

Let Me Die the Death of the Upright

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[0 : 00] I would like us to turn now for a short time to the passage we read and we can read again at verse 10.

Who can count the dust of Jacob or number the fourth part of Israel? Let me die the death of the upright and let my end be like his.

Particularly these words, let me die the death of the upright and let my end be like his. Many, many years ago I heard someone say that there are three persons in the scripture that terrify them.

And these three are Judas Iscariot, Saul the son of Kish and Balaam.

I wonder if you can connect them. Can you make a connection between these three? Well I think the simplest and the common denominator is that we all had what you would call an intense experience of the Lord.

[1 : 45] They all had knowledge of God, perhaps to a high degree. And yet each one of them, if you cannot say about them that they are lost, there's a very big question mark placed against them.

Balaam, you can forgive, I hope, the pronunciation. When it comes to place names or personal names in the Bible, my argument is my pronunciation is as good as the next person's.

My Hebrew doesn't allow me to suggest to you what the accurate pronunciation of his name is. Balaam has always fitted in with my ear, so that's the name he's called by today.

If you know him by a different name, fair and well, it's the same person I hope we're talking about. We don't know much about who he was. All that there is to be said about him as far as detail is concerned of his background, we find in these chapters in the book of Numbers.

Some speak of him as a Gentile rather than a Jew. In other words, he wasn't of the race of Israel. He was a Gentile.

[3 : 29] And yet he is clearly identified as a prophet. Some choose to use the word seer rather than prophet.

And I think there there's a suggestion even by that option being chosen, that there is an antagonism towards him.

The word prophet perhaps identifies him with the biblical prophets. Prophets who spoke on behalf of God to God's people.

Whereas seers could have been people who had a gift, mystical gift, a gift of the supernatural, without readily knowing what the source of that supernatural gift was.

Now what we know about Balaam is that on occasion, God filled his mouth. God gave to Balaam his word to speak on his behalf.

[4 : 52] It doesn't mean that that was always the case. And it may well be. Certain of the commentators at least identify Balaam as someone who had a reputation.

And that reputation was someone that was missionary in the use of his gifts. Which meant that this person, Balak, who is spoken of here, approached Balaam in order for Balaam to speak out against God's people.

Now, I don't think that would have happened spontaneously. I doubt if it would have been something that would have occurred if there hadn't been some kind of personal history on his part.

And certainly Jewish theologians suggest that. Now whether they're right in doing so, we have to abide by what the scripture says.

And what we know from the scripture is that this person, Balaam, was gifted and God spoke through him.

[6 : 19] Now what we see in the account, if you want to read this account, it's quite an interesting account, if not a difficult account to explain in all its detail, is that this Moabite king approached him in order to curse his enemies.

The unfortunate thing was Israel were the enemies of Moab. And what he was expected to do was come and curse the enemies who God had declared his own friends.

And that is in the background of what we have here. And the passion of Balaam is exposed with all his failings and faults.

For even though he recognizes God, it is not necessarily his God that he recognizes. Although he has a knowledge of God's people, he is not necessarily one of them.

Although he knows the truth of God at first hand, it is not necessarily a truth that he himself has believed in.

[7 : 44] And I'll just give you a quotation from one comment. I think this came from somebody, you know, there's three passages that you can find mention of Balaam in the New Testament.

And possibly these are comments arising out of this quotation. This is Sam Gordon. He says, In a nutshell, he went softly, softly on sin.

And he encouraged the people of God to compromise. He had one plank in his theology. If you can't beat them, join them.

It is fitting that, it is fitting in with the prevailing mindset. It is the accommodation principle being put into practice.

If you like, it is the all things to all men philosophy. Now that's just an opinion of a commentator.

[8 : 49] That's a description of the kind of person Balaam was. But we have to look at what the scripture says. And we're looking really today at one narrow part of the book, of this chapter, and this verse in particular.

And this verse recognizes or tells us that this person who was a seer or a prophet was someone who expressed a desire that you could readily acquiesce in.

You can see the wisdom of what he desires. And what he desires is this, let me die the death of the upright. Now that doesn't mean he wants to die there and then.

What it means is that when it comes for him to die, his death is going to be the death of the upright. The second thing that we can say about this person is that what he says here, although he sees the wisdom of it, there is a futility in the expression of that desire.

Because although he wants the death of the righteous, what is necessary for him to have that death is the righteousness that makes it possible.

[10 : 27] And from his life and from his behavior, he just cannot believe it possible for him to have that death as his death.

And if that is the case, then that begs the question, if his death is not the death of the righteous, what kind of death can he expect?

And you have to base your answer on what the scripture says. Well, I hope that everybody would agree that his desire is a wise desire.

that if any one of us is wise, even in a limited way, that we will at some point in our lives reflect upon what death will open to us.

