

Mark 9-10

“Resolving the Conflict”

This past week the sports’ news has been abuzz with something that happened between two coaches at the end of their NFL game last Sunday. (49ers, Jim Harbaugh and Lions, Jim Schwartz; 10-16-2011) It was a handshake, but it wasn’t very sporty!

We teach our children to practice good sportsmanship, but two grown men with high salaries, coaching two teams to remarkable turnaround seasons this year, got caught up in the emotion as one coach jumped exuberantly just before meeting the losing coach near mid-field. The victorious coach gave a quick hand-shake and a slap, as though pushing away the defeated coach. Words were exchanged about how one was treated by the other, a face-to-face confrontation as they continued to run off the field, and the two had to be separated ...all caught by the cameras, and kept the broadcasters buzzing all week!

We kept hearing comments about the nature of these men; that’s the kind of “fire” they have in their belly! Those who knew one of the actors in the drama said, “That’s the kind of guy he is and he doesn’t care what others think!” – making excuses for arrogant, immature behavior!

Could you imagine a guy like Tony Dungee spitting and cussing at others around him?

Somehow we’ve come to the point where we believe saying what we want, what’s on our mind, is a virtue! Some of our friends believe others need to know what they think and “they’ll be better off because they know, now, how I feel! That’s just the way I am!”

And that’s a virtue?

No, it’s not! Virtue is the maturity to know how to tell what you feel, what to hold back, and the sensitivity to care about other people’s feelings.

But when people are treated with privilege, they get fooled into believing they are excused from normal social courtesies.

You know, there were three disciples close to Jesus who believed they had special privileges. Jesus kept singling out Peter, James, and John. They were invited to the mountaintop of transfiguration when Moses and Elijah appeared before Jesus from heaven!

Can you imagine – did these guys strut back down the mountain?

The book of Mark tells us, maybe they did!

When Jesus returned from this mountaintop where God boomed out, “This is My Son; listen to Him!” He found the other nine disciples with a disturbed father whose son they were helpless to heal – their inability further highlighting their second-rate status.

Jesus healed the boy, Mark 9, and shortly after the healing, the twelve continue to follow Jesus from one place to the next. At the end of the day Jesus asked His twelve, “What were you talking about out on the road?”

1) [READING Mark 9:33-37]

³³They came to Capernaum; and when Jesus was in the house He asked them, “What were you arguing about on the way?”

³⁴But they were silent, for on the way they had argued with one another who was the greatest. ³⁵Jesus sat down, called the twelve, and said to them, “Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all.” ³⁶Then He took a little child and put it among them; and taking it in His arms, He said to them, ³⁷“Whoever welcomes one such child in My name welcomes Me, and whoever welcomes Me welcomes not Me but the one who sent Me.”

Beginning here, we will see a list, one after the other in Mark 9-10, where Jesus resolves

conflict for people around Him! At least five scenarios between people, between friends, and inner conflict within the heart and mind of man. We have time to look at a couple of these today.

The argument about being “the greatest” comes on the heels of three who saw Moses and Elijah appear before them – and the inability of the other nine who couldn’t pray for a boy’s healing.

We find the same separation and conflict with high achievers in school. Those who score the most points, who pass for the most yards, who run for the most touchdowns will find others treating them with privilege. These are high-profile achievers on the field or in the classroom, making the grades – compared with others just getting by. Everyone recognizes the high-achievers when they’re out eating pizza, at the movies, or on the ball field!

But the “achievers” on the sports’ stage have success because of the efforts of others around them. There aren’t too many at a football game who notice the work of the offensive linemen. The only people who notice them are the referees and the lineman’s mom and dad. But his part makes all the difference for the high-profile stars!

The disciples argued among themselves about who was the greatest. Jesus knew about the argument and He set them down and said, “If anyone would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all.” It was like Jesus telling the star quarterback to serve those around him.

Do you see the super-star and the scholarship winner being a servant?

Over and over, the bible tells us to “have the same mind in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though He was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself...” God the Son emptied Himself of His glory and power and position above creation “taking the form of a servant.”

And this is how *we* are to shape *our* lives – as servants of all! Yes! We can still be great ball-players and great students who take time to notice the least and the last and the lost among us. Followers of Jesus take the path of their Savior!

2) [READING 10:2-9]

²Some Pharisees came, and to test Jesus they asked, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?” ³He answered them, “What did Moses command you?” ⁴They said, “Moses allowed a man to write a certificate of dismissal and to divorce her.” ⁵But Jesus said to them, “Because of your hardness of heart he wrote this commandment for you. ⁶But from the beginning of creation, ‘God made them male and female.’ ⁷For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, ⁸and the two shall become one flesh.’ So they are no longer two, but one flesh. ⁹Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate.”

The conflict is another with which we are familiar! A conflict in the home and in the heart. And Jesus brings us back to understand the simplicity of God’s great plan: God made us for each other so that we would not be alone. He made us for friendship with a partner with whom we would grow together through the years, and care for one another and serve one another.

The big picture for creation has a great partnership! And with God’s plan in mind, we have to protect ourselves, our relationships, our marriages, from the evil influences outside and within! And I’m talking about our own selfish desires with lust and envy. Jesus said, “**Moses wrote those instructions** (for divorce) **only as a concession to your hard-hearted wickedness.**” There is sin within, an evil influence inside that can work to sabotage our relationships! And rather than give in to these impulses that harden our hearts, we can recognize temptation, confess any sin, practice kindness, forgiveness, and love!

