



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of Dan Duncan

2 Peter 2:10-16

Lesson 6

Spring 2020

"The Way Of Balaam"

TRANSCRIPT

Thank you, Seth, and good morning to all of you out there, and to the three of you here. Another week of online church, which is a little bit of an oxymoron, but we're thankful that we can do this, thankful for the technology, and appreciate the men that have been facilitating all of that. We are in 2 Peter, chapter 2. This is the third lesson in chapter 2, as we pick up in the middle of verse 10. Peter has been describing false teachers and he continues with describing them as,

“Daring, self-willed, they do not tremble when they revile angelic majesties, whereas angels who are greater in might and power do not bring a reviling judgment against them before the Lord. But these, like unreasoning animals, born as creatures of instinct to be captured and killed, reviling where they have no knowledge, will in the destruction of those creatures also be destroyed, suffering wrong as the wages of doing wrong. They count it a pleasure to revel in the daytime. They are stains and blemishes, reveling in their deceptions as they carouse with you, *(I'm going to comment briefly on that in the lesson, but carouse is probably better translated as 'feasting with you')*, having eyes full of adultery that never cease from sin, enticing unstable souls, having a heart trained in greed, accursed children; forsaking the right way, they have gone astray, having followed the way of Balaam, the *son* of Beor, who loved the wages of

unrighteousness; but he received a rebuke for his own transgression, *for* a mute donkey, speaking with a voice of a man, restrained the madness of the prophet."

2 Peter 2:10-16

May the Lord bless this reading of His Word and bless our time in it together.
Let's bow in a word of prayer.

Father, "...how good and how pleasant it is for brothers to dwell together in unity!" That's what the psalmist tells us, (Ps 113:1), and it certainly is a great blessing for us to come together in this important time of the week, united in our hearts to the study of Your Word. This is what nourishes us spiritually, and so, Lord, we thank You for the opportunity that we have together. We pray for Your ministry to us through Your Word, that the Spirit of God would open our hearts to receive the instruction that we have from the apostle in this text and the warnings that it gives us. May we learn those lessons, and may we be built up in the faith as we consider these instructions together. We look to You to bless us; we pray for that ministry within us.

We praise You Lord, as the sovereign God of this world and of the entire universe. And we count it a great blessing to know that truth, particularly, in these days that are very troubling and unsettling. But yet we can look to You and know, (as I guess I say most every Sunday), that You are on Your throne through all of this. And so we praise You for that and we thank You that we have the understanding of that; that we can rest confidently in that, and we can look to You for wisdom and grace in these difficult days. So we pray, Lord, You'd bless us in that way, bless us with knowledge and understanding, and the application of this text, and give us the wisdom we need that we should draw from it. Bless us spiritually.

But Lord, we also pray that You would bless us materially and physically, and we look to You to bless our health and to provide for it. Apart from health there are other physical needs; we have some with chronic problems and some facing surgery; You know who they are, Lord, and You know their problems and their needs, and I pray that

You would bring healing to them, that You would bring encouragement to them. And that You would generally bless all of us in the material things of life as we need to be blessed and as You know how to bless us.

So Father, we pray for that and pray for our leaders in these difficult days. Give them wisdom that we will follow as a nation the right course, as things begin to open up, that You would bless the economy and bless the businessmen of this land. We pray that particularly, though, for this assembly, this church. Bless those men and women who have jobs. And those who are out of work as a result of the issues that we're facing, we ask You to bless them, reemploy them. And bless the businesses that men have. I pray that You would prosper Your people. But through it all, may we rest in You and learn from these difficulties that we're passing through. And one thing that I pray we'd learn is that You're to be trusted, that You're faithful, and that You're powerful.

So Lord, we pray Your blessing upon us as we look at the lives of men who don't believe that, who don't trust You—false teachers. May we learn from the things that Peter wrote urgently and wants us to know and understand. So we look to You to bless us, to build us up in the faith. And then bless us at the end of this service as we take the Lord's Supper. Thank you for all that we have in Christ, and it's in His name we pray. Amen.

