

Mark 10 • Setting Spiritual Goals

Introduction

Throughout the Gospels Jesus encounters a lot of people and groups who have their own goals and agendas. They're often presented as being religious or based on a misinterpretation of God's Word, but all sharing the common denominator of things actually rooted in the flesh or the ways of the world. In other words, to some degree they may sound right or look right, but only bear the outward veneer of something religious because it's not rooted in love for God as much as using the things of God to satiate one's own desires. In the course of pursuing Christ's calling, our personal and earthly goals at every level are replaced by true spiritual goals designed to successfully change us from the old self into the image and likeness of Christ.

¹Getting up, He went from there to the region of Judea and beyond the Jordan; crowds gathered around Him again, and, according to His custom, He once more began to teach them.

²Some Pharisees came up to Jesus, testing Him, and began to question Him whether it was lawful for a man to divorce a wife. ³And He answered and said to them, "What did Moses command you?"

⁴They said, "Moses permitted a man TO WRITE A CERTIFICATE OF DIVORCE AND SEND HER AWAY."

⁵But Jesus said to them, "Because of your hardness of heart he wrote you this commandment. ⁶But from the beginning of creation, God MADE THEM MALE AND FEMALE. ⁷FOR THIS REASON A MAN SHALL LEAVE HIS FATHER AND MOTHER, ⁸AND THE TWO SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH; so they are no longer two, but one flesh. ⁹What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate."

¹⁰In the house the disciples began questioning Him about this again. ¹¹And He said to them, "Whoever divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery against her; ¹²and if she herself divorces her husband and marries another man, she is committing adultery."

[Read v.1-12]

Q: Why would the Pharisees be asking a question about something already commonly practiced in Israel at that time?

A: Because there wasn't agreement among them as to what the Law provided as the proper grounds for divorce, there were different practices when it came to divorce. The disciples of rabbi Shammai held to a very strict interpretation (divorce only for unfaithfulness) while the disciples of Hillel held a more lenient interpretation (divorce for almost any reason). There were conflicts as to how this was carried out at this time.

Q: What is revealing about the answer the Pharisees first give? How well do they quote the Law for which they're seeking an interpretation?

A: They only quote the **mechanics** of the Law, not the actual legal grounds which would justify putting those mechanics into motion. They're not quoting the part of the Scripture that gives the reasons to pursue a divorce, only how it is carried out once a person has decided to do it.

*"When a man takes a wife and marries her, and it happens that she finds no favor in his eyes because he has found some indecency in her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out from his house,
Deuteronomy 24:1*

Point: The real issue is not whether or not a divorce is effected by writing the proper certificate and sending her away, but as to the true meaning of "indecency", the condition that has brought about her disfavor.

Q: What is the scriptural basis by which Jesus responds to their question?

A: Rather than taking either side, Jesus goes back to the very first marriage to confirm that marriage meant one man and one woman becoming one flesh for one lifetime.

Point: In the parallel account of this event in Matthew, it's recorded that Jesus explicitly states, "except for immorality" (Matthew 19:9) Earthly marriage was supposed to reflect and teach something about the nature of the kind of spiritual relationship we're supposed to have with God – exclusively and wholly devoting our entire life just to Him.

[Note: Paul provides a definitive 6-point argument on the true nature of the Law in Galatians 3 & 4 for which separate Walk with the Word studies are available. His basic point, however, is that the Law of Moses was temporarily added, intended by God to only last until its fulfillment in Christ.]

Application: The goal of our earthly relationships is supposed to be the same as for our spiritual relationships, based on faithfulness rather than pleasing

ourselves. Marriage is a physical relationship which can only be dissolved by a physical cause, either death or adultery. This is also how spiritual separation is achieved by spiritual unfaithfulness.

