

"Calling on Balaam"  
Pastor Wally Contreras  
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(Numbers 22:1-35)

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Balak describes the people of Israel as "this horde" and that "they cover the face of the earth", yet if Balaam will come and curse them then maybe, just maybe "[Balak] shall be able to defeat them and drive them from the land". What attitude do I see in Balak's plan? Is it arrogance, fear, pride, ignorance, despair or some other attitude and why?

Children love to exaggerate. If you asked a child to describe the "monster in the closet" they would probably say it was ginormous and had long fangs and big scary eyes. Fear is an extreme emotion that is anything but rational. How accurate am I when it comes to describing my fears?

Scripture tells me "Do not be afraid" 33 times (ESV translation) and 34 times it tells me to "fear not". The opposite of fear is "calmness" and "confidence", not peace. (The opposite of peace is conflict and disharmony.) The opposite of being fearful is to be bold, brave, calm, and composed. Some will describe their fear by other names such as being worried or doubtful, saying that something was "scary" or "concerning", that they felt uneasy, anything but saying that they were fearful – that they were afraid. Why?

Pastor Wally said that to prevent being hurt, people oftentimes put up emotional "walls" to protect themselves, but then noted that when I put up a wall, I can't see passed the wall. He noted that in Proverbs 29:25 (ESV) "The fear of man lays a snare, but whoever trusts in the LORD is safe." Jon Bloom (DesiringGod.org) once wrote: "Why do we fear others' disapproval so much? We all experience this fear, and most of us don't want to admit how serious its tyranny can be. The Bible calls this the "fear of man," and it can weave a web of ambiguity around issues that are biblically clear. The fear of man can immobilize us when we should take action, and gag us into silence when we should speak. It feels powerful, but its power is deceptive. That's why the Bible tells us, "The fear of man lays a snare, but whoever trusts in the Lord is safe" (Proverbs 29:25) ...Snares are dangerous. If we get caught, we must do whatever it takes to free ourselves. God has the power to free us and he wants us living in the safe freedom of trusting him. But he frees us not by removing our fear of disapproval, but transferring it to the right place. And typically, he frees us by helping us face our false fears so that they lose their power over us... Due to our sin, weaknesses, and perhaps traumatic past experiences, we might assume these things are merely consequences of the fall. But at the core, they're not. God actually designed us to be

motivated by these emotionally powerful forces, for they uniquely reveal what we love. The person(s) whose reward of approval we desire most — whose curse of disapproval we most fear to receive — is the person(s) we will obey, our functional god. That's why the Bible so often commands us to "fear the Lord." Whose approval do my fear(s) reveal as being what or who I most desire?

How powerful is the fear of failure in my life and how has it impacted my ability to do what God is calling me to do in and with my life?

Luke 12:4-5 (ESV) "I tell you, my friends, do not fear those who kill the body, and after that have nothing more that they can do. But I will warn you whom to fear: fear him who, after he has killed, has authority to cast into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him!" What are some of the consequences when I allow worldly fears to distract me from the biblical fear of which Jesus has clearly and specifically warned me?

Balak wanted Balaam to get God to do something for him, namely to curse the nation of Israel and Balaam really wanted to be able to deliver for Balak. I noticed in Numbers 22:7 that the elders of Moab and Midian took "the fees for divination in their hand." Micah 3:11 (ESV) highlights the thought behind this practice: "Its heads give judgment for a bribe; its priests teach for a price; its prophets practice divination for money; yet they lean on the LORD and say, "Is not the LORD in the midst of us? No disaster shall come upon us." Do I, at times come before the LORD and try to "sweeten the pot" by being particularly faithful in reading my Bible or going to church or avoiding a favorite indulgence of mine?

Pastor Wally pointed out that when God asked the question "Who are these men with you?" in Numbers 22:9, God was really saying, "Let's not start off this conversation with a lie." Am I truly comfortable coming before God "just as I am"? If so, why so? If not, why not?

The MacArthur Study Bible (and Pastor Wally) pointed out that when God spoke to Balaam, he consistently used the name "God" and not "LORD" (Yahweh) which tells us that Balaam "did not have a personal relationship with Israel's God." An important distinction. Last week, Ms. Deb pointed out that many today call themselves Christians but are not followers of Jesus the Christ – another important distinction. Fox News recently reported: "A recently released study suggests the number of Christians in the U.S. is diminishing quickly and being replaced by those who do not identify with any religion. A new report by Pew Research Center and the General Social Survey published Tuesday found a surge of adults leaving Christianity to become atheist, agnostic or "nothing in particular." ...Noting how approximately

90% of Americans identified as Christians in the early 1990s, the study observed that number, which includes children, had fallen to only 64% by 2020.” Is it more important that the people with whom I associate or my “Who’s Your One” know “who” I am and “whose” I am or how I know “who” I am and “whose” I am and why or is it distinction without a difference?

Pastor Wally pointed out the Balaam’s assumption was that God’s permission to go with the elders to Balak was permission for him to curse Israel. Pastor Wally, when he gives the benediction at the end of the service, asks God to go ahead of us. It’s one thing to ask God to go before me, it’s quite something else to let Him go ahead of me. It’s one thing to know what it is God wants of me and another thing to infer that because God wants me to do that one thing, that He’s OK with me doing something else that I believe I need to do in order to accomplish His task. It is much like when Moses back in Numbers 20 decided that he needed to strike the rock a couple of times to get God’s water flowing. How easy (or difficult) is it for me to get into a “God plus X” mindset and why?

When the angel of the LORD (Jesus preincarnate) blocked Balaam’s way, it was the donkey (Shrek preincarnate) that God chose to use...not one of Balaam’s two servants to get Balaam’s attention that impending death was at hand if he went any further. The donkey spoke and asked why Balaam had struck her those three times. So amazing thing #1: the donkey spoke. Amazing thing #2: Balaam didn’t totally freak out at the sound of a talking donkey, but rather answered the donkey’s question. His answer? Balaam beat the donkey because she had “made a fool of [him]”. 2 Peter 2:16 (ESV) tells us that Balaam “was rebuked for his own transgression; a speechless donkey spoke with human voice and restrained the prophet’s madness.” Describe a time when the fear of being made a fool of in front of others caused me to react badly.

Have I ever felt fully confident in the path I wanted (and even felt called) to take, only to find my way cut short by immovable obstacles time and again? If so, how so?

Thank God that His best for me doesn’t rely on my own abilities, but rather it rests ultimately on His supreme and ultimate power and authority...His sovereignty. These roadblocks along the way can cause attitudes of impatience, anger, and embarrassment in me to surface, if I let them. Do I ever stop to consider that farther along this path I’m trying to take are dangers that I can’t yet see or do I keep trying to prod my donkey on down the road by any means possible to get where I’m wanting to go and why?