

Main Idea: In Mark 10:32-45 we see Jesus going up to Jerusalem, heading to the cross. We also see the conflict of competing agendas.

- I. Jesus desires 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 desire 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.

Take Inventory: What is my agenda in life?

*Scripture Reading: Mark 10:32-45*

In just three weeks Jesus’ Passion week will begin. And I want to help us be ready to appreciate it fully, to appreciate Him fully. There is nothing more important in life than knowing the One who went up to Jerusalem, and then responding rightly to that person and what He did. That’s the reason we’re starting a month long series in Mark 10-11 called, “*Up to Jerusalem, Heading to the Cross.*”

Up to Jerusalem. That’s the phrase Mark uses in Mark 10:32, “They were on their way up to Jerusalem,” and again in Mark 10:33 where Jesus said, “We are going up to Jerusalem.”

Jerusalem. This is where Jesus has been heading since the Father designed this plan in eternity past. This is it. It’s now time. He’s going up to Jerusalem. And Mark invites us to travel with Him.

We know what happened in Jerusalem. The betrayal, the scourging, the cross, the tomb, the stone rolled away. All so very significant. But we also need to know what happened on the journey up to Jerusalem, for it says so much to us about Jesus, and ourselves.

We begin in Mark 10:32-45. I’ve entitled today’s message, “*Competing Agendas on the Road to the Cross.*” Agendas. We all have them. Jesus did. The disciples did. And there’s nothing like going up to Jerusalem to help bring a person’s agenda into focus.

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<sup>\*\*</sup>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.

<sup>1</sup> For a previous message from this passage, see the Mark series, 5/21/06.

There are three scenes in today's passage. The first scene focuses on Jesus, the second scene on two of the disciples, James and John, and the third scene on the rest of the disciples, including us.

#### I. Jesus desires 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, but always lived to accomplish the agenda His Father had given 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 do 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.

Did you notice Jesus' location in the procession? He is *leading the way*. 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.

Mark sheds light on the perspective of those traveling with Jesus 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 hornet's nest. The Jewish leaders were already plotting to kill Jesus (John 11:53), which they knew, and Jerusalem was their headquarters.

You say, "Well, didn't Jesus know that too?"

Indeed He did. We're told at the end of verse 32, "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 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, 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.
- 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.” The truth 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.<sup>2</sup> 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 desires His Father's agenda. 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 governed His every decision. It's why we see Him now going up to Jerusalem, no matter what it costs.

E.g.—

So heading up to Jerusalem Jesus desires His Father's agenda. But in the very next verse we see a stark contrast.

## II. The disciples desire their own agenda (35-41).

Note the first word of verse 35, “Then.” In the ESV, “And.” Right after Jesus announced that He was going to be betrayed and killed, two disciples 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 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.” 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 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 a lot of homes 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 lay down and rest? We'll take care of the chores.”

Hardly. More like, “Not feeling well? I hope you don't get us sick! And before you

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<sup>2</sup> This kind of thinking is what was at the heart of the *Da Vinci Code* controversy a few years ago.

lay down, would you mind fixing our supper, ironing our clothes, washing the dog, and running me to my ballgame?”

We can relate to James and John, can't we? We've treated Jesus like this before. I know I have. He says to me 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 I say to Him, "Okay, Jesus. But now I want you to do for me whatever I ask."

It's the problem of competing agendas.

1. *We are prone to think that Jesus exists for us.* That He is there for our benefit, to give us what we want out of life.

2. *We must learn that we exist for Him.* He is the Lord. We are His servants. "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. Remember who else was with them? Their mother. They may be in their twenties, but mom is still trying to speak for them. She approached Jesus, says Matthew 20:20, requesting a favor.

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."<sup>3</sup>

Keep in mind that these aren't Jesus' enemies. These are His closest earthly friends, sons of Zebedee, who have forsaken their fishing business to follow the Master. Yet they still struggle with competing agendas.

So what would you have done if you were Jesus? If I had just shared with my friends that I was soon going to be mocked, flogged, and killed, and they responded with the kind of self-seeking request James and John gave, I think I would have lit into them, "Excuse me? You want me to *what*? Would you stop thinking about yourself and realize what I'm facing?"

Not Jesus. He humbly and gently used the moment to teach His followers an important lesson. He begins with a question in verse 36, "'What do you want me to do for you?' he asked."

He's not asking for information sake. He's asking to help them. He's saying, *Okay, let's go ahead and put your agenda on the table so we can talk about it.* Sometimes in order to change agendas we must be forced to see how ugly our self-promoting agenda really is.

In verse 37, "They replied, 'Let one of us sit at your right and the other at your left in your glory.'" We do see here some commendable traits in James and John. 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.

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<sup>3</sup> Quote taken from W. Wessel, p. 720.

