

# The Gospel of John

## Increasing our Faith

**John 3:22-36**

### **INTRODUCTION:**

During youth group on Thursday nights we are delving into the question "**Who is Jesus**"? Currently we are studying the steps of salvation and are covering "**believing**".

Ever since we started on this topic, God has put it on my heart to determine the difference between believing and faith.

Last Thursday we began to discuss the difference between believing and faith. For the youth that were there last Thursday, this will be a partial review for them as I am going to use the same illustration as they heard then.

This morning as we go through our scripture reading I want you to consider three things:

1. John the Baptist as an example of what faith looks like and how it works.
2. Jesus as the source for our faith.
3. The steps necessary to increase our faith.

### **All Stand and Read Scripture**

#### **John 3:22-36 (NASB)**

<sup>22</sup> After these things Jesus and His disciples came into the land of Judea, and there He was spending time with them and baptizing. <sup>23</sup> John also was baptizing in Aenon near Salim, because there was much water there; and *people* were coming and were being baptized— <sup>24</sup> for John had not yet been thrown into prison.

<sup>25</sup> Therefore there arose a discussion on the part of John's disciples with a Jew about purification. <sup>26</sup> And they came to John and said to him, "Rabbi, He who was with you beyond the Jordan, to whom you have testified, behold, He is baptizing and all are coming to Him." <sup>27</sup> John answered and said, "A man can receive nothing unless it has been given him from heaven. <sup>28</sup> You yourselves are my witnesses that I said, 'I am not the Christ,' but, 'I have been sent ahead of Him.' <sup>29</sup> He who has the bride is the bridegroom; but the friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly because of the bridegroom's voice. So this joy of mine has been made full. <sup>30</sup> He must increase, but I must decrease.

<sup>31</sup> "He who comes from above is above all, he who is of the earth is from the earth and speaks of the earth. He who comes from heaven is above all. <sup>32</sup> What He has seen and heard, of that He testifies; and no one receives His testimony. <sup>33</sup> He who has received His testimony has set his seal to *this*, that God is true. <sup>34</sup> For He whom God has sent speaks the words of God; for He gives the Spirit without measure. <sup>35</sup> The Father loves the Son and

has given all things into His hand. <sup>36</sup>He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.”

## Prayer

I would like to start by giving a brief definition of belief and faith.

"**Belief**" is an intellectual belief, while "**faith**" is a matter of *trust or confidence* based upon our beliefs that leads to **action**.

To explain the difference, let's start with belief. What does it mean?

**Belief** – An opinion or judgment in which a person is fully persuaded.

So our beliefs are things that we are thoroughly convinced of. Usually they are ideas or concepts that we gather through acquiring information and experience. Because of that, our beliefs can change over time as we gain more knowledge and experience more things throughout our lives.

What we believe may or may not require action. If you truly believed that your house was on fire, it would require action. You would do all you had time for to put out the fire without risking your life and notify the fire department of the fire.

Our beliefs can also change. When you smell the smoke and jump up to take care of your perceived house fire, you may discover that your next door neighbor was burning a pile of tires and your house is safe. Your need for action changes to no action required.

## **What Is Faith?**

The dictionary definition of Faith = (Belief x Action × Confidence)

The Bible also actually gives us a definition for faith.

## **Hebrews 11:1 (NASB)**

11 Now faith is the assurance of *things* hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.

As we read and hear God's word we begin to believe His truths and our faith grows. As we learn and believe more and more of His truths it helps us to see in greater clarity the evil in this world, our own humble position on this earth, the greatness of God, and a growing gratitude for his giving us this precious gift of faith.

Faith is "**the assurance of things hoped for**". This is not a wishful hope. It is a 100% assurance of hope. The kind of assurance that we have that the sun will rise every morning and set every evening until Jesus comes again. We have a confident hope for many things:

- That Christ successfully died for our sins.
- That He is coming again to bring us unto Himself.
- That heaven will be beyond our wildest expectations.
- That we will spend eternity with God in His glory and presence.

Our assured hope is an **expectation** that we will be rescued from this world. We believe

even what we cannot see because of the evidence that it is true.

