

## Now It All Makes Sense . . . Why It Makes No Sense

1. Warm-up question: Jeff told how, at age 12, he got to experience Mr. Toad's Wild Ride at Disneyland. The ride was full of near misses, sudden turns, high adventure, and eventually a head-on collision with a train. It was amazing, thrilling, and frightening all at once. What's the most amazing amusement park ride you've ever experienced?
  
2. Life is a lot like Mr. Toad's Wild Ride – lots of twists and turns, ups and downs, narrow escapes, crashing through walls, and never knowing what's next or where you're really going. Just ask Mary, mother of Jesus. On Sunday we completed our study of her life, as we followed her from the Cradle (Jesus' birth) to the grave (Jesus' death on the cross), where she and the disciples thought the story would end. But before we talk about how the story ends, let's first remind ourselves where it began. As we saw 6 weeks ago, Mary's wild ride began when an angel appeared to her as a teenager and told her she was going to miraculously conceive and bear a son who would be the long awaited Messiah. Mary was more than a little afraid, but also thrilled and amazed because she knew what this meant. She had been raised in a synagogue in Nazareth that taught her the conventional view of what the Messiah would be and do. She knew the plan, she was sure she had it all figured out, exactly how things were going to unfold, and she was ready! Because Mary had faith. But looking back on everything now, we can see that, at that point in her story when Mary was just a teenager, though she had faith, her faith was still immature.
  - a. Immature faith, Jeff suggested, is characterized by certitude (i.e., I've got it all figured out, I know exactly what God's going to do), and by a focus on ourselves and "our people" and what we want/need in the here and now. In this way of thinking, basically God is there to help us achieve our plans and dreams. To illustrate the point, Jeff sang Janis Joplin's song, "Lord, won't you buy me a Mercedes Benz." Is it fair to say that most people get stuck in this immature phase of spiritual life – pursuing God for what God can do for them? Is it wrong to pursue God for what we can get from God? Why or why not?
  - b. It didn't take long for Mary's certitude about God's plan to be challenged, as her son encountered enormous opposition from his own people and, despite Mary's warnings, refused to change course. Before long, he was dead. The plan was ruined, Mary was devastated, and her faith challenged. When in your life has God behaved in a way that almost undermined your faith?
  
3. When Jesus was crucified, Mary and his disciples were devastated. Why would God raise Jesus up, just to let him be cut down? It made no sense. But then came one last stupendous plot twist that suddenly cause everything to finally make sense. Read Act 1:1-14, as printed on p. 3.
  - a. Mary Magdalene was the first disciples to see Jesus when he arose. Try to imagine that moment when Mary Magdalene first told Mary, mother of Jesus, that

she had seen her son alive. What thoughts and emotions would you guess surged through Mary?

- b. After Jesus appeared to Mary Magdalene, other disciples soon experienced similar encounters, culminating in a final grand appearance before a large group of people that included Mary, the mother of Jesus, as described in the passage we just read. In the aftermath, we see a very different kind of faith in Mary and the disciples. Their determination to see the kingdom restored to Israel immediately was replaced by a willingness to wait (Acts 1:4). Their confidence that they had God's plan all figured out was replaced with questions and a recognition how much they didn't know (Acts 1:6). And their prayers telling God what to do were replaced with prayers seeking guidance from God for what they should do (Acts 1:15). Mary's once immature faith was now fully formed and mature. Jeff suggested three hallmarks of mature faith: (a) a willingness to wait; (b) a recognition of how much we don't know; and (c) prayers that focus on seeking guidance rather than constantly telling God what to do. Which of these three aspects of mature faith is hardest for you? And why is that aspect so hard?
4. We all want to grow into a mature faith, but how? As we look at Mary's life, her growth seems to have been catalyzed by two key factors. The first factor was shattered expectations. Mary's plans had to be shattered before she could open herself to the fullness of God's plan for her, her son, and the whole world.
    - a. Think back to the beginning of young adulthood when you were first formulating a plan for your life – the fate you were sure fate had in store for you. Let's call that your Plan A. What was your Plan A? How long did it last? How did it feel when your plan got shattered?
    - b. If God gave you the option to trade what your life has become (Plan B) for what you thought your life would be (your Plan A), would you make that trade? Why or why not?
  5. The other key factor that catalyzed the growth of Mary's soul was Jesus' resurrection. On those occasions in life when we have a brush with the supernatural, it challenges our small thinking and causes us to realize that we're part of a story that's much bigger than us. When Jesus arose, Mary suddenly realized that God's plan wasn't just about the political liberation of her people, but about the spiritual liberation of everyone everywhere for all of time. God's plan was so much better!
    - a. When in your life have you had a brush with the supernatural that filled you with awe and caused you to realize that you just need to trust the transcendence of God? How did that brush with the supernatural make you feel?
    - b. To have a mature faith, we eventually have to realize that we're not in charge, let go of the need for control, and surrender to the mystery of God's will in our life. Have you surrendered control? Do you think you're there yet? Why or why not?

## **Acts 1:1-14**

In the first book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus did and taught from the beginning <sup>2</sup>until the day when he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen. <sup>3</sup>After his suffering he presented himself alive to them by many convincing proofs, appearing to them over the course of forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God. <sup>4</sup>While staying with them, he ordered them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait there for the promise of the Father. 'This', he said, 'is what you have heard from me; <sup>5</sup>for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.'

<sup>6</sup> So when they had come together, they asked him, 'Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?' <sup>7</sup>He replied, 'It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. <sup>8</sup>But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.' <sup>9</sup>When he had said this, as they were watching, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. <sup>10</sup>While he was going and they were gazing up towards heaven, suddenly two men in white robes stood by them. <sup>11</sup>They said, 'Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up towards heaven? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.'

<sup>12</sup> Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day's journey away. <sup>13</sup>When they had entered the city, they went to the room upstairs where they were staying, Peter, and John, and James, and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James son of Alphaeus, and Simon the Zealot, and Judas son of James. <sup>14</sup>All these were constantly devoting themselves to prayer, together with certain women, including Mary the mother of Jesus, as well as his brothers.