You know, I know there are some people in the world and they don't want to discuss death, they don't want to talk about it, they don't want to think about it, they don't even want to have it as a as a as something that can possibly be in their experience.

[11 : 55] Because it seems to them that it's something that's out there and they don't want to contemplate it or even have its shadow cast over them at any time.

Now, you can't you can't live like that. You can't possibly expect to die like that because at some point every one of us expects that we'll die.

However much we reflect on it, however much we think about it, we cannot escape from it. we cannot escape from knowing about it, we cannot escape from the prospect of it, we cannot believe that there is going to be a point in which this world will be no longer our place of abode.

Now, the thing about Balaam is this, that he knew that and the text demonstrates to us that he was somebody who knew more than just a simple statement of fact that he was going to die, but that when he died he wanted to die in a particular way.

He wanted to die with the prospect beyond death being something that was entirely positive, something that he could anticipate as bringing with it great benefit or advantage.

[13 : 29] Now, I know there are people in the world and they want to believe and they would want you to believe that when death comes that's the end, that's the point beyond which you do not go.

Life ceases and all that life means comes to an end. there is no activity, there is no experience, there is nothing.

But whether they believe that or not, whether they want you to believe that or not, whether you believe that or not, what I would say to you is this wisdom dictates that you consider at least what the word of God says, what the Bible says, and the Bible says to us quite plainly that at the point of death one thing is certain, that man dies and the soul and the body that was necessary for life separate.

And the soul returns to God who gave it and the body returns to the dust which the Bible describes as returning to whence it came from.

Now, these are biblical truths, and Balaam clearly understood that death involved that, but he also believed or understood that there was something for the person who was a believer in God that God had promised would be their possession.

[15 : 15] salvation. And, you know, that begs the question, really, what kind of prophet Balaam was. If he was just a secular prophet who dabbled in the religion of the Jews, you could excuse him lacking knowledge, you could have sympathy for him if he didn't really know the truths of God.

But, if you look at the scripture, the scripture, and we'll look at the quotations the scripture sets before us, you'll see from these quotations that the scripture, God's word, tells us that this man is despised because of what he did with God's truth, because of the way that he lived, and he is responsible for treading the word of God under his feet.

In the book of Genesis, we read a truth concerning God's people. I will make your descendants as the dust of the earth, so that if a man could number the dust of the earth, then your descendants could also be numbered.

That's a promise given to God's people, Israel. The descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, that their number was going to increase, that they were going to occupy place given to them by God, God would be their God, and so on and so forth.

And when we read some of the things that Balaam said, it is plain from his knowledge that not only did God speak to him and speak through him, his knowledge of what God had taught through his word was knowledge that he possessed as well.

[17 : 34] And without question, this man knows what he's talking about. He knows and respects the word of God and also, if you read carefully this chapter and the chapter before it, he understands the futility of going against what God's word is saying.

he says himself, I could not go beyond the word of the Lord my God to do less or more, he says.

I could not do that because he confesses there the name of Jehovah as his God, even though his name, we've mentioned it before as far as pronunciation is concerned.

Very often when you read in the name in the Bible, names of people, the names identify the relationship that they have with God.

For example, if you think about Elijah or Elisha, the word El at the beginning of the word is the word for God and the word is there describing to us a person who is of the family of God, who have this relationship with God or their parents expected them to have this relationship or knowledge of God and they were taught as much.

[19 : 09] Now, as far as Balaam was concerned, the name Baal is the name of an idol, a false deity.

Baal was I think a god of fire, was a false god. And I remember there were many, many gods.

I was reading recently when Paul went to preach in, it was Corinth, maybe Athens, but he went to Athens, I think it was, that at the time that he preached there, the population is thought to have been about 10,000 people.

And yet at that time there was 30,000 deities, 30,000 idols, three idols per person.

They were just creating them and worshipping them almost at their heart's content.

[20 : 18] Now, Baal was not just a fecal character who was a small individual god that very few know. He was a major god.

Now, whether this meant that Balaam was somebody who was of the family of worshippers of Balaam, of Baal or not, it is in Machtter.

What matters is that he knew God's word. And he knew what God's word said. He knew what God's word promised.

He knew sufficient about God's word to make him want to be like God's people when death came. That's all that he needed.

God's word. And it may be that there are great many people under the gospel, like yourselves, some of you who hear God's word readily, who have repeatedly sat under God's word.

[21 : 26] And if I were to ask you, do you know what the Bible is saying? And you would say, well, I don't want you to make me sit an exam on this matter. But I've got a general idea that good people go to heaven.

People who believe in Jesus Christ will go to be with him. And you'll know certain truths concerning him and concerning what kind of life is expected of the believer and so on.

