

Not all the blood of beasts On ancient altars slain
Could give the guilty conscience peace Or wash away the stain.

But Christ, the heav'nly Lamb, Takes all our sins away;
A sacrifice of nobler name And richer blood than they.

My soul looks back to see The burden Thou didst bear,
When hanging on the curs'ed tree, And knows its guilt was there.

Believing, we rejoice To see the curse remove;
We bless the Lamb with cheerful voice And sing His bleeding love. Amen.
(Evangelical Lutheran Hymnary, #305, vv. 1-2, 4-5)

But God's anger was kindled because Balaam went, and the angel of the LORD took His stand in the way as his adversary. Now he was riding on the donkey, and his two servants were with him. And the donkey saw the angel of the LORD standing in the road, with a drawn sword in His hand. And the donkey turned aside out of the road and went into the field. And Balaam struck the donkey, to turn her into the road. Then the angel of the LORD stood in a narrow path between the vineyards, with a wall on either side. And when the donkey saw the angel of the LORD, she pushed against the wall and pressed Balaam's foot against the wall. So he struck her again. Then the angel of the LORD went ahead and stood in a narrow place, where there was no way to turn either to the right or to the left. When the donkey saw the angel of the LORD, she lay down under Balaam. And Balaam's anger was kindled, and he struck the donkey with his staff. Then the LORD opened the mouth of the donkey, and she said to Balaam, "What have I done to you, that you have struck me these three times?" And Balaam said to the donkey, "Because you have made a fool of me. I wish I had a sword in my hand, for then I would kill you." And the donkey said to Balaam, "Am I not your donkey, on which you have ridden all your life long to this day? Is it my habit to treat you this way?" And he said, "No." Then the LORD opened the eyes of Balaam, and he saw the angel of the LORD standing in the way, with His drawn sword in His hand. And he bowed down and fell on his face. And the angel of the LORD said to him, "Why have you struck your donkey these three times? Behold, I have come out to oppose you because your way is perverse before Me. The donkey saw Me and turned aside before Me these three times. If she had not turned aside from Me, surely just now I would have killed you and let her live." Then Balaam said to the angel of the LORD, "I have sinned, for I did not know that You stood in the road against me. Now therefore, if it is evil in Your sight, I will turn back." And the angel of the LORD said to Balaam, "Go with the men, but speak only the word that I tell you." So Balaam went on with the princes of Balak.

In Christ Jesus, the blessed "Beast" burdened with your sin and death, dear fellow redeemed:

We heard this last Sunday from the writer of Hebrews: “[W]hen Christ appeared as a high priest ... He entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption ... without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins.”

Consider all the OT animal sacrifices made and what a bloody mess they required. There was nothing quick or simple about it. The one making the offering for himself and his family did not merely “drop off” the animal and leave the bloody preparation to the priests. No, he himself was required to kill the animal at the door of the tabernacle. The animal had to be skinned, chopped up, the dirt cleaned off of it with water, and then piece by piece it was handed over to the priest who would then place it upon the altar.

Palm Sunday was the day the inhabitants and visitors to Jerusalem were to choose their lamb for the Passover meal on Thursday. Jesus was the Lamb of God who came to deliver His people. Both on that day and in our text we read of other beasts used by our Lord. But they were NOT fit for sacrificing for sins. They both were beasts of burden, one a female called a *jenny*, the other a colt of another *jenny* but both bore the weight of the whole world on their backs. As we consider these two events with such similarities, let us: **Behold the Real “Beast” of Burden Blessing His Believers.**

I

Balaam was a wicked prophet whom the king of Moab, Balak, hired to curse the Israelites as they were about to pass through his country on their way to the promise land. God told this evil prophet, “You shall not curse the people, for they are blessed”. Balaam was still willing to fulfill Balak’s will. Christ, the Angel of the Lord opposed Balaam on the way. Balaam’s donkey could see the pre-incarnate Christ. Balaam could not. When his *jenny* three times moved to avoid Christ, Balaam became angry and beat her. “Then the Lord opened the mouth of the donkey”, and she rebuked the prophet for the beatings. “Then the Lord opened the eyes of Balaam and he saw the Angel of the Lord standing in the way, with His drawn sword in His hand”. Christ told Balaam He certainly would have killed him and spared her had the donkey not turned aside.

