

Study Guide for the Central Church of Christ

February 24, 2019

To Adult Teachers:

February 24, we will study Numbers 22:12-31 Discussion questions are:

1. What are the primary means we have for determining God's will for us?
2. What are some areas in which God's will is quite clear? In what areas is it harder to know God's will?
3. What are some factors that might cause us to misunderstand God's will (or call into question what appears to be a plain understanding of his will)?
4. Picture Balaam riding his donkey. No matter what he does, the donkey simply will not cooperate. Has there been a time in your life when you experienced something similar; when it seemed the world was conspiring to keep you from reaching your goal? How did you react?
5. God spoke to Balaam through his donkey. What are some unexpected ways God might communicate with or make his presence known to us?
6. In our daily life, what could you do to listen more carefully to God's voice? If you want to hear God's voice, to what or whom should you be listening? What "background noise" do you need to tune out?

Sermon: *Hearing God in Unlikely Places*

Numbers 22:12-31

In Numbers 22, we find a strange story. The key players in the story are Balak, king of Moab; Balaam, a prophet; and last but not least, Balaam's talking donkey. The Israelites are heading for the Promised Land and Moab lies directly in their path. Balak knows his army is no match for them, so he offers to pay Balaam to come and pronounce a curse on them. You remember that he pronounced a blessing on them instead. Here's the "back story" behind that.

1. Balaam tells Balak he will need to consult with God. God's answer: (read) Numbers 22:12-13. Balaam hears God. His voice is clear and Balaam acts accordingly. Doesn't matter that money is being offered. God said "no." And there are those times when we hear God's voice very clearly. God has spoken clearly in his Word. We can know his will very specifically in many ways. The Ten Commandments. Someone leaves their purse in a shopping cart, we don't have to take long to inquire of the Lord. "Thou shalt not steal." An attractive person to whom we are not married suggests a weekend trip together, you don't have to agonize over the Lord's will: "thou shalt not commit adultery." Well, that's how clearly Balaam understands God. Don't go! End of story.
2. But that's *not* the end of the story. Balak ups the ante. He sends messengers to offer Balaam more money if he will curse the Israelites—a virtual blank check. This is Balaam's opportunity to get his 401k fully funded and be set for life. *Read* Numbers 22:18-19. Balaam stands firm, but questions God again. It's as if Balaam is asking God, "Is that your final answer?" We do that sometimes, too, don't we? The reality is that when we follow God, there's a cost. And sometimes we recoil from the cost. Or sometimes God's way doesn't make sense to us. Or following God means we may miss out of a

great opportunity. We have heard God, but we go back to him and ask, “Is that your final answer?” And it turns out that it wasn’t his final answer. *Read* Numbers 22:20-21. Balaam goes with God’s permission and all is well.

3. Or so it would seem! The next verse comes as a shock. *Read* Numbers 22:22. Why would God be angry and oppose him, when he had told Balaam to go with them? There are some subtle indications in the text that the change had more to do with Balaam than God. In v. 19, he asks what *else* the Lord will say. Later in the story, we find that he was being reckless (v. 32). Still later, we are told that Balaam’s method of hearing God had been faulty: *read* Numbers 24:1. Because of this, we find Balaam riding toward Moab, convinced that he’s in the center of God’s will, but in fact, God stands in opposition to him. Is it possible the same could happen to us? We are a walking collection of contradictions. Even when we think we are following God’s will, our motives are never pure. What distorts our hearing of God?
 - a. Money
 - b. Desires
 - c. Misinformed Expectations
 - d. Faulty means of hearing God.
4. So what does God do when we forge ahead, assuming we are following his will? He opposes us. How do you pick up on that? How did Balaam know? *Read* Numbers 22:23-4, 25-26, 27. How can you tell God is opposing you? Repeated roadblocks, coupled with our own anger. When you find that happening, you need to start listening for the voice of God. Where? He speaks to us in traditional and non-traditional ways. Look at how he spoke to Balaam: *Read* Numbers 22:28-29, 30, 31. He spoke to Balaam through his donkey. How might he speak to us? Listen to the voices of people that you least suspect
 - a. Through unexpected means. As we listen for God’s call and for the man God is calling here, tune ears to every source of input and evaluate for possibility of God speaking. In addition to Bible reading and prayer (ask Search Team and rest of congregation to be open to: conversations, articles, songs, recurring thoughts. All must be tested by the word, of course.)
 - b. The poor, weak, helpless. 1 Corinthians 1:27. Survey: widows, singles, attenders, etc. Search Team: the voices of people who are not present...yet. Legitimate voices.
 - c. Children. Psalm 8:2. Search Team: consider new believers and the children of the church.

In hearing God, we have a resource readily available to us that Balaam only received at the end of his story. *Read* Numbers 24:2. Bottom line: seek the Spirit of the Lord. *Read* 1 Corinthians 2:12-13