The Proverbs, (23:7), tell us that, as a person thinks in his heart, "so he is". That truth is on vivid display in our passage this morning, 2 Peter, chapter 2, verses 10 through 16. Since verse 1 of Chapter 2, Peter's subject has been "false teachers". He has given their heresy and he has warned of their judgment. Now he completes his portrait by describing their character, and Peter doesn't mince his words. One commentator called this "a colorfully expressed tirade". That's a little strong, but reading it did remind me of Luther, who's notorious for the style he used against opponents. He attacked them with insults and crude language - and they did the same. The 16th century was a rough age. We don't do that today. Really, we are the opposite.

Theological discourse is polite and conducted in a irenic spirit, (that's the expression often used), "irenic" being "one that promotes peace, cooperation." Not Luther, and not the apostle. Peter wasn't crude, but he was forceful; he took the gloves off, so to speak. But he did so under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. He called these heretics "animals", "stains and blemishes", and "accursed children." —Not out of personal animus, though no doubt he was angry. these were and are shameful people.

So the descriptions may be colorful, but they're appropriate. These men destroyed souls, just as they do today. They are skilled hunters—man hunters. Peter describes them as "trained". They are skilled in their tactics and objectives. All of this is a warning: "This is what false doctrine produces."

Paul gave some warnings to the Ephesian elders in Acts 20. I think I've read that more than once just in the past few weeks, but there he told them to guard themselves and the flock; wolves would inevitably arise in their midst. And we can expect the same. So while the passage may not be pretty or comforting, it is necessary. It's like the "Skull and Crossbones" on a bottle of poison, and that means we need to pay attention. And we need to pay attention carefully to what Peter says.

He's already described these people in verse 10 as men "who indulge the flesh" and "despise authority." He now gives a further description that can be summarized in the single expression, "self-centered", putting it mildly. They are ravenous for three things: Money, praise, and pleasure. Peter described them as "daring". Not daring in a noble sense, but in a reckless way. They are brazen. They're shameless in their attempts to exalt themselves. They're arrogant men. They are egotistical men. They are "self-willed", Peter says. "They revile angelic majesties" and don't tremble when they do it. They're so confident of themselves, so full of themselves.

Now the word actually isn't "angels", the word is "glories". You probably have that in the margin in the side of your Bibles. So it is subject to interpretation, but since this same word is used in Jude 8, with a clear reference to angels, it seems to me and to most students, commentators, that that is the likely meaning. They revile angels, glorious beings—powerful beings. How they did that isn't said. It may be that they

simply denied their existence. The descriptions that are given of these false teachers suggests that they were probably materialists, that they denied the spiritual, and that they denied the judgment to come, (we see that clearly in chapter 3). Here they mocked the very idea of angels, maybe somewhat like the Sadducees who didn't believe in the spiritual, who were materialist, and who didn't believe in angels.

Well, it's what people do today. I think these ancient false teachers are very contemporary. They're very modern. The Bible today, at least for those materialists today, is filled with inconvenient truths; truths of both doctrinal and an ethical nature; truths that deal with our behavior. And what do people do that don't want to hear that, don't want to believe that? Well, they deal with it very simply by rejecting the Bible and mocking the Bible.

William James was a 19th century psychologist who made, I think, a perceptive statement. He said, "A great many people think they are thinking when they are merely rearranging their prejudices." Rejection of the gospel is not due to reason. That is, it's not due to a preponderance of proof. It's not due to clear thinking—it's due to prejudice. And that was these false teachers. And their conceit is highlighted by the fact that angels, who are far greater and far more powerful than these teachers are, don't even do that.

That's what Peter says in verse 11. Not even the angels themselves bring a "reviling judgment against them before the Lord." (And the "them" that he's referring to is other angels, speaking specifically, I believe, of the fallen angels, of the demons.) And the reason for saying that is Jude speaks of the same thing. He states that Michael, the archangel, while disputing with Satan about the body of Moses, did not pronounce against the devil "a railing judgment." All he would do is say, "The Lord rebuke you!" which showed Michael's humility; while these false teachers mock: Mock either the angels directly or they mock the very idea of angels. They either claimed authority over the angels, or over the Scriptures, (over the Bible by denying the teaching of angels that's found in it), mocking the very idea of angels, as well as mocking the fundamentals of the faith that are found in Scripture. It's an expression of their pride—their arrogance.

