

A Biography of Anti-Meekness

Galatians 5:23; 2 Peter 2:15-16

April 19, 2015

Greg L. Price

If the life of Jesus Christ provides a biography of meekness in willingly and joyfully submitting to the yoke of His Father even to the point of suffering the equivalent of the horrors of hell for those who trust Him, who might provide a biography of anti-meekness in acting as though he took the yoke of God upon him, but in reality took the yoke of his own selfish ambition upon him? I submit that when we consider the life of Balaam, we read a biography of anti-meekness—a mere superficial façade of submission to the Lord, but a deeply rooted pride to seek earthly reward over humbly taking up the yoke of meekness in submission to the will of Christ.

Dear ones, when Jesus commands those who would follow Him to take His yoke upon them and to learn of Him because He is meek and lowly (Matthew 11:29), He does not consider this to be the extraordinary Christian—this is simply what every true Christian who trusts alone in Christ alone will do. This is not going beyond the call of duty, this is simply our humble and loving service to Jesus Christ who loved us and gave His life for us. The meekness of Christ is summarized in these words: “Not my will, but thine, be done” (Luke 22:42). That’s meekness, dear friend. Not what I want, not what I plan, not what I possess, but what Christ wants, plans, and would have me to possess in my life. Meekness is not clinging to our life and the world, but rather surrendering our life and this world to the lordship of Jesus Christ.

The main points for the sermon this Lord’s Day are: (1) Anti-Meekness Loves the Wages of Unrighteousness (2 Peter 2:15); and (2) Anti-Meekness Will Not Submit to the Yoke of Christ (2 Peter 2:16).

I. Anti-Meekness Loves the Wages of Unrighteousness (2 Peter 2:15).

A. The Apostle Peter’s design in 2 Peter 2 is to warn God’s people about certain false teachers who had secretly worked their way into the assembly of the Church, and to expose these false teachers as those who propagate heresies and live a life of compromise with the world.

1. Peter calls these false teachers “self-willed” (2 Peter 2:10)—that is what characterizes their life—living for self rather than for Christ (that is what I mean by the term “anti-meek”). Whereas “meekness” is taking the yoke of Christ upon oneself and humbly submitting to the will of Christ, “anti-meekness” is taking the yoke of self upon oneself and using Christ and Christianity to promote one’s own selfish agenda and ambition. Peter states that these false teachers were like Balaam “**who loved the wages of unrighteousness**” (2 Peter 2:15). Jude also exposes false teachers with similar words, “Woe unto them! For they ... ran greedily after the error of Balaam **for reward**” (Jude 11).

2. In both of these cases, Balaam is identified as one who did not submit and surrender all to Christ, but as one who only pretended to submit (while rebelling in his heart) in order to gain an earthly reward. Balaam’s faith was not in the Lord and his heart and affections were fixed upon the things of this world, and rather than dying the death of the righteous, he died the death of the wicked. It was not meekness (humble submission to Christ’s will) that characterized Balaam, but anti-meekness (resisting Christ’s will and loving the rewards which this world offers over the rewards which Christ offers).

B. In order to understand Balaam’s biography of anti-meekness in loving the riches and reward of this world over Christ, we must turn back to the Old Testament account of Balaam in Numbers 22.

1. Balaam is somewhat of an enigma and puzzle to many because God appears to him and

speaks to him His word to convey to Balak, the king of Moab; and yet Balaam is identified with false teachers and false prophets in 2 Peter 2:15-16 and Jude 11.

a. Balaam is like Judas Iscariot who was one of Christ's 12 apostles, gifted with the same supernatural gifts as were the other 11 apostles, and yet Christ called Judas a devil in John 6:70. Balaam is likewise gifted by God, but Balaam's heart and affections do not belong to God.

b. Like Judas, Balaam had some relationship/association to the Lord, and yet he was far away from a true faith in and love for the Lord. Like Judas, who looked to an earthly reward of reigning here upon the earth with Christ over the Romans and stole from the money bag (we are told in John 12:6), so Balaam looked to an earthly reward of riches which he prized more than an everlasting reward of righteousness and reigning with Christ. Like Judas who was self-willed (anti-meek), so was Balaam. Both were outwardly willing to give some semblance of following the Lord, but in both cases their anti-meek resistance against the will of Christ characterized their lives in betraying the Lord for an earthly reward.

