

“Lord, I Believe; Help My Unbelief!”

Compiled by Paul R. Blake

Introduction:

- A. Mark. 9:24
- B. Most Americans believe in God but don't know the religious tenets of their own denomination or the tenets of truth in the scriptures. (Cathy Lynn Grossman, USA TODAY, U.S. Religious Knowledge Survey, released by the Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life)
 - 1. 86% believe in God or a higher power, but don't know own traditions or of neighbors across the street or around the globe.
 - 2. Among 3,412 adults surveyed, only 2% correctly answered at least 29 of 32 questions on the Bible, major religious figures, beliefs and practices. The average score was 16 correct (50%).
 - 3. Atheists score highest in religious knowledge
 - 4. 55% of Catholic respondents knew the core teaching that the bread and wine in the Mass become the body and blood of Christ (transubstantiation), and are not merely symbols.
 - 5. 19% of Protestants knew their denomination's basic tenet of salvation is through faith alone.
 - 6. 55% of all respondents knew the Golden Rule isn't one of the Ten Commandments; 45% could name all four Gospels.
 - 7. Fewer than half (47%) knew that the Dalai Lama is a Buddhist; 27% knew most people in Indonesia are Muslims.
 - 8. "People say, 'I have a personal connection with God and that's really all I need to know.'" Reports Pew's Alan Cooperman, co-author
 - 9. But religion, as a force in history and a motivator in present times, "has consequences in the world," he adds, "whatever your faith or lack of faith, can shape your role as a citizen in the public square."
- C. The top scoring groups were atheists/agnostics, Jews and Mormons. These tiny groups, adding up to less than 7% of Americans, scored well on world religion and U.S. constitutional questions.
 - 1. The single question most people answered correctly: 89% knew that according to rulings by the U.S. Supreme Court, public school teachers cannot lead their classes in prayer. But only 36% of respondents knew teachers are allowed to teach classes comparing world religions, and just 23% knew that teachers can read from the Bible as an example of literature.
 - 2. In contrast, 54% could name the Quran as Islam's holy text.
- D. In a nation of un-learned believers, how long will it be before we become a nation of un-believers?
 - 1. How do we increase our own faith, let alone the faith of a decaying nation?

I. MARK 9:14-29

- A. Coming down from the Mount of Transfiguration with His three disciples, Jesus finds His other disciples embroiled in controversy, surrounded by a multitude, disputing with scribes
 - 1. The controversy involved a failed attempt to heal a deaf-mute boy prone to seizures, whose father desperately wanted him healed, whom the disciples of Jesus had not been able to heal
- B. Jesus chides His disciples for their lack of faith - Mark 9:19
 - 1. As the boy is brought to Jesus, he has a spirit-induced seizure - 20
 - 2. The father describes how this happened often since childhood - 21-22
 - 3. A chaotic scene to say the least: Disciples embarrassed and arguing with scribes, father pleading for help with his son, the son writhing from the seizure.
 - 4. Imagine Jesus going from the top of the mountain glorified by the transfiguration et al, only to come down the mountain to this mess
- C. Jesus responds to the plea of the father - Mark 9:23-24
 - 1. If the father can believe, all things are possible
 - 2. The father professes faith, asks for more faith
 - 3. "I believe. I have faith. I do put confidence in you, though I know that my faith is not as strong as it should be. Give me strength and will to put entire confidence in you." (Barnes Notes)
 - 4. We should incorporate this attitude in our own prayers, for when we are struggling with doubt, we believe, but our faith needs his gracious help
 - 5. "Help mine unbelief, help me to a pardon for it, help me with power against it; help out what is wanting in my faith with thy grace, thy strength (Matthew Henry)
- D. Jesus heals the deaf-mute boy - Mark 9:25-27
 - 1. Jesus privately informs the disciples of the reason for their failure
 - a. Mark 9:28-29
 - 2. They were relying on themselves before, but what does prayer and fasting do that they could not accomplish?
 - a. Prayer not only invokes God's help, it also reminds them that it is by God's power that it will be done, and fasting is the means whereby they measure and manifest their own seriousness and sincerity by humbling themselves

II. THE APPLICATION

- A. "all things are possible to him who believes"
 - 1. As one put it: "All things are possible, but they must be on the menu"
- B. The importance of faith - Heb. 11:6; Matt. 8:13, 9:22, 29
 - 1. It will help to pray: "Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!"
 - 2. But our requests and God's responses to our faith will always be subject to God's will - Paul's thorn in the flesh
- C. The power of prayer: Our faith, while important, is not always sufficient
 - 1. God must be involved, for only with Him all things possible - Luke 1:37
 - 2. Thus faith must be joined with prayer - James 5:14; 1John 5:14

D. The role of fasting

1. Fasting was often joined with prayer to incur God's favor - Ezra 8:21-23
2. Fasting served to humble oneself before God - Psalm 35:13, 69:10
3. Humility calls for God's favor - Isa. 57:15, 66:1-2
4. Therefore, people often served God with fasting and prayer
 - a. Luke 2:36-37; Acts 13:2-3

Conclusion:

- A. In a nation of ignorance, unbelief is not far behind.
- B. Among disciples who think they can take care of themselves, failure follows
- C. In Christians who fail, falling away waits in the wings
- D. Jesus answer to all is grow in faith, be steadfast in prayer, surrender whatever it takes to succeed