In verse 12, Peter compares them to irrational animals, whose thought and conduct are governed by natural desire, by instinct, like wild beasts. Lions are powerful animals, but they live by instinct. They are genetically programmed to respond in certain ways. Their choices are not rational choices - they act on impulse. They live to eat; that's their goal. So while a hunter could not wrestle a lion into a cage, he could trap him with a piece of red meat, because the unreasoning creature will smell the bait and follow his instinct into the trap. It's driven by a desire for food. And that's fine in the animal world; lions are made that way. In fact, Peter might have said, "My apologies to the animals for the comparison. They're meant to live like that." Men aren't.

Yet these men do. Instead of knowing God and following Him, they follow their own desires. They're governed by their appetites, like wild beasts. And their desires draw them to their ruin. That's what Peter says will happen to them. Lust destroys. Like these unreasoning animals that are captured in traps, these men are trapped in their sins and destroyed.

When I was a boy, the family took a trip to Los Angeles. First time that I had been to the West Coast, first time I'd seen the Pacific Ocean. And one of the sites that we visited was the La Brea Tar Pits. I was fascinated with it, had wanted to see it. They are natural pits full of tar that were covered with leaves or water. The bones of a lot of ancient animals have been found there, mammoths, saber tooth tigers, and others. They came to the pit to drink the water, which was on the surface. And in doing that, they became trapped in the tar below. Unable to get free, they died. Their thirst, their desire, led them to a sticky death.

Well that was these men. Peter said, "Like unreasoning animals...they will also be destroyed." They followed their desires into behavior that stuck to them, enslaved them, so that they became trapped in passions that destroyed them, body and soul. In verse 13 Peter says of them that they are "suffering wrong as the wages of doing wrong." That expression, "suffering wrong", has the idea of being defrauded. So the thought is, in the end, they get cheated out of the prize that they cheated to get. The pleasures that they were seeking eluded them, and eventually ruined them.

Now that can happen in any number of ways. Through their sin they may ruin their health. Or through their sin they may destroy their minds. Certainly sin scars the soul of an individual, and it affects the character and twists it. And, of course, it wrecks their reputations.

Paul tells us in Galatians 6:7, "Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap." That is a law every bit as fixed in the universe as the law of gravity. There are consequences for bad decisions, for bad choices—doctrinally and morally. But also, the fact is, sin is a cheat. It is so enticing, it makes promises, but it doesn't deliver. Maybe that's part of what's behind Paul's statement, "Do not be deceived." Sin is deceiving. Lust, for example, is never satisfied. It can never be ultimately satisfied. And still these men, they give themselves to it, and they give themselves to it with reckless abandon.

Peter says, "They revel in the daytime." Now that's unusual. Nighttime is the time for revelry. Most people have at least some sense of shame and try to hide what they do under the cover of darkness. But not these. They play around the clock. They are "stains and blemishes", Peter says, "reveling in their deceptions as they carouse with you." Now I commented on that in the reading of the text, I think a better translation for that is "while they feast with you." That's really what the word means. It's used here and in Jude in the same way. And so the reference is probably to the "love feast", that is the meal that preceded or accompanied the Lord's Supper.

This then is a situation that maybe similar to that which happened in Corinth, where you'll remember, in 1 Corinthians 11, Paul corrects the Corinthians for their abuse of that Supper. Some were enjoying a little too much wine, and others were eating most of the food before the poor saints got there. They were abusing it. Well, that seems to be the case, here, at least the venue for what Peter is talking about. By pretending to be Christians these men used that holy occasion to take advantage of people.

Saints are to be spotless. That's what sanctification is producing now in the believer in Jesus Christ. Not perfection, of course, but it is the process, a life-long

process, of transforming us—of removing the spots. It's what our hope of the glorious world to come, what our hope in the Lord's return, motivates us to be. This is what Peter will say in chapter 3, verse 14, where he takes up the subject of the Lord's return, and makes the point that it is a very practical doctrine: Because as we consider His return, it gives us a sense of urgency to live a life of obedience and a life that is one of righteousness.

