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The Second Epistle of Peter

Balaam's Children Are Among us Today – Can You Identify Them?

October 15, 2017

Sermon Text: 2 Peter 2:4-22

Scripture Reading: Numbers 23-24;

We continue this morning with our study of the second chapter of 2nd Peter and I am going to introduce you to an Old Testament character who you have no doubt *heard of*, but whose *importance as a very large theme in the Bible* you have probably not understood. Not because you are stupid, but because it is a theme that is largely ignored in the church, the neglect of which enables evil and wickedness to creep in among us.

This character's name is, of course, *Balaam*. We meet him way back in the book of Numbers and he is most likely the primary personality Peter had in mind when he wrote:

But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction. And many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of truth will be blasphemed. And in their greed they will exploit you with false words. Their condemnation from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep.(2 Peter 2:1-3)

Balaam's end is recorded in Deuteronomy and Joshua:

And Moses sent them to the war, a thousand from each tribe, together with Phinehas the son of Eleazar the priest, with the vessels of the sanctuary and the trumpets for the alarm in his

hand. They warred against Midian, as the LORD commanded Moses, and killed every male. They killed the kings of Midian with the rest of their slain, Evi, Rekem, Zur, Hur, and Reba, the five kings of Midian. And they also killed Balaam the son of Beor with the sword. (Numbers 31:6-8)

themselves; waterless clouds, swept along by winds; fruitless trees in late autumn, twice dead, uprooted; wild waves of the sea, casting up the foam of their own shame; wandering stars, for whom the gloom of utter darkness has been reserved forever. (Jude 1:11-13)

Now here is the interesting thing. The New Testament mentions Balaam quite a few times both directly and indirectly:

Direct References

They have eyes full of adultery, insatiable for sin. They entice unsteady souls. They have hearts trained in greed. Accursed children! Forsaking the right way, they have gone astray. They have followed the way of Balaam, the son of Beor, who loved gain from wrongdoing, but was rebuked for his own transgression; a speechless donkey spoke with human voice and restrained the prophet's madness. (2 Peter 2:14-16)

But I have a few things against you [church at Pergamum]: you have some there who hold the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, so that they might eat food sacrificed to idols and practice sexual immorality. Revelation 2:14)

Indirect References to the Balaam "Spirit" of Ministry

Woe to them! For they walked in the way of Cain and abandoned themselves for the sake of gain to Balaam's error and perished in Korah's rebellion. These are hidden reefs at your love feasts, as they feast with you without fear, shepherds feeding

If anyone teaches a different doctrine and does not agree with the sound words of our Lord Jesus Christ and the teaching that accords with godliness, he is puffed up with conceit and understands nothing. He has an unhealthy craving for controversy and for quarrels about words, which produce envy, dissension, slander, evil suspicions, and constant friction among people who are depraved in mind and deprived of the truth, imagining that godliness is a means of gain. But godliness with contentment is great gain, for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take

anything out of the world. But if we have food and clothing, with these we will be content. But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs. (1 Timothy 6:3-10)

So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed: shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock. (1 Peter 5:1-3)

Alright then, let's see if we can draw all of this together and we will see how incredibly important it is for us to be aware and beware of Balaam today. In fact, I will go further and say:

The visible church today is largely controlled by Balaam's children. It is vital that we know how to identify them.

This Strange Character, Balaam

We know that Balaam was opposing God, even though he was a "prophet" who spoke for God, or at least had done so in the past and later, as with Balak, spoke God's Word mixed with error. We know he was opposing God for several reasons, but the primary one is this:

Then the LORD opened the eyes of Balaam, and he saw the angel of the LORD standing in the way, with his drawn sword in his hand. And he bowed down and fell on his face. And the angel of the LORD said to him, "Why have you struck your donkey these three times? Behold, I have come out to oppose you because your way is perverse before me. The donkey saw me and turned aside before me these three times. If she had not turned aside from me, surely just now I would have killed you and let her live." (Numbers 22:31-33)

A quick reading of the account of Balaam in numbers might lead the reader to conclude that Balaam was a genuine, though imperfect, prophet who truly served the Lord. But that is not the case. Even in Numbers there are indicators that Balaam had become a hired gun, a prophet for hire who "served the Lord" for money.

