

WHAT IS YOUR AMBITION?

10 ³²They were on their way up to Jerusalem, and Jesus was going ahead of them. [The disciples] were astonished; and those who followed [them] were afraid. [Jesus] again took the Twelve [aside] and began to tell them what was going to happen to him. ³³[He said,] Listen, we are going up to Jerusalem; but the Son of man will be betrayed to the chief priests and the scribes; they shall condemn him to death, and hand him over to the Gentiles. ³⁴[The Gentiles] shall mock him, and spit on him, and scourge him, and kill him; but after three days he shall rise again. ³⁵Then James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came near to him and said, Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we shall ask you. ³⁶He said to them, What do you want me to do for you? ³⁷They said to him, Grant that we may sit [with you] in your glory—one at your right hand and one at your left hand. ³⁸But Jesus said to them, You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I [am about to] drink? Or to be baptized with the baptism with which I [am about to be] baptized? ³⁹They said to him, We are able. Then Jesus said to them, The cup that I drink, you shall drink; and the baptism with which I am baptized, [with that baptism] shall you also be baptized. ⁴⁰But to sit at my right hand or at my left hand is not mine to give; on the contrary, [it is for those] for whom it has been prepared. ⁴¹Now when the [other] ten [disciples] heard about this, they began to be indignant against James and John. ⁴²Then Jesus called them to himself and said to them, You know that those who are recognized as rulers among the Gentiles lord it over [their subjects]; and their high officials rule over them [with tyranny]. ⁴³But it must not be like that among you. On the contrary, whoever desires to be great among you, shall be your minister; ⁴⁴and whoever desires to be first among you, shall be servant of all; ⁴⁵for, indeed, the Son of man came not to receive ministry, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.

⁴⁶Then they came to Jericho. Now as [Jesus] was leaving Jericho, along with his disciples and a large crowd of people, a blind beggar, [named] Bartimaeus, ([whose name means,] the son of Timaeus), was sitting by the roadside. ⁴⁷When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to cry out, Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me. ⁴⁸But many people rebuked him, ordering him to keep quiet. But he cried out all the more, Son of David, have mercy on me. ⁴⁹Then Jesus stood still and said, Call him. So they called the blind man and said to him, Take courage. Get up; he is calling for you. ⁵⁰Throwing aside his garment, [the blind man] leaped to his feet and came to Jesus. ⁵¹Then Jesus asked him, What do you want me to do for you? And the blind man said to him, Rabbi, [I want] to receive my sight. ⁵²Jesus said to him, Go your way; your faith has healed you. Immediately he received his sight, and followed him along the road. (Mk. 10:32-52)

Introduction

A successful New England businessman and his wife came to visit their pastor; they came to discuss their marriage.

The story that emerged revealed that this man's all-consuming ambition to succeed was costing him dearly: it was costing his marriage, his children, his health. He was a

man who owned his own business and routinely spent 19-20 hours a day at work. He usually left for work before the rest of the family awoke and returned after the children were in bed. When he was present for an evening meal he would be pre-occupied with business plans or called away to the phone in order to close a business deal.

In trying to understand where this man was coming from, the pastor happened to ask about his father. Suddenly his mood changed dramatically. He revealed that his father had labeled him a “bum,” and had repeatedly told his son, “You’ll never amount to anything.”

The pastor discovered that sitting before him was a man, now in his mid-forties, who had made it his ambition to prove his father wrong. He had made it his ambition to become a success as defined in terms of high income and status. To succeed, he had committed himself to non-stop devotion to his business.

The dictionary defines ambition as being “the desire to achieve a particular objective;” it goes on to say that ambition “may suggest equally a praiseworthy or an inordinate desire,” such as “an ardent desire for rank, fame, or power.”

What is your personal ambition? You can discern your ambition in life by considering such questions as these:

- What do I want to do with my life?
- What do I want to become?
- For what do I want to be remembered?
- How do I define success?

Is your personal ambition in harmony with your calling to be a disciple of Christ? Or is it in conflict with that divine calling? As disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ, we must allow our Lord’s counsel and example to define the overarching ambition of our lives.

I. Make It Your Ambition to be Different from the World (Mk. 10:32-44)

As Jesus is making His climactic journey to Jerusalem, two of His disciples approach Him privately with a request. It is a personal request: We want you to do something for us. It is also a presumptuous request: *“Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we shall ask you”* (vs. 35.)