This can be summed up in an illustration of Charles Blondin, a tightrope walker who asks a crowd if they believe that he can safely walk a wheelbarrow across Niagara Falls on a 1300 foot long, two inch diameter tightrope. **That is the length of 4 <sup>1/3</sup> football fields!** Many in the crowd were asked if they believed he could do this? At first very few believed. Over time most would believe he could. Then they were asked "Who is willing to get into the wheelbarrow"? Only those whose "belief" has reached the point of faith will get in.

Blondin crossed Niagara Falls in many different ways. His first crossing was in 1859.

- He once walked backward to Canada and returned to the U.S. pushing a wheelbarrow.
- Two weeks later, he somersaulted and back-flipped his way across, occasionally pausing to dangle from the cable by one hand.
- Shortly later he carried a man across on his back.
- He crossed at night.
- Another time he crossed with a blindfold on and a black sack over him depriving himself of sight.
- He crossed carrying a table and chair.
- In his most famous crossing, he carried a stove and utensils on his back, walked to the center of the cable, started a fire and cooked an omelet. When it was ready, he lowered the breakfast to passengers on deck of the Maid of the Mist.
- When he was 65 years old he carried his son and another man across on his back and made another omelet for the crowd.

By the time he gave his final performance, in 1896, it was estimated that Blondin had crossed Niagara Falls 300 times and walked more than 10,000 miles on his rope.

### **What would it take to agree to ride across Niagara Falls in a wheelbarrow pushed by Blondin?**

- Would just hearing about all of his accomplishments be enough?
- Would you want to see it for yourself many times?
- Would you ask Blondin how confident he was that it could be done.
- Would you insist that the two of you practice two feet off the ground? How many times? Maybe 100?
- Maybe you would see if **you** could even learn to emotionally handle high places like a water tower or on the edge of a high cliff.
- Would you do it just for **notoriety**? Is notoriety really worth the risk? After all, you might fall to your death.
- Then you might ask yourself "What is the risk verses reward?"
- Would you do it for a million dollars?
- Would you check to make sure the million dollars was available?
- What if you fell and died? Is the risk of receiving nothing sufficient to attempt the crossing?
- What if you were guaranteed that the million dollars would be given to your family if you fell and died? Would the risk finally be worth the reward?
- The youth say "**yes**", because if you succeed you and your family would be financially sound and you could give a lot of it to the Lord.
- Should you die you are with the Lord and your family would be financially sound.

When people were asked if they believed that Blondin could make it across Niagara Falls many at first bet against him. But as he consistently accomplished the feat, more and more, even if he was adding difficulty to the crossing such as pushing a wheelbarrow, would then say they thought he could do it.

Their belief was put to the test when they were asked if they would be willing to ride in the wheelbarrow. There is a difference between **simply believing** and **having to act** on that belief. All of a sudden their belief system had to greatly increase before they were confident enough to **act** on their belief and ride across on a wheelbarrow.

You will notice that before you were willing to act on your beliefs you HAD to be CONVINCED that the likelihood of making it across Niagara Falls was very probable. It required that you believe many things before you had the faith to act upon them.

## **BODY:**

### **I. AN EXAMPLE OF FAITH.**

Can you imagine how seemingly hard it would be to be selected by God to be a forerunner of Christ? To introduce the prophesied Messiah in person to the world? To be on the spot to fulfill the prophecies concerning himself and carry out his assignment from God? No pressure, right! This took great faith! John the Baptist was willing to take on the task knowing that if God called him to do the job, then despite his own weaknesses, God would cause it to happen. His **faith** could confidently say, "If God is with me, who can be against me?"

In a discourse about John the Baptist, Jesus honored the prophet with these words:

#### **Matthew 11:11a (NASB)**

***11 Truly I say to you, among those born of women there has not arisen anyone greater than John the Baptist!...***

The Gospels tell us that John certainly did **not** see himself as “great”—he did not see himself as worthy enough to baptize Jesus or even to untie His sandals.

The “greatness” that Jesus refers to concerning John has to do with John’s unique position in history, **not** with any special talent, holiness, or personal merit. In fact, immediately after stating that John is the greatest “among those born of women,” Jesus continues:

#### **Matthew 11:11b (NASB)**

***...Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.***

One reason Jesus called John the Baptist the “greatest” was that John held the honor of being chosen by God as the forerunner to the Messiah.

