

Mark 10:32-45 “The Conflict of Competing Agendas”**

Main Idea: In Mark 10:32-45 we see the conflict of competing agendas. We also learn what agenda Jesus lived for and consequently we should live for.

I. Jesus is thinking of His Father’s agenda (32-34).

- A. He leads the way to Jerusalem (32).
- B. He reveals what is going to happen to Him (33-34).

II. The disciples are thinking of their own agenda (35-41).

- A. James and John ask Jesus for a favor (35-37).
 - 1. We are prone to think that Jesus exists for us.
 - 2. We must learn that we exist for Him.
- B. Jesus corrects the brothers (38-40).
 - 1. He helps them see their folly.
 - 2. He reminds them of the Father’s authority.
- C. The other disciples have the same problem (41).

III. Jesus calls us to change agendas (42-45).

- A. We must reject the world’s agenda (42).
 - 1. To be successful is to be *over* people.
 - 2. You exist for me.
- B. We must adopt God’s agenda (43-44).
 - 1. To be successful is to serve.
 - 2. I exist for God and you.
- C. We must delight in doing what Jesus did (45).
 - 1. He came to serve others by dying for them.
 - 2. He sets us free so we too can serve.

Make It Personal: What’s your agenda in life?

You are not your own.

That’s what the Scriptures tell us. If we know Christ as Savior, we are *not our own* for the simple reason we have been bought with a price and are under new ownership. Our new owner, the Living God who purchased us at the price of His Son’s blood, has given us a new purpose in life, namely to live for the glory of God (1 Cor. 6:19-20).

That's God's agenda for us, that we live every moment of our lives for His honor which is accomplished by doing His will. That likewise should be *our agenda* as well, to live every moment of our lives for His honor which is accomplished when we delightfully do His will.

Right here is where we get into trouble. In place of God's agenda, we pursue our own agendas. It's the problem of *competing agendas*. Every day, indeed, every moment of every day we are faced with the challenge of *competing agendas*.

The phone rings at work. A voice on the other end speaks rudely to me. I'm faced with a choice. Do I speak rudely in return (so as to defend my right to some respect), or do I respond with kind and selfless words (so as to glorify God whose Word clearly commands me, "Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse"; Rom. 12:14)? It's a battle of *competing agendas*.

It's the end of the month and things are tight. Do I give the Lord a tithe from this week's paycheck, or do I rationalize that I can't afford to give to Him this week (not if I'm going to be able to keep my cable television)? Once again, we're faced with competing agendas.

I'm a high school senior. Do I choose a college major based on what will eventually produce the highest standard of living for me, or based on how I can most effectively be trained for service in God's kingdom? It's a matter of competing agendas.

We've lived in our house for several years and are noticing that many of our peers are "upgrading." What should we do? Should we buy a bigger home (which will involve more debt, overtime at work to pay off the debt, and less time for ministry), or should we take seriously God's command, "You shall not covet your neighbor's house;" Exod. 20:17)? Once again, the decision we make will reflect the agenda for which we are living.

Unfortunately, in the rat race of life we find it difficult to slow down and ask the *why* questions. Why did I make that choice? In other words, whose agenda am I trying to promote right now, God's or mine?

The passage before us this morning will help us (even *force* us) to slow down and take some inventory. In our text in Mark 10, we see a conflict involving *competing agendas*. We see one individual who lived for the right agenda and some other individuals who were operating by a deficient agenda.

It's good to be back in Mark! And timely too. It was two years ago that we began an expository study of Mark's gospel account, entitled, "Straight Talk about Jesus." We took a break from that series last year and now we return to our study of the life of Christ.

There couldn't be a better time for a serious study of Jesus. We're in the midst of *The Da Vinci Code* craze. My friend, if you don't know the truth about Jesus, you are set up to fall for erroneous notions about Him—and that is what is happening to many these days. Who was Jesus really? Did He really have a relationship with Mary Magdalene and father a child?

I'm not going to spend time right now examining the historical fallacies of *The Da Vinci Code* (our aim this morning is to use our time to explore the wonderful truth of the biblical account of Jesus), except to share this perspective from Erwin Lutzer, pastor of Moody Church in Chicago:

"The movie will confuse lots of people, but Jesus will become the centerpiece of many conversations. For those who are prepared to explain that Christianity rests on solid foundations, the opportunity will be tremendous."[\[1\]](#)

In Mark 10:32-45 we learn something important about Jesus, namely the agenda that governed His life. We also see the conflict of competing agendas at work in the lives of His disciples. Finally, we hear Jesus teach about the subject of agendas. Let's take a look at the three elements of this passage.