That kind of information you readily have. And you may say, and a lot of people do say this, that they would like to go to heaven.

They want to go to heaven. Certainly don't want to go to hell. They certainly don't think about going to hell. It's the last thing on their minds.

And they would rather not believe that there is a hell. But you see, the knowledge of hell comes from the same place that the knowledge of heaven comes from.

[22 : 28] the belief that you have in either place is based upon what God's word teaches. And how you choose to act with regard to that knowledge influences what you do.

And if you think that going to heaven simply involves you in dying the death of the righteous without living the life of the righteous, then you haven't really understood what God's word is saying.

And this was the problem for Balaam, whose behavior illustrated that he had a knowledge of what God's word said, but the knowledge that he had of what God's word said did not change the life that he lived sufficiently for you to believe that he really believed the word and put his trust in it.

a Christian by the name of James Buchanan, a preacher of a past generation, he said, concerning the knowledge that the scripture presents to us, this knowledge must either prove the savor of life unto life or the savor of death unto death.

death. If it is not the means of our conversion, it will be the ground of our condemnation. Some people may say, I'd rather not, if this is what it means, I'd rather not have God's word.

[24 : 09] Well, you can't undo what's been done. many people may have blundered into something and they would say, I'd rather never happened, never gone to this place.

But there's a futility in that thinking because you can't undo what's part of your past. And you can't unlearn the truths that you've been taught.

And you can't unbelieve what you've been said before so as to believe it. and not having that is not really to your advantage either.

This knowledge that Balaam had was a futile knowledge because the simple reason is that he could not be a friend of God and a friend of the world.

He could not love the things of the world and love God at the same time. If you go back just to the previous chapter, I'm hoping that you'll read this for yourself.

[25 : 18] It's a very interesting story. But in chapter 22 God said to Balaam, you shall not go with them, you shall not curse the people of God for they are blessed.

God had told him what he could and could not do. Because they were simply God's people. This was something that God told him. Then you read on and he says in verse 18, 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 command of the Lord my God to do less or more.

In other words, the information that he had was sufficient to keep him on the right road, to do the right thing, to speak the truth that God gave him to speak and to desist from doing what God wished him not to do.

And yet as you look through the journey that he's on, what we find out is that he cannot resist the temptation of accruing wealth, even though it means that it comes with a spiritual cost.

You know, there's the famous story and it's told you here in the previous chapter of the way that Balaam goes on the road which God had told him not to go on and he's met by an ass and he's met by an angel and the angel is hidden from his view but the ass that he's riding on sees the angel and well I'm sure you know you've been taught the story as children and people spend a lot of time how could the ass talk?

[27:19] How could the words of God come from the mouth of the ass and even there's a lesson there for Balaam how could he speak the words of God any more than the ass could speak the words of God spoke to him he probably thought that he had more right to speak God's word than he asked it but what we need to look at is what the scripture says about this man and the scripture is really what keeps you right God's word tells you where Balaam was at when God was dealing with him and where he was in relation to God in the second epistle of Peter in chapter 2 and verse 15 the apostle Peter there I'll read the whole section he says there about a certain people who are false prophets and teachers and the like he says they well I can read from verse 12 these like irrational animals creatures of instinct born to be caught and destroyed blaspheming about matters of which they are ignorant will also be destroyed in their destruction suffering wrong as the wage for their wrongdoing they counted pleasure to revel in the daytime they are blots and blemishes reveling in their deceptions while they feast with you they have eyes full of adultery insatiable for sin they entice unsteady souls they have hearts trained in greed accursed children for taking the right way they have gone astray they have followed the way of Balaam the son of Beor who loved

Cain from wrong doing but was rebuked for his own transgression a speechless donkey spoke with human voice and restrained the prophet's madness that's what the bible tells you that Balaam was guilty of he knew the right to do he knew what he had to do what God had told him and yet he went on to do otherwise and he is compared there to those who are false prophets those who have set about for gain to entice people to follow their wisdom or lack of it as the case may be again you find in the epistle of Jude on chapter 11 mention is made of him again 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 he's got very very sad companions named along with him there Cain and there's the other one here Cain and Korah Korah who God brought down fire from heaven upon then in the book of revelation in chapter 2 once again we read there I have a few things against you you have some there who hold the teachings of Balaam who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel so that they might eat food to sacrifice to idols and practice sexual immorality the scripture tells you the kind of person

