

## BALAAM'S DONKEY

A farmer who wanted to sell his donkey. A potential buyer showed up and looked the animal over. He asked if he could hitch him up to the wagon and see how he worked. The farmer did so and climbed up into the wagon with the customer handing him the reins. The customer tapped the reins but the donkey didn't move. He said, "Giddyup" but the donkey just stood there. He cried out "Ya Donkey" but it just looked straight ahead. The farmer got down off the wagon, picked up a two by four and hit the animal right between the eyes. While the donkey staggered the farmer got back up into the wagon and said, "Now try it." The customer tapped the reins, the donkey moved out and the old farmer said, "He's a good donkey, but sometimes you have to get his attention first." Aren't we like that sometimes? We say we want God's guidance but often God has to first get our attention? Well, today we want to talk about the opposite scenario. A time where God used a donkey to get a man's attention.

Num 22:21 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, 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. 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. 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, "What have I done to you to make you beat me these three times?" 29 Balaam answered the donkey, "You have made a fool of me! If I had a sword in my hand, I would kill you right now." 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. 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." 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."

Balaam was not a Jew but a foreigner. He was not a righteous man or a biblical prophet but a sorcerer, a sort of ancient seer or "witch doctor." He would use his powers to place curses on people for money. Religion was his business, not his life-style. Balak, The king of Moab had seen what the Israelites had done to the Amorites and was afraid. He wanted Balaam to use his powers to place a curse on Israel - hoping to conquer the people. Obviously, neither Balaam nor Balak had any idea who they were dealing with!

Balaam seemed to acknowledge that the God of the Israelites was indeed powerful but he did not worship. He was ready to accept Him as God, but not HIS god. Have you ever known anyone like that? They recognize who Jesus was and who God is, but only in an intellectual way. Balaam was ready to obey God's command as long as he could profit from doing so. Although he realized the awesome power of Israel's God, his heart was occupied with what he could get from his occupation.

Reading this story might lead us to believe he turned to God in the end, but later passages in the Bible show that Balaam couldn't resist the tempting pull of money and idolatry. This mixture of motives - obedience and profit - eventually led to Balaam's death.

Today we are continuing in our series Walking in His Will, looking at the ways that God guides us. Last week I looked at 5 ways that God practically leads us. Today I want us to think about some ways that God speaks to us when we stray from His will. There are several things we can learn from Balaam:

1. Start With Obedience – green light

When King Balak first sends word to Balaam through messengers, he is asked to inquire of the Lord. Balaam does so and as a result received his answer:

Num 22:12 But God said to Balaam, "Do not go with them. You must not put a curse on those people, because they are blessed."

This is a clear statement. God did not stutter. He gave his instruction in a way that Balaam could easily understand. There was no question about what God meant or wanted. This story reminds me of Jonah. He was told clearly to go to Nineveh. Like Balaam, Jonah did not get into trouble because God didn't give good directions. He got in trouble because he didn't follow them. There wasn't a problem with misunderstanding. The issue was obedience.

When God says do it then DO IT! When God says don't do it then DON'T DO IT! Do not keep pushing the issue or try to manipulate things so that you hear what you want to hear. This will always lead to error.

2 Tim 4:3 The time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. 4 They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths.

We learn more by five minutes' obedience than by ten years' study. -- Oswald Chambers

In the eleventh century, King Henry III of Bavaria grew tired of court life and the pressures of being a monarch. He made application to the abbot (head monk) at a local monastery, asking to be accepted as a contemplative and spend the rest of his life in the monastery. "Your Majesty," said the abbot, "do you understand that the pledge here is one of obedience? That will be hard because you have been a king." "I understand," said Henry. "The rest of my life I will be obedient to you, as Christ leads you." "Then I will tell you what to do," said the abbot. "Go back to your throne and serve faithfully in the place where God has put you." He went on to serve faithfully as the Holy Roman Emperor. When King Henry died, a statement was written: "The King learned to rule by being obedient." When we tire of our roles and responsibilities, it helps to remember God has planted us in a certain place and told us to be a good accountant or teacher or mother or father. Christ expects us to be faithful where he puts us, and when he returns, we'll rule together with him.