I. Jesus is thinking of His Father's agenda (32-34).

One of the first things you notice from a study of Jesus' life is that *He didn't do His own thing*. He lived to accomplish the agenda His Father gave Him. Hear it from His own lips...

John 4:34 "My food [i.e. agenda] is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work."

John 5:36 "For the very work [i.e. agenda] that the Father has given me to finish, and which I am doing, testifies that the Father has sent me."

John 6:38 "For I have come down from heaven not to do my will [i.e. agenda] but to do the will [i.e. agenda] of him who sent me."

John 17:4 "I have brought you glory on earth by completing the work [i.e. agenda] you gave me to do."

From the cradle to the cross, this was Jesus' agenda, to obey His Father's will. It ought not surprise us, then, to see this same ambition in Mark 10. We see Jesus doing two things in verses 32-34.

A. He leads the way to Jerusalem (32). "They were on their way up to Jerusalem, with Jesus leading the way." Stop there. Where were they heading? To Jerusalem. Why Jerusalem? Jesus has an appointment to keep in that city, an appointment placed on His calendar by His Father in eternity past. In a very real sense, Jesus has been on His way up to Jerusalem since the manger, indeed, since the divine council before time. It would be in Jerusalem that He would give His life as a sacrificial lamb.

Don't miss Jesus' location in the procession. He is *leading the way*. No one coerced Him to go to the cross. Hebrews 12:2 says, "Who for the joy set before him endured the cross." See Him, beloved. His gaze is set, His gate filled with resolve. He is going to Jerusalem and nothing will stop Him.

Note the perspective of those traveling with Him, at the end of verse 32, "And the disciples were *astonished*, while those who followed were *afraid*." Why were the disciples astonished and the other travelers [probably Jewish pilgrims traveling to observe Passover in Jerusalem] afraid? Because they knew Jesus was walking into a lion's den. They knew that the Jewish leaders were already plotting to kill Jesus (John 11:53) and Jerusalem was their headquarters.

You say, "Well, didn't Jesus know that too?" He sure did. Verse 32 ends, "Again he took the Twelve aside and told them what was going to happen to him." Jesus knew what was coming. And He wanted His followers to know that He knew. That's why...

B. He reveals what is going to happen to Him (33-34). "'We are going up to Jerusalem,' he said, 'and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death and will hand him over to the Gentiles, who will mock him and spit on him, flog him and kill him. Three days later he will rise.'"

Keep in mind this is a private conversation between Jesus and the Twelve. "We are going to Jerusalem," He told them. He told them what would happen, too. This is actually Jesus' third major prediction of His coming passion (the first in 8:31, the second in 9:31).

As a prophet Jesus makes eight predictions about what this trip to Jerusalem will mean for Him. He predicts:

- 1) He will be betrayed (by the very people who should have known better, the teachers of God's Law).
- 2) He will be condemned to death.
- 3) He will be handed over to Gentiles.
- 4) He will be mocked.
- 5) He will be spit on.

6) He will be flogged.

7) He will be killed.

8) He will rise from the dead on the third day.

Some scholars say these verses were added later, as part of “post-resurrection church tradition.” This, by the way, is what is at the heart of the *Da Vinci Code* controversy. The fact is, how you view Jesus will affect what you do with prediction-passages like this one. If Jesus was merely a man, then you will conclude there’s no way he could predict His future like this, and would consequently say his followers inserted these comments later. But if Jesus is truly the Son of God, then predictions like these pose no problem. If He is God, He certainly knows and can foretell the future.

Allow me to restate the obvious. Jesus went to Jerusalem knowing full well the unthinkable agony He was going to experience. Why then did He go? It boils down to one very simple reason. He was thinking of His Father’s agenda for Him. It was His Father’s plan that He enter this world as a man, live a perfect life, and then die in the place of and for the benefit of undeserving sinners, gaining eternal life for all who would repent and believe in Him. This was His Father’s agenda, and it was this agenda that governed His every decision.

