

April 3, 2011 - The Quest

Time flies, doesn't it? Seems like it to me. I was looking through some things this week and I realized that we are half-way through our series in the Book of Mark, which seems almost impossible to me. I was thinking back to last year. Last year we went through the Gospel of Luke and we started just before Christmas, at mid-December and went all the way until Easter. And we were going at about the same pace, two chapters a week, but it just took a lot longer because there's a lot more to the Book of Luke, a lot more chapters. And so, to think that we're half-way done our series already seems amazing to me and I guess that kind of lends itself to the pace that Mark has been setting throughout the first 8 Chapters of his Gospel. We've covered eight chapters already, we're going to cover kind of the back nine or the back eight as it might be, in the next couple of weeks. But in that first eight chapters that we've covered already, very quickly, Mark goes through almost three years worth of stuff, in Jesus' life. Three year's worth of stuff that Jesus does in those eight brief chapters. I broke that down and that's essentially four month's per chapter. So I want you to pause very quickly, and think back to everything that has happened in your life since December 3<sup>rd</sup>. How much has gone on in your life since December 3<sup>rd</sup> and then try and compress that down into a couple of short paragraphs and write all that down. And I thought "That would be a little bit challenging for me to do", but really, to be honest, I live a fairly mundane life. But in four months of Jesus' life there was a lot of stuff happening. We've already seen Jesus cleansing lepers; and He's been healing people who have been lame and had all kinds of sicknesses; and He's been casting out demons; and He's been raising people from the dead; and He's been feeding tens of thousands of people with just a little kid's lunch box; and He's been doing things like calming great storms with just a couple words; and He's been walking on water and all these incredible things have been happening and Mark has just been packing them all in as tight as he can so he can get them all in, in these first eight chapters of his story. But, the end of Chapter 8 kind of marks a turning point in the Gospel.

I don't know how many of you remember. TSN used to have, on a lot of their sports programs, they used to show the TSN Turning Point; which was a big save; or a big catch; or a big hit; or some very dramatic moment that the commentators decided, this was the 'Turning Point' on which the whole game kind of hinged and after this, everything was different. I remember watching a hockey game once, on a different channel, and listening to Don Cherry talk, and it was after the game and he said "You know guys, the 'Turning Point' of the game was the National Anthem and after that, that was it, it was all over." But, we kind of reached the 'Turning Point' here at the end of Mark, Chapter 8, of his Gospel. Up to this point, Mark has been portraying Jesus as the servant of God. As the person who has come to do the work that God has given Him. And now, here at the end of Mark, Chapter 8, Mark says "After everything you've seen, Jesus poses the question". Jesus and His disciples went to the villages around Caesarea, Philippi, and on the way He asked them: "Who do people say that I am?" They replied, "Some say John the Baptist, and others say Elijah, and still others, one of the Prophets". "But what about you" he asked. "Who do you

say I am?”. Peter answered “You are the Christ”. And so Jesus is asking His disciples, “after everything that has gone on in these last three years, after all this stuff that has happened, what’s the word on the street? What are people saying?” “Who do people think that I am?” And Jesus gets a fairly good review. He gets John the Baptist, which is a fairly notable thing. He gets Elijah. Some of the people think that Jesus might be Elijah come back to life. And really, that’s a pretty big compliment because Elijah, if you look at kind of the history of Israel, Elijah, he’s one of the big names. I don’t know if he’s top three but he’s probably top five. Definitely top 10. You have Abraham and you have David and you have Moses and then after that, Elijah has to be right in there at the top of those names. So, to be compared to Elijah, that’s a pretty good thing. But Jesus says “Okay, now put all that aside, what about you?” And I tried to compare that to something in our terms and if I went out and I’d probably never have the guts to do this, but I’d say “Who do people say I’m like?” And if I got results like, oh, Martin Luther or Alexander Campbell or Max Lucado, I would be feeling pretty good about myself if that were the kind of results I got back. But Jesus says “We’re going to whole different level here, who do you say I am?” And Peter comes up with the correct answer and he says “You’re the Christ, you’re the Messiah, you’re the One sent from God”.