2. The biography of anti-meek Balaam begins in Numbers 22:1-6 with Balak (the king of Moab) in great fear over the innumerable nation of Israel whom God had delivered by opening the Red Sea for Israel to pass safely through to the other side and sending it crashing down upon the pursuing Egyptians, and whom God had led most recently in victory against a kingdom of giants—the Amorites. Balak decides to call upon Balaam to curse Israel for him as the easy way out (no fighting, no fuss, just Israel's destruction, or at least to weaken Israel to such an extent that Moab could easily overwhelm Israel and destroy them).

3. Balak, the king, sends a delegation of important elders of Moab to present to Balaam the king's request, along with certain "rewards" (Numbers 22:7). Balaam provides lodging for the elders of Moab and brings the matter unto the **LORD** (not to a false god, but to Yahweh, Numbers 22:8). If Balaam knew the covenant name of God revealed to Moses at the burning bush, then surely he knew about Israel's exodus from Egypt. Is it likely that the king of Moab knew of Israel's deliverance from Egypt and Balaam did not? How could Balaam dare to ask the God of Israel if it would be all right for him to accompany these men to meet Balak, so that he could curse Israel? This is absolutely incredible! Balaam's heart of love for worldly achievement and reward is already indicated in the fact that he did not immediately send these enemies of the Lord away, but gave them lodging in his home.

4. God appears to Balaam (possibly in a dream) and commands Balaam not to go with the elders of Moab, for God had blessed Israel (Numbers 22:12). This is the stated will of God (it's not complicated, it's not unclear). This should have forever settled the issue with Balaam (that he should not even entertain the thought again or bring it before the Lord again), but as we shall see, Balaam outwardly submitted (with an anti-meekness, a pretended meekness) to the Lord in sending the elders and their rich reward back to the king (Numbers 22:13-14), but did not inwardly submit (with a willing and earnest meekness of the heart).

5. However, Balak, the king of Moab, will not take "no" for an answer, and proceeds to send an even more distinguished entourage from his court to Balaam (this time princes of Moab), and this time Balak promises to promote Balaam to a high place of honor in the kingdom and to give Balaam whatever he asks as payment ("Name your price" Numbers 22:17). Balaam responds with some pious statement that he can only say what the Lord allows him to say, but once again he tells these royal ambassadors to lodge for the night with him (knowing they are God's enemies) while he seeks the will of God in this renewed carrot dangled in front of him (Numbers 22:18-19). It's not only because Balak the king would not take "no" for an answer, but also because Balaam would not take "no" for an answer with such worldly reward within his grasp that he went back to inquire once again from the Lord (whether he should go with the emissaries of the king).

a. As will become clear, it is not because Balaam wants to submit in meekness to the will of God that he goes once again to the Lord with this second offer from Balak, king of Moab. It is rather because Balaam wants to use the Lord (not serve the Lord) in order to obtain some earthly prize and honor

before man. It wasn't that Balaam did not know the will of God; it was that he did not want to do the will of God.

b. Balaam acts as if God can be manipulated by means of going to Him a second time.

c. We may be manipulated by the tears, threats, and attacks of others (family and friends, or enemies). But God cannot be manipulated by us. He is absolutely righteous and holy and sovereign. We will indeed find mercy at His throne when we come beating our chests and crying out, "God be merciful to me, a sinner"; but we cannot manipulate him by bargaining with Him, or by our mere tears, or sacrifices.

6. Once again God appears to Balaam, but this time God gives Balaam the "ok" to accompany the princes back to stand before Balak, the king of Moab (Numbers 22:20-21). This is not a case of Balaam submitting to the will of God, but rather a case of God giving Balaam over to the wicked and selfish ambitions of his own heart.

a. Thus, what may seem to be God's blessing a person with riches, with successes, with accomplishments, and with the applause of man, may in fact be God's turning one over to the selfish, willful ambitions of one's heart (like Balaam).

b. God having revealed to Balaam in the first place that He would not curse Israel, a meek Balaam would have taken the yoke of the Lord upon him and sent the princes packing rather than receiving them and presuming to seek God's will (when it had already been revealed to him). This does not mean that we ought not to be persistent in prayer (to ask, seek, and knock, and to continue to do so, especially when we pray for the glory of God, seek the Lord out of faith and love for Him, and knock on a door of mercy not on a door in which God owes us anything).