And the New Testament comments on Balaam leave no doubt at all that he was motivated by greed. Listen to the verses again:

They have eyes full of adultery, insatiable for sin. They entice unsteady souls. They have hearts trained in greed. Accursed children! Forsaking the right way, they have gone astray. **They have followed the way of Balaam, the son of Beor, who loved gain from wrongdoing**, but was rebuked for his own transgression; a speechless donkey spoke with human voice and restrained the prophet's madness. (2 Peter 2:14-16)

And Jude again:

For they walked in the way of Cain and abandoned themselves **for the sake of gain to Balaam's error** and perished in Korah's rebellion.

And if this were not wicked enough, there is something else that Balaam did in order to make money in his “ministry”:

But I have a few things against you: you have some there who hold the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak **to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, so that they might eat food sacrificed to idols and practice**

sexual immorality. (Revelation 2:14)

There is no doubt about it, right? Balaam's children, just like their namesake, “minister in the Lord's name” claiming to speak for Him. But their motivation is greed and their message is false. They actually oppose the Lord.

The children of Balaam must necessarily preach a false gospel and a message that appeals to the sensual lusts of the flesh, that tickles the itching ears of false Christians, or there would be no profit in prophesying for them. Not only does their evil “gospel” bring them money and self-glory, but it teaches professing Christians to worship false gods and engage in sexual immorality and wickedness.

Now, return to what Peter tells us about the “children of Balaam” creeping into the church:

They have eyes full of adultery, insatiable for sin. They entice unsteady souls. They have hearts trained in greed. Accursed children! Forsaking the right way, they have gone astray. **They have followed the way of Balaam, the son of Beor, who loved gain from wrongdoing**, but was rebuked for his own transgression; a

speechless donkey spoke with human voice and restrained the prophet's madness. (2 Peter 2:14-16)

Clearly, Peter is warning us! *There will be false prophets among YOU.* Watch out for them! They look ever so much like “godly” saints at first, but just watch and they will be revealed for what they really are:

These are waterless springs and mists driven by a storm. For them the gloom of utter darkness has been reserved. For, speaking loud boasts of folly, they entice by sensual passions of the flesh those who are barely escaping from those who live in error. They promise them freedom, but they themselves are slaves of corruption. For whatever overcomes a person, to that he is enslaved.

For if, after they have escaped the defilements of the world through the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the last state has become worse for them than the first. For it would have been better for them never to have known the way of righteousness than after knowing it to turn back from the holy commandment delivered to them.

What the true proverb says has happened to them: "The dog returns to its own vomit, and the sow, after

washing herself, returns to wallow in the mire." (2 Peter 2:17-22)

Consider the parable of the soils to understand what is happening even more clearly:

"Hear then the parable of the sower: When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what has been sown in his heart. This is what was sown along the path.

As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy, yet he has no root in himself, but endures for a while, and when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately he falls away.

As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and it proves unfruitful.

As for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it. He indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty." (Matthew 13:18-23)

There is, in other words, a “faith” that is not full-grown, genuine faith. Christ’s Word germinates, you might say, in someone who hears it. But if the seed of the Word is going to become authentic faith, it must take root and bear fruit. The devil knows this, so he comes along where the Word is preached and does all he can, through these evil children of Balaam, to persuade people to turn back or to keep them blinded so they don’t see Christ’s light and truth. The seed never takes root, you see. No wonder then that Peter and Jude use such incredibly harsh language about Balaam’s children.

We have already looked at how these wicked ones get started. They look soooo much like real servants of Christ:

For if, after they have escaped the defilements of the world through the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the last state has become worse for them than the first.

Balaam “knew” the Lord. The Lord spoke to Balaam. Listen to this remarkable statement once again:

When Balaam saw that it pleased the

LORD to bless Israel, he did not go, as at other times, to look for omens, but set his face toward the wilderness. And Balaam lifted up his eyes and saw Israel camping tribe by tribe. And the Spirit of God came upon him, and he took up his discourse and said, "The oracle of Balaam the son of Beor, the oracle of the man whose eye is opened, the oracle of him who hears the words of God, who sees the vision of the Almighty, falling down with his eyes uncovered: (Numbers 24:1-4)

And then he gives a prophecy *about Christ!*

I see him, but not now; I behold him, but not near: a star shall come out of Jacob, and a scepter shall rise out of Israel; it shall crush the forehead of Moab and break down all the sons of Sheth. (Numbers 24:17)

