

January 12, 2020

GOD CALLS

NUMBERS 22:22-25

INTRODUCTION

Balaam and the donkey. For certain this is a most perplexing passage of scripture. But make no mistake it is scripture. It is not a fable or a fairy tale. It is God's decided means of communicating a truth to His people. Balaam is complex. At times, he seems to be a man of obedience but, in truth, he is a pagan seer/sorcerer. Like King Cyrus, Balaam's story shows us that the Lord can use means that may appear contradictory to what we think. What matters most is the point of the story: it is the power of God that accomplishes God's tasks not the abilities of men. We have only one message: What God tells us to say and that is it!

THREE STRIKES (Numbers 22:22-27)

On the surface, this passage can appear a bit odd; strange even. God tells Balaam to go to Moab and to prophesy and then, seemingly out of nowhere, God sends the angel of the Lord to impede Balaam's progress. God, who told him to go is now, *"incensed that Balaam was going"* (Numbers 22:22). To oppose him the angel of the Lord appeared, with sword drawn, three times. In each case the donkey's movement was increasingly constricted. In each case the donkey turned away from the path leading to Moab. But why this *seeming* change of mind by the Lord? Balaam, at all times, was to move only when and as the Lord instructed him. In verse 20 we find the conditional wording of the Lord (not seen in the CSB) *"If the men come have come to call you, rise, go with them: but only do what I tell you"* (Numbers 22:20, English Standard Version). It is widely suggested that it was this disobedience that incensed God. The men had not come to Balaam as of yet, but in the very next verse we are told *"Balaam rose in the morning, saddled his donkey and went with the princes to Moab"* (Numbers 22:21). Things must be done God's way when God calls us to it. Not the way we would like or when we would like to. This story teaches us more than about a talking donkey. It teaches us that God will oppose us in what He has called us to do if we do it in ways that are contrary to His purposes and designs.

TWO QUESTIONS (Numbers 22:28-30)

The donkey speaks! This is a remarkable occurrence but not more so than the fact that Balaam engages her. But there is something more than the exchange that is being expressed. Yes, a donkey is speaking and a man is listening but what the scripture is actually teaching us is the fact that the Lord can use anyone (anything) to accomplish His purposes. The question the donkey raises are questions designed by God to expose to Balaam his own disobedience and sinful reactions. His first answer to the donkey is one of accusation – *"You made me look like a fool. If I had a sword in my hand, I'd kill you now"* (Numbers 22:29). Balaam is exposed here. Not only does he accuse but he speaks murderous language and the true nature of his heart is revealed. To Balaam's violent response the donkey says *"Am I not the donkey you've ridden all your life until today? Have I ever treated you this way before"* (Numbers 22:30)? Balaam's response to the donkey is an admission that is both short and filled with tension: *"No"* (Numbers 22:30). From the lips of a donkey a great contrast is before Balaam: the prophet (sorcerer) has been disobedient but the donkey has only been obedient. Could it be that the Lord uses this odd relationship to teach Balaam a lesson in humility?

ONE VIEW (Number 22:31-35)

Out of his admission of being wrong Balaam is granted what, to this point, what only the donkey had been privileged to. Balaam saw, *“the angel of the Lord standing in the path with a drawn sword in his hand”* (Numbers 22:31). An interesting contrast is made here. The angel tells Balaam that he was spared the sword because the *“donkey saw me and turned away from me these three times. If she had not turned away from me, I would have killed you by now and let her live”* (Numbers 22:33). What Balaam was going to do to the donkey, he, himself would have experienced but is spared because of the donkey. His eyes are opened and now he sees himself as well as his sin and as a result wants to go back home (Numbers 22:34). That would be too easy. Now, the famous seer will continue his mission, assisted by a donkey and speaking only what the Lord will have him to speak (Numbers 22:35). Balaam will travel with the men, but with one view – the view of the Lord.

CONCLUSION

No individual, or group for that matter, is bigger than the mission of God. The most gifted and the most eloquent in the kingdom of God are not indispensable. When the Lord calls us to a task may we learn from this narrative that God will get His view across in spite of who we are. He does not stand in need of anyone because He can use anything. He chooses to use us, so let us walk in humility.