

Christmas Series: “Why Did He Come?”

Main Idea: In Mark 10:32-45 we learn from Jesus Himself why He came. We also learn the difference it should make for us. There are three scenes in this text.

- I. We see Christ’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. We see competing agendas (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. We see the call 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.

Take Inventory: Am I living my life in light of why He came?

Scripture Reading: Philippians 2:5-11

Why did He come? Yes, the Son of God came to earth as a baby. That’s what Christmas is all about. But *why* did He come?

Many don’t know. In fact, many who think they know really don’t know.

I want us to know. And for that reason we’re beginning a three-week series simply entitled, “*Why Did He Come?*” The Bible tells us why, and we’re going to look at three passages that answer the question.

Today we turn to Mark 10. In Mark 10:32-45 Jesus Himself tells us why He came. He also makes clear the difference it should make in our lives.

Why did He come? Simply stated, *the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve*. The Creator and King of the universe came to serve.

Serve whom? And in what way? We’ll find out. We’re going to see three things in today’s text and I want to highlight them at the outset.

- I. We see Christ’s agenda (32-34).
- II. We see competing agendas (35-41).
- III. We see the call to change agendas. (42-45).

I. We see Christ’s agenda (32-34).

One of the things you notice when you study Jesus’ life is that *He didn’t do His own thing*, but rather lived to accomplish the agenda His Father had given Him. He said that many times, such as in...

** 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 For an earlier message from this text, see the Mark series preached at WBC on 5/21/06.

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, it was Jesus’ agenda to obey His Father’s will. It ought not surprise us, then, to see this same ambition in Mark 10. Jesus does 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. Jesus is heading somewhere with His followers. Where? To Jerusalem. Why Jerusalem? Because Jesus has an appointment 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 His Father decreed this event in eternity past.

Don’t miss Jesus’ location in the procession. He is *leading the way*. No one coerced Jesus to go where He is going. See Him, beloved. His gaze is set, His gate filled with resolve. He is going to Jerusalem and nothing will stop Him.²

Mark gives us the perspective of the others at the end of verse 32, “And the disciples were *astonished*, while those who followed were *afraid*.”

Why were the disciples astonished? And why were the other travelers [probably Jewish pilgrims traveling to observe Passover in Jerusalem] afraid? Because they knew Jesus was walking into a lion’s den, for the Jewish leaders were already plotting to kill Him (John 11:53) and Jerusalem was their headquarters.

You say, “Well, didn’t Jesus know that?” Indeed He did. At the end of verse 32 we’re told, “Again he took the Twelve aside and told them what was going to happen to him.” Yes, 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 week (the first in 8:31, the second in 9:31).

This time Jesus specifies eight things are going to happen to Him in Jerusalem.

- 1) He will be betrayed, and that 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.

² Hebrews 12:2 says, “Who for the joy set before him endured the cross.”

- 6) He will be flogged.
- 7) He will be killed.
- 8) He will rise from the dead on the third day.

Some Bible scholars say these verses were added later, as part of “post-resurrection church tradition.” This, by the way, is what was at the heart of the *Da Vinci Code* controversy a few years ago. 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, for 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 a very simple reason.

This was His agenda for coming. 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, thereby gaining eternal life for all who would repent and believe in Him. This was His Father’s agenda, and therefore His, and it that governed His every decision.

Why did He come? Mark 10 tells us. We see Christ’s agenda, to go to Jerusalem and die and conquer death.

II. We see competing agendas (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, telling them, “I am going to be condemned, mocked, spit upon, flogged, and killed. And it’s going to happen when we arrive in Jerusalem.” And 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 often respond?

“Oh, mother dear, you don’t look like you’re feeling well. Why don’t you go lay down? We’ll take care of the chores. You need some rest.”

Sometimes that happens, but sometimes it’s, “Not feeling well? Oh no! I hope you’re not contagious! And 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.”

Once again, it boils down to competing agendas.

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. But the truth is...

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 mom 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.”³

Let’s keep in mind that these aren’t Jesus’ enemies. 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.

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 eyes off of yourself and think about what I need for a moment!”

Not Jesus. He gently used the moment to teach His disciples an important lesson. He begins with a question in verse 36, “What do you want me to do for you?” In other words, “Let’s go ahead and 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 unsightly our present 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 such 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. You’re not thinking rightly.”

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?”

Why did Jesus ask that question? For this purpose...

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

³ Quote taken from W. Wessel, p. 720.

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.

But Jesus isn’t finished. 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 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 in verse 41, “When the ten heard about this, they became indignant with James and John.”

So 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? 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*.⁴

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.”⁵

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

⁴ At which time Jesus taught them about servanthood (9:33-37).

⁵ J. D. Jones, p. 380.

than it does for us, that they didn't have the kinds of sinful hearts that plague us. The truth is, they were *just like us* and the Scriptures make that quite 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!"⁶

So 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 let's look in the mirror. Do you see any warts? Be honest. Whose agenda matters most in your life?