And this is a sign that everything is going to change. And after this, everything is going to be totally different. And Jesus says “Now that you’ve figured out who I am, let Me start explaining to you what that really means”. Because for Peter and the disciples and most of the other people, when they thought of Messiah, what they thought of was someone who was going to come in and raise up a big army and was going to take on the Romans and kick them out of our country and return Israel to it’s former glory and might and greatness and make us one of the powers of the world again just like we were back in the time of David. That’s what Messiah is going to do. And Jesus says “You’ve got the right name but you’ve got the wrong idea, so now, let Me start to explain to you what I’m going to do.” And so, from that very moment on, Jesus starts saying things like “The Son of Man is going to be given over into the hands of sinful men and He is going to suffer and He is going to die and on the third day, He is going to be raised again.” Jesus says that three times right after Peter’s confession and then He says it again in Chapter 9 and again in Chapter 10, as if He’s trying to get the disciples to understand what Messiah is really all about.

And this, turning point is not just philosophical, it’s actually also, geographical, if you can believe that. Up until this point in the Gospel of Mark, this is what we’ve seen Jesus doing, for the most part. Running around in Galilee, going back and forth across the sea and just kind of going around there doing all of His things. But, after this point, after the end of Mark Chapter 8, Jesus’ course goes like this, straight towards Jerusalem. Mark Chapters 1 through 8, He’s going back and forth to Galilee trying to get people to see that He is the Messiah. And chapters 9, onwards, He’s headed to Jerusalem to show people what the Messiah is really all about. What God has sent Him to do.

And so, Chapter 9 is the beginning of a quest. Now, a quest is a search for something. It’s a

search for something that's of great value and significance and it often requires taking a journey as Jesus is going to do with His disciples. And Jesus is clearly on a quest of His own to accomplish the task that God has given Him. And the disciples are on a quest, they don't really don't understand what it's all about but they're going along on this quest with Jesus to find out where He is leading him. And Mark wants his readers to go on a quest to discover the truth about who Jesus really is.

Have you ever been on a quest yourself? Try to think of quests that I've been on and one occasion came to mind. I remember, must have been 10/12 years ago, we were still living in Wawota and we were going to go down into the States, I think to visit Michelle's parents. But we were ready to take this trip and we had got our bags packed and the suitcases were loaded into the car and we had some snacks for the way and we had our maps and we had everything together and we were ready to go and were going to the car and I started doing one of these things (patted his pockets). And I said "do you know where my wallet is?" And so, began the quest, to find my wallet cause we couldn't leave until I found my wallet. And we went all through the house, I think we even took some of the bags out and started looking through the bags. And we searched all over for this valuable thing that we had to discover. And that was our quest. And the end of our quest took us to underneath the driver's seat of the car and then we had the wallet and we could go. But, have you ever been on a quest like that? A search for something of great value and significance. I did some research this week, to see the kinds of things people 'quest' after. Came up with a lot of interesting results. Some people quest for jewels; some people quest for adventures; and apparently some people even quest for munchkins. Some people quest after a great song. Others, probably some of you, quest for speed. And there are a few of us who from time-to-time are on a quest for our brain. I found that there are people who quest to fight. And I hope there are a lot more people in the category of questing for peace. And after we have quested for everything on the face of the earth, then, we go to the ocean and quest in the sea. And after we've exhausted everything on the Planet, then we quest throughout the Galaxy. And people quest for all sorts of kinds of things.

And when we come to Chapter 10 of Mark, we find a man who is on a quest. Starting in verse 17, Mark says this:

"As Jesus was starting out on His way to Jerusalem, a man came up to him knelt down and asked "Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" "Why do you call me good", Jesus asked. "Only God is truly good, but to answer your question, you know the commandments. You must not murder. You must not commit adultery. You must not steal. You must not testify falsely. You must not cheat anyone. Honour your father and mother."

