

Balaam

Now our next example is in **Numbers 22**. Two books to the right: **Exo, Lev, Num...**

Here's the context...

- There was a prophet named Balaam, and somehow that's not recorded for us in Scripture, Balaam seemed to have the power to bless and curse certain people.
- A king named Balak wanted to be able to defeat the Israelites, so he sent messengers to Balaam to hire him to curse Israel so they would be weakened.
- Balaam really wanted the money Balak was offering, so he made what I consider to be the most foolish request in all of Scripture: he actually asked God if God would want him to go w/ Balak so he could curse Israel. Just think about that for a moment:
- Is there any way God would want someone to curse His people?
- God delivered Israel from Egypt and cursed the Egyptians for mistreating them.
- Did Balaam really think there was any chance God would want him to curse His people?

Of course not. Balaam's request was so foolish, I think Balaam knew beforehand that God wouldn't want him to do this. But he asked anyway b/c he wanted the money so badly.

Look at **Num 22:12** to see God's response...

Num 22:12 And God said to Balaam, "You shall not go with them; you shall not curse the people, for they *are* blessed."

Not surprisingly God told Balaam two things:

- Do not go with the messengers.
- Do not curse Israel b/c they are blessed.

But Balaam really wanted the money, so he kept asking, and finally God let him go.

Last week we talked about God's permissive will, and this one of the best examples in Scripture. God's permissive will takes place when...

We keep pushing...

Or we resist God so strongly...

He finally allows us to have what we want...

- Even though He knows it's not what's best for us...
- Even though He knows it will cause us problems...

But even when God's permissive will takes place, His will is still accomplished. Man's rebellion or man's stubbornness doesn't frustrate God's will.

And we see that even w/ Balaam: God let him go, but every time he opened his mouth to curse Israel, blessings poured out.

So it wasn't God's perfect will for Balaam to go, but it was God's permissive will. And even when he went, God still worked it out for the good of His people.

And since it wasn't really God's will for Balaam to go, God was angry w/ him when he went. Look at **verse 22** ...

22 God's anger was aroused because he (Balaam) went, and the Angel of the LORD took His stand in the way as an adversary against him.

God was so angry about Balaam going **the Angel of the LORD** stood in his way...and it says **as an adversary against him!** And God was angry for a few reasons:

1. First, God made it obvious He didn't really want Balaam to go. It says **God's anger was aroused BECAUSE HE WENT**. When Balaam went, God was angry like parents might be angry when a child does something they really don't want the child to do.
2. Second, God was angry b/c of the reason Balaam went: he was a greedy man. God knew Balaam was willing to disobey simply for money. God was angry Balaam would be so controlled by greed.
3. Third, God was angry b/c of what Balaam was willing to do: he was actually willing to curse God's people. He wanted to curse people that God said were blessed.

Now we're going to skip a few verses and I'm simply going to tell you what happened...

- Balaam couldn't see the **Angel of the LORD** standing in his way, but his donkey could. So the irony is...
 - Balaam is a diviner, but he couldn't divine that an **Angel** was in his way...
 - He's a prophet – or seer – but he couldn't see the **Angel**...
 - But his donkey could!
- So three times the donkey wouldn't go the direction Balaam wanted, and three times Balaam beat his donkey for it.
- Then one of the most unique moments in Scripture took place. As far as I know there are only two times animals spoke:
 - First, when the serpent spoke to Eve.
 - Second, when Balaam's donkey spoke to him...asking him why he struck her.
 - We talk about “dumb animals” but this is the account where an animal looks smarter than its owner.
 - You've reached a very low point in life when God has to speak to you through a donkey.
- Finally, the **Angel of the LORD** opened Balaam's eyes so he could see the Angel. This is when Balaam was finally able to see as well as his donkey! And the **Angel of the LORD** rebuked Balaam. Look at His words in **verse 33**...

33 The donkey saw Me and turned aside from Me these three times. If she had not turned aside from Me, surely I would also have killed you by now, and let her live.”

Something else that makes Balaam look very foolish is he was beating an animal that was saving his life! If the donkey hadn't turned aside each time, the **Angel** says He would've killed Balaam and let the donkey live!

Now let me pause and briefly tell you something about Balaam so we understand his confession when it takes place.

Throughout the account...

- Balaam's words always give the impression he wants to obey God.
- But his actions always reveal he doesn't want to obey God.
- He says one thing, but does something else.
 - He says he can't go w/ the men, but he keeps asking to go w/ them.
 - He talks about obeying God, but he keeps trying to disobey God.

Let me show you something that captures Balaam's hypocrisy. Look at **verse 18**...

18 Then Balaam answered and said to the servants of Balak, "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, to do less or more.

This sounds good, but then look at the next verse...

19 Now therefore, please, you also stay here tonight, that I may know what more the LORD will say to me."

He says this even though God had clearly told him not to go.