Jesus inquires, What do you want me to do for you?

Now they make known to Him their request: *“Grant that we may sit [with you] in your glory—one at your right hand and one at your left hand”* (vs. 37.) This is their desire, their ambition; namely, to attain the highest positions of rank and prestige for themselves.

Now consider the effect of their ambition—their desire to gain positions for themselves without regard for others; their pre-occupation with the promotion of themselves. First, they are completely insensitive to Christ. They are insensitive to Christ's demeanor. According to Mark 10:32, *"They were on their way up to Jerusalem, and Jesus was going ahead them. [The disciples] were astonished; and those who followed them were afraid."* Our Lord's whole demeanor indicated His determination to face the awful fate that lay before Him in obedience to His Father's will, His willingness to offer Himself as the atoning sacrifice upon the cross of Calvary. James and John were also insensitive to Christ's words:

[He said,] Listen, we are going up to Jerusalem; but the Son of man will be betrayed to the chief priests and the scribes; they shall condemn him to death, and hand him over to the Gentiles. ³⁴[The Gentiles] shall mock him, and spit on him, and scourge him, and kill him; but after three days he shall rise again. (Mk. 10:33-34)

They disregarded their Lord's approaching suffering, thinking only of how they could exploit their relationship with Him for their own personal gain.

Second, they are insensitive to their fellow disciples. They have spent three years of their lives together; they have been through so many experiences together with Christ. Now, when it appears that a limited number of positions (only two seats) are available, they forget their brothers and the bond they share, selfishly seeking to seize the opportunity.

Note the consequence of this self-ambition on the part of James and John: it causes indignation, resentment, divisiveness, a sense of betrayal. According to verse 41, *"when the other ten disciples heard about this, they began to be indignant against James and John."*

Observing that the other ten disciples *"began to be indignant,"* Jesus calls them to Himself and contrasts the mindset of the world with the lifestyle of the kingdom of God:

Then Jesus called them to himself and said to them, You know that those who are recognized as rulers among the Gentiles lord it over their subjects; and their high officials rule over them [with tyranny]. ⁴³But it must not be like that among you. On the contrary, whoever desires to be great among you, shall be your minister; ⁴⁴and whoever desires to be first among you, shall be servant of all. (Mk. 10:42-44)

In the world's scheme of things, the great ones exercise dominion over others. In the kingdom of God, the great ones render service to others.

In the light of our Lord's counsel, consider the admonition of the Apostle Paul to the Galatians: *"Since we live by the Spirit, let us walk by the Spirit. ²⁶Let us not*

become conceited, provoking and envying each other" (Gal. 5:25-26.) We are cautioned to not become conceited. How is an attitude of conceit conveyed to others? It can be conveyed by the way we speak to others: Do we address our Christian brothers and our neighbors with courtesy and politeness? Or do we tend to issue commands to them, like the great ones of the world issue commands to their subordinates? An attitude of conceit and arrogance can be conveyed by the way we treat others: Do we treat our Christian brothers and our neighbors with respect and dignity and love? Or do we convey the impression that they are our personal servants whose sole function is to fulfill our desires and to serve our ambitions?

What is the consequence of exhibiting an attitude of conceit? By exhibiting an attitude of conceit we may cause some of our brethren to become *"provoked;"* causing them to become indignant, angry, challenged, and defiant. By treating them like our servants we make it very difficult for them to recognize that they **are** our servants, just as **we** are their servants, note Galatians 5:13, *"You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love."*

By entertaining and exhibiting an attitude of conceit we may cause others of our brethren to become envious: they will wish to imitate our "aggressive, authoritative" style. By treating them as our servants, instead of serving them, we are setting a bad example for them. Note the Apostle Paul's example that he expects the church to follow: *"I try to please everybody in every way, for I am not seeking my own good but the good of many, so that they may be saved. ¹Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ"* (1 Cor. 10:33-11:1.)

