

THE GREAT ADVENTURE

Mark 8:27-38

Introduction: Let's get right to our passage this morning in **Mark 8:27-28**
"Jesus and his disciples went on to the villages around Caesarea Philippi. On the way he asked them, "Who do people say I am?"

28They replied, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets."29 "But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?" Peter answered, "You are the Messiah."

30Jesus warned them not to tell anyone about him.

31He then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again. 32He spoke plainly about this, and Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him.

33But when Jesus turned and looked at his disciples, he rebuked Peter. "Get behind me, Satan!" he said. "You do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns."

34Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. 35For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it.

36What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? 37Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul? 38 If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of them when he comes in his Father's glory with the holy angels." (NIV)

Let's Pray

Our 2023 Vision Series is all about Reimagining. Reimagine the Two Greatest Commandments, Loving God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength; and loving other's as you love yourselves. On the night Jesus was betrayed He gave the disciples and us a new command, ***"love others as I have loved you."*** That's a game changer, that takes our love for others to a whole new level. Don't treat others how they have treated you, treat them and love them as Jesus has treated and loved you. Reimagine the Great Commission...what it means to go into all the world and make disciples. The big truth is that we can do all these things when we remember and reimagine that the Holy Spirit has been given to empower us so that we can be witnesses. We have been **Empowered to Make an Impact in this world.**

The question I want to ask you TODAY is, ARE YOU LIVING THE GREAT ADVENTURE.

STORY: A few years ago, a representative from Teach America paid a visit to one of the premier college campuses—Duke university. Teach America hires the brightest students and places them in some of the nation's worst public schools. So, the representative stood before the crowd of Duke students and said, "I can tell just by looking at you that I've come to the wrong place.

Just looking at you, I know you've achieved success and that you're on track for even more success. Yet I'm here today to convince you to throw your life away in the toughest job that you'll ever have. I want people to go into the hollow of West Virginia and the ghettos of South Los Angeles to teach in the worst schools in America. Last year two of our teachers were killed on the job.

But just by looking at you, I can tell that you're not interested. So go to grad school, make your millions, and live for success and comfort. But if by chance you're interested in the toughest job in America, I have a few brochures so come over and see me. Meeting's over." With that, those Duke students pushed into the aisles and mobbed that representative, signing up for more information.

I believe that deep down God has wired us for a sense of mission and a glorious adventure. We want to make a difference in this world. We want our life to count for something.

In our story, Jesus and His disciples are in the city of Caesarea Philippi or “Caesarville” since it referred to the Roman ruler - Caesar. It used to have a good Jewish name; the region of Naphtali near the city of Dan. But then Caesar and his armies conquered it and renamed it.

It was here in this region of ambiguous symbols of humankind's lust for military might and the religious quest for meaning, that Jesus stopped, turned, and confronted His disciples with the ultimate question, ***“Who do men say that I am?”***

The disciples casually rattle off what the word on the street is. They told Jesus that the fears of Herod Antipas, who murdered John the Baptist, had promoted the theory that He was John raised from the dead. Others believed He fulfilled the prophecy of Malachi that He was Elijah come to prepare the way for the Messiah. Still others surmised that the vision given to Judas Maccabaeus was being realized: He was Jeremiah who had come with a golden sword to wage war for the deliverance of Israel. Others simply said Jesus was one of the prophets.

But the second question Jesus asks is riskier: “Who do **you** say that I am?” Peter raises his hand, “Teacher, O, I got this one: you’re the Christ.” The word “Christ” means “the Messiah” or “the Anointed One.” It carried overtones of salvation and deliverance.

This was not the question of an insecure leader seeking to know his standing in public opinion polls. It was a question designed to determine the extent to which people were discovering His true identity, His mission and His message.

In verse 31 Jesus starts to lay down the fork in the road. Three phrases would have stuck out:

must suffer many things,
must be rejected,
must be killed.

We're told in verse 32 that he "spoke plainly (or boldly, directly, candidly) about these things." Up to this point in the Gospel of Mark when they hear "You are the Christ" they think power and success.

Now Jesus starts to talk about vulnerability and failure. Jesus claims that all of this "**must**" happen—a little Greek word suggesting clear purpose.

Suffering, rejection, and death—do we really want to follow that kind of Messiah? Or should we look for another?

Then Jesus issues the ultimate challenge to follow Him into a Great Adventure and it's found in Mark 8:34: ***"Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me."***

This passage is the hinge of the entire Gospel story of Mark. As the great Yogi Berra once said, "If you see a fork in the road, take it."