Balaam loved to give the impression that he wanted to obey God, but what he really wanted was the money the men were offering.

And the reason I'm telling you this is his confession in **verse 34** is no different...

34 And Balaam said to the Angel of the LORD, (here it is...) "I HAVE SINNED, for I did not know You stood in the way against me. Now therefore, if it displeases You, I will turn back."

Balaam found out **the Angel** almost killed him, so he makes this confession which is just like his other words:

- It sounds good...
- He says he sinned by going...
- He says he'll turn back...

But look at the words **if it displeases you**. I almost can't capture the absurdity of this statement...

- Back in **verse 12 God said, "You shall not go with them; you shall not curse the people, for they are blessed."** That makes it clear God would be **displeased** if he went.
- Then an Angel stood in his way...with a sword...and almost killed him!

And Balaam says, “If it displeases you for me to go, I’ll turn back”???

How much clearer could it be that God is **displeased**? When the **Angel of the LORD** stands in your way with a sword, you know God is **displeased**.

But here’s the thing...

After Balaam said all this, he still went anyway!

- He said, “**I have sinned**,” but he kept on going.
- He said, “**I have sinned**,” but continued to be an enemy of Israel...
- He said, “**I have sinned**,” but then he tried over and over and over and over to curse God’s people.

WE SEE CONFESSION WITHOUT REPENTANCE WITH BALAAM, WHO HAD NO INTENTION OF CHANGING.

What good is there in saying, “**I have sinned**”...

- If you’re going to continue doing the exact same thing?
- If you have no intention of changing...or doing anything different...or repenting?

So here’s how Balaam serves as an example to us...

Balaam is like people...

- Who confess...
- Who say, “**I have sinned...**”

But they have no intention of changing!

Have you ever met people and...

- They say they’re sorry...
- They say they’ve sinned...
- They sound sorry...
- They even look sorry...

But...

- No matter what words come out of their mouths...
- No matter how good it sounds...
- No matter how believable it seems...

They keep doing the exact same thing. They have no intention of changing whatsoever.

That’s Balaam!

But here’s the question...

Can we be like this?

- Do we say we’re sorry?

- Do we say we've sinned?

Buuuuut...

- In our hearts we know nothing is going to change!
- We know our lives will not be any different!
- We have every intention of continuing to do the same thing!

Balaam is...

- The man who says he's sorry for looking at things he shouldn't, but he knows he's going to go back to looking at the same things. He doesn't really have any intention of changing.
- Balaam is the wife who disrespects her husband, confesses her sin, but knows the next time she's upset at him she'll go right back to disrespecting him.
- Balaam is like people who waste money like crazy, apologize, but they know the next time they want something they're going to buy it w/o a second thought.

We want to make sure we're not like this. When we say, "**I have sinned**":

- We want to make sure we intend to repent.
- We want to make sure our confession is followed by change in our lives.

Achan

Now our final example is in **Josh 7**. Once again please turn two books to the right: **Num, Deut, Josh**.

Let me briefly explain the context for this account...

When Israel conquered Jericho, in **Josh 6:19** the Israelites were told: "**All the silver and gold, and vessels of bronze and iron, *are* consecrated to the LORD; they shall come into the treasury of the LORD.**"

Apparently Jericho had a lot of wealth, and all of it was supposed to be given to God.

But something happened...

A man named Achan took some of the wealth from Jericho, and he kept his sin a secret.

And Achan's sin was so serious, something else happened...

Israel's next battle was against a settlement called Ai. And Ai was so small compared to Jericho, the spies who looked at it said, "*The whole nation doesn't have to go; only send two or three thousand men.*" So 3,000 Israelites went out to fight against Ai and...

THEY LOST!

36 Israelites died in the battle!

Joshua was confused, so he cried out to God to find out why this happened. God told Joshua a sin had taken place, referring to Achan's sin. But God didn't tell Joshua WHO sinned.

Instead, look at **Josh 7:13** to see what God said the people should do...

13 Get up, sanctify the people, and say (this means say to them...), 'Sanctify yourselves for tomorrow, because thus says the LORD God of Israel: "There is an accursed thing in your midst, O Israel; you cannot stand before your enemies until you take away the accursed thing from among you."

Notice three things:

1. First, the people were supposed to prepare themselves before God dealt w/ them the following day.
2. Second, God made it very clear why Israel lost: b/c of the **accursed thing** Achan had stolen.
3. Third, God said Israel would continue to lose until the **accursed thing** was destroyed.

Now let me ask you to put yourself in Achan's position for a moment...

When Israel lost in battle against Ai...

- I don't know if Achan knew that Israel lost b/c of him.
- I don't know if he knew his sin cost 36 men their lives.

But when Joshua said the words of **verse 13**, Achan learned...