Balaam's initial response was obedience. However, King Balak would not take no for an answer so he sent a second larger delegation with the promise of great riches. Instead of sticking to God's word and letting his no mean NO he agrees to go back to God and ask again.

Num 22:15 Then Balak sent other princes, more numerous and more distinguished than the first. 16 They came to Balaam and said: "This is what Balak son of Zippor says: Do not let anything keep you from coming to me, 17 because I will reward you handsomely and do whatever you say. Come and put a curse on these people for me." 18 But Balaam answered them, "Even if Balak gave me his palace filled with silver and gold, I could not do anything great or small to go beyond the command of the LORD my God.

Notice he says "my God", but if this were really true then Balaam should have just said that the answer is no and sent the delegation on it's way. He does not do that. He goes back to the Lord and asks again. He pushes an issue he has already received clear instruction about.

While Balaam says that he is not interested in money his very actions show the opposite is true. It does not say what Balaam said to God, but perhaps it was one of those arm-twisting kind of prayers where you act like you're interested in doing the right thing, but in reality, you've already made up your mind about what you're going to do. You know what I'm talking about. One of those prayers where you let God in on your plans and tell him what's best for your life. Trying to get God's will to line up with yours.

It is interesting that Peter, in speaking of sin, uses Balaam as an example of greed:

2 Pet 2:14 ... they are experts in greed -- an accursed brood! 15 They have left the straight way and wandered off to follow the way of Balaam son of Beor, who loved the wages of wickedness. 16 But he was rebuked for his wrongdoing by a donkey -- a beast without speech -- who spoke with a man's voice and restrained the prophet's madness.

When Balaam asks again he receives a different answer. Did God change his mind? No. Sometimes God teaches us by allowing us to have our own way. How many of you would be honest and admit that there have been times when you have compromised God's Will for your life? God told you to do one thing but you chose another and as a result missed God's blessing.

When we talk about understanding God's will for our life, it is important to remember that that we are talking about God's greater plan for us. There things in our lives that we can do which are good things that on the surface look fine. However, often these good things keep us from doing the great things that God has for us. Never settle for good things when you can accomplish great things. Never settle for good or plan B when you can have God's best or plan A best for your life.

Obedience to Jesus Christ is essential, but not compulsory; he never insists on being Master. We feel that if only he would insist, we should obey him. But our Lord never enforces his "thou shalt" and "thou shalt not"; he never takes means to force us to do what he says. He never coerces. In certain moods we wish he would make us do the thing, but he will not; and in other moods we wish he would leave us alone altogether, but he will not. If we do not keep his commandments, he does not come and tell us we are wrong. We know it, we cannot get away from it. -- Oswald Chambers

So how do you seek God's best for your life? You are obedient to His calling. I shared last week how, when I met Naomi, I sought counsel from friends on whether to marry her. Naomi was not the first girl I ever dated. There was another girl I dated before her who was very nice. However, I felt that God was calling me into missions. She did not share that call, so I knew it would not work. Could I have married her? Of course, but I would not be where I am today. The very first time I met Naomi she told me how God was calling her into ministry – we were heading in the same direction.

Obedience means you stay focused on your calling. I sometimes say to people who come in for pre-marital counseling that the person you marry will either double or half your ministry. I spoke with the youth a while back and shared this with them - E.g. pick a point along the outside walls of this room. You may be next to someone right now that is nice but as you move towards your ministry that person may move away and another come closer. That can apply to all other areas of life. Maybe you are in a job that is keeping you back, or fear is keeping you back.

Get up and in obedience head for what God has called you to. As you do that he will bring blessings and opportunities into your life that you have never dreamed of.

## 2. See Divine Obstacles – yellow light

God eventually allows Balaam go with the messengers, but He was not pleased about his attitude. It was a reckless path certainly plan B. His greed for the wealth offered by the king had blinded him so that he could not see how God was trying to stop him. Though we may know what God wants us to do, we can become blinded by the desire for money, possessions, or prestige.

