.

2Tim 2:19 Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his. And, Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity.

Col 1:10 That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God;

1Thess 2:12 That ye would walk worthy of God, who hath called you unto his kingdom and glory.

- Keep a good name.

Ecc 7:1 A good name *is* better than precious ointment; and the day of death than the day of one's birth.

Pro 22:1 A *good* name *is* rather to be chosen than great riches, *and* loving favour rather than silver and gold.

- Be careful how you live.

2Pet 3:11 *Seeing* then *that* all these things shall be dissolved, what manner *of persons* ought ye to be in *all* holy conversation and godliness,

1Thess 1:5 For our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance; as ye know what manner of men we were among you for your sake.

Jas 1:23-25 For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass:

24For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man

he was.

25But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth *therein*, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed.

- Be careful how you speak.

Jas 1:26 If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion *is* vain.

Matt 12:36-37 But I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment.

37For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned.

Col 4:5-6 Walk in wisdom toward them that are without, redeeming the time.

6Let your speech *be* alway with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man.

Toward them that are without means those who are not in the church, those who are not saved. Our speech should be seasoned with salt.

I don't like popcorn with no salt. I am not attracted to it. I do not find it flavorful. If Nancy or I make popcorn, we ask the question, "Good popcorn?" Is the salt right? People should find the Gospel tasty. But salt also is going to make you thirsty, too. Also, salt in water can be used for gargling and other healing uses. Our speech needs to be with salt, making men thirsty for the Gospel, attracted to the Gospel, and healed with the Gospel.

It is good to learn how to talk about Jesus. Someone might say, "I not very good at that." The question is, "Are you just trying to excuse yourself from the responsibility of witnessing, or are you confessing that you need to learn more?" I certainly hope that when someone says that that they are getting ready to study more.

Titus 2:1-8 But speak thou the things which become sound doctrine:

2That the aged men be sober, grave, temperate, sound in faith, in charity, in patience.

3The aged women likewise, that *they be* in behaviour as **becometh holiness**, not false accusers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things;

4That they may teach the young women to be sober, to love their husbands, to love their children,

5*To be* discreet, chaste, keepers at

home, good, obedient to their own husbands, **that the word of God be not blasphemed.**

6Young men likewise exhort to be sober minded.

7In all things shewing thyself a pattern of good works: in doctrine *shewing* uncorruptness, gravity, sincerity,

8Sound speech, that cannot be condemned; that he that is of the contrary part may be ashamed, having no evil thing to say of you.

- Be careful of your message.

1Pet 3:15-16 But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and *be* ready always to *give* an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear:

16Having a good conscience; that, whereas they speak evil of you, as of evildoers, they may be ashamed that falsely accuse your good conversation in Christ.

It is strange that in the world, someone who really loves a product or a service and talks about it a lot is referred to as an "evangelist," as in "he is an evangelist for Microsoft," or "he is an evangelist for Apple." You will actually see this as part of someone's job description. I really think this is a sacrilegious use of the word evangelist because the word evangelist is so ingrained in our culture as one who preaches the Gospel that any business use is taking holy and making it profane. What are you an evangelist for? It is hard to not look like you are identifying with a movement when you are trying to be a responsible citizen promoting policies that will influence the culture. However, our messaging should so clearly be the Gospel and Biblical that there should be no doubt what our life is all about. There are so many voices calling for us to follow some cause and it is hard to examine them all. Now this might not stop me from doing some analysis of some of the messaging we are confronted with, but we had better get back to *our* message pretty quickly.

1Cor 2:2-5 For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified.

3And I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling.

4And my speech and my preaching *was* not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power:

5That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God.

Gal 3:1 O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you, that ye should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ hath been evidently set forth, crucified among you?

Gal 6:14-15 But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world.

15For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature.

What is especially interesting in this passage in Galatians is Paul's message that ethnic identity is of no significance. What *is* important is the new birth in Christ.

Our message is that people are in rebellion against God, asking Him to accept what *they* think He should be satisfied with as a payment for their sin. Jesus Christ is the only sacrifice God accepted, but if you do not recognize that God is lovingly reaching out to you so you can escape the judgment to come, then you will have missed the blessing of eternity.