In his book, The Island of Lost Maps, author Miles Harvey says this:

In my 30s I spent a great deal of time at the Kopi [a travelers' café in Chicago] whose walls were adorned with masks from Bali and shelves filled with guides to far-flung destinations. I was then the literary critic for Outside Magazine, a great job but one that was beginning to wear on my patience.

The books I read were about people who climbed Himalayan peaks, rode a bicycle all the way across Africa, sailed wooden boats across the Atlantic, or tracked into restricted areas of China. These tales of adventure filled my days and my imagination, and yet my own life was anything but adventurous. The interior of the Kopi coffee shop was ringed by clocks, each one showing the time in some distant locale, and as I watched the weeks ticking away in places like Timbuktu and Juno and Denpasar, I began to long for an adventure of my own.

Harvey said that he loved looking at maps. He would look for hours at exciting places in South America, Africa, or Australia and lose himself in the glories of possible adventures around the world.

He would find an exciting spot on the map, put his finger on the spot and then say to himself, When I grow up, I will go there. [Say that with me: When I grow up, I will go there.](#)

If you call yourself a Christian, a Christ-follower, then this is the ultimate challenge. Notice who it's for: ***"Then he called the crowd to him along with the disciples."*** In other words, this call to follow Jesus isn't just for a select group of super-saints. This is for you and me.

Ordinary people living unremarkable lives, encountering routine struggles are issued the same challenge. ***"If anyone would come after me ..." here's what you must do. That's a BIG if***

Jesus is talking about a transformed life, not just a three-step process to a better existence. This is the essence of Christian spirituality. The Apostle Paul put it this way, ***"I have been crucified with Christ and it is no longer I who live but Christ who lives within me."*** Christ is in you—that is our life. Jesus' challenge to follow Him in the Great Adventure will confront us on three levels.

1. Jesus challenges the myth of COMFORT

"If anyone wishes to come after me let him deny himself." At first glance this sounds psychologically unhealthy. Shouldn't Jesus tell us to affirm ourselves and care for ourselves? Let's be clear what it does not mean: it does not mean that you can never enjoy the simple pleasures of life. After everything God made in the creation account, He said it was good.

He challenges us to deny ourselves. The Bible calls it the old man or the flesh. It's that part of us which rebels against God's glory. The Bible warns us this way: ***"... do not use your freedom to indulge your flesh"*** (Galatians 5:13). In other words, the flesh constantly wants to be indulged and catered to. A few verses later the Bible says, ***"For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit."***

One of our most basic distorted desires of the flesh is the craving for a comfortable life.

Most parents could tell you about a reality called the “terrible twos” when the whole world revolves around us and our need for comfort. Some parents can also tell you about the “terrible twelves” and the “terrible twenty-twos.”

Unfortunately, as we grow older our craving for comfort and a comfortable life grows deeper and stronger.

All of us have a “terrible two-year-old” inside of us. Jesus says, ***“Deny yourself. Put off the old self which is being corrupted and put on the new self”*** (Ephesians 4:22-24).“

When Jesus told us, “Deny yourself,” he was saying, “Say no to your flesh.” If this sounds easy, it’s not. A quote from a 19th century theologian named Abraham Kuyper says: Self, big and inflated, is not hard to deny. But self-shrunk ... hiding behind pious emotions and piles of good works, is extremely dangerous. For what is there to be denied? There is scarcely anything left ... At least, so he thinks. But he is mistaken. Self is still there. And what was called self-denial is really nothing less than the self taking care of itself.

That’s why we must constantly “walk in the Spirit” which means that we’re constantly seeking the direction of the Holy Spirit. That’s why the Apostle Paul could say, ***“I die daily.”*** Jesus challenges the myth of our comfort.

2. Jesus challenges the myth of SAFETY

Taking up your cross does not mean putting up with difficult people, like your crazy uncle or sister busy bottoms at church. Everyone in Jesus’ day knew what a cross meant; it was an instrument of death.

Bishop Moule said years ago, “People carrying crosses were already convicted and were going to execution.”

Those who listened to Jesus that day knew how gruesome crucifixion was, so there was surely an instant shock that ran through that crowd when Jesus said that. All who follow Jesus must “take up their cross.”

In his book, *The History of Christian Mission*, author Stephen Neill shows that the first 300 years after Jesus, his followers were often under threat. "Every Christian," he wrote, "knew that sooner or later he might have to testify to his faith at the cost of his life."

In his book, *Divine Appointments*, Erwin McManus suggests that many people unintentionally become sideliners to the great adventure of life.

McManus defines a sideliner as, "An observer rather than a liver of life, somebody who is more a spectator than a player." These are people who live more vicariously than valiantly. They find their romance in movies or novels but God forbid they should ever do something really passionate and wild to demonstrate their own love for somebody else.