If you are driving down the road and everything is coming against you then you have to ask yourself at some point if the problem is not that the world is full of bad drivers but that maybe you are in the wrong lane.

Sometimes God will do what He did with Balaam and will "stand in the road to oppose us" if he doesn't like the way we're doing or handling things. He loves us so much that He tries to get us to turn around if we're going the wrong way or to re-think things if our approach is wrong. He doesn't just abandon us when we disobey. He keeps trying to get through to us before we hurt ourselves or someone else. If you get out of the Will of God, he won't let you go without putting a couple of "STOP" signs in the road to try and get your attention. Problem is, if you're already in "cruise control", you may not even see them.

Acts 16:6 Paul and his companions traveled throughout the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been kept by the Holy Spirit from preaching the word in the province of Asia . 7 When they came to the border of Mysia, they tried to enter Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to. 8 So they passed by Mysia and went down to Troas. 9 During the night Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him, "Come over to Macedonia and help us."

Balaam had heard but disobeyed God. It appears he's doing the right thing but really it is compromise. He is doing it the wrong way and for the wrong reasons. So God "opposes him", and in an attempt to get his attention, sends an angel as a roadblock. The donkey sees the angel standing in the road, sword drawn - and reacts by beating her.

Donkeys are famous for being stubborn. They're the kind of pack animals that don't seem to get much respect, probably because they don't give much respect. Compare someone to a horse, with terms like philly or stud or mustang and you just might sound flattering. However, compare someone to a donkey, with the common terms used for those who act like donkeys, and they probably won't be too happy with the comparison. In this case the Donkey was right and Balaam was wrong. Have you ever felt like that donkey? You see a friend heading in the wrong direction towards danger and you try to stop them but you end up getting abused instead?

## 3. Stop When Opposed (Repent) – red light

The angel went ahead of Balaam to oppose him 3 times. Often when God wants to get our attention there is a repeated test. E.g. Peter denying Christ. In each case we see that the angel used a path that was narrower until it was impossible to pass. God often does this in our lives. When He sees us going the wrong way he begins to apply pressure which increases the further we go. E.g. the harder you hit a wall the harder the wall hits you!

When Balaam finally realized that it was the Lord that was opposing him he reacts in 3 ways:

a. Humble yourself – he bowed low (vs. 31)

1 Pet 5:5... clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because, "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble."

When Balaam realized it was the Lord he "bowed low and fell facedown." Balaam had learned a lesson at the hands of a donkey that had greater spiritual insight than he. Have you ever felt like that. Perhaps your child reminds you of a spiritual truth that you had overlooked.

Pride separates us from God. Humility allows us to see the truth and respond in the right way.

b. Acknowledge your mistakes - I have sinned (vs. 34)

Balaam recognized his sin and confesses that he had been wrong. He realized that he had abused the very thing that was standing in the way of his destruction. Perhaps there is someone in your life you have treated harshly because they loved you enough to try and step in between you and the danger you were heading for.

When God turns you around, the first thing you should do is find them and apologize for hurting them. Thank them for caring enough to say and do the right thing even when it cost them.

c. Don't repeat the offense - I will go back (vs. 34)

Repentance isn't just a temporary right turn side step – it is a permanent turning around and heading back the way you came. Going the opposite direction in attitude and obedience. With Jonah this meant completing the task he had been given - going to Nineveh.

What does this mean for you? Is there an area of your life you have compromised in? Is there some area that you chose your plan before God's. Maybe it is a relationship. Maybe it is a vocation. Go back to God and ask Him if you need to turn around.

There was a man who got lost in the desert. After wandering around for a long time his throat became very dry, about that time he saw a little shack in the distance. He made his way over to the shack and found a water pump with a small jug of water and a note.

The note read: "pour all the water into the top of the pump to prime it, if you do this you will get all the water you need". Now the man had a choice to make, if he trusted the note and poured the water in and it worked he would have all the water he needed. If it didn't work he would still be thirsty and he might die. Or he could choose to drink the water in the jug and get immediate satisfaction, but it might not be enough and he still might die.