In the very next verse we see a stark contrast. On the trip to Jerusalem Jesus is thinking about His Father’s agenda, but...

II. The disciples are thinking of their own agenda (35-41).

Note the first word of verse 35, “Then.” Right after Jesus announced that He was going to be betrayed and killed, two of His followers approached Him.

A. James and John ask Jesus for a favor (35-37). Verse 35—“Then James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to him. ‘Teacher,’ they said, ‘we want you to do for us whatever we ask.’”

How’s that for timing! The Lord had just poured out His soul to these men. “I am going to be condemned, mocked, spit upon, flogged, and killed,” He shared. “It’s going to happen when we arrive in Jerusalem,” He made it clear. Their response?

“Yea, okay Jesus. We want You to do for us whatever we ask.”

Where did *that* come from? Didn’t they hear what He just told them? He just revealed that He is going to suffer horribly, and they want to know if He will do something for them.

It makes me think of what happens in the typical home when mom says she’s feeling like she’s getting sick. How do dad and the kids respond? “Oh, mother dear. If you aren’t feeling well, why don’t you go lay down? You deserve to think of your needs. We’ll take care of the chores.” Hardly. The more accurate response would be... “Not feeling well? Oh no! I hope you’re not contagious! Before you do get sick, would you mind fixing our supper, ironing our clothes, washing the dog, and running me to my ballgame?”

The way James and John treated Jesus isn’t so different from the way we often treat Him, is it? We hear Him say to us in His Word, “I gave My life for you. If you want to be my disciple, you must take up your cross daily and follow Me (Mark 8:34).” And what do we say to Him? “Excuse me, Jesus. I want you to do for me whatever I ask. I want a better job. Give me better health. I’d like a better wife.”

Once again, it boils down to competing agendas. Simply put...

1. *We are prone to think that Jesus exists for us.* He is there to do our bidding, to enable us to accomplish our agenda. That’s what we sinfully assume. Here’s what we need...

2. *We must learn that we exist for Him.* “All things are from Him, through Him, and TO Him. To Him be the glory forever (Rom. 11:36).”

Matthew’s account indicates James and John weren’t alone. Their mother also approached Jesus and made this request (20:20).

Calvin had this to say: “This narrative contains a bright mirror of human vanity; for it shows that proper and holy zeal is often accompanied by ambition....They who are not satisfied with himself alone, but seek this or the other thing apart from him and his promises, wander egregiously from the right path.”^[2]

Keep in mind that these aren’t Jesus’ enemies talking. These are His closest earthly friends. These sons of Zebedee have forsaken their fishing business to follow the Master. Yet they still struggle with competing agendas. Take heart if you can relate.

If I had just shared with my friends about my upcoming death and they responded with the kind of self-seeking request James and John gave, I think I would have lit into them... “Didn’t you hear me! Get your self-centered eyes off of yourself and think about me for a moment!”

Not Jesus. He gently used the moment to teach His men an important lesson. He begins with a question. Verse 36—“What do you want me to do for you?” he asked.” In other words, “Let’s put your selfish agenda on the table for all of us to see.” Sometime in order to change agendas we must be forced to see how ugly our self-promoting agenda really is.

Verse 37—“They replied, ‘Let one of us sit at your right and the other at your left in your glory.’” We do see some commendable traits in James and John here. We see their *faith*—the very boldness of their request indicates that they believe Jesus is going to reign in glory, that death will not hold Him. We see their *dedication*—even though a hostile crowd awaits them in Jerusalem they are going with their Master no matter what. We see their *devotion* for Jesus—they want to be near Jesus, as close as possible, even right next to Him as He sits on His throne.

Yet no amount of faith, dedication, and devotion can justify self-promotion. What right do James and John have to ask for this honor? Do they think they deserve to be at Jesus’ right and left hand in glory, and the other disciples *don’t*? That’s a question they’re about to hear from the other disciples!

But let’s be honest. We, too, tend to think more highly of ourselves than we ought. That’s because we are by nature *proud* people. And like these brothers, we too need Jesus to set us free from our self-promoting agendas so that we might seek first His kingdom agenda.

Watch what the Lord does next...

B. Jesus corrects the brothers (38-40). Verse 38—“You don’t know what you are asking,” Jesus said.” How’s that for setting the record straight! “Men, you don’t know what you saying. Your perspective is way too narrow.”

