

I Am Convinced

2 Timothy 1:1-14

Introduction

You might call the biblical region of Caesarea Philippi “the Hilton Head of its day.” It was a resort-like area where people went to get away from the hustle and hassle of their lives. It was also the sort of place a company might take its management team for a business retreat. You know, get the staff together away from home and talk about the important stuff.

It was located in the foothills of Mount Hermon, a few miles north of the Sea of Galilee. It had a beautiful water spring near it, the largest water source to River Jordan.

- Although this region was only a short distance from Galilee, where people worshipped the God of the Bible, Caesarea Philippi was a place where immorality and pagan worship was rampant.
 - Maybe more Las Vegas than Hilton Head.
- Among other gods, it was the religious center for worshipping the Greek God known as Pan.

According to the Gospels, Jesus went to Caesarea Philippi one time ... at least there is only one recorded instance of such a trip. It is described in both Matthew 16 and Mark 8 – same trip, two recordings. As I described above, Jesus took His management team there (the 12 disciples) so He could talk to them about a very important issue. The Gospel writers record that once the caravan arrived He asked them:

Who do people say I am? (Matthew 16:13)

There were a number of different answers that day – all of which were wrong, of course.

Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets. (Matthew 16:14)

But when Jesus asked the personal application question:

“But what about you?” he asked. “Who do you say I am?” (Matthew 16:15)

And as you might recall, Peter confidently and boldly responded:

You are the Christ (Messiah), the Son of the living God. (Matthew 16:16)

Who is Jesus ... really? Who do people say that He is? For us at Grace Church, it is still a valid and important question today as we seek to fulfill our mission as Christians in this current culture.

- Who do YOU say He is? Who do the PEOPLE around us say He is?

A few years ago, the George Barna Research group surveyed a broad range of Americans, asking them the same question that Jesus asked His disciples 2000 years

ago: Who is Jesus Christ to you? The results were quite interesting ... and in some cases more than a little bit disturbing.

What I am about to share with you is important – because the answer to that question is the essence of the Gospel this church and other faithful Christian churches preach and proclaim. Here are five popular beliefs that came out of that survey:

1. The Vast Majority of Americans Believe Jesus Was a Real Person

That's not too surprising. Jesus Christ has made cameo appearances in hundreds of pop culture places, from *The Da Vinci Code* to *South Park*. But, although the character of Jesus has certainly been fictionalized, satirized and mythologized over the centuries, the vast majority of Americans still believe that Jesus was an historical figure – someone who actually lived in the area around Jerusalem 2000 years ago.

The Barna survey showed that more than nine out of 10 adults say Jesus Christ was a real person who actually lived (92%). While the percentages dip slightly among younger generations—for example, only 87 percent of Millennials agree Jesus actually lived—Americans are still very likely to believe the man, Jesus Christ, once walked the earth.

2. Younger Generations Are Increasingly Less Likely to Believe Jesus Was God

The historical fact of Jesus may not be in question for most Americans, but people are much less confident in the divinity of Jesus – that is, whether or not Jesus was God. Most adults—not quite six in 10—do believe Jesus was God (56%), while about one-quarter say he was only a religious or spiritual leader like Mohammed or the Buddha (26%). The remaining one in six say they aren't sure whether Jesus was divine (18%).

Millennials are the only generation among whom fewer than half believe Jesus was God (48%). About one-third of young adults (35%) say instead that Jesus was merely a religious or spiritual leader, while 17 percent aren't sure what he was.

In each older generation, the belief in Jesus as divine is more common—55 percent of Gen-Xers, 58 percent of Boomers and nearly two-thirds of Elders (62%) believe Jesus was God.

3. Americans Are Divided on Whether Jesus Was Sinless

Perhaps it is a reflection of their questions about Jesus' divinity, but Americans are divided on whether Jesus committed any sins during his earthly life. About half of Americans agree, either strongly or somewhat, that while he lived on earth, Jesus Christ was human and committed sins like other people (52%). Just less than half disagree, either strongly or somewhat, that Jesus committed sins while on earth (46%), and 2 percent aren't sure.

Similar to other trends in perceptions of Jesus, Millennials are more likely to believe Jesus committed sins while he was on earth—56% of Millennials believe so. Gen-Xers, Boomers

and Elders are all similar to the national average when it comes to beliefs about Jesus' fallibility—they are almost evenly split on whether Jesus sinned while he lived on earth.

4. Most Americans Say They Have Made a Commitment to Jesus Christ

On the whole, Americans are still committed to Jesus. The act of making a personal commitment to Jesus—often seen as the “first step” in becoming a Christian—is a step that more than six in 10 Americans say they have taken and, moreover, that commitment is still important in their life today.