But again, let's be honest. We tend to do the same thing. We too are prone to think more highly of ourselves than we ought. By nature we are *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?" The point of 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." Can you drink the cup I am going to drink?

And can you be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with? **Baptism**, that is, going under the water, also symbolizes suffering and trouble in the Hebrew Scriptures (see Psalm 18:16, "He drew me out of deep waters"; 69:1-2 "Save me, O God, for the waters have come up to my neck...I have come into deep waters; the floods engulf me").

Can you share in my fate? Can you join me in the suffering I'm about to experience? That's what Jesus is asking with these questions.

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.

So Jesus says 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 at the time how much they would suffer for following Jesus. James would be the first apostle to become a martyr. John would die last, after he was boiled in oil and banished to the isle of Patmos.

But it wasn't just their folly that Jesus wanted them to see.

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, "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 designed the plan. It's His agenda that matters to Me, and it's His agenda that should matter to you."

One of the sad things about sin is that *it spreads*. One sin, if not addressed through repentance, leads to more sin, often in more people. We see this illustrated in verse 41, "When the ten heard about this, they became indignant with James and John."

So now 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 offended because the two brothers had brought Jesus a foolish request? I don't think so. I get the sense they were upset because the brothers asked for something they wanted for themselves. They too wanted the highest place.

It's worth noting that this isn't the first time these men have clashed over the subject of status. Go back one chapter in your Bible and notice Mark 9:33-37.

“They came to Capernaum. When he was in the house, he asked them, “What were you arguing about on the road?”<sup>34</sup> But they kept quiet because on the way they had argued about who was the greatest.<sup>35</sup> Sitting down, Jesus called the Twelve and said, “Anyone who wants to be first must be the very last, and the servant of all.”

<sup>36</sup> He took a little child whom he placed among them. Taking the child in his arms, he said to them,<sup>37</sup> “Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me does not welcome me but the one who sent me.”

The reason the ten could so easily spot pride in their brothers' hearts is because pride lurked in their own hearts. J. D. Jones offers this wise 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.”<sup>4</sup>

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 Jesus 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!”<sup>5</sup>

We've seen some warts this morning, the warts of selfish ambition and pride on the faces of Jesus' first followers. Not very pretty, is it? Now let's look in the mirror. Do we see any warts? Be honest. Whose agenda matters most to us?

What makes you upset? Keep a journal of upsets some time. It's quite revealing. Write down every time you get upset for a week, and answer the questions, “When I got upset just now, what was I thinking, and what was I wanting?” It might look something like this.

Monday, 7:30 am. I got upset driving to work just now. What was I thinking? That I had a right to go 35 mph like the sign says, not 25 mph like the person in front of me. What was I wanting? For the person to get out of my way.

Do you see what's happening? I've got an agenda problem. You mean, “His agenda versus mine?” No. God's agenda versus mine. The Sovereign Lord has a reason for me being behind this other driver just now, perhaps to increase my ability to show mercy and exhibit patience. The fact that I'm upset reveals which agenda matters most to me in the moment.

Thursday, 2:30 am. I got upset when I woke up and couldn't get back to sleep. What was I thinking? I don't function well if I don't sleep well. What was I wanting? I want to go back to sleep, now.

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<sup>4</sup> J. D. Jones, p. 380.

<sup>5</sup> As told by William Barclay, p. 253.

Again, what's happening? I've got an agenda problem. Is the Lord sovereign over my sleep or lack of it? Does He have something He wants me to do when I can't sleep? Yes. Since my body is His temple, He may want me to see if there are reasons I'm not sleeping. Maybe I'm taking my problems to bed with me rather than dealing with them before the sun goes down. Maybe I need to see a doctor. Then again, maybe I'm not going back to sleep because He has things He wants to teach me during the quietness of the night, or petitions He wants me to bring to Him in behalf of others. So again, the fact that I'm upset reveals which agenda matters most to me in the moment, God's or mine.

You say, "Okay, I see the problem. What needs to happen?" Jesus tells us in scene 3.

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

How do we do that? The change involves three responsibilities. We see the first in verse 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.'"

**A. We must reject the world's agenda (42).** According to the world's agenda...

1. *To be successful is to be **over** people.* Note Jesus' emphasis on the word **OVER**. 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 choose to flat out reject the world's agenda. The world's perspective on 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 141 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.

So how do we change agendas? First, Jesus calls us to reject the world's agenda.

**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**.* The world so often measures 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 the way they pray.

Allow me to illustrate with a couple of prayers.

Prayer #1: "Oh Lord, please give me a better job. Make my pain go away. Give me better neighbors." Nothing wrong with asking for those things, but 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."

So which of the 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 bell-hop. But when we're focusing on God's agenda our cry will be, "Oh Father, You know what I would like, but what I want most is for You to 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." So to put it simply put, when it comes to our agenda...

**C. We must delight in doing what Jesus did (45).** And what did He 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.

#### Take Inventory: What is my 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?