After thinking about it the man decided to risk it. He poured the entire jug into the pump and began to work the handle, at first nothing happened and he got a little scared but he kept going and water started coming out. So much water came out he drank all he wanted, took a shower, and filled all the containers he could find. Because he was willing to give up momentary satisfaction, he got all the water he needed. Now the note also said: after you have finished, please refill the jug for the next traveler.” The man refilled the jug and added to the note: “ Please prime the pump, believe me it works”!

We have the same choice to make, do we hold on to what we have because we don't believe there are better things in store for us, and settle for immediate satisfaction? Or do we trust God and give up all that we have to get what God has promised us? I think the choice is obvious. We need to pour in all the water, trust God with everything. Then once we have experienced what God has to offer, the living water, we need to tell other people, “Go ahead prime the pump, believe me it works”!

I can tell you from experience today to listen to God's will – it works! It worked for me, and it will work for you.

A minister decided that a visual demonstration would add emphasis to his Sunday sermon. Four worms were placed into four separate jars.

The first worm was put into a container of alcohol.  
The second worm was put into a container of cigarette smoke.  
The third worm was put into a container of chocolate syrup.  
The fourth worm was put into a container of good clean soil.

At the conclusion of the sermon, the Minister reported the following results:

The first worm in alcohol - Dead.  
The second worm in cigarette smoke - Dead  
Third worm in chocolate syrup - Dead  
Fourth worm in good clean soil - Alive.

So the Minister asked the congregation – “What can you learn from this demonstration?”

Maxine was sitting in the back, quickly raised her hand and said, "As long as you drink, smoke and eat chocolate, you won't have worms!"

That pretty much ended the service --

Eugene Peterson in *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction* writes, “It is not difficult in our world to get a person interested in the message of the Gospel; it is terrifically difficult to sustain the interest. Millions of people in our culture make decisions for Christ, but there is a dreadful attrition rate. Many claim to have been born again, but the evidence for mature Christian discipleship is slim. In our kind of culture anything, even news about God, can be sold if it is packaged freshly; but when it loses its novelty, it goes on the garbage heap. There is a great market for religious experience in our world; there is little enthusiasm for the patient acquisition of virtue, little inclination to sign up for a long apprenticeship in what earlier Christians called holiness.”

S. I. McMillen, in his book *"None of These Diseases,"* tells a story of a young woman who wanted to go to college, but her heart sank when she read the question on the application blank that asked, "Are you a leader?" Being both honest and conscientious, she wrote, "No," and returned the application, expecting the worst. To her surprise, she received this letter from the college: "Dear Applicant: A study of the application forms reveals that this year our college will have 1,452 new leaders. We are accepting you because we feel it is imperative that they have at least one follower."

the price you pay for obeying God at the moment may be nothing compared to what you will pay for disobeying.

"One step forward in obedience is worth years of study about it." -- Chambers in *Our Daily Bread*, March 4, 1993

Lord, fill my mouth with worthwhile stuff, And nudge me when I've said enough.

If God were to remove from us the possibility of disobedience there would be no value in our obedience, it would be a mechanical business. -- Oswald Chambers

The term obey would be better expressed by the word use. For instance, a scientist uses the laws of nature; that is, he more than obeys them, he causes them to fulfill their destiny in his work. That is exactly what happens in the saint's life. He uses the commands of the Lord, and they fulfill God's destiny in his life. -- Oswald Chambers

A mother had a particularly trying day with her young son. Finally she flung up her hands and shouted, "All right, Billy. Do whatever you want to! Now let me see you disobey THAT!"

In 1777 during the Revolutionary War two battles were fought on the battlefield of Saratoga in New York. After these battles a pillar was placed as a monument to what happened there. At the base of it are four bases for the bronze figures of the generals who fought there so heroically. The first contains the figure of Horatio Gates. The second is Philip Schuyler. The Third is Daniel Morgan, but when we come to the fourth we see something unusual. The base is empty. This one was for a general whose performance during battle merited honor. However, he later committed an act of treason and his name became associated with being a traitor rather than a hero. Only the name this general remains in the stone. His name is Benedict Arnold, and his name will always remind us of someone who went from heroism to treason.