II. Anti-Meekness Will Not Submit to the Yoke of Christ (2 Peter 2:16).

A. Up to this point, we have seen indications in this biography of Balaam's anti-meekness that what moved Balaam was not the yoke of Christ in humbly submitting to the revealed will of God, but rather a love for the wages of unrighteousness. The true nature of Balaam's sin in resisting the will of God now becomes ever so clear in the narrative that follows.

1. On the following morning after the Lord turns Balaam over to pursue his love of worldly ambition for honor and reward, Balaam saddles his donkey and sets out in royal splendor, being led by the royal princes of the king of Moab. But at this point we are confronted with the sin of Balaam and the holy anger of the Lord (Numbers 22:22). Balaam was clearly disobeying the will of the Lord.

a. The Angel of the Lord (which was most likely, a pre-incarnate appearance of the Lord Jesus Christ) blocked the road in which Balaam rode upon his donkey. God blinded the eyes of Balaam and every other person with him to the Angel of the Lord with drawn sword, ready to wield it in righteous judgment against Balaam. However, the eyes of Balaam's donkey were opened to see this fearful sight. His donkey at first simply turned off of the road into a field to avoid the mighty Angel of the Lord, and Balaam gave his donkey a hard stoke with his rod (Numbers 22:23).

b. Then as the road took Balaam through a vineyard with walls beside the road, the Angel of the Lord again appeared with no one seeing Him except the donkey. This time the donkey ran against the wall to avoid the threatening sight, injuring Balaam's foot in the process. And again Balaam issued a swift and powerful stroke against his donkey (Numbers 22:24-25).

c. A third time the Angel of the Lord appears and this time in a very narrow place where there was no opportunity for the poor donkey to escape from the frightening presence of God. Thus, the poor creature knows not what to do but to stop and to fall down in the middle of the road, crushing Balaam beneath. And Balaam's wrath is released with a fury as smites his donkey with the rod (Numbers 22:26-27).

2. It is at this point that God makes it very clear to Balaam how close he came to death due to his anti-meek resistance and rebellion to pursue his own worldly dreams over a meek submission to the revealed will of God.

a. First, God miraculously puts human words into the mouth of the donkey (Numbers 22:28). What is amazing (and may reveal the degree of Balaam's rage), he actually responds and dialogues with the donkey as if it were a very normal thing to do (Numbers 22:29-30). It seems to me, had Balaam been in his right mind, he would have immediately recognized the miracle that was happening and would have fallen upon his face, confessing and repenting of his sin before the Lord. Balaam beat his donkey, but it was his poor donkey that had prevented him from being slain by the sword of the Lord. Dear ones, if we resist the yoke of Christ for the yoke of our own pleasure and success in this world, God may choose to show us our foolishness by speaking to us through His own providential donkeys in our lives.

b. Second, God then opens the eyes of Balaam to behold the terror of the Angel of the Lord with his unsheathed sword standing in the way, simply awaiting Balaam's approach (Numbers 22:31-33). And the Angel of the Lord rebukes Balaam for his anti-meekness in not surrendering all to the Lord, but rather determining to love and go after what he wanted by way of worldly honor and success.

3. No doubt Balaam is shaking in his boots at this point. He confesses with his mouth (not with his heart as we shall see) his sin in heeding the call of Balak, the king of Moab, and also gives some verbal indication of his willingness to turn back home instead of continuing his journey to Balak (Numbers 22:34). But the Lord tells Balaam to continue his journey to Balak, but only to speak the word that God authorizes him to speak (Numbers 22:35). Let no pastor or teacher (or any other) ever attempt to take credit for what he understands, teaches, or does, for God can do as much through a donkey (Matthew 3:9).