King Balak took the evil prophet to three different locations ordering him to curse the Israelites. Rather each time Balaam, controlled by the Lord, spoke a blessing. The king sent him back home, but before Balaam left he gave the king four more prophecies. In the fourth prophecy, Balaam foretold of the Messiah: “A star shall

come out of Jacob; and a scepter shall rise out of Israel; it shall crush the forehead of Moab, and break down all the sons of Moab." Balaam's prophecies ended up being seven blessings upon God's people and instead God's enemies according to His will were cursed.

So the *jenny* bearing Balaam bore the weight of the world of sinners, in that she carried the rider of condemnation, but Balaam was unable to carry out his Satanic will. Rather the Lord's will to bless His people through the promised Savior was accomplished.

II

Jesus carefully had his disciples choose the beast of burden upon which He would enter Jerusalem that Sunday before His crucifixion. This colt also bore the weight of the world on its back, as the Son of God loaded down with the sins of all mankind was placed upon Him by the heavenly Father. Yes, these beasts of burden got to walk on a carpet of cloaks and palm branches among the cries of the people remembering how Solomon, David's son, rode into Jerusalem on David's beast of burden on the occasion of his coronation.

But little did they know on that Sunday with what crown Jesus would be fitted to wear on Friday. With voices lifted up in joyful anticipation they cried out: "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord! Lord, in the highest, save us now!" Jesus, as the Lamb of God who would take the sins of all people, was the true "Beast" of burden for them who lined the Jerusalem streets that day and for you, me and all sinners of all time. Jesus came in blessing, not in condemnation.

As far as we know during the ride Jesus' beast of burden did not stop. It plodded along so that the curse could be spoken by the heavenly Father upon His Son, that sacrificial Lamb for all sinners. But as a Lamb led to the slaughter was silent, so Jesus did not open His mouth in opposition to the path to the cross. Just as Isaac allowed his father, Abraham, to tie him up and place him on the altar, so Jesus allowed His Father to prepare the altar upon the cross for Him. Jesus had many times already spoken to His disciples about His impending arrest, trial, crucifixion and burial. So while the people receiving Him on Palm Sunday as their long awaited Savior did not fully grasp what sacrifice was about to be made, Jesus knew.

The beast of burden that served our Lord that day would not know these things either. But the Apostle Paul's words surely applied to it as well: "[T]he creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption

and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now." So Balaam's donkey felt the injustice of the curse of sinful mankind at the hand of her master. She got to express it with human words and object to her subjection to this futility in service to Balaam.

The Palm Sunday beast of burden, felt no such futility in service to its Lord and Master. Perhaps, if the colt was not entirely weaned, there was interest in its mother and slowed the pace at times during its service to the Lord, but we read of no interruption of this magnificently royal, yet humble entrance of the long awaited Son of David, the King of kings, not even from the press of the crowd.

The real "Beast" of burden entered that holy city that day blessing all its inhabitants, visitors, sinners all - past, present and future. We look about at all the kingdoms of the world today and see with great sadness how even the mightiest of them all has currently been brought to its knees and you and I personally feel its humiliation. But our eternal King, with the mightiest of all scepters, has arisen and with it has crushed the head of the diabolical kingdom of "Moab" seeking to curse us. Christ's Kingdom has come among us ruling in His grace, blessing us with forgiveness, life and salvation.

Behold how blessed you are in this your God-given "Beast" of burden. *Surely He has borne your griefs and carried your sorrows; yet we esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God and afflicted. He was wounded for your transgressions, crushed for your iniquities; upon Him was the chastisement that brought you peace, and with His stripes you are healed.*

Your blessed "Beast" of burden did not step aside, nor had He stubbornly laid down on the path to His cross. He received the full force of the eternal beating at the hand of His Father's exacting justice for all your sin. His life was not spared. As a result this blessing is still spoken upon you today: *Your sins are all forgiven you!* Go now in peace to the promise land prepared and secured for you. Amen.