But these men reject that; they reject the whole notion of the Lord's return. They had no sense of urgency. In fact, they had no fear of God at all. They are spots and “stains and blemishes”, without any evidence of sanctification, without any evidence of new life in them. Peter's condemnation of them gets specific in his description in verse 14. They are lustful men. He describes them as “having eyes full of adultery”. The idea is just that, that their eyes are filled with adultery. But literally Peter says, “Their eyes are full of an adulteress.” Now that doesn't change the meaning but does give the charge, makes it a little more concrete, “that's how they look at women”, and is what Peter is really saying. They're always calculating; they're always scheming to charm for their own purposes. And Peter says they “never cease” from this. One commentator put it bluntly. “They lust after every girl they see.” It's a bit crude, maybe, but that's the sense of it. “They never cease”, Peter says. They can't stop. Sin is enslaving; like that tar in the pit, it sticks.

So there is a sense in which sin is its own punishment. It gains power over a person. Now that is a terrible condition, because these people are in bondage to a life that is untrustworthy, which is unsatisfactory, and that they can't stop. They have no self-control. But that's not so much Peter's point as it is that they are relentless in their pursuits, and their victims are of a certain type, “unstable souls”. That's who they entice.

The word “entice” literally means to “catch with bait”. It's used of fishing, and it's an appropriate term for Peter to use, being an old fisherman. That's how he pictures these men, only they are trolling the church for their catch. No church is immune from such people. They're predators and their victims are easy prey because they are

unstable. They are not mature in the faith. They're not well grounded. They are spiritually weak.

The best defense against heretics and spiritual hedonists and their seduction, spiritually and morally, is the Word of God; knowing the doctrines of the faith, knowing the instruction on the life we're to live, and walking with Christ. But because the naïve don't have minds that are trained in wisdom, they do not have the discernment to recognize the lies of those who are "trained" in deception and greed.

Now that's how the false teachers are described. They are "trained" in this. The word that's used is *gumnazo*, and we get our English word gymnasium from it. I think it gives some color to the description that he gives here; they have worked at this. They have trained themselves in this. Over time, through experience, they have learned the art of seduction. They're smooth; they know what to say to win people's confidence and get what is not theirs. It's a pathetic picture that Peter paints here; no irenic spirit here. But his language is not excessive, and his language is not mean-spirited. It is accurate. He calls them "accursed children". Luther would have applauded that.

But these are the facts. Their character and conduct exposes what they are. They are under a curse, under God's wrath. And apart from repentance, they're doomed to eternal judgment—Hellfire. Only the power of the cross can deliver them or deliver anyone. It is by faith in Christ that we crucify the flesh and then spend the rest of our lives doing that. That's Romans, chapter 6, verse 6, "Knowing this, that our old self was crucified with *Him*, in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin." He crucified our old self when He was crucified. Killed it at the cross. Redemption was accomplished there. It is applied in time and in each generation in the new birth. And at that moment, with regeneration, (being born again and believing), at that moment we appropriate what Christ did in our salvation. That is now our position with the Lord, and our condition in this world. The flesh has been crucified. We're not the people we once were.

Now sin is still in us, we still deal with that. We see that in Galatians 5, and in Romans 7—it's very coherent, if not from experience, from the Word of God. But by the

power of the Spirit we are able to keep that sin from reigning over us, and not obey its lusts. We deal with that in a struggle, as I say, and it's never complete, and we're never perfect this side of heaven. But we have ability to do that. Killing sin is within our ability, and it is an ongoing struggle.

But these men are not in that struggle, because these men are not joined to Christ. They haven't believed and they don't have a new nature. They don't have the Holy Spirit, so they are enslaved to the lusts and the desires of their heart and are under God's curse. And the fault is all theirs. They can blame no one for their condition but themselves.

Peter puts all the blame on them in verse 15 where he explains their condition, explains why they are people under God's curse. They have forsaken "the right way", he says, which is literally, "the straight way", which is a common Old Testament metaphor for obedience to God by following His truth and His righteousness. It was a conscious act on their part. They deliberately left the straight path, the way of truth, in order to follow another way.

