

Message: Week 4 of “Adjusting My Crown Series”, presented by Rev. Kristen Lowe on 07-31-2016 at Crossroads United Methodist Church, Waunakee, WI.

Saul of Tarsus, better known to us as Paul, the great saint of the New Testament, didn't start out that way. He was a persecutor of Christians... until the resurrected Christ appeared to him on the road to Damascus. Paul's conversion was a testament of God's unfailing love for us and that no matter what road we've been down, Christ's redemptive power can triumph over anything!

Galatians 1:11-20

In Paul's letter to the church at Galatia, he says:

I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that the gospel I preached is not of human origin. I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it; rather, I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ.

For you have heard of my previous way of life in Judaism, how intensely I persecuted the church of God and tried to destroy it. I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my own age among my people and was extremely zealous for the traditions of my fathers.

But when God, who set me apart from my mother's womb and called me by his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son in me so that I might preach him among the Gentiles, my immediate response was not to consult any human being. I did not go up to Jerusalem to see those who were apostles before I was, but I went into Arabia. Later I returned to Damascus.

Then after three years, I went up to Jerusalem to get acquainted with Cephas and stayed with him fifteen days. I saw none of the other apostles—only James, the Lord's brother. I assure you before God that what I am writing you is no lie.

Galatians 2:19-21

“For through the law I died to the law so that I might live for God. 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. I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing!”

A word of God for the people of God. Thanks be to God!

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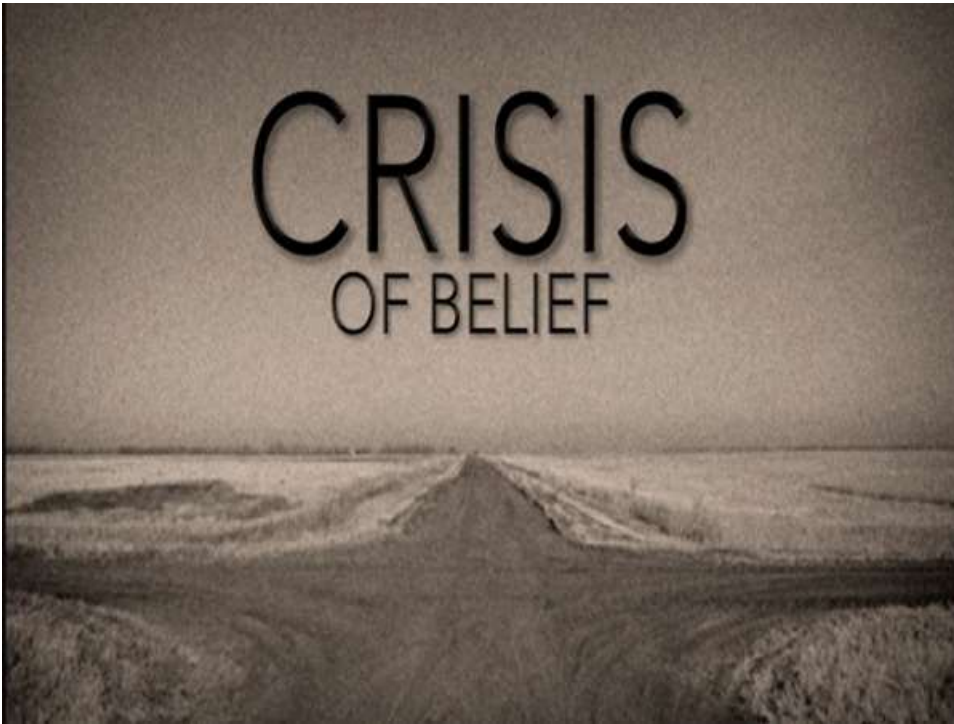
There's an old, old story about the time a crowd had gathered to watch a stunt man perform at Niagara Falls. It seems that the fellow had rigged up a wire from shore to shore, right across the falls, and was wowing the crowd by riding a bicycle along that wire. Back and forth he went, several times, and so, to make it more exciting, he asked the crowd if they believed he could make it across while carrying various things. First, he held up a suitcase and an umbrella, and asked, "Do you believe I can make it across the falls carrying these?" Since people had seen what he could do without anything in his hands, and it was pretty impressive, most of them shouted, "Yes, yes, we believe." Sure enough, he got all the way across and back with no trouble. Next he picked up a violin and a bow, and asked the crowd, "Now do you believe I can ride my bike on this thin wire, across these falls, while I play my fiddle?" Again, they had seen incredible things, and so they shouted out again, "Yes, yes, we believe." It was just astonishing to listen to a string of bluegrass fiddlin' wafting out over the roaring waters of Niagara. He did it!

Finally, the stunt man picked up a chair, and said, "Now I have just one more question. Do you believe I can put somebody in this chair and balance them on my bike and ride across the falls? Do you believe I can do this?" Well, the crowd went wild. They cheered and they whistled. They stomped and they shouted. "Sure. Yes. Go for it. We believe. We believe."

