

Our Own Personal Agendas Luke 23:13-25

A question as we begin our study of these scriptures today . . . “Are you a person with an agenda?” “Do you most always have a plan, a goal, and ambition that you are working towards?”

I can well recall those earliest days of my working life. I was young and very ambitious. I had just finished a tour of duty in the military and was ready to get on about real-life in the corporate world. And I was fortunate to immediately find a job as a banker.

And yes, I did start at the very lowest rung of the ladder. But from those first moments of my working career I had a plan, an agenda, that filled my head. I was determined to become the “President” of a bank.

And yes, looking around me, I could easily see that most of the other young men and women that I worked alongside had much the same plans and agendas, but I did not let that discourage me. I pushed on ahead and I actually became very successful in my efforts.

Fortunately for me, after some years, something else took place that changed my plans, my agenda. I came to know the Lord Jesus as my Savior and I eventually left that old plan and agenda and found a new one, one of serving our Lord in Christian ministry.

But from my experience in those early years of life, I gained some valuable understanding about “plans” and “agendas”, especially the kind that can take control over our emotions and efforts and can carry us into places and down pathways where we should not go.

And unfortunately, as much as we would like to not think such things, those same kinds of controlling emotions and efforts are not unique to the corporate world alone. They can just as easily take place within the Christian community.

Simply put, personal agendas are part of that category that our Lord spoke about when He told us about how “all temptation is common to man”. Sin and sin’s agendas are common to us all. And no matter what our career choice

may be, we will find a way to exert our power and our influence to try to accomplish our own agenda for our own benefit.

And so it was with the religious community of Jesus' day. Men who, for the most part, did probably genuinely want to do good and right things, looked at what they had in front of them, this man Jesus, and He simply did not fit within their agenda. And so He had to be removed, at any cost!

And so, these men, these religious leaders, with their own collective agendas guiding and controlling their emotions, having arrested Jesus, were trying to convince the local authorities to rid them of this obstacle that had been interfering with their agendas. And so we read here in Luke chapter 23,

¹³ Pilate then called together the chief priests and the rulers and the people, ¹⁴ and said to them, "You brought me this man as one who was misleading the people. And after examining him before you, behold, I did not find this man guilty of any of your charges against him. ¹⁵ Neither did Herod, for he sent him back to us. Look, nothing deserving death has been done by him. ¹⁶ I will therefore punish and release him."

¹⁸ But they all cried out together, "Away with this man, and release to us Barabbas"— ¹⁹ a man who had been thrown into prison for an insurrection started in the city and for murder. ²⁰ Pilate addressed them once more, desiring to release Jesus, ²¹ but they kept shouting, "Crucify, crucify him!" ²² A third time he said to them, "Why? What evil has he done? I have found in him no guilt deserving death. I will therefore punish and release him." ²³ But they were urgent, demanding with loud cries that he should be crucified. And their voices prevailed. ²⁴ So Pilate decided that their demand should be granted. ²⁵ He released the man who had been thrown into prison for insurrection and murder, for whom they asked, but he delivered Jesus over to their will. (Luke 23:13-25)

As we read these words, we can't help but sense the intensity within the hearts and minds of these men as they resolutely trudged back and forth between men of high authority in a frenzied effort to carry out their evil plan, first to their own courts, then to Pilate, then to Herod, then back to Pilate again.

Simply put, these were "men with an agenda", a very specific one, one that they were determined to end in only one way, the death of Jesus.

But their rationale, as they went about their enraged agenda, became complicated in that while they were filled with a ravenous desire to kill Jesus, they, at the same time, wanted desperately to keep their own hands clean throughout the process.

This was “legalism” at its furthest limits, the insistence on maintaining the “letter of the law”, while totally disregarding the “Spirit behind the law”.

First, they convened a “mock trial”, accusing Jesus of false crimes. And though they found no transgression in Him, they still pronounced Him guilty, deserving of death.

And then, as they approached Pilate to petition Him to carry out their murderous deed for them, they refused to enter into the Roman courtyard because, with that day being the Sabbath, they would have been considered unclean and unable to eat the Passover. Listen to these words given in John chapter 18.