- *Israel lost b/c of me...*
- *36 men died b/c of my sin.*
- *I'm the one with the **accursed thing in [the] midst of the camp, and Israel is going to continue to lose in battle – more men will die – until MY **accursed thing** is destroyed.***

So this would've been a really good time for Achan to do something we have talked about a number of times up to this point in previous sermons: confess his sin and repent.

And if you look at **verse 13** notice the words:

- **Sanctify the people**
- **Sanctify yourselves**

There's a real emphasis on **sanctification**. Some translations say **consecrate** or **purify**.

The reason I mention this is while the people were **sanctifying** or **consecrating** or **purifying** themselves, I wonder if Achan thought of **sanctifying** or **consecrating** or **purifying** himself...

- By confessing his sin and repenting?
- By giving up the **accursed things** hidden in his tent?

But he didn't do that. He had plenty of time to confess and repent...but he kept silent. And that's what I really want you to notice about this account...

Achan had LOTS of opportunities to confess his sin, but...

- He kept it hidden as LOOOOOOOOONG as he could.
- He kept his sin a secret until it was no longer a secret!
- He will confess his sin, but ONLY AFTER he had no other choice.

And he'll have no other choice, b/c God is going to reveal his sin to the entire nation. Let me briefly tell you what's going to happen. God told Joshua to...

- Tell the people that they would be presented by tribe, and the tribe w/ the sinner would be identified.
- Then the tribe would come forward by **families** or clans, and the guilty **family** would be chosen.
- Then that **family** would come forward by **household** and the guilty **household** would be chosen.

Achan heard this was going to happen, but he still didn't confess.

Let's read about the selection process. Look at **verse 16**...

16 So Joshua rose early in the morning and brought Israel by their tribes, and the tribe of Judah was taken.

Achan is still silent. No confession.

17a He brought the clan of Judah, and he took the family of the Zarhites;

Achan is still silent. No confession.

17b and he brought the family of the Zarhites man by man, and Zabdi was taken.

Achan is still silent. No confession.

Now I don't know what exactly Achan was thinking while all this was taking place, but I suspect it must have been terrifying as he watched the finger of God get closer and closer to pointing at him.

Gerald Vreeland in his commentary said, "*Achan waited to confess, as the concentric rings [inescapably] tightened.*"

Have you ever watched videos of boa constrictors squeezing their prey to death? That's probably what Achan felt like as this process took place.

But he still kept silent. No confession.

18 Then he brought his household man by man, and Achan the son of Carmi, the son of Zabdi, the son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, was taken.

Now let me get you to think of something else...

- The nation of Israel lost a battle b/c of Achan's sin.
- 36 men died b/c of Achan's covetousness.

Do you think the friends and families of those men were in attendance? Do you think they – along w/ the rest of the nation of Israel – really wanted to find out whose sin caused the death of...

- Their friend...
- Their father...
- Their brother...
- Their son...
- Their uncle...
- Their cousin?

I bet everyone was waiting to find out, and I'm sure they weren't happy w/ Achan when they learned his covetousness caused the deaths of their loved ones.

Now at this point w/ Achan chosen out of the hundreds of thousands of men present, there was no keeping silent any longer. God singled Achan out before the entire nation to get him to confess. Look at **verse 19**...

19 Now Joshua said to Achan, “My son, I beg you, give glory to the LORD God of Israel, and make confession to Him, and tell me now what you have done; do not hide *it* from me.”

We've talked about confessing our sins versus covering them in our sermons recently, and I want you to notice a real treasure that's contained in Joshua's words. He said...

Give glory to the LORD God of Israel, and make confession to Him, and tell me now what you have done.

By telling Joshua his sin, Achan was confessing to God, and by his confession, he was giving glory to God. The lesson for us is:

- When we confess our sin, we are honoring God.
- When we cover or hide our sins – which is what Achan had been doing – we are dishonoring God.

So Achan finally produces this forced confession...

20 And Achan answered Joshua and said, “Indeed (now notice these words...) I HAVE SINNED against the LORD God of Israel, and this is what I have done:

Now we don't have to read any more. Achan confessed and he and his family were executed. Just to let you know, I believe they were all executed, b/c they were all involved in some way or another hiding the sin.

There are other examples in Scripture when people sinned – like Korah and his followers – and the children weren't killed. But I think Achan's family was killed b/c they were all guilty.

Now here's the question...

Why did Achan FINALLY confess his sin? The answer brings us to the rest of Lesson 1...

WE SEE CONFESSION WITHOUT REPENTANCE WITH ACHAN, WHO ONLY CONFESSED BECAUSE HE WAS CAUGHT.

Before we get into this lesson, let me make one qualifying point...

Sometimes people get caught and they genuinely repent as a result:

- Getting caught is a blessing – or grace – from God to help produce repentance in our lives.
- If you get caught in your sin – no matter how hard it might be – thank God that He loves you enough NOT to let you keep on sinning.