Yet John died without seeing the fullness of God’s plan in Christ. John never saw the crucifixion of Christ or His glorious resurrection. Yet even the “least in the kingdom of heaven” knows of these events and understands their meaning.

John the Baptist knew that his ministry would have to diminish and that Christ's ministry would have to increase. He never considered Christ as competition. He understood his role and stayed with God's plan.

## II. OUR SOURCE FOR FAITH.

The true source of our faith comes from God.

We know that God has to perform a work in us to enable us to come to Jesus.

### **John 6:44-47 (NASB)**

<sup>44</sup> No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up on the last day. <sup>45</sup> It is written in the prophets, 'And they shall all be **taught of God.**' Everyone who has **heard** and learned from the Father, comes to Me. <sup>46</sup> Not that anyone has seen the Father, except the One who is from God; He has seen the Father. <sup>47</sup> Truly, truly, I say to you, he who **believes** has eternal life.

Our source of faith is God. We read His Word which comes from Him and learn the truth. Too often we spend time and energy trying to increase our faith when Jesus said that's not really our problem. We need to read, pray, and plead with God to **give** us more faith.

Paul tells us that our faith comes from hearing.

### **Romans 10:17 (NASB)**

<sup>17</sup> So faith *comes* from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ.

We hear God's Word by reading the Bible, listening to sermons, going to youth groups and Bible study, from the witness of other Christians, and even from the Holy Spirit Himself with His "wee small voice" convicting us and guiding us in our Christian walk with God.

Our problem is really with unbelief, not a lack of faith.

The good news is that we can change our unbelief into belief. It's really a fairly simple process. We just need to become more fully persuaded of the truth instead of the misconceptions and lies that we are currently holding on to.

The more we expose our minds to the truth, the more we become persuaded and convinced of that truth. The best way to expose our minds to the truth is to study the Bible. The more time we spend exploring the truth of the Bible, the more our minds become convinced of that truth.

### **Colossians 3:2 (NASB)**

<sup>2</sup> Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth.

Do you want more faith? Then invest more time reading, studying, and thinking about God's Word. You'll find your faith will just grow as a result because it will change and increase your beliefs.

Not only is faith the assurance (or 100% confidence) of *things* hoped for but it is also "the conviction of things not seen". While faith is putting our trust in something we cannot see, it does not mean that there is no evidence for that faith. We believe there is a

God, not because we can see Him, but because we have plenty of evidence that He exists. We see God's creation which tells us there is a Creator. There are plenty of evidences through history and science which proclaim the accuracy of the Bible. While we cannot see God, we can have faith in Him because of the proof that He has given to us through history, science, nature and His Word.

### **III. HOW TO INCREASE OUR FAITH.**

Faith = (Belief x Action × Confidence)

Faith includes our beliefs, but it is bigger than that. Faith requires action. If it doesn't move us to do something or say something – actually take some kind of action – it's not really faith at all. James said it this way.

#### **James 2:17 (NASB)**

*<sup>17</sup> Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself.*

Until we take action, our “faith” is just a bunch of words. James says that unless faith produces action it is in fact dead, or not faith at all.

As a side note, some people get confused and turned around on this point and try to do good things to generate faith. However James didn't say the good things we do produce faith. He said our faith, if it is real and alive, will naturally move us to do good things.

The last part of that whole faith equation is confidence. Basically confidence is a measure of how firmly we hold to a particular belief based on knowledge or past experience.

### **CONCLUSION:**

#### **Putting It All Together**

Just as we had to generate a whole list of beliefs before we were willing to **climb into the wheelbarrow**, we also have to believe God's Word with enough confidence to take action. When we **spiritually** climb into the wheelbarrow, we exercise faith. And it doesn't take much of that faith to see huge things happen, even miraculous things.

Faith is not something we conjure up on our own, nor is it something we are born with, or something we can attain by works.

#### **Ephesians 2:8-9 (NASB)**

*<sup>8</sup> For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; <sup>9</sup> not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.*

**Faith is a gift from God**, not because we deserve it, have earned it, or are worthy to have it. It is not from ourselves; it is from God. It is not obtained by our power or our free will. Faith is simply given to us by God, along with His grace and mercy, according to His holy plan and purpose, and because of that, He gets all the glory.

#### **The Family of God.**