[Read v.13-16]

¹³And they were bringing children to Him so that He might touch them; but the disciples rebuked them. ¹⁴But when Jesus saw this, He was indignant and said to them, "Permit the children to come to Me; do not hinder them; for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. ¹⁵Truly I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child will not enter it at all." ¹⁶And He took them in His arms and began blessing them, laying His hands on them.

Observation: Isn't it interesting that marriage leads to children, and so the very next topic involves children?

Q: Why might it not be surprising that adults were bringing their children to Jesus and asking Him to bless them?

A: This was a customary practice of the day, for rabbis to bless children. It would be a very powerful statement at that time that common people recognized Jesus as a proper teacher of the Law.

Q: What is the significance of receiving "the kingdom of God like a child"?

1. Unspoiled children are ideal models in this regard: humble, receptive, dependent, filled with potential, and their character malleable to being formed and guided permanently for the rest of their life to come.
2. In Mark's time, children were generally under tutors and guardians until adulthood, a time of being made ready to follow in the steps of their earthly fathers and to inherit and carry on their father's business. The spiritual parallels to this are obvious.
3. From a developmental point of view, children don't usually come with the experiential or "emotional baggage" that must be overcome in adults. They're a kind of "blank slate".
4. Others?

Application: The goal of attaining a right relationship with Christ begins by jettisoning our emotional baggage/history to be made new according to His Word and ways.

[Read v.17-31]

¹⁷As He was setting out on a journey, a man ran up to Him and knelt before Him, and asked Him, "Good Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?"

¹⁸And Jesus said to him, "Why do you call Me good? No one is good except God alone. ¹⁹You know the commandments, 'DO NOT MURDER, DO NOT COMMIT ADULTERY, DO NOT STEAL, DO NOT BEAR FALSE WITNESS, DO NOT DEFRAUD, HONOR YOUR FATHER AND MOTHER.'"

²⁰And he said to Him, "Teacher, I have kept all these things from my youth up."

²¹Looking at him, Jesus felt a love for him and said to him, "One thing you lack: go and sell all you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me."

²²But at these words he was saddened, and he went away grieving, for he was one who owned much property.

²³And Jesus, looking around, said to His disciples, "How hard it will be for those who are wealthy to enter the kingdom of God!" ²⁴The disciples were amazed at His words. But Jesus answered again and said to them, "Children, how hard it is to enter

Observation: In the parallel accounts of this event in Matthew 19 and Luke 18, the man is described as "rich", "young", and a "ruler". From an earthly point of view, he had everything anyone would possibly want. Also note that this example ends up talking about family, the natural progression from the previous sections on marriage and children.

Q: Why was Jesus' reaction to being addressed as "Good Teacher" actually very natural for that time?

A: It was not customary for Jews to use the word "good" when addressing a rabbi, a with very high spiritual meanings attached.

Q: Is Jesus then denying that He is "good"?

A: No, in reality Jesus is asking if the man truly believe Jesus is the Messiah the Son of God, the only proper reason to call Jesus "good". Jesus was asking the man if he believed Jesus was God.

Q: At first blush, it appears that Jesus has listed the last six commandments all having to do with loving one's neighbor, but which one is obviously missing and why?

A: Jesus omitted the one commandment He knew was the main issue in the man's life, "Do not covet".

Point: The rich, young ruler had everything except salvation. Although he had paid attention to the Law, and the Law brought him to Christ, he had not yet humbled himself as a lost sinner whose personal entanglement was his wealth.

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the kingdom of God! ²⁵It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.”

²⁶They were even more astonished and said to Him, “Then who can be saved?”

²⁷Looking at them, Jesus said, “With people it is impossible, but not with God; for all things are possible with God.”

²⁸Peter began to say to Him, “Behold, we have left everything and followed You.”

²⁹Jesus said, “Truly I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or farms, for My sake and for the gospel’s sake, ³⁰but that he will receive a hundred times as much now in the present age, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and farms, along with persecutions; and in the age to come, eternal life. ³¹But many who are first will be last, and the last, first.”

