

The Hope of a New Beginning

Ministry Update ... go to Mark 1 ...

Opening Illustration:

Let's take a reality check together: *Who isn't looking for more?*

Most of us wouldn't mind having a better paying job; many of us simply want a better job. We're looking for a better home, better self image, better social circle, or whatever it is that we think is better than what we're stuck with.

I want to be a better husband (my wife wants me to be a better husband). I want more for my kids. I want my next year to be better than my last year. Don't you hope for a better year? If you own a business you hope that it will grow some each year. Few want to sit at status quo. Who wants better health?

I'm hoping for better. You're hoping for better. We're all hoping for better. We're all hoping for more of this and more of that.

I could go on and on, but why are we always looking for a little more in some way or area of our lives? Why does what we have never seem to be quite enough? What are we continually saying about life in this world if we're constantly hoping for more and for better? What are we saying about ourselves?

It's doubtless that there are a few present who feel content in your lot, and you think the rest of us ought to be as well. Hasn't God given each of us the measure we're meant to have? Sure. But maybe, according to the gospel, we've only received a down payment in the Spirit and there is far more to come, more than we can imagine, when Jesus returns. Thus, we should not settle for this life but long for the next. You'll want to listen up, this word also applies to you who feel you don't need more.

Take it up a notch: *Think about the excitement that a new beginning brings!* A new city. A new job. A new opportunity that allows you to escape from a grinding or oppressive situation. A new lease on life. Think about newly weds, just married and starting a new life together.

[Illustration:] When my mother was a young girl she remember's my grandfather trying his hand at farming on the prairies in Saskatchewan. His heart was in farming. Unfortunately, as hard as he worked he couldn't make it work. In their poverty, my mother recalls eating porridge for breakfast, lunch, and super - cold porridge slices in her school lunch. My grandfather had to fold the farm and leave. He came to Vancouver and worked in an industrial plant, where he learned news skills like welding. He and my grandmother saved their money and bided their time. Then the day came when he was able to buy about 2500 acres (3-4 sections) in the interior caribou of BC, and begin his dream of farming and ranching again. This time it worked very well for him. It was a brand new beginning.

Then there is our youngest cultural generation, not the millennials but generation z - the spiritual nones, comprising 30% + of Canadian population and growing fast. They have no confidence in our current societal systems. Unlike millennials, generation z is concerned for the world and is willing to sacrifice for a new way forward, believing it all depends on them and that they have to figure it out for themselves. They want to get busy and work hard, but it won't be business as usual, for they're the ones who want to save the bees and stop the

pipelines (for renewable energy), and many other items like that. What is won't due, something new is absolutely needed and they're going for it.

We can discern that something real is lacking, something significant, that leaves us reaching. And history teaches us that we've never found it, much less laid hold of it. *What shall we do?*

Presenting the Good News:

Good news! The answer has been before us, on offer, for 2000 years!

Mark 1:1 - read. The answer is Jesus! There is much we could say from this one verse from which Mark launches his account of Jesus. Yet, focus with me on the word, "beginning."

What does this word mean, what does it signify?

For the Israelite people, it would mean the start of the new, long awaited era of freedom to be inaugurated by the Christ. Something they have been desperately hoping for.

It goes much further. The beginning of the gospel means the end of something else:

Romans 10:4 - For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.

Jesus is the end of the old way, whether under the law written on our hearts, which is the case for every living person, or the law chiseled on stone tablets, which the ancient Jewish people received; which ever it is, that same grind of death under a law we clearly can't keep ends as we receive the gift of God's righteousness by faith in Jesus.

He begins remaking us here and now, from the inside out; and he will remake the world and it will be the home of righteousness, that which is good, right, and true.

In Jesus, God hits the reset button on creation. For those of you who may not know, in the very beginning God created the world, and people, and it was very good. Tragically, the first couple rebelled against God, which wayward path we've all followed since. This is what has reeked all the havoc in our lives and in our world. Yet, the good news, is that, in amazing love, God has sent his beloved Son to reconcile us to our loving Father, and to give us a brand new start with an amazing future!

2 Corinthians 5:17 - Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.

Jesus is everything we need for a new start.

Colossians 2:9-10 - For in him [in Jesus] the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, and you have been filled [made complete, overflowing] in him, who is the head of all rule and authority.

