

## THE STORY OF BALAAM

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*Lessons: Numbers 22*

Sometimes we see clearly what is truly valuable in life. There are times when we see this as one sees on a bright day in the sunshine. Because this is not always so clear to us, it is useful for us to try to hold on to the clear sight, and to try to remember it, even when it seems as if there are clouds in our sky and our values are not clear.

The clear sight of the right values was expressed by Balaam when he was asked to come to do something that was harmful. Even though there were times in the story when he did not see clearly, he did have the right answer when asked if he would do something that was wrong for the sake of riches.

He had been asked by King Balak to come and curse some people, and the Lord had told him they were not to be cursed, but blessed. (Cursing is to speak evil against people with the hope that bad things will happen to them. Blessing is to speak what is good with the hope that what is good and happy may come to them.)

The answer he had given was “no.” Although they had brought money and riches, he had sent them back to the king with the answer that this was something the Lord would not allow. But later, the king sent even more servants with even greater promises of honor and riches. That is when Balaam spoke these clear words:

“Though Balak were to give me his house full of silver and gold, I could not go beyond the Word of the Lord my God...” (*Numbers 22:18*).

And later in the story when the king spoke angrily to him and said, “The Lord has kept you back from honor,” (*Numbers 24:11*) Balaam responded:

“Did I not speak to your messengers whom you sent to me, saying ‘though Balak were to give me his house full of silver and gold, I could not go beyond the Word of the Lord’...?” (*Numbers 24:13*)

Would you hurt someone for a little bit of money? When you are seeing clearly, of course you would not. And would you do it for some more money? The right answer is still no. And what if you were offered all the money in the world to do what you knew was wrong and hurtful? Well, listen carefully to something the Lord said about this to His disciples. He put it in the form of a question:

"What is a man profited if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?" (*Matthew 16:26*)

Listen to another way that question is put by the Lord:

"What advantage is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and is himself destroyed or lost?" (*Luke 9:25*)

The Lord allowed the disciples to answer that question within their own minds. And He allows us to think it over within our minds. When we are thinking rightly, the answer is perfectly clear, isn't it? It would not make any sense to lose yourself for the sake of gain, even if it were everything in the world.

Such clear truth not only helps us in the big decisions of life, but it also helps in the little ones. Just think of the little decisions we make in the way we talk. When we speak it can be to try to encourage others and help them, or it can be to discourage them and harm them.

The way people talk can make a lot of difference to whether their life is one that makes others happy, or whether their life brings discouragement and pain to others.

There are plenty of times when we just don't think of whether what we say is helpful or hurtful. In the cloudy moments of life, we just do and say what happens to come to us without even thinking of it. It is useful, then, to put the question: In your life and in the days of your life, do you want to be an influence for good on others that encourages them and makes them happy?

You would answer, "Yes." And what if you might get the reward of a little personal satisfaction or fun by speaking ill of others or making life unpleasant for them. Is it worth it? The right answer (one we may not always see) is that it is **not** worth it.

Let us remember this as we remember a true story about a man named Balaam who was called to curse. It is a story with ups and downs, but it has a good ending. It ends not in a curse, but in a blessing. And it is the story in which a man says no to what is wrong:

"Though Balak were to give me his house full of silver and gold, I could not go beyond the Word of the Lord my God" (*Numbers 22:18*).