In contrast to the negative admonition of Galatians 5:26, note the positive admonition of Hebrews 10:24, *"let us consider how we may **provoke** one another to love and good works."*

Whatever may be our personal ambition, as Christians, let us make it our primary ambition to be different from the world:

Then Jesus called them to himself and said to them, You know that those who are recognized as rulers among the Gentiles lord it over their subjects; and their high officials rule over them [with tyranny]. ⁴³But it must not be like that among you. On the contrary, whoever desires to be great among you, shall be your minister. (Mk. 10:42-43)

The world's counsel is: Become #1 at the expense of others. Our Lord's counsel is: Become #1 by expending yourself for others.

II. Make It Your Ambition to be Like Your Lord Jesus Christ (Mk. 10:35-52)

Our Lord Jesus put Himself at the disposal of these two disciples: *“What do you want me to do for you?”* (vs. 36.) Consider what He was about to do for them—and for us—as He is on His way to the cross: *“you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich”* (2 Cor. 8:9.)

Our Lord Jesus did not take offense at these two disciples. Whereas the other ten disciples *“began to be indignant,”* this was not the response of the Lord Jesus. The Lord’s reply in verse 40 almost sounds as though He would have granted their request if it were within His power to do so. To better appreciate our Lord’s gracious response to this utterly insensitive and selfish request made by these two disciples, consider the following example. Suppose you were to confide to your dearest friend that you have contracted a very rare disease and that you have only one week left to live. After a few moments of silent contemplation, your friend inquires, “After you are dead, can I have your valuables?” How would you respond to such a request? But our Lord does not respond with indignation, as He would have every right to do; on the contrary, He exhibits a forbearance that issues from a heart of self-giving, sacrificial love. One great purpose for which Christ our Lord went to the cross was so that He might at last share His very throne with His disciples—not just two of them, but everyone of us who are His disciple! In Revelation 3:21 there is recorded His sure promise: *“To him who overcomes, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I overcame and sat down with my Father on his throne.”*

Our Lord Jesus would proceed to present to His disciples a dramatic example of service (vs. 46-52.) Jesus put Himself at the disposal of the blind beggar, Bartimaeus, in the same way that He offered Himself to His beloved disciples. He asks the blind beggar, *“What do you want me to do for you?”* (vs. 51)—this is the same question our Lord asked His disciples (vs. 36.)

Shortly after this incident, our Lord Jesus would present an even more striking example of self-denying, self-sacrificing love and service—He would stoop down to wash His disciples’ feet, personally assuming the role of the most menial of household slaves:

It was just before the Passover Feast. Jesus knew that the time had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he now showed them the full extent of his love. ²The evening meal was being served, and the devil had already prompted Judas Iscariot, son of Simon, to betray Jesus. ³Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God; ⁴so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. ⁵After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples’ feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him. (Jn. 13:1-5)

Jesus' love for His disciples gave Him the motivation to perform this humble act of service: "Having loved his own who were in the world, he now showed them the full extent of his love" (Jn. 13:1b.) Jesus' knowledge of His relationship to God His Father gave Him the security to perform such an act of service: "*Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God*" (Jn. 13:3) Jesus' purpose in performing this act of menial service was to provide an unforgettable example for His disciples (including ourselves): "*I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you*" (Jn. 13:15.)

Whatever may be our personal ambition, as Christians, let us make it our primary ambition to be like our Lord Jesus Christ.

The disciple is not above his teacher; but every one when he is perfected shall be like his teacher. (Lk. 6:40)

Conclusion

That prosperous New England businessman had made it his ambition to become a success, as success is defined by the world. Relationships were not important to him; spiritual well-being was not a priority; the acquisition and application of godly wisdom were of little or no value to him. His driving motivation and objective was to make his business the biggest and the best in its section of the Yellow Pages phone directory.

The pastor remarked that as their counseling sessions proceeded he could almost see this man kneeling before Christ, relinquishing one ambition for another, relinquishing his own chosen ambition for that which Christ desired for him to fulfill.

But it never happened.

Eventually the counseling sessions were discontinued. The couple drifted away from the church and the pastor lost contact with them. After some time had passed, the pastor received word that this man's ambition had finally cost him everything: his marriage, his children, his business, and even his life. (*Ordering Your Private World*, pp. 42-49)

Let us take to heart the two-fold counsel and command that comes to us from this passage of Scripture: 1) Let us make it our primary ambition to be different from the world; and 2) Let us make it our primary ambition to be like our Lord Jesus Christ.