4. When Balaam arrives before Balak, the king of Moab, he tells the king that he can only prophesy what the Lord puts into his mouth, and three times Balaam blesses Israel (rather than cursing them). Balak finally sends Balaam away after the third failure to obtain a curse from Balaam against Israel (Numbers 24:10-11).

5. One would think that Balaam had been taught of the Lord and had learned from the Lord the vanity and wickedness of his own yoke of loving selfish and worldly reward and ambition. But such is not the case, for we learn later on that Balaam was slain among the Midianites by the sword of Israel. Having failed to obtain the earthly reward that he loved and coveted, he conspired with Balak, king of Moab, and with the Midianites to bring God's judgment upon Israel by inviting Israel to their immoral feasts in eating meat that had been offered to their false gods. In so doing, God would bring judgment upon Israel for such grievous sin (Numbers 31:8,16; Revelation 2:14). Thus, Balaam outwardly confessed his sin unto the Angel of the Lord (Numbers 22:34: "I have sinned"), but once again, Balaam had not taken up the yoke of Christ to submit in meekness to willingly give up his love for earthly riches, ambition, dreams, and honor in order to follow the Lord in faith, love, and obedience. Balaam's repentance was the repentance of one who got caught in the act with his hands in the cookie jar (there was regret for having gotten caught, but not repentance in grieving over having offended the Lord God who had mercifully spared his life up to that point).

B. I find it very enlightening what God thinks of our own anti-meekness in loving and pursuing our own ways, our own rewards, our own ambitions and dreams, our own pleasures, or our own successes and accomplishments. God calls it "madness" (2 Peter 2:16). The Greek word used here means "out of one's mind". Dear ones, we are out of our minds, we are acting in a self-destructive manner when we take up the yoke of anti-meekness in loving and following our own dreams, successes, and ambitions rather than taking up the yoke of meekness in loving and pursuing Jesus Christ, in surrendering all to Christ, and in submitting all that we are and ever hope to be to our glorious Savior and Lord. Regardless of what the world may think about us, from God's perspective (which alone truly counts), only we who take the yoke of Christ upon us in meekness and humble submission to Him are not "mad", out of our mind, and self-destructive.

Let me leave you with the following applications.

1. Prayer is not intended to change God, but rather to change us, so that we can earnestly, without resentment, in gratitude and love cry out to Christ, "Not my will, but thine, be done". Balaam continued to inquire of God, as though he needed to know God's will. God had made His will very clear to Balaam. Balaam just wanted a different answer.
2. Let us "use" God for our own ends, our own designs, our own pleasures in this world. Let us rather constantly plead with the Lord that we would be those who are used of the Lord to serve Him by submitting in meekness to the yoke of Christ (even if that yoke be one of trial, persecution, affliction, heartache, waiting rather than moving forward, rejection). It is so easy to see the folly of Balaam's ways, but we must plead with the Lord to show to us the folly of our own ways. When we are using God, it is our happiness that is more important to us than our holiness; it is our pleasure that is more important to us than His pleasure. The fruit of the Spirit of meekness is not trying to mold and shape the doctrine, worship, gospel, and commandments of Christ into that which make our life easier and more comfortable with those around us, but rather the fruit of meekness is working by the grace of God, praying without ceasing, exercising ourselves to godliness that we might be conformed to the image of Christ and love His doctrine, worship, gospel, and commandments regardless of what it may cost us in this life.
3. Balaam expressed a desire to die the death of the righteous (Numbers 23:10). He had enough knowledge of God to want the peaceful conscience of those who are righteous before God in their death and have the hope of everlasting life. Balaam had such a desire, but had no willingness to take the yoke of Christ upon him and to surrender all to Christ in meekness.
4. In appearance, Judas may look very much like Peter. But Peter had a broken and contrite heart when he wept at having denied the Lord Jesus. Judas was regretful for having betrayed innocent blood, whereas Peter was grieved and broken that he had offended Christ, and Peter's heart of trust in and love for Christ was revealed in his submission to Christ. Peter struggled, but Peter was humbled by the providential donkeys God used in his life and looked to the mercy of God in Christ Jesus. Judas fell into despair and hanged himself. Peter looked in hope to Christ and believed he had been crucified with Christ and made alive in Christ.

Copyright 2015 Greg L. Price.