To help them Jesus uses a question in verse 38? “Can you drink the cup I drink or be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with?” By that question...

1. *He helps them see their folly.* To Jewish ears, the cup symbolizes trouble and suffering. The image comes from the Old Testament, for instance, Psalm 75:8, “In the hand of the LORD is a cup full of foaming wine mixed with spices; he pours it out, and all the wicked of the earth drink it down to its very dregs.” Baptism in water also symbolizes suffering and trouble in the Hebrew Scriptures (e.g. Psalm 18:16; 69:1-2).

Can you share in my fate? Can you join me in the suffering I’m about to experience? That’s what Jesus is asking. The brothers’ response?

Verse 39—“We can,” they answered.” These words indicate that James and John are ready to take on whatever

comes their way, such is their love for Jesus. But love can be blind...and misguided.

Jesus said to them in verse 39, “You will drink the cup I drink and be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with...” Little did these men know the price they would pay for following Jesus. James would be the first apostle to experience martyrdom. John would be boiled in oil and banished to the isle of Patmos, the last apostle to die.

In addition to helping them see their folly...

2. *He reminds them of the Father’s authority.* Verse 40—“But to sit at my right or left is not for me to grant. These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared.”

Note those words, “Not for me to grant.” They make it clear that even Jesus’ authority is delegated. Though He is God Almighty, He lives in submission to His Father. He obeys His Father. He yields to His Father.

To paraphrase Jesus’ words, “What you’ve asked of Me is not mine to give. I didn’t write the plan. I came to carry it out. You want to know about who will sit on thrones. That’s an agenda question. I don’t make the agenda. You certainly don’t make the agenda. That’s the Father’s prerogative. He wrote the script. It’s His agenda that matters to Me, and it’s His agenda that should matter to you.”

One of the tragic characteristics of sin is that *it breeds*. It doesn’t stay alone. It spreads. It infects those with whom it makes contact. My initial sin creates a ripple affect that can turn into a tidal wave. We see this illustrated in verse 41, “When the ten heard about this, they became indignant with James and John.” Simply put, James and John aren’t alone...

C. The other disciples have the same problem (41). An agenda problem!

When the ten heard what James and John asked Jesus, they were “indignant”—the word means “incensed, offended, irate.” Why were they upset? Was it righteous indignation, that is, were they upset because the brothers had brought Jesus a foolish, even sinful request? I don’t think so. They were upset because the brothers asked for something they wanted *for themselves*. They too wanted the highest place. It’s worth noting that in the previous chapter we find these twelve men arguing about...*who was the greatest!*^[3]

The reason the ten could so easily spot pride in their partners is because pride lurked in their own hearts. J. D. Jones offers an important insight:

“It takes a conceited man to spot conceit in another; it takes a passionate man to detect bad temper in another; it takes a jealous man to discover jealousy in another. And so these ambitious disciples were quick to discover the ambitiousness of James and John, and were correspondingly irritated by it.”^[4]

Far too often we have a stain-glass view of the apostles. We wrongly think they were made of different “stuff” than we are, that somehow living for Christ came easier to them than it does for us, that they didn’t have the kinds of sinful hearts that plague us. The fact is, they were *just like us* and the Scriptures go out of their way to make that plain.

The story is told that a painter did a portrait of Oliver Cromwell. Cromwell had warts on his face, but thinking it would please him, the painter didn’t include the warts in his painting. When Cromwell saw it he said, “Take it away! And paint me warts and all!”^[5]

We’ve seen some warts this morning, the warts of selfish ambition and pride on the faces of men who were thinking of their own agendas. Now look in the mirror. Do you see any warts? Be honest. Whose agenda matters in your life?

What makes you angry? Do you get upset when other people get what you want? Do you see what that anger is revealing? You have a heart in which an agenda competition is taking place and your anger is showing which agenda you are giving priority.

You say, “Yes, that’s me. What needs to happen?” Jesus tells us in verses 42-45.

III. Jesus calls us to change agendas (42-45).

How do we do that? The change involves three responsibilities.

A. We must reject the world’s agenda (42). “Jesus called them together and said, ‘You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them.’”

According to the world’s agenda...

1. *To be successful is to be **over** people.* Note Jesus’ emphasis on the word OVER here. In the world successful leaders are those who lord it *over* their subjects, who exercise authority *over* them. As far as the world’s thinking goes...