"Teacher", the man replied, "I've obeyed all of these commandments since I was young". Looking at the man, Jesus felt genuine love for him. He said "There is still one thing you haven't done. Go sell all your possessions and give your money to the poor and then you will have treasure in Heaven and then, come follow me." At this the man's face fell and he

went away very sad for he had many possessions. Jesus looked around and said to His disciples, “How hard is it for the rich to enter the kingdom of God.” This amazed them, but Jesus said again “Dear children, it’s very hard to enter the Kingdom of God, in fact it’s easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the Kingdom of God.” The disciples were astounded. “Then who in the world can be saved?” they asked. Then Jesus looked at them intently and said “Humanly speaking, it’s impossible but not with God. Everything is possible with God.” Mark 10:17-27

This young man comes to Jesus and he’s rich. The story is often dubbed “The Rich Young Ruler” but we have to actually look at all three Gospel accounts to put that title together. He’s rich in this story and if we read Matthew’s account, Matthew specifies that he was a “young man” and Luke’s account says that “he was a ruler or an important leader in the City”. So when you get the picture of this guy, he is a rich young ruler. Someone of significance and importance. In the NIV, it says “he came running to Jesus”. Running through the crowd all the way up to the front to see Jesus and when he got to Jesus he knelt down and very respectfully asked “Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” And that was a rather lofty albeit admirable goal. And Jesus’ response to him was very simple “do not murder; do not commit adultery; do not steal; do not lie; and honour your father and mother”. Man says “I’ve been doing all of that since I was very young but there must be something else to it Jesus?” “I can sense that this is not all I’m supposed to be doing.” I’m not getting what I’m seeking here.” And Jesus said “There’s still one more thing that you lack.” Now, five out of the six commandments that Jesus tells this young man to obey are about not doing something wrong. Murder, adultery, stealing, cheating, those kinds of things. As opposed to, going out and doing what is right. And this is what the man was saying when he came to Jesus. “I haven’t done anything wrong to anyone.” To which Jesus replies “But what good have you done for people?”

Now, consider your relationship with your spouse or your closest friend or with your children, how well would that relationship survive if the standard of behaviour that you expected from one another was simply to not do anything wrong. I’m going to be your best friend and our deal is, I will never do anything bad to you. Well no, we kind of expect a little bit more from each other, don’t we? In those kind of relationships we kind of expect that yes, you won’t do anything bad to me but you will do some good towards me, as well. And that’s what Jesus is suggesting to the man. The man was on a quest and he was seeking but he was on the wrong quest. He was on a quest for respectability. And respectability is focused on not doing things that are bad but following Christ is meant to take us beyond that and become focused on doing the things that are good. And Jesus challenges him to sell his possessions and give the proceeds to the poor. This is by no means mean spirited by Jesus. Jesus isn’t really trying to hit him where it hurts or give him a really tough challenge to see if he can overcome it. No, Mark tells us that Jesus couldn’t help but genuinely love this guy. He says, you’re on a quest but you’re on the wrong quest, let me help re-direct you here a little bit. There’s one thing keeping you from trusting in God. There’s one thing keeping you from relying on God and depending on God and that one thing is preventing you from

fully surrendering to God and if you give that up, you will reach the goal of your quest.

Now, I've always thought that this guy has kind of got a little bit of a bad rap. Because after Jesus says all this, the text says that "his face fell and he went away sad because he had a lot of possessions." And so most people take that and infer from that, that he didn't do what Jesus said and he didn't follow Jesus and so on. But, I think that's a bit of a bad rap and I want you to kind of consider this for minute. Some of you have been following on Facebook that my wife has challenged me to a bit of a dual, where we will give up all of our pop and Starbucks and it's a bit of a challenge between the two of us to see which one caves first and I will say I'm disappointed that most of you are not choosing me to win that competition, so far. We'll see how that goes. But, as I look at this competition she proposed it to me and I said "Sure, why not, we can do that" and I know, hey, we'll save some money doing that. We might shed some pounds doing that and I'll have gloating rights to all of you and her when it's all over and all of that are very good thing. So I'm excited about this whole thing, but I'd be lying if I told you I'm not a little bit sad that tomorrow, when I'm thirsty, I can't just crack open a Dr. Pepper. That's a little sad to me. I want you to think of what's your most valuable possession. Just one thing. Your most valuable possession. Your computer; your TV; maybe it's a stamp collection or a coin collection or a hockey card collection. Maybe it's your car, or your house. Maybe it's great-grandma's pearls. I don't know what it is. Think of one thing that you would consider "this is probably my most valuable possession." Don't worry about whether it's the most valuable in dollars. This is the most valuable for you. Think about that. Now, what if, I said "After service today, I want you to go home and I want you to get your 'one thing' and I want you to take it over to Bob and Sharon's house and put it in the Alumni garage sale. How many of you would be a little sad at that. Now, imagine I said "take your top 10 things and do that". What if I said "You know what, we'll be conservative, just take half of your stuff and give it away." What Jesus is asking is a challenge and I feel bad for the guy cause he goes away sad. We would go away sad as well.

