

The Doom of the Double-Hearted.

by Horatius Bonar

The sermon explores the tragic life of Balaam as a cautionary tale about the dangers of divided loyalties and the necessity of total commitment to God.

Scripture: Numbers 31:8, Jeremiah 45:5, Matthew 6:24, Matthew 7:13-14, Luke 9:62, Galatians 6:7, James 4:4, 2 Peter 2:15, 1 John 2:15-17, Revelation 21:8

Topics: "Commitment to God", "Double-Heartedness"

Description

Horatius Bonar warns against the fate of the double-hearted, exemplified by Balaam, who sought to serve both God and mammon, ultimately leading to his downfall. Balaam's life was marked by indecision, covetousness, and a desire for worldly gain, which resulted in a tragic end devoid of honor or lamentation. Bonar emphasizes that one cannot serve two masters and that the pursuit of both righteousness and unrighteousness leads to spiritual ruin. He calls for a commitment to God without compromise, urging believers to examine their lives and choose between the world and the divine. The sermon serves as a stark reminder of the consequences of a divided heart and the importance of living a life fully devoted to God.

Transcript

"Balaam also, the son of Bear, they slew with the sword." - Numbers 31:8

Balaam had taken the field against Israel- against a people whom he had pronounced blessed- whom he had pronounced invincible both by earth and hell. Yes; Balaam "the son of Beor,"- he, and not another of the name- he rushes on the bosses of the Almighty's buckler; he defies Israel and Israel's God! But he fails. He would sincerely have cursed Israel; but he could not. He counseled Moab to seduce Israel by temptation, and his device succeeded too well. He now fetches his last stroke. In vain He perishes ignobly. He is slain with the sword which he had defied. Such is the end of the backslider; of one who knew the truth but did it not; who once said, "Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his." It was certainly not the end he prayed for; yet it was the end to which his whole life had been tending. He reaped what he sowed, and in him "God was not mocked." He died as he lived, in fellowship with Moab, yet in heart persuaded that Israel was the beloved of the Lord, and that Jehovah was God. His life had been with Midian, and so was his death. His grave is with the unclean. He passes from earth with none to soothe his death-bed and close his eyes; none to lament for him or to build his monument.

Sad end of a life of halting and indecision, and resistance of the Spirit, and braving of conscience, and rejection of light, and wretched covetousness. He loved the wages of unrighteousness, and verily he had his reward. Let us see what he wanted and how he failed; how ambitious he was, yet what a life of utter failure and disappointment was his. He would sincerely have risen, but he sunk. He would sincerely have been rich, but he lost everything. What a wasted life! Yet the life of one who knew better things but did them not; who knew that the world was vanity, yet followed it; who knew that Israel's portion was the best, yet chose that of Moab; who knew the true God and the true Messiah, but preferred the idolatries of Israel's enemies. He saw Him from the top of the rocks, but that was all. He got a passing glimpse of the cross, but no more. It was all he saw of the way of life, before he plunged into death and woe.

I. He wanted to serve two masters. These were the same as the Lord in after days designated God and mammon. He wanted not to offend either; to please both. He was like Issachar crouching between two burdens. But it would not do. He failed. Such is the certain failure of all who make the like attempt. "You cannot serve God and mammon." He loved the one master, mammon; and he dreaded the other; but would sincerely do the will of both. He could not afford to lose the favor of either. Miserable life! More miserable death! The life and death of one whose whole career was one long attempt to do the bidding both of God and the devil.

II. He wanted to earn two kinds of wages. The wages of righteousness and the wages of unrighteousness (2 Peter 2:15) were both in his eyes; he would sincerely have the pay both of God and of the devil. He was unwilling to do or say any which would deprive him of either. He was as cautious and cunning as he was covetous. He would not work without wages; and he would work for a hundred masters if they would only pay him well. How like many so-called "religious" men among ourselves.

III. He wanted to do two opposite things at the same time. He wished both to bless and to curse. He was willing to do either according as it might serve his interests. The only question with him was, "Would it pay?" If the blessing would pay, he would take it; if the curse would pay, he would take it. If both would pay, he would take them both. Blessing and cursing were both alike to him, confessing and denying the true God, worshiping Baal or Jehovah, it mattered not, if by "this craft he could have his wealth." So with many among us. If Sabbath-keeping will pay, they will keep the Sabbath; if Sabbath-breaking will pay, they will break the Sabbath. True Balaams- without principle, without faith, and without fear!