You say, "I'm not sure."

Okay, here's a question that will help. What makes you angry? Did you get upset this past week? What precipitated it? Answer that question and you'll see what agenda was controlling you in that moment. God's agenda? Or your own?

Do you ever get upset when other people get what you want, like the disciples did? Do you see what your anger is revealing? You have a heart in which an agenda competition is taking place, and your anger is showing everyone in the room which agenda is most important to you.

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

III. We see the call 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 mind of a follower of Jesus Christ.

Let's be honest. Every conflict that has ever occurred in a church 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, when people are not pursuing the same thing.

What's needed? Jesus calls His followers to reject the world's me-first agenda. We're not to live that way. Rather...

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?

⁶ As told by William Barclay, p. 253.

1. *To be successful is to serve.* So 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 Waiter. 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."

There is it. Why did He come? There's the answer. He came to serve. That's why the baby is lying in a manger. He came to serve. See the humility of God in that manger. See the Servant of God that the prophet Isaiah foretold. See the Son of Man who says He did not come to be served, but to serve.

And serve He most certainly did. He healed the sick. He fed the hungry. He encouraged the downtrodden. He gave sight to the blind. He cleansed the leper. And ultimately, He *gave His life as a ransom for many*.

That was His greatest act of service. He served, not just by giving food and sight and healing, but by giving *Himself*. That's why He came. To give His own life as a ransom payment for sinners.

Friends, because of Adam's sin and our own, we enter this world in captivity. But Jesus came to set sinners free. God's agenda was for His Son to become a ransom payment. The One was going to die in the place of the many. What should have happened to the many would happen to Him. What they deserved, He took upon Himself. He took their place. He died as their substitute. He became their ransom payment to set them free.

Who are these *many* for whom Christ became a ransom payment? You can answer that in two ways. First, if you could find a long ladder to reach to heaven, you could open the Lamb's book of life mentioned in Revelation 21:27 and see the names God recorded. Those are the *many* that the Father has chosen and for whom the Servant has given His life as a ransom payment.

But only God has access to that book. Thankfully, there is a way we can know. Just tell people why Jesus came, and how He served sinners by making a ransom payment for them. Then ask them if they want to be set free.

My friend, this is critical. Who benefits from Jesus' ransom payment? Who are the many? They are the men, women, boys and girls, who admit the truth about their bondage, admit their total inability to do anything about it, and place their total trust in the person and payment of the One God sent to rescue them.

Dear friend, because He came, you can be set free today, if you will call on the Lord Jesus Christ. I invite you to do so, and He will save you and give you eternal life.

You say, "How can I tell for sure if Jesus has saved me?"

According to Jesus, here's how.

C. We must delight in doing what Jesus did (45). What did Jesus do?

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

And something amazing happens when we receive His ransom payment...

2. *He sets us free so we too can serve.* The first word of verse 45 make this clear, "For..." That word takes us back to what Jesus just said in verse 44, "Whoever wants to be first must be slave of all."

If Jesus' agenda was to serve, can ours be less? He doesn't set us free so we can go our own way. He liberates us so we can walk in His steps. As servants.

In 1864 E. S. Elliot wrote this appropriate prayer-song to Jesus.⁷

*Thou didst leave Thy throne and Thy kingly crown,
When Thou camest to earth for me;
But in Bethlehem's home was there found no room
For Thy holy nativity.
O come to my heart, Lord Jesus,
There is room in my heart for Thee.*

*Heaven's arches rang when the angels sang,
Proclaiming Thy royal degree;
But of lowly birth didst Thou come to earth,
And in great humility.
O come to my heart, Lord Jesus,
There is room in my heart for Thee.*

*The foxes found rest, and the birds their nest
In the shade of the forest tree;
But Thy couch was the sod, O Thou Son of God,
In the deserts of Galilee.
O come to my heart, Lord Jesus,
There is room in my heart for Thee.*

*Thou camest, O Lord, with the living word
That should set Thy people free;
But with mocking scorn, and with crown of thorn,
They bore Thee to Calvary.*

⁷ https://hymnary.org/text/thou_didst_leave_thy_throne_and_thy_king

*O come to my heart, Lord Jesus,
There is room in my heart for Thee.*

*When the heavens shall ring, and the angels sing,
At Thy coming to victory,
Let Thy voice call me home, saying "Yet there is room,
There is room at My side for thee."
My heart shall rejoice, Lord Jesus,
When Thou comest and callest for me.*

Take Inventory: Am I living my life in light of why He came?

He came to serve. Does my life reflect that? Ask yourself some questions:
-Have I received the payment that the Servant made for sinners like me?
-If so, am I walking in His steps and serving God and others?
-Who has God placed in my life that I can serve today?