Now I hope Achan genuinely repented when he was caught...but considering how silent he was for so long, I doubt it.

To me, Achan is a picture of people who confess when they have no other choice. There's some period of time they could confess, but...

- They keep their sin a secret as long as possible.
- They hide their sin as long as they can.

And when they can't hide their sin any longer – when it's no longer a secret – they finally say, "I have sinned."

But let me ask you this...

- How much does a confession mean when it's practically squeezed out of someone?
- It's nice Achan confessed...finally...but why didn't he confess earlier?
- Does a confession really mean as much when you've been caught and there's no way out?
- How much does a confession mean when a child is caught w/ their hand in the cookie jar?

Isn't it much better to confess BEFORE you're caught?

Think about these situations for a moment...

- Let's say a man has been going places his wife has no idea about, and he gets caught and confesses...
- Or let's say a woman has been making purchases behind her husband's back, and he catches her and she confesses...
- Or let's say a child has been in a relationship the parents have forbidden, and the child gets caught and confesses...

What are the nagging, frustrating, questions when each of these people are caught?

- *Why didn't they confess earlier?*
- *Did they only confess b/c they were caught?*

- *Would they have ever confessed?*
- *How much longer would their sin have gone on?*

The only way for confessions to be as meaningful as possible is for them to take place BEFORE the sin is revealed.

Please hear me when I say...

- Earn your wife's trust...
- Earn your husband's trust...
- Earn your children's trust...
- Earn your parents' trust...
- Earn your friend's trust...

By confessing your sin before you're caught!

And I want to give you one more reason to confess before you're caught. And this brings us to our last lesson...

CONFESS YOUR SIN BEFORE GOD REVEALS IT.

There's a very important lesson we can learn from Achan that relates not just to this sermon, but all of our recent sermons discussing confession and repentance...

We can't hide our sins from God!

No matter how silent we remain, God is going to bring our sins to light if we don't confess them. Achan is one of the best examples of this in Scripture, but there are a number of verses I can give you making this same point. Here are a few of them...

- **Num 32:23b Be sure your sin will find you out.**
- **Jer 16:17 My eyes *are* on all their ways; they are not hidden from My face, nor is their iniquity hidden from My eyes.**
- **Jer 23:24 Can anyone hide himself in secret places,
So I shall not see him?
Do I not fill heaven and earth?**
- **Amos 9:3 Though they hide themselves on top of Carmel,
From there I will search and take them;
Though they hide from My sight at the bottom of the sea,
From there I will command the serpent, and it shall bite them.** In other words, there's no escaping God's punishment!
- **Heb 4:13 There is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things *are* naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we *must give* account.**

There are other verses I could give you, but hopefully you get the point!

We face two choices regarding our sins...please hear me when I say this:

- We can confess them.
- Or we can hide them for some period of time until God reveals them. And it seems to me when He does:
 - It's always much more painful...
 - It's always much more humbling...
 - It always involves greater consequences...
 - It always involves a much larger number of people...

Than if we confessed on our own.

David is a great example...

David tried to keep his sin a secret, but God told Nathan the prophet what David did. Nathan confronted David, and listen to what God said...

2 Sam 12:12 For you did *it* secretly, but I will do this thing before all Israel, before the sun.

When God said, "**I will do this thing before all Israel,**" He meant David would be punished before everyone...and that's how David was punished!

Over the last few years a number of high profile men ended up experiencing very high profile scandals. I decided not to mention their names, but I'm sure a number of them come to mind. The question is...

- *Would their sins have gotten so bad...*
- *Would their sins have become so public...*
- *Would their sins have had to serious consequences...*
- *If they had confessed them earlier...*
- *If they hadn't forced God's hand – if they hadn't forced Him to reveal their sins – b/c of their desire to hide it?*

Some of you might be like Achan:

- You're going to wait to confess your sin until the last possible moment...
- You probably even feel like Achan as though you're being squeezed by a boa constrictor.
- I can tell you when God reveals your sin, it will be much more painful than if you confess it yourself!

Instead, don't test God:

- Confess your sin before you're caught.
- Confess your sin before God has to reveal it.

Now let me conclude by reminding you of the verse that's been our theme during these sermons...

**Pro 28:13 He who covers his sins will not prosper,
But whoever confesses and forsakes *them* will have mercy.**

The three men we looked at this morning – Pharaoh, Balaam, and Achan – they didn't prosper b/c they only obeyed half the verse. It says **whoever confesses [their sins] AND FORSAKES THEM will have mercy.**

- These men **confessed their sins**, but they didn't **forsake** them.
- Confession without forsaking – or confession without repentance – isn't enough.

We want to make sure we confess our sin, and then we want to make sure that confession is accompanied by repentance.

Let's pray.