IV. He wanted two kinds of friendship. He would sincerely be friends with everybody. Perhaps he was timid; of those whom Scripture calls "fearful" (Revelation 21:8); perhaps, also, he was ambitious, and sought great things for himself wherever these could be obtained (Jeremiah 45:5); certainly he had before him "the fear of man which brings a snare," and the love of man's approbation which brings no less a snare; he dreaded Israel's God, of whom he knew much, but he dreaded also Moab's gods, though whether he really believed in them we know not. Made up of these contradictions, and acting not by faith but unbelief, he tried to secure the friendship of all whom he counted great, whether in heaven or in earth. He shut his eyes not only to the sin but to the impossibility of such a course; he saw not that the friendship of the world is the enemy of God, and that whoever will be the friend of the world must be the enemy of God.

V. He wanted to have two religions. He saw religion to be a paying concern, a profitable trade, and he was willing to accept it from anybody or everybody, to adopt it from any quarter if it would but raise him in the world, and make his fortune. Perhaps he thought all religions equally right or equally wrong, equally true or equally false. He would rather not offend any god if lie could help it. He would make concessions to

"religious prejudices" of any kind if the prejudiced people will only help him on. He was like Erasmus of old, whom a German writer thus describes- "Erasmus belongs to that species of writers who have all the desire to build God a magnificent church; at the same time, however, not giving the devil any offence, to whom, accordingly, they set up a neat little chapel close by, where you can offer him some touch of sacrifice at a time, and practice a quiet household devotion for him without disturbance."

Such was Balaam; two gods and two religions he wanted to have. But this double service, and double friendship, and double religion would not do. He could make nothing by them. They profited him nothing either in this life or that to come. His end was with the ungodly, his portion with the enemies of Israel. And his soul, where could it be? Not with Israel's God, or Israel's Christ, or in Israel's heaven. He reaped what he sowed. He was a good specimen of multitudes in these last days. An educated and intelligent man, shrewd and quick-seeing, of respectable character, high in favor with the rich and great, a religious man, too, after a fashion, not unsound in creed so far, for he acknowledges Jehovah as the true God.

But he is fond of the world, fond of money, fond of preferment; one that would not let his religion stand in the way of his advancement; who could pocket all scruples if he could pocket a little gold along with them; hollow of heart, but with a fair outside; just an Erasmus; no Luther, no Calvin, no Knox, no confessor, no martyr. His worldly interests are the main thing to him. He would rather not risk offending God, but yet he would not like to lose Balak's rewards and honors.

He would rather not take up his cross, nor deny himself, nor forsake all for his God. Religion with him is not just a thing to be suffered for- at least if he can help it. So is it with multitudes among us. They want as much religion as will save them from hell; not an atom more. The world is their real God; gold is their idol; it is in mammon's temple that they worship. Love God with all their heart! They don't so much as understand the meaning of such a thing. Sacrifice riches, place, honor, friends to Christ! They scoff at the thing as madness. Oh, be on the side of God, out and out. Don't trifle with religion.

Don't mock God and Christ. Love not the world. Be religious in your inmost soul. Don't mistake sentimentalism for religion, or a good character for the new birth. You may go very far and yet not be a Christian. You may follow Christ in some things; but if not in all, what is your following worth? This world or the world to come, that is the alternative; not this world and the world to come. Christ all or nothing. The soul more precious than worlds, or utterly worthless. No middle ground; no half-discipleship; no compromise. No. The friendship of the world is enmity with God. Come out and be separate. The new birth, or no religion at all.

Look to your latter end! What is it to be? Where is it to be? With whom is it to be? Anticipate your eternity. Is it to be darkness or light, shame or glory? Oh make sure, make sure! Do not sear your conscience by praying Balaam's prayer, "Let me die the death of the righteous." What will that avail you? It is the life of the righteous that God is calling you to lead and he will take care of your death. Decide, halt not; else surely yours will be a wretched life and a still more wretched death. What will gold, or purple, or honor do for you when you lie down to die, or rise up to be judged?

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