

Balaam: The Blind Side of Stubbornness

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I) Numbers 22-24

II) Introduction

- A) *In the film "Forrest Gump" the simple minded Forrest was with his bitter, disabled Vietnam veteran friend, Lieutenant Dan. Lieutenant Dan was watching a church choir sing on television and in a sarcastic tone Dan asked Forrest, "Gump, have you found Jesus yet?" Forrest's innocent reply was, "I didn't know I was supposed to be looking for Him."*
- B) **The story we are going to read in the Bible today alerts us to a common and very dangerous malady, spiritual blindness.**
- 1) It is common because of sin. Your sin and my sin makes us all spiritually blind to God and what he is doing. We just can't see it.
 - 2) It is dangerous because spiritually blind people think they know the truth about what is going on when they are actually completely in the dark.
 - 3) Spiritual blindness leaves us without the ability to see God's big picture for our lives. We are left clueless about how we fit into any strategy he might have and completely in the dark about the future.
- C) **These are the signs of spiritual blindness.**
- 1) One, Spiritually blind people **don't pray.**
 - (a) *They decide what to do without any wisdom or insight from God.*
 - 2) Two, Spiritually blind people refuse to act on the principles of God's word.
 - (a) *They lack Godly wisdom, insight and understanding because they're not obedient to what God says to do.*
 - 3) Three, Spiritually blind people do not humble themselves before God.
 - (a) *Sure they may go to church but they are too self-absorbed, too self-conscious, too stubborn to bow humbly before God.*
- D) **Do you know what it's like to be spiritually blind? I do.**
- 1) There have been times in my life when I tried to make people think **I could see just fine** but in reality... **I was blind.**
 - (a) *I didn't pray,*
 - (b) *I didn't act on the principles of God's word and*
 - (c) *I didn't humble myself before God.*
 - 2) Spiritual blindness is dangerous.
- E) **The text we're looking at this morning is a wake up call to all of us who are susceptible to spiritual blindness.**
- F) **Text: Turn in your Bibles to Numbers 22**
- G) In the books Exodus and Numbers we read the stories of Moses and the Nation of Israel as they made their way to the promised land from Egypt.

- 1) *The writer of Numbers makes a dramatic shift in scenes from Moses and Israel to the nation of Moab. Here we meet two Moabite men afflicted with spiritual blindness.*

III) **Balak: blind to God's big picture**

A) ***Balak, the king of the Moabites saw Israel coming and shook with fear. He was convinced that Moab didn't have a chance if they were to go to war. Israel was too big, too powerful.***

- 1) **22:4** So Balak son of Zippor, who was king of Moab at that time, ⁵ sent messengers to summon Balaam son of Beor, (the country's most prominent Diviner or Soothsayer) who was at Pethor, near the River, (likely the Euphrates) in his native land. Balak said:

"A people has come out of Egypt; they cover the face of the land and have settled next to me. ⁶ Now come and put a curse on these people, because they are too powerful for me. Perhaps then I will be able to defeat them and drive them out of the country. For I know that those you bless are blessed, and those you curse are cursed."

B) ***Balak, the King of Moab was spiritually blind to God's big picture.***

- 1) He saw the great nation of Israel, knew that they had just wiped out the Amorites and assumed that Moab was next.
 - (a) *He was not a worshipper of Yahweh, the one true God. Had he sought God's counsel, he would have found out that Israel had no plans to go to war with Moab.*
- 2) Balak didn't see God's big picture and so he came up with his own solution; the solution was to have Balaam put a curse on Israel.
- 3) Here is the first sign of Spiritual blindness.

IV) **1. Spiritually blind people don't pray.**

A) ***How can we ever see God's big picture if we're not willing to pray?***

- 1) Start by praying.
- 2) Pray when it's convenient and when it is inconvenient. Learn to make prayer your first priority.
- 3) Don't just pray for God to take away your problems; **pray that God will open your eyes to see his big picture** and to help you to choose the best solution.

V) **Balaam prayed and God answered**

A) ***Balaam refused to receive the delegation from King Balak for a whole day so that he could pray to God to know what to do.***

- 1) God said to Balaam, **"Don't go, you must not curse something that I have blessed."** So Balaam sent the delegation on their way back to the King.