²⁸ Then they led Jesus from Caiaphas to the Praetorium, and it was early morning. But they themselves did not go into the Praetorium, lest they should be defiled, but that they might eat the Passover.(John 18:28)

What an odd and difficult thin line of reasoning for them to follow as they went about their evil agenda! They could lie, they could deceive and they could plan murder, but they could not enter into a Gentile courtyard because that would defile them.

What manner of reasoning could they possibly have! Nonetheless it was the way that their minds worked.

And although from other accounts in these gospels we know that these men were themselves permitted to stone to death offenders of their law, for some reason they believed that with Jesus, they needed to have Pilate carry out their murderous plan for them.

Thankfully, because the things that they were trying to do were clearly prophesied for us in the Old Testament scriptures, you and I are able to know the real reasons why these men took the steps that they took, especially the involvement of the Roman authorities.

And had these church leaders have searched their scriptures, they also would have seen it for themselves.

We do know that they read from the Book of Isaiah in their synagogue worship because we're given an account of Jesus reading from that Book and saying that the words were speaking about Him.

Listen! Luke chapter 4

¹⁶ And he (the Lord Jesus) came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up. And as was his custom, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and he stood up to read. ¹⁷ And the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written, ¹⁸ "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, ¹⁹ to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." ²⁰ And he rolled up the scroll and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. ²¹ And he began to say to them, "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." (Luke 4:16-21)

Folks, those were words of prophecy clearly given within the pages of their scriptures over 700 years earlier by Isaiah in the Book of Isaiah chapter 61.

And also, had these church leaders have read but a few verses earlier in Isaiah chapter 53, they would have also found other prophecies that were unfolding right before their eyes as they watched the Roman soldiers mistreat, beat and mock the Lord Jesus.

But they were so completely obsessed with carrying on forward with their own agenda that they were oblivious to the fact that they themselves were bringing this prophecy to completion.

And so, back and forth they trudged, desperately trying to carry out their evil schemes.

Now, while I know that there is no real defense that can be made for these religious leaders, may I say again that for the most part they probably really did

desire to do good and right things. They were men in full time religious ministry, daily guarding and protecting the flock of God.

And in those days, as in our own day, there were so many, many who came along claiming to be someone they were not.

And as guardians of God's church, these men were charged with the responsibility of dealing decisively with all those pretenders. And this Jesus seemed to them to be the worst of the worst.

But where and how do otherwise good men go astray from their "good intentions"? These men went astray much in the same way that you and I go astray. They did not first do their "homework". They were not faithful to study the scriptures and to know the truths within them.

As I said a moment ago, had they have read those prophecies that I spoke about in Isaiah 53 and then also in Psalm 22, they would have known that the Messiah would be beaten and then hung on a cross, the very things that were taking place right in front of them, things that they themselves were causing. Listen! Isaiah 53 verse 3,

³ He was despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not. ⁴ Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. ⁵ But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed. (Isaiah 53:3-5)

And then in Psalm chapter 22 are also prophecies foretelling Jesus' own words as He would later on that day suffer on the cross. There He would say,

¹⁴ I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint; my heart is like wax; it is melted within my breast; ¹⁵ my strength is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue sticks to my jaws; you lay me in the dust of death. ¹⁶ For dogs encompass me; a company of evildoers encircles me; they have pierced my hands and feet— ¹⁷ I can count all my bones— they stare and gloat over me; ¹⁸ they divide my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots. (Psalm 22:14-18)

Are not these words so clear that they should have been unmistakable to those men?

But such is the way of "human wisdom", or as the Apostle Paul would later describe it, the "wisdom of the wise".

Folks, may I repeat something that we have said so often before, and that is that "human intellect" and "human reasoning" is never enough, in itself, to enable a person to comprehend spiritual things. And all these things that were taking place before these men's eyes were very spiritual indeed.

And by the evidence of their corrupt behavior, we can clearly know that these men were not "Spirit-filled". And so, they went about doing the only thing that their corrupt minds could devise, they sought to destroy the One Man that could save them from their sinful behavior.

And folks, we must take this as a warning because we do this very thing ourselves.

It begins by our not first turning to these scriptures to find the truth. If we fail there, then most all that follows will turn out to be fatally flawed.