Jesus was holding up the Law as a kind of mirror so the man could see what kind of sinner he was.

But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks at his natural face in a mirror; for once he has looked at himself and gone away, he has immediately forgotten what kind of person he was. But one who looks intently at the perfect law, the law of liberty, and abides by it, not having become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer, this man will be blessed in what he does.

James 1:22-25

Q: So is Jesus stating that everyone must sell everything and give it to the poor?

A: No, He is touching the spot most sensitive to this particular person. But the principle most certainly applies to whatever is holding us back from following Him completely. We’re not saved by such works, but by trusting the Son of God who gave everything to make us rich. Sinners cannot hang on to their sins at the same time they’re reaching out to Jesus.

For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, so that you through His poverty might become rich.

2 Corinthians 8:9

Q: Why is the disciples’ reaction quite normal according to Jewish thinking at the time? What major interpretation of Scripture is Jesus correcting?

A: At that time, physical prosperity was equated to spiritual prosperity. In the Mosaic Law it was stated that physical prosperity was the reward for spiritual faithfulness. Therefore it was generally assumed that a rich person must be “righteous” and a poor person must be suffering the results of their personal sin.

Point: *The problem is that over time the motive for obeying the Law became the desire for gain at the expense of true love for God.*

Q: We probably have some idea that there will be rewards in the life to come, but how are these benefits realized “now in the present age”?

A: It speaks to the benefits of our new family in Christ and the new “house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or farms” we receive in this life in the church.

Q: What did Jesus do with the man which He also did with the Pharisees where Scripture is concerned?

A: Jesus contrasted the letter of the Law with the spirit of the Law to pierce the issue of surface obedience in order to penetrate to the more important issue of obedience from the heart.

Application: *The goal of attaining a right relationship with Christ will entail being purged of relationship baggage that can maintain the world’s hold on us. Anything given up will be more than compensated by what is gained in our new relationships in the body of Christ and the life to come.*

³²They were on the road going up to Jerusalem, and Jesus was walking on ahead of them; and they were amazed, and those who followed were fearful. And again He took the twelve aside and began to tell them what was going to happen to Him, ³³saying, “Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be delivered to the chief priests and the scribes; and they will condemn Him to death and will hand Him over to the Gentiles. ³⁴They will mock Him and spit on Him, and scourge Him and kill Him, and three days later He will rise again.”

³⁵James and John, the two sons of Zebedee, came up to Jesus, saying, “Teacher, we want You to do for us whatever we ask of You.”

³⁶And He said to them, “What do you want Me to do for you?”

³⁷They said to Him, “Grant that we may sit, one on Your right and one on Your left, in Your glory.”

³⁸But Jesus said to them, “You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?”

³⁹They said to Him, “We are able.”

And Jesus said to them, “The cup that I drink you shall drink; and you shall be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized. ⁴⁰But to sit on My right or on My left, this is not Mine to give; but it is for those for whom it has been prepared.”

⁴¹Hearing this, the ten began to feel indignant with James and John. ⁴²Calling them to Himself, Jesus said to them, “You know that those who are recognized as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them; and their great men exercise authority over them. ⁴³But it is not this way among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant; ⁴⁴and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be slave of all. ⁴⁵For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.”

[Read v.32-45]

Observation: *This is now the third time in which Christ has instructed the disciples about His coming death and crucifixion in Jerusalem. One might think that the third announcement would have some kind of sobering or humbling effect, but that was not the case.*

Q: What is the overall lesson that they have not learned where Jesus is concerned?

A: That the cross must come before the crown, a teaching that suffering must be experienced by all before glory. There’s a kind of myopia that wants to ignore the former and go straight to the latter.

Q: What “cup” refer to?

A: It’s Christ’s submission to the Father’s will in becoming sin for us. (See Jn. 14:36; 18:11)

Q: And what does “baptism” here refer to?