"All right," said he. "If you believe, I now need for one believer to step forward and sit in the chair."

Our faith... in essence is like this.

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Which just means that there is often a tremendous gap between what we say we believe and what we really believe. A disconnect between our ideas and our commitment. A very large gap.

When we shift our focus from worldly views to a Godly view, it will always lead to a crisis of belief? What we think we believe will go into tension with what the world is telling us, and there will be a crisis. When the moment of truth comes, and God invites us to sit in the chair going over the falls, then we will find ourselves in crisis.

I want you to see that when God invites us into some new truth, the first crisis of belief will come even before we feel like our feet are firmly planted. The first crisis of belief will be within ourselves. It will be within our own heart and mind. We have to overcome what we see all around us, what we hear and what we are told day after day. Our senses are inundated with actions that try to force an identity upon us.

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Years and years of daily identity formation verses the quiet whisper of the Holy Spirit within. Our own minds work to suffocate that voice... you are a child of the most High God. You are beautiful, you are more than you believe you are. You are an amazing work of art... you have been redeemed!

God's truth for our lives contradicts the world's standards. It creates a crisis of belief. It's easier for us to walk the wide path on this one... the path that lies so clearly before us – the worldview. But, we are called to remember who and whose we are. And when we muster the conviction to believe this Biblical truth against the world's force, it can feel pretty intense. That can feel like riding the bike over Niagara Falls, and the tight-wire isn't even tight! When something happens to reach down into your very core and make you change who you are and what you are about, conflict arises and you must choose which of these truths is going to be yours! Your own truth is powerful. Truth that you have hammered out for yourself.

Paul tells us in the Galatian letter about his story. He speaks about what life used to be like for him. Think about what he walked away from when he became a Christian and realized that everything that he believed was wrong... that even what he believed about himself was faulty.

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REALIZATION

That moment when it dawns on you
that your former belief isn't real.

It's a startling moment, isn't it? When we receive that paradigm shift... when our belief system takes a sharp turn. It's called realization. REAL-ization.

Despite the fact that Paul was eradicating Christians by any means possible, he was, in his own mind and his own circle doing what he thought was right and even being encouraged by his higher-ups. He was on the fast track to success.

So when God sought Paul out and Paul converted to Christ, not only did he walk away from all those props and supports, but he also had to learn a new way of thinking. He had to turn around in the road, change the direction he was going, and learn a whole new pattern of thought. Think about it. He had to not only change old thought patterns about Christ, but also believe... FULLY believe in God's unconditional love for him... even after what he had done. He had to somehow make it his own truth.

Hear me here. What I preach, even though I am interpreter of the Bible, even though I pray for God to speak through me, even though I study each week and critique my message against the theology of the United Methodist Church that it is indeed the right and true doctrine of Jesus Christ, for you to believe what I am saying... you have to work it out internally to be your own truth.

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And... the truth I'm trying to help you call your own is who and whose you really are. Do you believe that you are a redeemed, beautiful, chosen, highly desired, purpose filled child of the most high God?



There are three areas of belief.

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The first area of belief is Believing in God. But be careful here, because I want to remind you that the Bible says that even the demons believe and tremble. So there needs to be more.

The second area of belief is critical and this is an area where even Christian believers are often attacked. I think that we do pretty well believing in God... but then the enemy comes in like a flood and tries to destroy the ability to believe in ourselves.



God encourages us over and over in scripture: Do Not be afraid, I am with you! Be bold and be strong, the Lord your God is with you wherever you go. And make disciples for Jesus Christ. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me!!! The second area of belief is trusting that what Jesus says about us, what God tells us in scripture is real.

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The third area of belief is trusting Jesus when he said, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything. He will remind you of everything that I have ever told you. You will do works greater than these. But if we don't believe in ourselves... or rather God's ability to make us more than we are, we can't be very effective in the Kingdom of Heaven. The third area of belief is believing that the Holy Spirit can do miracles in and through us.

Last week I offered an illustration. I auctioned off my tennis shoes for \$7.50. In contrast, Michael Jordan's Flu Game shoes sold for \$105 thousand dollars at auction. My point is that the shoes were made valuable through the person who filled those shoes.

Scripture tells us that we are a vessel. We can fill ourselves with all sorts of worldly things. But those things do not have eternal value. They are temporal... those things eventually rot and rust. If we fill ourselves with the eternal, we not only thrive here, we also thrive in eternity. When we fill ourselves with the Holy Spirit, we can believe that we contain the value of the Holy Spirit.

To really get our heads around this, we are told we walk by faith and not by sight.

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Every day we are bombarded by attacks to our self-esteem and self-doubt. But it's at that moment, that we are called to remember that we are Children of the King of Kings. It's at those times when I have to especially adjust my crown and remember whose I am. It's then when I have to reevaluate the worth of the Holy Spirit and how much I'm allowing the Holy Spirit to be at work in my life. And the more we practice this, the better we get at it until one day, we look in the mirror or into the face of another and we recognize the face of God.

“..it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.”