Now that's a sobering, sobering statement, because it indicates that they once followed the truth. They sat under the teaching of the Bible. They professed to believe it, then abandoned it—Apostatized. It happens—even in a place like this.

Peter had seen it. He saw it with Judas, a man he knew and a man he trusted. That's why he said earlier in chapter 1, in verse 10, to be diligent to make God's calling of you "sure". These men had not done that. Their profession of faith was not deep, it was not genuine. At some point they began to drift, spiritually. Then they took a different way, a deliberate decision to go a different way, the way of self-gratification.

This leads into Peter's final Old Testament character study: Balaam, "the prophet who worked for profit", as the commentator Charles Green put it. It's a good way of stating it, "The prophet who worked for profit." They chose Balaam's way. The result of that was they are lost. Peter says they have gone astray, meaning they have taken a way of confusion and ruin. They've gone off into error.

They're like Balaam. He was a false prophet and is the example of a man who was motivated by greed, by the desire for financial gain, and a man who had a bad end. The account of Balaam is found in Numbers, chapters 22 through 25, and then his end is given in chapter 31. As Israel approached the promised land, they camped in Moab, which was across the Jordan River from Jericho. Their presence there frightened the king of Moab, Balak. Israel's numbers were great, and they'd already defeated the Amorite kings, Og and Sihon. So Balak saw the nation as a threat, and he sent a delegation to Balaam, in order to hire him to come and curse Israel.

Balaam had a reputation as a man who had powerful magic. So Balaam listened to this proposal, this offer, and initially refused it. And in the first half of Numbers 22 he seems to be a faithful prophet. The reality is, his refusal was a stall tactic in order to negotiate a better price. God first told him, "not to go", in verse 12, and then He allowed him to go in verse 20, because it was Balaam's real desire to do that. In his heart he refused the warning that God gave, and he kept entertaining that offer from these emissaries from Balak.

Well that's what Peter says, he "loved the wages of unrighteousness." Money was more important to him than God's command. This is a case of God letting a man follow his desires against God's prescribed, or stated, will against God's revelation; and the result would be, Balaam's life would be ruined. Still, on the way, God gave the false prophet another warning, maybe the most unusual warning in all of the Bible, when his donkey spoke to him.

Balaam was riding along when an angel with a sword in his hand stood in front of them. Balaam couldn't see him; he was spiritually blind. But the donkey did and tried to avoid the danger. Now they were on a narrow path through a vineyard with a wall on either side. So when the donkey moved one direction Balaam's foot bumped against the wall and angered the prophet, so he struck the donkey. When it happened again, Balaam got very angry and started beating the donkey with a stick. That went on until the donkey spoke and said, "What have I done to you?" Now how do we explain that? Is

this proof that the Bible is really a collection of legends or myths, like Aesop's fables with talking animals?

I can imagine that these false teachers liked that passage, and they point to that passage and say, "Look at this. A story about an invisible angel with a sword, and a donkey that talks. Now that is just a fable." Not at all, this was a miracle with a lesson. Numbers 22, verse 28 states the reason for the event, "And the Lord opened the mouth of the donkey." Now that's unusual. It's supposed to be unusual, but it's not hard for God to do. Nothing's too difficult for the Lord. So it's not unbelievable. It may be completely out of our experience, and of course it is. But it's not out of the realm of the possible, God can do anything. And in one sense, it prefigures what is about to happen. Balaam will give blessings rather than curses. So just as God can make a donkey speak, He can make a false prophet prophesy.

But the incident with the donkey was a rebuke, Peter says. His donkey could see danger that Balaam couldn't see. The animal had more sense than the "mad prophet", that's what Peter calls him. It was only when the Lord opened Balaam's eyes that he saw the angel of the Lord standing in the way, sword drawn, and then he realized the danger that he was in. Still, he continued with the men of Moab. and in spite of his best efforts, he could only bless Israel, rather than curse it. In fact, he gave a great messianic prophecy, in Numbers 24, verse 17, of the "star coming forth from Jacob." In spite of man's best efforts, God cannot be frustrated.