What most often takes places is this, from our daily experiences, or habits, or teachings from our parents, we gradually form our beliefs, some of those beliefs good and right, but many of them unfounded.

But if we like our beliefs, we then seek further validation of them. That is when we turn to the scriptures, hoping to find special verses that might endorse our unfounded beliefs.

And unfortunately, there are many scripture verses that when taken out of context can appear to validate most any of the corrupt beliefs that we invent.

But such manner of "truth seeking" will seldom point us to the truths that God desires for us. We instead need to begin by first searching these scriptures, and doing that with a completely "open mind", one not yet settled upon a belief, one without a private agenda. And then, as we read and search, we are to allow God's Holy Spirit to form His proper beliefs within us.

Some might argue that it is impossible for us to be completely “open minded”. And I do agree! But when we truly surrender to the power of God’s Holy Spirit, then He can do miraculous things within us.

There was no such “open mindedness” in these church leaders. As we shared in an earlier study, these men had already formed their corrupt thoughts and beliefs. And their minds were made up long before Jesus was ever arrested. And in their frenzy to accomplish their purposes, they were prepared to violate all boundaries of truth and justice.

As I have said to you on other occasions, my mind sees circumstances like this one before us in a very visual form. Here, I can’t help but see a pack of ravenous dogs mercilessly ripping and tearing at the flesh of their helpless prey.

In these men’s behavior, we see sinful nature at its peak! And left unchecked, left uncontrolled, the sinful nature within each of us can do things that we would not otherwise imagine ourselves doing.

And may I take this thought one step further! To use words such as “unchecked”, or “uncontrolled” is not adequate to our consideration of such a powerful influence as our sinful nature. We cannot actually keep our sinful nature “in check” or “under control”.

No, our own abilities cannot reach that far. Our sinful nature is far too powerful and too devious. And as we see in the behavior of these religious leaders, it will surely always find a way out from our restraints and out into the events and behaviors of our daily life.

No, God’s answer for our sinful nature is far more ruthless and decisive. God’s answer for our sinful nature is to completely “kill it out” within us.

And such a death blow can only be dealt through the “wonder-working power” of the blood of the Lord Jesus, His death, His burial and His resurrection.

Here, in this passage, we have men, some well-intended, some not, but all still yet very obviously under the complete control of their sinful nature, intent on carrying out an agenda at any and all costs, even to the destruction of their own souls.

And in their frenzy to crucify Jesus, they not only willfully surrendered up their own souls, they also surrendered up the souls of their children. Listen to these words given in Matthew chapter 27,

²² Pilate said to them, "What then shall I do with Jesus who is called Christ?" They all said to him, "Let Him be crucified!" ²³ Then the governor said, "Why, what evil has He done?" But they cried out all the more, saying, "Let Him be crucified!" ²⁴ When Pilate saw that he could not prevail at all, but rather that a tumult was rising, he took water and washed his hands before the multitude, saying, "I am innocent of the blood of this just Person. You see to it." ²⁵ And all the people answered and said, "His blood be on us and on our children." (Matthew 27:22-25)

What foolish words for men to say, "His blood be on us and on our children."

But again, that is the danger when we become "men with an agenda"!

Before we finish our thoughts for today, may I encourage each of us to look deeply within our own souls and to ask the question "Am I a person with an agenda"? Yes, I do make my plans, but do I also always insist that I am right and that things ought always to be done my way?

Folks, we can believe ourselves to be very "right" about something, as did these religious leaders. And sometimes, we might even be right about a matter, but by forcing our own opinion, we can often do far more harm than good.

"Humility" must always be our guide, to humbly desire God's plans and His purposes for ourselves and for other people.

Jesus was humble even to His own death on the cross. As He hung there dying, He cried out for mercy for those who were mistreating Him, saying "Father forgive them, for they know not what they do!"

Are you, am I, willing to give up on our agenda and to have the humility of Christ?

Listen to these words of Philippians chapter 2 as we close!

⁵ Have (this mind) this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, ⁶ who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, ⁷ but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. ⁸ Being found in

appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. (Philippians 2:5-8)

Pray with me.