Balaam, like his children today, KNEW the Lord is real, the Lord is God, and yet Balaam willfully chose personal gain and wealth out of his own evil greed. *He chose to use his calling as a prophet of God for personal gain and glory.* This is exactly the kind of person Paul ran into:

When they had gone through the whole island as far as Paphos, they

came upon a certain magician, a **Jewish false prophet named Bar-Jesus**. He was with the proconsul, Sergius Paulus, a man of intelligence, who summoned Barnabas and Saul and sought to hear the word of God. But Elymas the magician (for that is the meaning of his name) opposed them, seeking to turn the proconsul away from the faith. But Saul, who was also called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked intently at him and said, "You son of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness, full of all deceit and villainy, will you not stop making crooked the straight paths of the Lord? And now, behold, the hand of the Lord is upon you, and you will be blind and unable to see the sun for a time." Immediately mist and darkness fell upon him, and he went about seeking people to lead him by the hand. (Acts 13:6-11)

And here is another child of Balaam:

But there was a man named Simon, who had previously practiced magic in the city and amazed the people of Samaria, saying that he himself was somebody great. They all paid attention to him, from the least to the greatest, saying, "This man is the power of God that is called Great." And they paid attention to him because for a long time he had amazed them with his magic. But when they

believed Philip as he preached good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women. Even Simon himself believed, and after being baptized he continued with Philip. And seeing signs and great miracles performed, he was amazed. Now when the apostles at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent to them Peter and John, who came down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit, for he had not yet fallen on any of them, but they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then they laid their hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit. Now when Simon saw that the Spirit was given through the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money, saying, "Give me this power also, so that anyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit." But Peter said to him, "May your silver perish with you, because you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money! You have neither part nor lot in this matter, for your heart is not right before God. Acts 8:9-21)

Are your eyes starting to open as to the nature and tactics of these sons of the devil that we are calling the children of Balaam? I hope so because they are with us today in numbers probably as large as they ever have been in the history of the church.

What do they look like? Let's review it again:

- They “know” the Lord. They have experienced His Spirit. They once evidenced **signs** of repentance and regeneration
- They chose to turn off the right Way and went their own way, **motivated by greed for money and self glory**
- They preach a false gospel that tickles the ears of the masses, appealing to the flesh and thus they often appear quite successful, many follow them
- They are used by the enemy, just like Balaam was, to lead people away from Christ and into sin and idolatry

Last week I read on one fellow's blog a very true and insightful statement. Here it is:

Where there is big money, there is big corruption.

That writer is a Christian and he was talking about corruption in the visible church today. It is not just the Vatican where big money and big corruption exist. Make no mistake, many “celebrity” Christian personalities are bringing in millions of dollars. *In*

order to keep this money that they crave rolling in, they must preach a message that appeals to the flesh and lusts of people's sin.

If we are wise, we can look around us and see many, many indicators that Balaam's children are in fact controlling much if not most of the visible church today. Greed and fame-seeking is everywhere. And Christians are not being at all careful in heeding the warnings of Scripture. As a result, they are being led away from Christ. Either into libertinism or legalism.

I do not think that it is unreasonable for Christians to know just how much money the big names in Christianity are really making. Yet this is kept very hush hush and secret. After all, if in fact the following Scripture is true (and it is) then where we see big money being made off of “the ministry,” we can *know* that corruption is present. Notice carefully that Paul is speaking here specifically of *teachers of doctrine*:

If anyone teaches a different doctrine and does not agree with the sound words of our Lord Jesus Christ and the teaching that accords with godliness, he is puffed up with conceit and understands nothing. He has an unhealthy craving for controversy and for quarrels about

words, which produce envy, dissension, slander, evil suspicions, and constant friction among people who are depraved in mind **and deprived of the truth, imagining that godliness is a means of gain.**

But godliness with contentment is great gain, for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world. But if we have food and clothing, with these we will be content.

But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. **For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils.** It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs. (1 Timothy 6:3-10)

It is not a sin to be wealthy. But it is absolutely wrong to grow wealthy *by being a servant of Christ and getting that wealth from the ministry.* Peter warns of it. Hear him once more:

So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed: shepherd the flock of God

that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock. (1 Peter 5:1-3)

Think then of all the mega churches around us today. Of all the huge “Christian” ministry organizations led by highly paid CEO’s. Scripture warns us and warns us that such places are fertile ground for birthing children of Balaam.

Don’t you be taken in.