You know. Jesus goes on to talk about how it's difficult for someone rich to enter the Kingdom of God and there's this discussion with His disciples that follows. And I think as we read into that text we need to re-define and re-calibrate and maybe a little exchange rate, if you would, on the term "rich". I would suggest that as we read through that instead of saying that it's difficult for someone who is rich let's just say it's difficult for those who have stuff that they want to keep. And so instead of maybe 100 dollar bills let's put it in a more accurate currency (Canadian Tire Money). How difficult is it for us when we have something that we want to keep, that we want to hang on to? And God says "I want you to hang on to Me, instead". And of course this shocks the disciples. The disciples say "Man if a rich person can't enter the Kingdom, then who possibly can?" Because you see, in their world view, if you were rich that meant God was blessing you for being righteous so the richer you were the more righteous you must have been and so the richest people were the most righteous people and so they must be the people who are closest to entering Heaven. And so, when Jesus says how hard it is for the rich people, they go "Wow! If they can't get

in, then what hope do the rest of us have?” And Jesus says, “You guys are questing after the wrong thing. You’re putting your confidence into the wrong thing.” And he goes into this long section talking about a camel and the eye of a needle and we could talk about that at length, but we’ll save that for another day. The bottom line of this story is that our challenge is the same as the man. It’s the same as the disciples and that is to simply let Jesus re-define our quest. To examine our lives and ask ourselves “What am I trusting in more than God? What am I relying on, more than God? What am I putting my faith and hope in, more than God?”

Second story Roy read for us earlier. It’s about a man named Bartimaeus and, just a quick little side note here. In the Hebrew language and the Aramaic as well, the little prefix “Bar”, actually means “son of” and so Bartimaeus means “son of Timaeus”. And Mark actually puts that in parenthesis and explains that to his readers. Now, think back to our first lesson in this series, Mark is writing to people in Rome who were probably Romans so they may not have this Hebrew background they may not understand that Bartimaeus means son of Timaeus, so that’s why he kind of puts that in there. So, we assume that the reason that Mark actually names him by name is that, it’s a name people will recognize. And so, that either means, as in the case of Jairus which is back in Mark, Chapter 5 that we read about, he was an important official and so people would recognize the name. But this guy is a blind beggar and so we assume that he’s not known for being wealthy or important or being prominent or anything. And so, the assumption is that, Bartimaeus, or maybe his son Timaeus, was a member of the early church and so as Mark is telling this story, it’s like he’s saying “there was this guy and his name was Ian McLeod” we’d all go “Oh! I know Ian” and so, that’s kind of the context of the story. And so, whenever you see a name that starts with “Bar” like Bartholemew or you remember in Acts this guy named Barnabas, which was a name that the early Christians gave the name to. This guy means “son of encouragement”. Wherever you see that name ‘Bar’ that means ‘Son of’, which is why Israelites have the Barmitzva, which is the commandment for a son coming of age. And they also have ‘Batmitzva’, which is for a daughter. And so, what we have is really for Robert Orr. Instead of calling him Robert, we would have called him Barharold. And for Robert Waddell, we would have called you Barjerry. It’s kind of like we do with last names. It’s like Brad Peterson. Somewhere back in Brad’s family tree, there’s a guy named Peter and Peter had a boy named George and that was George Peterson. And that’s how it went along. And so as you read through the Bible, just a little side note as you read through some of those names. Bartimaeus, son of Timaeus.

Anyways Roy has already read this for us once this morning but we’ll go through it once, very quickly. Mark 10: 46-52:

“They reached Jericho and as Jesus and His disciples left the town, a large crowd followed Him. A blind beggar named Bartimaeus (Son of Timaeus) was sitting beside the road. When Bartimaeus heard that Jesus of Nazareth was near by, he began to shout “Jesus, Son of David, Have mercy on me!”