A: Christ’s suffering on the cross for the sins of the world. (See Lk. 12:50)

Point: *The cross must come before the crown, suffering before glory.*

Q: How does Christ’s exhortation to be a servant coincide with His own life and ministry?

A: Christ’s First Coming was the fulfillment of the Messiah coming as the “suffering servant”. In fact, the Gospel of Mark is devoted exclusively to this theme, documenting Christ’s example as a servant.

Point: *We’re to be living a life of co-death and co-resurrection with Christ, the working in us of the cross and suffering first before the realization of the crown and glory to come. In the course of this process, we are to be like Him in every way, a suffering servant to others, rid of all earthly attachments both material and in the form of relationships.*

Q: How might this all fit in with the previous teachings on marriage, children, and family relationships?

A: All of these are supposed to be pursued with the attitude and goal of a servant to the same degree that Christ “*did not come to be served, but to serve*”.

Q: What was the condition of a servant in these days?

A: A servant had nothing of his own – everything was owned and supplied by his master, even his very life. A servant did nothing on his own except at the command of the master and in accordance with his master’s business.

Application: *The goal is to leave behind all notion of being served but to instead be a servant and so fulfill our obligations of love and service to both Christ and the members of His body the same way that He Himself fulfilled them.*

⁴⁶Then they came to Jericho. And as He was leaving Jericho with His disciples and a large crowd, a blind beggar named Bartimaeus, the son of Timaeus, was sitting by the road. ⁴⁷When he heard that it was Jesus the Nazarene, he began to cry out and say, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” ⁴⁸Many were sternly telling him to be quiet, but he kept crying out all the more, “Son of David, have mercy on me!”

⁴⁹And Jesus stopped and said, “Call him here.”

So they called the blind man, saying to him, “Take courage, stand up! He is calling for you.”

⁵⁰Throwing aside his cloak, he jumped up and came to Jesus. ⁵¹And answering him, Jesus said, “What do you want Me to do for you?”

And the blind man said to Him, “Rabboni, I want to regain my sight!”

⁵²And Jesus said to him, “Go; your faith has made you well.”

Immediately he regained his sight and began following Him on the road.

[Read v.46-52]

Q: How did the people who approached Jesus in the previous sections – the Pharisees, the parents bringing their children, the young man, and even James and John – address Jesus?

A: They addressed him by some form of “teacher”.

Q: How does this stand in contrast to how Bartimaeus addresses Jesus?

A: Calling Jesus “Son of David” is the equivalent of calling Him the Messiah, the Son of God. Whereas the previous people addressed Jesus from an earthly point of view, the “blind” man addressed Jesus by His true, spiritual identity.

Point: *The only one who wasn’t blind in this chapter was the so-called “blind” guy! He seems to be the one person who immediately experienced his desire because it proceeded from someone who brought their need into Christ’s presence by first acknowledging Whose presence they were in to begin with.*

Application: *Our first and foremost goal in coming before Christ should be to leave ALL baggage at the door in order to proceed from the purity of seeking Him because He IS the Son of God, rather than bearing our personal concerns first. Proper submission to Christ results in everything else being taken care of.*

“But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.

Matthew 6:33

Overall Application

- *What are your goals where faithfulness is concerned? What is your commitment to putting His Word into practice?*
- *In what ways are you like a child in your relationship to Christ, and what ways need to be amended as such? What emotional baggage are you still holding on to?*
- *What kind of residual effects remain where past or current relationships are concerned? Is there something which you’ve not allowed to be replaced by Christ which continually draws you back to the ways of the world or the flesh?*
- *If others were to give you a formal, personal evaluation, how often would they identify you with the characteristics of being a servant? How evident is it to them that we seek more to elevate our self than to serve like Christ?*
- *How well do we recognize how all things proceed from the way we acknowledge the sovereignty and authority of Jesus as truly being the Son of God? Wouldn’t this help put our goals at every level into the proper perspective?*