- 2) King Balak was a very stubborn man and this was not acceptable. He wanted Israel cursed so he sent another delegation to Balaam. This time with more people in the delegation who more important, more impressive than the first group. They gave another message to Balaam from the king that said, "I'm going to make you very rich if you come and curse Israel."
- B) This time when Balaam prayed, God gave very clear instructions, "go, but under one condition; you must say and do exactly what I tell you to say and do."**
- 1) There is a very important lesson here for anyone who is called to do a ministry. Not just pastors, mind you, any ministry that God calls you to undertake.
 - 2) Do not try to add your agenda into God's agenda. If you do, you will be stopped.
 - 3) If you try to avoid saying or doing what God has instructed you to do to make the message nicer or less scary, you will be stopped.
 - 4) Just watch what happened to Balaam. Here is the second sign of spiritual blindness.
- VI) 2. Spiritually blind people refuse to act on the principles of God's word.**
- A) There is a very strange twist in this story.**
- 1) **Balaam got up in the morning, saddled his donkey and went with the princes of Moab. ²² But God was very angry when he went...**
 - 2) The text does not tell us exactly what happened here to make God angry. It could be that Balaam agreed initially to God's instructions but while on the way, he chose in his heart to add his own ideas or to soften the message so as not to upset King Balak.
 - 3) Either way, Balaam was going off to do the ministry God had called him to do but was not going follow through and say exactly what God had instructed him to say.
 - 4) This made God angry, really angry. So angry that God sent an angel to stop him. Balaam didn't know it but his life was in danger.
- B) Sin made Balaam spiritually blind and in his blindness, as we will see, was about to become the stuff legends are made of.**
- C) If you've ever wondered if God has a sense of humor, you don't have to look any further than Numbers 22.**
- 1) **²² But God was very angry when he went, and the angel of the LORD stood in the road to oppose him. Balaam was riding on his donkey, and his two servants were with him. ²³ When the donkey saw the angel of the LORD standing in the road with a drawn sword in his hand, she turned off the road into a field. Balaam beat her to get her back on the road.**
 - 2) **²⁴ Then the angel of the LORD stood in a narrow path between two vineyards, with walls on both sides. ²⁵ When the donkey saw the angel of the LORD, she pressed close to the wall, crushing Balaam's foot against it. So he beat her again.**

- 3) ²⁶ Then the angel of the LORD moved on ahead and stood in a narrow place where there was no room to turn, either to the right or to the left. ²⁷ When the donkey saw the angel of the LORD, she lay down under Balaam, and he was angry and beat her with his staff. ²⁸ Then the LORD opened the donkey's mouth, and she said to Balaam,....(PAUSE)
"What have I done to you to make you beat me these three times?"
(a) *If I were Balaam and my donkey began talking to me that I would at least say, "hey, a talking donkey!" Instead...*
 - 4) ²⁹ Balaam answered the donkey, "You've made a "donkey" out of me – a fool out of me!"
(a) *Like Balaam, spiritually blind people are consumed about looking foolish in front of other people. No one wants to look like a donkey when you're on a mission from God.*
- D) A pastor friend, Kris Causton shared this story with me.**
- 1) While driving to church on a Sunday near Christmas a few years back she witnessed a strange event. It was obvious that this church had gone all out for their annual Christmas pageant. They likely had made a nice manger scene and scattered real hay around the platform for effect. They likely had all the people in Biblical costumes and may have even been using a real baby to play the infant Jesus. But that's not the scene she saw.
 - 2) The parking lot was packed with cars. A truck with an open horse trailer was back up near the door. The scene that caught her attention was like a Norman Rockwell painting. Three men were behind a sitting donkey pushing with all their might to try and get the stubborn animal through the door. The donkey was unmoved and obviously didn't have any interest in carrying Mary down the center isle of the church during the pageant.
- E) Balaam couldn't have been more accurate; the donkey made a donkey out of him.**
- 1) Balaam said, "If I had a sword in my hand, I would kill you right now."
 - 2) ³⁰ The donkey said to Balaam, "Am I not your own donkey, which you have always ridden, to this day? Have I been in the habit of doing this to you?" "No," he said. ³¹ Then the LORD opened Balaam's eyes, and he saw the angel of the LORD standing in the road with his sword drawn. So he bowed low and fell facedown.
 - 3) ³² The angel of the LORD asked him, "Why have you beaten your donkey these three times? I have come here to oppose you because your path is a reckless one before me. ³³ The donkey saw me and turned away from me these three times. If she had not turned away, I would certainly have killed you by now, but I would have spared her."
- F) Have you ever wondered why God seems to be keeping you from**
- 1) getting something you think you need,
 - 2) from a job you think you want,
 - 3) or from a relationship you think you'd love.

- 4) Don't be surprised if God stands in your way to prevent you from hurting yourself or worse yet, destroying yourself. It is for your own good.
- G) ***The donkey saved Balaam's life 3 times. 3 times Balaam couldn't see the danger in front of him.***
 - 1) I want you to notice the progression. It may sound familiar in your life. It does in mine. We'll call the progression, "Stubborn Donkeys."
 - 2) The first time the donkey saved Balaam's life the donkey saw the angel and took a different path.
 - 3) Don't be surprised by the first stubborn donkey. You may be determined to go a certain direction, reach a particular objective, complete a certain goal and then all of the sudden you are driven off the beaten path.
 - (a) *A few years back I was focused on my work in music and video production. Little did I know that Pat was praying for a significant change of direction in career. In a matter of months the "career donkey" I was riding on, left the path and went rumbling off course. What did I do? I blamed the donkey. It was the publisher's fault, and the agent's fault that I wasn't thriving. I couldn't see the angel standing in the road.*
 - 4) A second time Balaam's life was saved the donkey saw the angel brandishing a sword. The result was that the donkey crushed Balaam's foot against a wall.
 - 5) The second stubborn donkey does more than take you a different direction. In the progression this time he inflicts pain.
 - (a) *I got back on my "career donkey" and headed down the original path again. I jumpstarted my career by writing a play and creating a kid's radio show but failed at both. This time I got hurt, like my heart was crushed against a wall. So what did I do? I blamed the donkey. Don't people see I have talent? Don't they know who I am?*
 - 6) A third time the donkey saved Balaam's life the donkey put Balaam in a tight spot where he could not turn around. The donkey simply laid down.
 - 7) The third Stubborn Donkey will not move forward.
 - (a) *I was in such a tight spot, eventually all my ambition and all my options were at a dead end. So what did I do? I blamed the donkey. It was everybody else's fault that my career was at a standstill. God was silent but I never considered the possibility that God was the one standing in my way.*
- H) ***Does this sound familiar to you? Are you spiritually blind to God's strategy? Are you punishing the donkey when what you really need is to obey the principles of God's word?***
 - 1) *³⁴ 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."*