Look at how Mark puts it, simply quoting Jesus in **Mark 1:14b-15 - read.**

The gospel is the beginning of knowing God; his amazing presence, his astounding love, his unrivalled power to save and his just rule to guide, his sheer goodness - everything you and I will ever need. God is what is missing, God is the more, and Jesus is the way.

This is clearly affirmed by the phrase “the beginning” of the gospel in Mark 1:1, which firmly rests on “the beginning” of the world in Genesis 1:1. That is, the originator and maker of all things is the originator and author of the gospel. The one who made us, in his image and likeness, where we alone find full satisfaction forever, he is the one who has come in Jesus Christ to restore us to himself. In Jesus we meet our God who loves us and has laid down his life for us, taking away all our sin, so we can return to our God.

This is a point Jesus makes crystal clear much later in the Mark’s account (12:13-17). In a debate against some religious leaders, Jesus calls all people to render to God what is God’s - that which bears his image and inscription - which is you and me. The message: Quit fighting your God, quit running from your God, you can return to your God, repent and believe this good news!

[Illustration:] My neighbour, whom I’ve gotten to know over the past 4 years, like most people, found his identity in his vocation. It was a great paying job. Then an injury took it all away, and he’s been unable to work for the past few years. He’s not recovering. He’s lost. He said he no longer knows who he is. I shared with him that he is a someone, and it’s not based on his performance, but firmly on the truth that he is created in the image and likeness of God. I told him that God loves him, is pursuing him, that he has died for all the wrong he has thought, said, and done, and Jesus simply wants him to come home and start new, to render himself to his God. My neighbour is thinking about it.

The Apostle Paul grips our minds, hearts, and lives with the reality of this hope in **Romans 5:1-11 - read** (and comment).

Receiving the Good News of Hope:

Let’s bring this home: *We tend to settle for less than Jesus.*

But: Why is it so hard, if not near impossible, for us to enter into the more we’re deeply longing for, to accept God’s invitation into something thoroughly new in Jesus? Why do most of us remain in that which is less than, which falls short?

Listen to this well warn quote of C. S. Lewis, opening his sermon, *Weight of Glory*:

... it would seem that Our Lord finds our desires, not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased.

The reason we miss out is that our desires are far too weak. We have to give way and long and hope for more than this world can ever give us, for something entirely new. Then realize that God has given us just that, his very best, his beloved, Jesus, the King of God’s everlasting Kingdom.

[Illustration:] I recall Pat. He came to a church I was pastoring in. When I met him his life was a mess. He was a junky. His wife had left him and he was on the verge of not being able to see his daughter any longer. Plus he had just lost his job. He was prepared to let himself slide off the deep end. I sat down with him and I explained the Story of God - where we came from, what’s gone wrong with us, what our true need is, what it’s all coming to - and I specifically explained the gospel to him, that his true need is Jesus. It was a Holy Spirit

empowered conversation. Still, I had no idea if Pat was going to believe and what was going to become of him. He was clearly in despair. He had lost all hope of anything ever changing.

About a week after our big gospel conversation, one night he hit rock bottom. He was thoroughly broken and despondent. He grieved deeply that his daughter would have no dad to love and raise her. Then, in complete desperation for something more he said to Jesus, "I'm nothing but a junky and I'll never be anything else. You have to help me or this is it." And he was delivered from his addiction and bondage that hour.

What happened? Pat had to come to a place of desiring God more than anything else. That's what happened. And he got up a new man. Inside 30 days he got his job back, his wife returned to him, and he was being a father to his daughter. He enrolled himself in long term recovery. When I saw him again a few weeks after our conversation - not knowing what had happened to him in that time - I could hardly recognize him as his spirit and countenance had so changed. Pat was full of new life and overflowing with hope in Jesus.

Really, I felt like a spectator to the Spirit of Jesus throughout the entire process. That's all I was. Jesus did it all, Pat got to leave his mud pies for a holiday on the beach, and got to witness this in awe.

Folks! This is Christmas!

I chose a more extreme illustration, but know, this applies to everyone outside Jesus. You have no idea what God offers you in Christ!

Here's the more you're looking for. It's Jesus. You need Jesus. We all need Jesus. He is God's gift to us. Receive him, abide in him, hope in him. You won't be disappointed (Romans 5:5).

Band, come on up. Let's pray together ...