They fight their battles through fantasy proxies like James Bond or Katniss Everdeen. Sideliners admire and applaud the great servants, courageous heroes, and spiritual superstars, but they do not get up out of their chair. They do not rise to their feet and shout. They do not leave the room in which they are sitting. They don't get up and actually go with God. They think to themselves, "When I grow up, I might go there."

Jesus is challenging the myth of comfort and safety, the lie that life should be completely safe and risk-free; the seduction that we must arrange our life to avoid danger. Please don't misunderstand me: safety is a good thing.

But the truth is that if you want to follow Jesus, you might get hurt.

3. Jesus challenges the myth of CONTROL

That's the problem Peter has in this passage: he thinks he's in control; he assumes that he's in charge and Jesus must line up behind him. Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him." "Look, Jesus, you must get a grip here. This talk of rejection and suffering isn't appropriate for a real Messiah."

Jesus spoke plainly in verse 31, but now he's brutally blunt. Notice what Jesus did in verse 33—***"But when Jesus turned and looked at his disciples, he rebuked Peter. "Get behind me, Satan!" he said. "You do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns."***

The phrase means, “Line up behind me. You’re the follower; I’m the leader.” Then He said: “You do not have the mind of God.”

The essence of Christianity isn’t following a list of rules or performing religious duties. It all boils down to Jesus’ words to his followers-***follow me.*** Line your life up behind Jesus. When Jesus says things like ***“Love your enemies”*** or ***“Do not store up for yourselves treasure on earth”*** or ***“Do not worry about your life”*** or ***“Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength”*** they aren’t just suggestions, they are a way of life.

Joke: A Sunday School teacher taught her class, “The wicked kings and queens of the Bible thought no one was more powerful than they were. Who can tell me who or what is more powerful than a king or queen?”

“I know,” a little boy blurted out, “An Ace!”

Of course, the answer she expected was, “God.” He is above all powers, all kingdoms. And when God became a man in the person of Jesus, he demanded our full and complete allegiance, and rightfully so.

Martin Luther said, “A religion that gives nothing, costs nothing, and suffers nothing, is worth nothing.”

Jesus challenges the myth that we’re in control. He challenges the myth of a safe and comfortable life and issues the ultimate challenge to pick up our cross and follow Him.

Let’s back up: Mark wrote his Gospel so that people could see Jesus for who he is. The first verse says, “The beginning of the good news about Jesus Christ, the Son of God.” Mark tells the story of Jesus as an action adventure. We see grace course through the limbs of a paralyzed man. We see Jesus defeat a regiment of demons.

We see Jesus wake a little girl from death as though naptime was over. We see him feed thousands from a recipe of five loaves and two fish, leaving twelve times more leftovers than he started with.

He walks on wind-whipped water and gives a deaf man hearing and speech. Mark 7:37 says, "People were overwhelmed with amazement." The problem with all those miracles, much like the parables Jesus told, was that people couldn't correctly answer the question, **"Who do you say I am?"**

Then in Mark 8 at the halfway point in Mark's gospel, Jesus repeats himself, twice. He does one miracle that He's done before. Then he splits a miracle into two halves. It all has to do with the problem of ***spiritual blindness***.

Mark 8, beginning in verse 22 says, ***"They came to Bethsaida, and some people brought a blind man and begged Jesus to touch him. 23He took the blind man by the hand and led him outside the village. When he had spit on the man's eyes and put his hands on him, Jesus asked, "Do you see anything?" 24He looked up and said, "I see people; they look like trees walking around." 25Once more Jesus put his hands on the man's eyes. Then his eyes were opened, his sight was restored, and he saw everything clearly." (NIV)***

Was this guy's blindness a really bad case requiring two treatments?

Here is the center of the gospel of Mark. Everything in Mark has led up to this, and everything after it starts here. Almost no one who had seen and heard Jesus thought he was just Jesus of Nazareth. He was more. The disciples told Jesus what the people thought of Him.

In Verse 29 Jesus asks: "'But what about you?' he asked. 'Who do you say I am?' Peter answered, 'You are the Christ, the Messiah.'" According to Matthew's more detailed account of this story, Jesus responded, ***"Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but my Father in heaven."***

So, it seems the disciples' blindness has been healed with that great realization: "You are the Christ." But like the story before it, this is a miracle of two halves. This confession, is akin to the blind man's statement, ***"I see people; they look like trees walking around."***

So now in Verses 31-33, it says, ***"He then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again. 32He spoke plainly about this, and Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. 33But when Jesus turned and looked at his disciples, he rebuked Peter. "Get behind me, Satan!" he said. "You do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns."***

No one fully sees Jesus who will not see his death and resurrection as the heart of God's plan for the salvation of lost sinners.

Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 1:23-24, ***"We preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, [whose eyes Jesus has opened], both Jews and Greeks, Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God."***

Jesus diagnosed Peter's blindness: ***"You do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men."***

Jesus comes to each of us and asks the ultimate question, **"But who do you, yourself, say that I am?"**

Do you believe that He is who He said He was?

The true biblical Jesus is more than just a comforter. He also confronts us, and He will not accept second place in our lives. He calls us to the exhilarating adventure of dynamic discipleship. Though He meets us as we are with incredible grace, He loves us too much to leave us as we are.

The authentic Jesus of the Bible tenderly cares for us when we hurt, but He tenaciously exposes anything that keeps us from being all He intends for us to be. His love and forgiveness are unqualified, but His demands are unequivocal. He is the Master who holds before us the mandate of the Kingdom of God and calls us to commit all we have and are to Him.

His ultimate question perhaps is the hardest of all if we want to be honest in how we answer. **"Who am I to you...really?"** That cuts into the core of our being and forces us to evaluate whether our priorities, values and attitudes match our declaration that Christ is our Lord and Savior.

How we answer Christ's ultimate question determines what we will receive from Him regarding the five most urgent needs of our lives.

First, our answer will determine how much we will know and experience His supernatural power.

Second, how we answer Christ's ultimate question determines our ability to live the abundant life He promised.

He sustains us in loneliness and gives us strength in our weaknesses. He gives us guidance in indecision and wisdom in confusion. He raises us up to walk on stormy seas.

True Christianity is not only life as Christ lived it or life as we live it in Him, but life as He lives it in us. **"Abide in Me and I in you"** (John 15: 5).

That's what Christ promised Simon, the big fisherman, that day at Caesarea Philippi when he answered His ultimate question. In Matthew's account it reads, **17Jesus replied, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in heaven. 18And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it."** (Matt. 16: 17-18, NIV).

When we claim Him as our Lord and Savior, He gives us a new name and an unshakable faith and uses us to build His Kingdom.

Third, how we answer Christ's ultimate question determines our ability to receive and give forgiveness.

Forgiveness was so important to Christ that the phrase in the Lord's Prayer about forgiving our debtors as we have been forgiven by our debts was the only one, He felt it necessary to stress and explain with urgency:

"For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses"(Matt.6:14-15).

Fourth, how we answer His ultimate question determines our experience of the death and resurrection power we are called to share with Christ.

Our cross, means death to self and a resurrection to a totally new life. It also means the surrender of our wills to faithful obedience to seeking and following the guidance of Christ.

The death and resurrection cycle of Christ is repeated in us. That why the Apostle Paul said, ***"I die daily"*** (I Cor. 15:31).

But he also said, ***"I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, 11and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead. 13Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, 14I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus."*** (Phil: 3:10-11,13-14, NIV)

"Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Colossians 1: 27), was the Apostle Paul's way of explaining it. ***"I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me."*** (Gal 2:20, NIV).

Our relationships are radically altered as we live in fellowship with Christ.

And that brings us to our ***fifth*** point: how we answer Christ's ultimate question determines our courage to face death.

Underneath all anxieties is the fear of dying. Not so for us, if we belong to Christ. His promise was fulfilled: ***"I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; 26and whoever lives by believing in me will never die."*** (John 11: 25-26, NIV).

CONCLUSION: So, let me ask you this: Have you accepted Christ's ultimate challenge to follow Him into a great adventure. Are you seeking your own comfort, perhaps even when you do religious things? Are you addicted to safety and security, so much so that it cripples you from living a fully for Christ? Do you strive to be in control? Do you want Jesus to line up behind you—rather than the other way around? Finally, is your life marked by joy?

**Christ whispers in our souls, “Who do you say that I am?”
Everything, now and for eternity, depends on your answer.**

The lyrics of a popular song by Brendan Graham and Rolf Loveland communicates what Christ is ready to do for us, in us, and through us.

**"When I am down and, oh my soul so weary;
When troubles come and my heart burdened be;
Then I am still and wait here in silence,
Until You come and sit awhile with me.**

**There is no life, no life without its hunger.
Each restless heart beats so imperfectly,
But when You come and I am filled with wonder,
Sometimes, I think I glimpse eternity.**

**You raise me up so I can stand on mountains,
You raise me up to walk on stormy seas,
I am strong when I am on Your shoulders,
You raise me up to more than I can be."**

William Wallace once said, **“All men die, but not all men really live.”**

If you want to really live – follow Jesus. And just so you know, following Jesus has no connection to choosing to follow someone on social media, where you are a safe click away from the action. **Jesus invites us to pass through the empty tomb into the unknown of all our tomorrows; to risk and trust and follow Him into the greatest adventure of all time.**