2. *You exist for me.* If you invade my space when I’m driving, I get angry at you. If you get the job that I want, I resent you. If I’m a leader and you are under my authority, I expect you to advance my cause because *you exist for me*. So it is in the world.

Now listen carefully to Jesus’ first words in verse 44. *Not so with you.* We must flat out reject the world’s agenda. The world’s agenda of success must go. It has no place in the minds of the followers of Jesus Christ.

Let’s be honest. Every conflict that has ever occurred in Wheelersburg Baptist Church ’s 128 year history took place because there were competing agendas. Every conflict that’s every happened behind the four walls of my house and yours happened for the same reason. People don’t fight when they’re living for the same agenda. Church members don’t fight. Husbands and wives don’t fight. People at work don’t fight. Fights occur when a united agenda is lost, that is, when people are not pursuing the same thing. Jesus calls us to reject the world’s agenda. Secondly...

B. We must adopt God’s agenda (43-44). “Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all.”

What does Jesus say about true success here? This...

1. *To be successful is to serve.* Business owner, the world often says that you measure success by how many people are *under* you in the chain of command. God measures success by how many people you are serving. In other words, are you using your position of authority for His honor and the good of others? The world says that you exist for me. To the contrary, Jesus says...

2. *I exist for God and you.* This is not my world. This is God’s world. Love God and love neighbor, this is the essence of God’s Law, of God’s *agenda* for us.

We need to retrain our minds according to this agenda. It starts in our prayer closet. Remember how Jesus taught us to pray? “Father, Your kingdom come, Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.” Those two requests have to do with our agenda. Whose agenda should matter in the life of a child of God? You can tell what’s on a person’s heart by what they pray. Allow me to illustrate with two prayers:

Prayer #1: “Oh Lord, please give me a better job. Make my physical pain go away. Give me better neighbors.”

Contrast that prayer with prayer #2: “Oh Lord, my job is hard but help me to honor You there. My body aches, but help others to see You in the way I respond to my pain. My neighbors do offensive things, but enable me to model Your unfailing love to them.”

Which of the above prayers comes from a heart that’s gripped by God’s agenda? The second, for sure. When we

have our agenda in mind, we tend to view God as a Cosmic Bell-hop. But when our perspective of God is accurate and our focus is on His agenda, our constant cry will be, “Oh Father, cause *Your kingdom* to come and cause *Your will* to be done, on earth (and especially in my life) as it is in heaven.”

Every day we make dozens of decisions and those decisions reflect the agenda that is controlling our hearts. Consequently, every day we must choose to reject the world’s agenda and adopt God’s agenda. What does that look like in living color? Our Lord pointed to Himself in verse 45, “For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” Simply put, when it comes to our agenda...

C. We must delight in doing what Jesus did (45). What did Jesus do? We’re told two things about our Lord here.

1. *He came to serve others by dying for them.* He didn’t come to get, but to give. What He gave was His very life, and He gave His life as a ransom payment.

Because of Adam’s sin and our own, we enter this world in captivity. Jesus came to set sinners free. God’s agenda was that His became a ransom payment. The One died as a ransom for the many. What should have happened to the many happened to Him. What they deserved, He took upon Himself. He took their place. He died as their substitute.

Who benefits from His ransom payment? Those who admit the truth about their bondage and place their faith in Him, accepting Him as Savior and Master. If you will call on Christ He will set you free today! But know this...

2. *He sets us free so we too can serve.* The first words of verse 45 make this clear, “For even...” If Jesus’ agenda was to serve, can ours be less? He doesn’t set us free so we can do our own thing. He liberates us so we can follow in His steps.

Make It Personal: What’s your agenda in life?

You are not your own. If you know Christ, you have been bought with a price and have a new agenda. It’s a call to serve God and others. Is the Lord’s agenda your agenda? I encourage you right now to ponder some questions...

-Do I have an agenda problem?

-What can I do today to show that God’s agenda is real in my life?

-Who has God placed in my life that I can serve today?

**Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

[1] Taken from Focus on the Family website, <http://www.go.family.org/davinci/>

[2] Quote taken from W. Wessel, p. 720.

[3] At which time Jesus taught them about servanthood (9:33-37).

[4] J. D. Jones, p. 380.

[5] As told by William Barclay, p. 253.

