



+ YOU

Winter 2024
Owning a Faith that Matters

Sermon Title: Encountering Change

To be used with Session 1: Life-Changing Faith

Scripture: Acts 22:1-16

Connection with the Study: To complement the Bible Study “Life-changing Faith,” this sermon sets the stage for a series of messages on the faith of the Apostle Paul in his own words. This sermon zeroes in on his narrative concerning the encounter of the living Christ on the road to the city of Damascus. This encounter led Paul to a first step of faith that resulted in a dramatic change in his thinking and the direction of his life. This sermon will present an opportunity for listeners to also encounter the living Christ and take the first step on their own journey of faith.

Introduction

(Place a chair on the platform.) Let’s consider this object sitting on the platform. Most of us believe this is a chair. It looks like a chair. It feels like a chair. It smells like a chair. It probably tastes like a chair if you’re into tasting chairs. I believe this is a chair. But is this chair doing me any good? No, not really. What needs to happen to make this chair profitable in my life? I must sit on it. That is, I must place the full weight of my body on the chair and allow the chair to support me.

This is what faith is. Faith is placing the whole weight of my life in dependence on Jesus Christ and His death on my behalf. Faith is relying on the payment He made for my sins. It is trusting God exclusively in every aspect of my life. Today we begin a series of messages on living by faith. To guide us in that study, we will be looking at the very words of Paul the Apostle as he speaks of his own journey of faith. We begin with an understanding of how that journey of faith begins.

Renounce False Approaches to a Right Relationship with God (Acts 22:1-5)

Saul of Tarsus (later called Paul) was a Pharisee. As such, his entire mindset was that a right relationship with God came about from doing certain things—observing laws and rituals. In addition, Saul took great pride in his Jewish heritage. He was a part of God’s “chosen people” and, no doubt, firmly believed that this status made him right with God. He worked zealously to promote his chosen way of being right with God and worked in direct opposition to the new “Way” of Christianity that spoke of a right relationship with God that comes through complete dependence on what God has done for us through the atoning death of His Son, Jesus Christ. In doing so, Saul was pursuing a false approach to being right with God.

Unfortunately, many people are like Saul, relying on false approaches to a right relationship with God. Some believe their relationship with God is secure because of family relationships—their mother or father or grandparents were Christian. Or maybe they feel secure because they were raised in the church or have been baptized. These are false approaches to a saving relationship

with God. Trying to be good and do good is also a dead end. The Bible states very clearly that none of us can be good enough or do enough good things to put ourselves in a right relationship with God. The journey of faith must begin with a renunciation of anything we think we can do or possess that will put us right with God.

Paul spelled this out plainly in Titus 3:5 where he wrote that we are not saved based on righteous deeds that we have done but based on God's mercy and the regenerating power of God's Holy Spirit.

Recognize the Call of Jesus to a Right Relationship (Acts 22:6-10)

In his defense before the mob gathered against him in Jerusalem, Paul shared his life-changing encounter with the risen Christ. His encounter certainly was unique to him. Yet each person needs an encounter with Jesus Christ as they begin the journey of faith. Paul was confronted by his wrong thoughts and actions toward Christ. In that confrontation came the call of Jesus to a new attitude and new direction in his life. In the call of Jesus came a realization in the mind of Paul that he was wrong with God; that is, he was a sinner, and he needed a new approach to being put right with God.

God's call comes to all of us. Paul's response should be the response of each and every one of us: "What should I do, Lord?" With that response must come the recognition of the fact that we are sinners in need of a Savior. It is an acknowledgement that the various approaches we have taken to try to make ourselves right with God were all dead ends. Our response must include the affirmation that there is nothing that I can do to put myself in a saving relationship with God and that it is all dependent on what God did for me in the death of Jesus Christ. Salvation is all of God and nothing of us. Jesus took the initiative to call Paul. He takes the initiative to call to us as well.

Respond by Absolute Dependence on the Death of Jesus (Acts 22:10-16)

Paul's immediate response to the call of Jesus was a response of obedience. Paul was directed to make his way into Damascus. Even though he was temporarily blinded by the confrontation with Christ, Paul quickly directed his traveling companions to lead him into the city to the house of a man called Judas who lived on Straight Street (Acts 9:11). Acts 22:16 are the instructions given to Paul through Ananias that Paul willingly obeyed. Paul was setting aside the false approaches to salvation and embracing God's way of righteousness: total dependence on the atoning death of Jesus Christ to remove the guilt and penalty of sin.

One day we will all stand before the throne of God and in one way or another we will answer the question from God: "Why should I let you into heaven?" We can answer one of two ways: (1) something I've done or (2) something Jesus has done for me. I can stand before God and say, "Look at all I've done for you; look at how good I've been." The tragedy is that the Bible states that our works of righteousness are counted as filthy rags (Isa. 64:6). I don't know about you, but I don't want to stand before Holy God dressed in filthy rags. Instead, I want to stand before God dressed in the righteousness of Jesus Christ. That comes by depending on Christ's death to forgive us our sins and clothe us in Christ's righteousness.

Conclusion

What does it mean to “have faith in Jesus Christ?” What does it mean to “believe in Jesus?” It is certainly more than believing some facts about Jesus—He actually lived, He is God, He was a good teacher, and more. (Point to the chair referenced in the introduction.) I can believe this is a chair, but it does me no good unless I put the entire weight of my body in the chair. I can believe all I want concerning the facts of Jesus Christ, but it will do me no good. Instead, I need to “sit down” in Jesus Christ. One of the meanings of the Greek word for faith is to “rely on,” “to depend on,” “to lean heavily on.” That’s what belief or faith in Jesus Christ is all about. It is leaning on Him and depending on His work on Calvary to provide salvation for me. Not what I have done; rather it is what Jesus Christ has done for me. The life-long journey of faith begins with a response of surrender to the call of Jesus Christ.

Dr. Sam Crouch is retired from 52 years in ministry. Sam was educated at Baylor University and Southwestern Seminary. He and his wife live in Tucson, Arizona where Sam enjoys writing, reading, yardwork, and cats. His latest book is [Clearing the Fog: Gaining an Understanding and Appreciation of the Old Testament](#).