That wasn't the end of the incident. Balaam continued to work against Israel. He found a way to get his wages. He tried to corrupt the nation with immorality. He used Midianite women who were neighbors of the Moabites, to seduce the men of Israel at a place called Baal Peor. It was an attempt to cause intermarriage with pagan people, and cause Israel to assimilate into Canaanite society. It was wrong: Balaam knew it was wrong, but he did it for money. He did it from greed. It failed, and Balaam suffered the penalty and died by the sword he had avoided earlier. He persisted in sin in spite of the warnings. Balaam's two sins were, he loved money and he taught God's people to sin.

He paid for both. That's the way of Balaam. It is the way of unbelief—it is the way of self-indulgence, —its end is destruction.

What is the point of Peter's illustration? He was encouraging the churches not to be impressed with these false teachers, as clever and charming as they may be. They are no different from Balaam. A dumb donkey had clearer vision than he did. His mind was made mad by his lust for money, and he came to a bad end. So too are these men mad, and so too will they come to a bad end. There is nothing new here. "Don't be charmed or beguiled by these kinds of people", Peter is saying. "They are well trained in deception."

Well, how do we do that? How do we avoid that? How do we apply the lesson that Peter is giving here? Well first, it's by being aware of the danger by being aware of the threat that such men pose to us. And secondly by knowing God's Word. God has not left us unprepared for anything; any contingency, any danger, any threat. He has given us a new nature, as believers in Jesus Christ. He has sealed our hearts with the Holy Spirit, who is our guide and our enabler. And He's given us the Word of God, and eyes to see it and understand it. And we're to equip ourselves with it. It is the safeguard for our lives. It is the unstable who fall, the unstable who are not grounded in the Word of God.

Peter knew that well. Peter knew what it was to be unstable and to fall. He did that in spite of the Lord's warnings to him—he denied Jesus three times. So he learned the lesson from that that we need to learn. And that is, first of all, to know that we are in and of ourselves weak, and we are no match of the devil and his angels. We need to study God's Word; we need to learn its doctrines; and we need to walk with the Lord. We need to walk by the Spirit, and not depart from the Word of God or from the Spirit.

Now this happens only by God's grace. But by His grace we walk wisely and securely. And by His grace and knowledge we become helpful to others, maybe even helpful to a false teacher. After all, if God could restrain the madness of Balaam He can use you to rebuke and maybe restrain a man in error—and even help him, by God's grace, to turn from his error and to the Lord.

Making a dumb donkey speak is no more of a miracle than making me or you speak truth and bring healing light. That's a miracle of God. And He can do it with every one of us.

So, in these dark days in which we live, in these trouble times in which we live, which needs the light of God's Word, may God make us eager and diligent to know His living Word. And if you, who are watching, listening, if anyone of you is not a believer yet in Jesus Christ, we call you to Him. He's the living Savior, the eternal Son of God, very God of very God who became a man in order to die for sinners.

Does that seem like madness to you? It's not. It's glory. You need the eyes to see it, so pray for that. Pray that God would open your eyes to see that glory and the truth of it and bring you to faith in Christ. In Him are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. In Him is eternal life that is obtained for all who believe in Him. God help you to do that.

Let's bow in a word of prayer and ask the Lord to bless the things that we've considered and prepare our hearts for the Lord's Supper that we'll take in just a moment. Let's pray.

Father, we do thank You for Your goodness to us. We live in a dangerous time, and really, there has never been a time since the fall of man that the world hasn't been dangerous for Your people. And so we're not living in any kind of unique days. But they're times that need Your light, that need the Word of God, and need men and women who will stand for You, and have the truth, equipped with the light of Your revelation. Help us to be men and women who desire to know Your truth. It's the best safeguard for the temptations of this world, and for the tempters of this world—the false teachers of this world. Help us to be well girded to put on the armor of God and know how to use the sword that You've given us, which is the Word of God. Make us useful.

Father, we thank You for the death of Your Son, which has made us, who are believers in Jesus Christ, new creatures. We thank You for Him. And as we now prepare to take the Lord's Supper, we pray that You would prepare our hearts for that. And may this be a time of deep reflection, and a time of sanctification as we consider the Lord Jesus' life and death for us. It's in His name we pray. Amen.

(End of Audio)