While the majority of Americans report such a commitment, some groups are significantly more likely to have done so than others. Women, for example, are more likely than men to have made a personal commitment to Jesus (68% compared to 56%, respectively).

White Americans are the least likely ethnic group to have committed to Jesus: Only six in 10 white Americans report having done so (60%), compared to eight in 10 black Americans (80%) and nearly two-thirds of all non-white Americans (65%).

The more money people make, the less likely they are to have committed to Jesus: Those making more than \$100K per year are significantly less likely (53%) to have made such a commitment than those making between \$50K and \$100K (63%) or those making less than \$50K (65%).

And, of course, Millennials are much less likely than any other group to have made a personal commitment to Jesus that is still important in their life today. Fewer than half of Millennials say they have made such a commitment (46%), compared to six in 10 Gen-Xers (59%), two-thirds of Boomers (65%) and seven in 10 Elders (71%).

5. People Are Conflicted between “Jesus” and “Good Deeds” as the Way to Heaven

Among adults who have made a personal commitment to Jesus, most also believe that Jesus is the only way to heaven. When given several beliefs about the afterlife to choose from, nearly two-thirds of those who have made a personal commitment to Jesus say they believe that after they die, they will go to heaven because they have confessed their sins and accepted Jesus Christ as their savior (63%). Only 2 percent of adults who report a personal commitment to Jesus say they will not go to heaven. About one in seven admit they don't know what will happen after they die (15%).

Overall, roughly two out of five Americans have confessed their sinfulness and professed faith in Christ (a group Barna classifies as “born again Christians”).

Millennials are less likely to believe that Jesus is the path to Heaven than are other generations. Among Millennials who have made a personal commitment to Jesus, only 56 percent say they believe they will go to heaven because they have confessed their sins and accepted Jesus Christ as their Savior. This percentage climbs to two-thirds of Gen-Xers (64%), six in 10 Boomers (62%) and nearly seven in 10 among Elders (68%).

Many adults believe, however, that they will go to heaven as a result of their good works. Broadly speaking, this is the most common perception among Americans who have never made a commitment to Jesus—and it is also quite common among self-identified Christians. In this category, people believe they will go to heaven because they have tried to obey the Ten Commandments (5%), as a result of being basically a good person (8%), or on the grounds that God loves all people and will not let them perish (7%).

If you want to study this further – and see better pictures – just Google “George Barna Research Five Popular Beliefs About Jesus.”

All around Timothy and all around us today there are challenges and pressures to believe something other than what the Scriptures teach. And if we don't know what the truth is, we are susceptible to believing anything.

Today marks the beginning of a new sermon series titled “I Am Convinced.” We will look at the foundational truths of Scripture, so that we can know what it is we believe. And as we KNOW we can move forward in faith because we are convinced!

When the Apostle Paul wrote to his protégé Timothy in our second lesson for today, he gave Timothy three challenges that work for us as well.

CHALLENGE #1: FAN THE FLAME

You see it in verse 6:

I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you (2 Timothy 1:6)

We have all been given gifts by God – gifts that have been given for the purpose of advancing the kingdom of God.

- According to Paul, using those gifts is the public demonstration of what you believe about Jesus.
- As we use those gifts, the Holy Spirit works in and through us to accomplish the will of God.

CHALLENGE #2: DO NOT BE ASHAMED

Verse 8:

So do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord or of me his prisoner. Rather, join with me in suffering for the gospel, by the power of God. (2 Timothy 2:8)

Timothy was the pastor of the church at Ephesus. And those people knew that Timothy was Paul's friend and co-laborer, but Paul was now a Roman prisoner! “Don't be ashamed of me or of the Gospel!” Paul admonished. “Our suffering is all a part of our heavenly calling as ministers.”

When Christians face challenges to what they believe, they suffer with Christ (Phil. 3:10).

- The same power that saves us also strengthens us for the battle.
- Paul emphasized that everything that happens is a work of God's grace in us, so if God permits us to suffer what right have we to complain or quit!
- "God has a purpose in mind," Paul advised. "Let Him work out that purpose."

CHALLENGE #3: KEEP THE FAITH

Verse 13:

What you heard from me, keep as the pattern of sound teaching, with faith and love in Christ Jesus. (2 Timothy 1:13)

In other words, measure that the world says by what the Scriptures say ... by what the church has historically taught

- For churches like ours, that is the purpose of using creeds and catechisms.
- We want to teach the same thing that the church has always taught.

APPLICATION

What an encouragement it is to know that Christ is faithful and able to keep His own!

I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him until that day. (2 Timothy 1:12)

"I know whom I have believed!" was Paul's confidence—not "I hope" or "I think."

That is our goal too.

Amen.