Balaam was even with the knowledge that he had of the scripture he chose to go against it he chose to live not in its light but putting its light under his feet and yet he desired heaven he desired the good things that God's people are promised he wanted these things but he was not willing to give up the evil that he was doing in order to do that and you know that is really the bottom line as far as some people's choices are concerned some people say I don't believe in Christ because I don't know enough about him that is not right if they knew enough about Christ to know that they need Christ then there is nothing debarring you from from gleaning sufficient knowledge from God's word to ensure that the knowledge that you're lacking would be supplied even if it means going on your knees crying out to God in heaven to open your eyes and to open your ears and to open your heart and to give you the wherewithal by which you might believe in him but don't say that you're not able to get what is necessary for your salvation because it's there for you with God's help any person can gain what is necessary for them to be safe in

Christ now we're told here that this man's end was not what he wanted behold he says let me die the death of the upright let my end be like this and there's no doubt what he's wanting but the scriptures that we read there tell us that that is not how things were for him it could not be like that there is life or there is death there is heaven there is hell there is good there is evil and it's no choice at all if you choose evil rather than good because evil will bring you limited satisfaction temporary satisfaction this was all this man was wanting I was reading in the morning there one of the commentators he was using this illustration he was a

[34 : 14] Jewish commentator a Jewish rabbi and he was talking about a fellow Jew who was quite well off and they were wanting him to support the work the building work of the temple and although he was well off he was mean and the rabbi invited him to his home and he took him to the window of his study and he asked him can you look out that window and tell me what you see and he looked out the window and he said I see people then he took him into the study and stood him in front of a mirror and he said tell me what you see and he said I see my own face and he said you know it says when people stand in front of a bit of glass with a bit of silver behind it a bit of silver behind it they tend only to see themselves in other words greed or the desire to satisfy self becomes the abiding passion and that was the problem for Balaam not lack of knowledge of who

God was or what God's people were or what God had promised to them or what it meant for them to die and to go into eternity he understood that he knew that do you understand it you know that you've been taught that heaven is a place that God has promised for his people and that his people are going to heaven to be with the Lord which is far better to be with Christ in order that they be like him to enjoy the blessings of his company the blessings of his fellowship with his people and all that entails and you've been told that but if you choose something that keeps that from you then it is by virtue of your choice that you have done that if

I know we can't overemphasize the the element of choice because as far as some preaching goes it's all down to choice but that's not the truth of it but we cannot take choice out of it either we're told in the scripture that God said to a certain people choose you this day whom you will serve remember that when Elijah was speaking to the people if God be God serve him but if you follow him sometimes he presents you with choices and when you read God's word and when you think of what God's word is saying to you it's not because ignorance has clouded your judgment it's because in your analysis of what God's word is saying well I don't want to leave these things in the world behind

I don't want Christ as much as I want these things I don't want to put my sin where it won't be so much a part of my life we've all got secret sins favorite sins sins that we're very bound up with and we're reluctant to put them behind us in order to go to Christ and when we give place to that then the consequences we must understand that there are consequences well may you understand something of what this word says to about this man Balaam complex complicated passion amazing that God would speak to his people through him amazing amazing that we are able to hear you know when he was faced with choices that he had to make he had to acknowledge

God's word had to be spoken the truth had to be heard he couldn't do these things against who God was and yet with that understanding he still showed himself to be such a person as the new testament describes as someone who was who is despicable well may God help us understand the significance of that let us join in prayer amen oh lord have mercy upon us so that your word will speak to our hearts that we will not be blinded to the truth that contains that we would rest upon the one who speaks to us through it that we may put our trust in him remember all who are your people bless them in their life of faith remember those who would desire to be with them and amongst them may that desire be strengthened and may the resolution be genuine that they might stop short of embracing the

[40 : 02] Christ who is the Christ of the gospel watch over as we pray and forgive our sins in Jesus name amen our closing psalm is psalm 48 again we're going to sing psalms page 63 psalm 48 a page 63 at verse 8 as we have heard so have we seen God's city will endure the Lord almighty evermore his city keeps secure we contemplate your steadfast love within your house oh God for like your name your praise extends through all the earth abroad all that you do is righteous Lord Mount Zion's joy is great and Judah's towns rejoice as they your judgments celebrate round

Zion walk and count her towers view every citadel so that to children yet unborn her story you may tell for God the Lord who is our God forever will abide he is our God forever more and to the end our guide we can sing these verses in conclusion as we have heard so have we seen God's city will endure as we have heard so have we seen God's city will endure the Lord almighty ever more his city keep secure we contemplate your step as love within your house oh

God for like your name your praise extends through all the earth abroad all that you do is right just Lord Mount Zion joy is great and Judas towns rejoice as they your judgment celebrate celebrate round Zion walk and count her towers view every citadel so that to children yet unborn her story you may tell for

God the Lord who is our God forever will abide he is our God forever more and to the end our guide now may grace mercy and peace from God the Father the Son and the Holy Spirit rest and abide with you all now and always amen for right grace long feet old