

**Sermon**  
**22 March 2015**  
**West Kirk of Calder & Polbeth Harwood**

**By: Rev Dr Jonanda Groenewald**

**Text: Numbers 22:22-35**

**Baptism (WK)**

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What happened before...

Today's sermon is based on Numbers 22-24, but if we read all that *now* me might just still be in church by lunchtime, so I decided rather to tell you what happened!

So here goes:

We all know that the Israelites had to travel through the desert for 40 years to reach their new home, the Promised Land. And although that was hard, they had built up a reputation for themselves during this time. Because for as far as they had gone, they had defeated their enemies. And they were growing in number by the day.

They had almost reached their destination now, but the Moabites were in their way. The king of Moab, Balak, was scared to death of the Israelites – so he decided to make a plan. He summoned the prophet Balaam to curse the Israelites, so he could win the war against them.

Now I know that the whole idea of cursing somebody might sound just a wee bit foreign to you in the year 2015, but in Old Testament times it was common practice – they believed that a cursed nation was a weakened nation, and to be truthful, Balak would do almost anything not to be defeated by the Israelite army.

Balaam, the prophet, was not one of God's people, but seeing that Balak relied upon him so strongly, God decided to use him in any case. So God appeared to the prophet and told him that the Israelites could not be cursed, because they were a blessed nation. So although the king summoned the prophet, he didn't go to the king.

This didn't make the king give up, though, so he sent for Balaam a second time. This time he agreed to go see the king, but he warned him that he could only say what God tells him to say – that's how a prophet works.

*Let's now read our Bible passage to hear what happened next...*

And the plot thickens...

While Balaam was on his way to the king, God just wanted to make sure that all the riches Balaam's been promised if he helps the king, won't lead him astray. So God sent an angel to appear to him – just a wee reminder of who was in control...

Of course this is actually very ironic – the guy who is supposed to be the prophet doesn't see the angel, but his donkey does!! And only once his donkey starts *talking* to him he realizes that something strange is going on, something bigger than him...

Ignorant about what happened with Balaam on his way to see the king, Balak couldn't have been happier when he saw the prophet, and straight away he took him to where the Israelites were camping, so he could curse them.

But then what happened? The prophet didn't curse them,- he blessed them!! The king couldn't believe his ears! And in the hope of ratifying this mistake, he took the prophet to a different spot and asked him to try again...

That wasn't a very clever move – because this gave the prophet the opportunity to bless the people of God *again!*

By this time the king was furious, but he was also desperate, so he gave the prophet a 3<sup>rd</sup> chance – and guess what happened? He blessed the Israelites again...

And just to rub a little salt in the wounds, as the king was chasing the prophet away, Balaam didn't spare any detail in describing to the king what the Israelites were going to do to the poor Moabites...

The king now realised that he didn't stand a chance against the people of God.

What he didn't know, is that from the very beginning he never had a chance against them. God wouldn't allow anybody to mess with his people.

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Quite a story, isn't it? A story that reminds us that God is always true to his promises.

He promised his people a new home, and nothing and nobody was going to stand in his way to keep this promise – even if it meant that He had to use a gentile prophet and make a donkey talk – his promise he was going to keep! And that he would make sure of.

But that's not all we learn in this story. It also reminds us of God's goodness and love – because he probably could have stopped the prophet from cursing the Israelites by just keeping him away from them or keeping him quiet, but he did *more* than that – he told the prophet to *bless* them.

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Throughout the course of history, time and time again, God has proven to his people that he loves them. And us. God still loves us in the same way.

We see this in another story that involves a donkey – the story of Jesus riding into Jerusalem with his head held high, knowing that that journey was going to end on a cross.

God made a promise to us too – namely that he would save us all from sin and death, and that he did in Jesus Christ.

God will not allow anything or anybody to stand in the way of him fulfilling his promises to us.

After Jesus rose from the dead and went back to God in heaven, God promised never to leave his children alone again. And he didn't – he sent us his Spirit.

And no matter how many times we disappoint God, he will stay; because he won't ever allow anything to stand between us and the purpose he has for us here on earth.

Just like God used the prophet Balaam to bless Israel instead of curse them, he can still change situations that look completely hopeless to us into something meaningful.

And this he will do sometimes even without us knowing a thing – because Israel had *no idea* what was going on between that king and prophet.

(So ..... and ....., remember that God has a plan for the 2 of you and your wee boy too. And he will make sure it happens.)

*Nothing* will ever stand between you and God's plans for you, God's purpose with you and God's promises to you...

So let's choose to go through life with open eyes, so we can see the route God wants us to take, and so that we notice the angels he sends our way, to either nudge us in the right direction or help us make the right choices.

Let's never allow our circumstances to make us doubt God's love for us – because he does more than keeping curses away from us, he blesses

us. And he does this whether we realize it, or not, and whether we acknowledge it, or not.

Even when life is hard God blesses us, because isn't it a huge blessing to know that even in the darkest of times, you will never be alone, because God is there?

God will never allow anything or anyone to stand between us and Him.

Amen