- 2) ³⁵ The angel of the LORD said to Balaam, “Go with the men, but speak only what I tell you.” So Balaam went with the princes of Balak.
- i) God’s message to you may come through an angel or a donkey, it doesn’t matter. What matters is “God’s message!”**
- 1) God’s message to me came during a job interview with another church. My eyes were opened to see that I was to invest myself in the church where we were attending. My obedience there would eventually lead to a full time call to pastoral ministry. This new path eventually led me here.
 - 2) **I felt like a foolish donkey.** The Bible wisely tells us this,
 - 3) 1 Cor. 1:27-29 **But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. ²⁸ He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are, ²⁹ so that no one may boast before him.**
 - 4) The third sign of spiritual blindness is this.
- vii) Spiritually blind people don’t humble themselves.**
- A) Unfortunately, we are too self-absorbed; too self-conscious; too stubborn to humble ourselves before God, so sometimes God uses our circumstances to humble us.**
- 1) You see, after the discussion with the “Donkey,” Balaam recognized his sin. He was so humbled that he wanted to turn around and go back home. But instead, God said to keep going.
 - 2) This should be a great encouragement to you. After Balaam blew it, God could have chosen someone else to carry his message but he didn’t. Instead, God corrected Balaam, opened his eyes and told him to keep going from there.
 - 3) You may think that you are damaged goods to God because you’ve blown it, royally blown it. You may be thinking that God can’t use you because you were so blind.
 - (a) Start here. Humble yourself before God. God uses people who humble themselves. You may be damaged, you may have been stubborn but you can be transformed by the power of God in your life.
- B) After this experience Balaam was a changed man. He brought the message from God to King Balak.**
- 1) It was the message of someone who finally saw the world clearly as God sees it,
 - 2) It was the message of someone who heard and obeyed the word of God,
 - 3) It was the message of someone who was humble before God.
 - 4) This is the message Balaam prophesied to Balak the king:
 - (a) ¹⁷ **“I see him, but not now; I behold him, but not near. A star will come out of Jacob; a scepter will rise out of Israel. He will crush the foreheads of Moab...**

- 5) This vision was not only for Balak and the Moabites or for the people of that generation. This message was a word for all people of every generation and every nation. This message is for you and me.
(a) Balaam saw the coming of Jesus and the destruction of Moab.
- 6) Obviously, the king didn't like what Balaam had to say with the crushing of the foreheads of Moab and all. In spite of angering the King, Balaam completed his mission and said exactly what God had told him to say.
- 7) It is a much more fearful thing to anger God than an earthly king.

VIII) Conclusion

A) Open your eyes

- 1) Be aware here that the Bible is not telling us that every time we come up against difficult times, are diverted off our planned path or are stopped cold in our tracks that God is necessarily standing in the way. Sometimes those obstacles are there to teach us perseverance, patience, courage and other virtues.
- 2) But what we can learn here is that sometimes when we are riding a stubborn donkey we have to consider that we do not see the whole picture and that God is standing in our way.
- 3) Here is the challenge. Open your eyes.
(a) Open your eyes to the possibility that you are on the wrong path, have been inflicted with real pain, or are completely stuck in your life because God is standing in the way.
- 4) The story of Balaam is a good reminder that we don't always see or understand what God is doing. We may think that our path is set and our life will go a certain way. But God knows stuff that we could not possibly know.
- 5) So, on your journey your donkey may veer off the path, it may cause you pain or it may just plain refuse to go any further.
- 6) If this is your reality right now, pray that God would open your eyes.
(a) Open your eyes to see God's big picture and how you fit into it.
(b) Open your ears to hear God's word and act on it.
(c) Open your heart to be humble before God.

IX) Prayer

- 1) Lord Almighty God, open our eyes. Some of us are struggling this morning blaming donkeys because we are spiritually blind to what you are doing, what you are preventing us from doing. Open our eyes, Lord.
- 2) We bow low before you now as we come to your table. As when the disciple broke bread with you on the road to Emmaus, let our eyes be opened when you feed us in this meal. We pray this in Jesus name, Amen.

X) Song: Open My Eyes

XI) Benediction