Be quiet, many of the people yelled at him, but he shouted all the louder “Son of David, have mercy on me!”

When Jesus heard him he said “Tell him to come here”. So they called the blind man, “Cheer us! They said. Come on, He’s calling you”. Bartimaeus threw off his coat, jumped up and came to Jesus. “What do you want me to do for you?” Jesus asked. “My Rabbi” the blind man said “I want to see.” Jesus said to him “Go, for your faith has healed you”. Instantly the man could see and he followed Jesus down the road.

Now, this story comes on the heels for the story of the rich young ruler and it is a story of contrast to our first story. Now, our first story featured a man who was rich; who was young; who was important. This story features a man who is dirt poor; who is totally unimportant in society and most likely a little bit older. The first story, the rich young ruler comes running through the crowd right up to the front. In our second story, Bartimaeus is sitting on the ground on the side of the street, behind the crowd. The first man is very reverent and respectful and he goes down on his knee and says “Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” Bartimaeus, on the other hand is shouting “Jesus, Jesus, over here, Jesus”. “What’s that, Oh! You’d like me to keep it down” (then even louder) “Jesus, Jesus, over here, Jesus.” Trying to get Jesus’ attention. And the contrast between those two people shows us that it really doesn’t matter who you are or where you’re at, your quest is for the same thing. Your quest is for Jesus. Now, the rich young ruler went away sad, but Bartimaeus got up and he was so excited when he got up, it says “he threw off his coat and left it behind”. Now, Mark is great for including these little kind of details in his Gospel. Because you see, his coat was most likely his most valuable possession. Because a coat back then, would serve not only as a coat during the daytime, but it could also serve as a blanket at night time when it got cool. And especially, if you were a beggar who was living on the street, you would need to have that coat in the night time when it got cold. There was actually a law that said “If I borrowed something from Roy. Roy, I need to borrow your lawn mower and I’ll give you my coat as collateral as a promise that I’m going to bring your lawn mower back. Roy is not allowed to keep my coat after sundown, he has to give it back because I need that coat when it comes to night time. But Bartimaeus gets up and he says “I don’t need this anymore cause I’m going to Jesus”. And Mark’s message in both of these stories seems to be quite clearly: You need to clarify your quest. Unlike the reluctant ruler, blind Bart, readily abandons his most prized possession to answer Jesus’ call and he is rewarded for his faith. We need to clarify our quest. Determine what it is you are seeking first and foremost. Decide what it is that is of top priority and importance in your life. Discern what you are relying on, trusting in, depending on. And then, ask yourself, who do I really believe Jesus is? Because, if I really believe He is who He says he is, if I really believe He is as Mark is making Him out to be, then He is the answer to all of those questions. The challenge for us is different for each one of us. Bartimaeus didn’t need to be told to sell his possessions and give to the poor. For the rich young ruler, throwing off his coat and leaving it behind wouldn’t have been anything of significance.

So what is it for you? Is it your cash or your coat? Is it your credibility, or your career? Is it your skills or your talents? Is it your beauty, your brawn or your brains? Is it your pleasures or your past times? Is it your status or your position? Is it your reputation or your relationships? Whatever it is for you, you may or may not have to get rid of it, but you most certainly need to get it where it belongs, which is second place to God.

In Matthew 6:31-33, Jesus says:

“So don’t worry about these things saying, “What will we eat? Or, what will we drink? Or What will we wear? (and we could insert, and will people like me or how pretty am I? or will I be in charge? Or who is the best or the strongest or the fastest or the smartest?) For these dominate the thoughts of unbelievers, but your Heavenly Father already knows all of your needs. Seek first the Kingdom of God above all else and live righteously, and He will give you everything you need.”

And that is why Mark wants to stick us right dead centre in the middle of all the action because he wants us to be able to see and hear and taste and touch and smell what’s going on so we get to the end of Chapter 8 and we have this question, “Who is Jesus to us?” Who are we going to believe that Jesus is and we’re confronted with that question and we must decide what our answer is going to be. Is Jesus going to be the one we trust in? The one we rely on? The one we depend on? And then, we are left with a choice. But we’ll save the choice for next week.