



The Wilderness: Balaam's Donkey

Exodus 20:1-13, 22:21-38

"Arrggghhh," Ripply growled under his breath as he angrily hurled an empty conch shell far out into the sea.

Matey popped his head out of the galley door, "Ahoy there, Ripply Waters!"

Ripply glanced over and replied half-heartedly, "Oh, hey there, Matey."

"The cook's looking for you." Matey said after walking over to where Ripply was slouched against the rail.

Ripply shot an angry look. "Oh, he was, was he?" he growled.

Matey didn't notice Ripply's tone of voice and cheerily passed on his message.

"Aye, it's your turn for kitchen patrol!"

"Well, I ain't goin' near that kitchen." Ripply pounded his fist on the rail.

Matey looked confused. "You have to. Cook has a whole pile of potatoes he needs you to peel."

"I ain't doin' it!"

"But you have to! Cook's making mashed potatoes!"

"I'll mash his potato! I'll..."

"Don't say it!" Matey interrupted. "I'm sensing some anger here."

"Oh, 'ya think?!" Ripply retorted. "I'm so mad at that cook I could chew marshmallows and spit taffy!! I worked the night watch last night, so I missed dinner to watch out for enemy vessels. I didn't get done until after midnight! So, I went down to the galley and I asked the cook if I could get something to eat and he said, 'Too late the kitchen's closed!' I was so angry! If I wasn't so tired from hunger, I would have ..."

Matey held up his hand to stop Ripply before he said something truly awful.

"Wow, as much as I'd like to see that marshmallow and taffy trick, you shouldn't say angry things, sir!"

"Why not?" Ripply asked grasping the rail so hard his knuckles turned white.

"We should always say and do things that honor God. Acting in anger can get you in lots of trouble." Matey explained, "like what happened to Moses."

Ripply was surprised. "Moses lost his temper?" he asked. "Moses always seemed like such a godly fella. I can't imagine him getting angry."

"Oh, he did!" Matey said reaching into the treasure chest for Captain Billy's Bible. He turned to Numbers 20. "There was this one time when Moses was leading God's people through the desert. They were thirsty and very grumpy! They started complaining against Moses and his brother Aaron! They said crazy things like 'This desert is a terrible place with no water! You should have just let us die in Egypt!'"

"Did Moses lead them back there to Egypt?" Ripply asked.

"Oh no, Ripply," Matey replied. "God told them to gather the people at the big rock and then speak to the rock and drinking water would pour out."

"Water from a rock? That would be a miracle!" Ripply exclaimed.

"Well, God's in the business of sending us miracles."

Ripply nodded in agreement. "So, did Moses talk to the Rock?" he asked.

"No," Matey replied. "Moses was angry with God's people so he yelled at them and then and struck the rock with his staff. Water did pour out because God had promised and God always keeps His promise. But, Moses and Aaron did not obey what God told them to do. The Bible says, "But the Lord said to Moses and Aaron, 'Because you did not trust in Me enough to honor Me as holy in the sight of the Israelites, you will not bring this community into the land I give them.'"

"What land are you talking about?" Ripply asked.

"God was going to lead His people into the new land He had promised them." Matey explained. "But because Moses and Aaron didn't control their anger and forgot to honor God with their words and actions, they weren't allowed to go."

"Aye, they were stubborn as mules!" Ripply noted.

Matey smiled a knowing smile. "Sometimes people can be more hard-headed than a mule! Like old Balaam. He were a fella that was headed to Moab to curse God's People by saying bad things that he hoped would happen to them."

"He didn't do that, did he?" Ripply asked.

"Well, he tried to!" Matey explained as he turned the page of the Bible to Numbers 22. "He jumped on his donkey and started for Moab but God sent an angel with a sword to block his path! Balaam didn't see the angel but his donkey did and she tried to turn off the road! The donkey tried to stop three times and each time Balaam beat the donkey and yelled at her."

Ripply was shocked. "Well, that's no way to treat a poor animal," he exclaimed.

"That's what the donkey thought and she told Balaam to stop it!" Matey stated.

Ripply stared Matey straight in the eyes. "I beg your pardon?"

"She told him to stop. She said, 'What have I done to make you beat me these three times?'" Matey explained in a matter-of-fact way.

"The donkey talked to him?" Ripply asked, still not believing.

Matey shrugged. "Is something wrong with that?"

"Well, it's not every day you see a talking donkey!" Ripply pointed out.

"It's not every day you see an angel on the highway either. God can do anything!" Matey continued. "Finally God showed the angel to Balaam, as well. The angel said, 'Why do you keep beating your donkey? If she hadn't turned away, I would have killed you by now!'"

"Wow, so the donkey saved Balaam." Ripply noted.

"Aye, she would rather take a beating from Balaam than disobey God and His angel! And what's more, when Balaam arrived in Moab, here's what he said to the king," Matey read, "Well, I have come to you now,' Balaam replied. 'But can I say just anything? I must speak only what God puts in my mouth.'"

"I guess it would be wise for all of us to only say the words that God puts in our mouths." Ripply said thoughtfully.

Matey agreed. "Angry words and actions got Moses, Aaron and then Balaam in trouble..."

"And it'll get me in trouble, too." Ripply interrupted. "I've got to learn to control my temper. I'm going to go down to the galley and apologize to the cook." He stood up straight and marched across the deck and into the galley.

Matey clapped with excitement. "Oh goody, we can have mashed potatoes after all!" He announced out loud so that every deck hand nearby could hear.