We have a string of five stories here describing a variety of conflicts, and we should notice that four of these stories are surrounded by parenthesis, by statements, where Jesus describes His purpose for the cross. *Before the first conflict* Jesus prepared them, **“The Son of Man is going to be betrayed. He will be killed, but three days later He will rise from the dead.”** (Mark 9:32)

Jesus understood His purpose. He knew He came to earth to pay the ransom for sin. He knew His plan was to serve God by showing us a life beyond sin, beyond death, a great life God has for us beyond this world! And Jesus knew that what He knew about life and death, what He knew about heaven and hell would create trouble for Him!

In the next chapter, *as the closing parenthesis*: **Jesus began to describe everything that was about to happen to Him in Jerusalem. “When we get to Jerusalem,” He told them, “the Son of Man will be betrayed to the leading priests and the teachers of religious law. They will sentence Him to die and hand Him over to the Romans. They will mock Him, spit on Him, beat Him with their whips, and kill Him, but after three days He will rise again.”** (Mark 10:32-34)

Each time Jesus described the torture awaiting Him, He promised, “After three days I will rise from the dead!”

You know, that should still be incredible news for us! Because He said that those who die with Him will rise with Him, too!

Do you know the way to die with Him is to deny your place of privilege and to serve Him as your Lord? We “serve” Him by confessing that we are sinners, repenting to live in a new direction, submitting our will to the will of His Spirit! Serving God!

When you read Mark 9-10 you will hear what God’s Spirit is teaching about servanthood. If you want to be prominent become like a servant to all. Think about that: Serving not because you are inferior, but because you understand a superior love!

STORY: There was a business dispute. A house was built but there were some defects in it; things weren’t getting put together they way they should. The builder spent a lot of money and long delays getting things together –

The owner of the home was being obnoxious pressing the builder to get things right, and really became a pain, coming on strong. And they argued on that back and forth. The owner of the house arguing about the facts of the construction flaws, and the builder arguing about the owners attitude – and they were both right to do so! The whole thing got so ugly the two sides had to get lawyers to settle the problem.

But everything began to change the day the mediator gave them some homework to read, some Bible passages one evening before their next meeting the following day, inviting them to really meditate over the lessons.

The next morning, when the builder came back, you could tell from his whole expression something had changed. He came in with a soft attitude, saying, “You know, last night I realized ...this is my fault. I should’ve built that house the right way in the first place. And if I’d done it, we wouldn’t be here today. I was stubborn and proud when you tried to point that out to me, instead of saying ‘You’re right! Let’s get this fixed!’ And that’s my fault; my pride. I have a hard time taking criticism.”

He began to confess things that were more about his heart and his character!

The other man responded to that in a way that was stunning. He began to apologize, too, saying, “Well, if I hadn’t been so difficult and argumentative, I’m sure you would have been more reasonable.”

And the builder answered again, “No, it was my fault.” And that almost led into a whole new conflict! But their attorneys were listening to this – seeing how the power of the Holy Spirit was transforming people’s lives!

Strangely, with all that Jesus had said, His two brightest disciples didn’t get it either!

3) [READING 10:35-39a]

³⁵James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came forward to Jesus and said to Him, “Teacher, we want You to do for us whatever we ask of You.” ³⁶And He said to them, “What is it you want Me to do for you?” ³⁷And they said to Him, “Grant us to sit, one at Your right hand and one at 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 be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?” ³⁹They replied, “We are able.”

James and John came to Jesus asking if they might sit at His right hand in His glory. Another conflict! The others heard about it and were indignant! I like that word. They were ticked! **Jesus called them all together, and said, “You know that those who are supposed to rule over the people exercise great authority. But it shall not be so among you; but whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. For the Son of man also came not to be served but to serve...”**

Somewhere, we miss what is radical about Jesus Christ and replace it with what is comfortable. We come to servanthood from an American culture that has shaped our biblical understanding. We believe serving the Lord is important, but we serve on our terms. *We* choose where to serve – rather than bend to the Spirit of God. *We* judge who will be worthy of our effort!¹

David Platt writes in his book, *Radical*, “We live in a land of self-improvement. Certainly there are steps we can take to make ourselves better. So we *modify* what the gospel says about us. We’re not evil, we think; and certainly not spiritually dead! We believe in the power of positive thinking – that I can become a better me and experience my best life now! And we believe that’s what God intends for us – to make life *easy*. As long as I follow certain steps, think certain thoughts, and check off certain boxes, then I’m good!”

But the truth we try to “modify” tells us that our sin-problem is greater than anything we could *ever* overcome! There is nothing we can do to bring ourselves into the holy presence of a loving God. And because we can’t – He did! God has come so that we might come to Him!

He has to open our eyes! He has to set us free! He has to overcome our evil! And He has to appease His wrath for our sin! Yes – He has to come to us! And He did! And He does!

He gave us the Spirit of His Son – a Spirit of a Servant – to make that possible.

When you really believe the bigger picture of the biblical message – you understand the call to serve through the power of God’s Spirit changing you!

When you really believe... that’s faith!

If you’ve been “pretending” to live differently you probably know you’re pretending. You experience the conflict around you and within you. You’re unsettled. You’re worried. You’re troubled. You’re anxious.

What conflict are you experiencing? Do you find yourself lukewarm in the way you worship God? With whom are you in conflict?

¹sermon resources from “*Radical*”; by David Platt

Maybe you've tried to resolve the conflict with the best solution you know how – but nothing has changed! What Jesus did on the cross resolves our deepest conflict – our inability to change ourselves. If you still reign as lord over your life there will be no lasting change! It's time to let another be God – because you and I don't make a very good god.

Come to Jesus; God has a plan for your salvation! The Bible says: **Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though He was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death – even death on a cross.** (Philippians 2:4-7)

When we ask, “Why hasn't the Spirit come into my life?” maybe we've not been willing to die to the flesh and crucify our old life ...with His!

Today, we can begin that spiritual journey through prayer, confessing our sins and repenting to live to serve God!