

WHY OFFICIALS & SOLDIERS BELIEVED IN JESUS

Jn 4:43-54; Mt 8:5-13

I. THEY'D HEARD ABOUT HIM (as curious creatures, we're always interested in "news")

- A. St Paul, in Ro 10:14, asks "how shall they believe if they have not heard"
- B. The Official (probably a Jew serving under Herod Antipas, the ruler of Galilee), had heard about Jesus' recent activity in Judea—cleansing Temple? unrecorded miracles? teachings?
 - 1. Sick son prompted journey to find Jesus in Cana
 - 2. Human needs—food, shelter, health, etc—often provide initial step, coming to Christ
 - a. How ought "health care" be central to Church's ministry?
 - b. Yet it seems miracles, not social services, leads to faith in Christ
- C. The Centurion (possibly a "God-fearing" Gentile like Cornelius, who came to Christ via Peter's witness), in Capernaum, fully aware of Jesus' renown
 - 1. Concern for paralyzed servant—unlike some masters, compassionate
 - 2. Roman soldiers often positively portrayed & receptive to the Gospel—on what basis?
 - a. As disciplined men ("subject to orders") aware of higher authority? Stoic side to Gospel?
 - b. As warriors, aware of mortality? Martyrdom basic to Gospel?
- D. How Ought we today spread "good news"?
 - 1. Elite media? social media?
 - 2. Mass evangelism? personal evangelism?
 - 3. Educational materials? educational institutions?

II. THEY SOUGHT HIM OUT

- A. Nobleman goes to Cana—making personal effort, consciously questing
- B. Centurion goes about Capernaum—taking initiative, looking for healer
- C. Clearly everyone has a personal responsibility re his own salvation—must "walk in the light"
 - 1. Willful ignorance culpable—cf. Frederick Bastiat re "no absolutes" folly
 - 2. Honesty/humility re condition, i.e. needing help
 - 3. Aware of, acknowledging, rightful Source

III. THEY ASKED FOR HIS HELP

- A. Official "begged" Jesus to help him—rather like Naaman seeking out Elisha (II Kings 5), so too Herod's official (upper class) willing to ask a common laborer (Jesus the carpenter) for help
- B. Centurion "pleaded" with Jesus to heal his servant—not too proud to plead!
- C. Proper posture re Christ: humble (i.e. down-to-earth honesty)
 - 1. Rightly recognizing Jesus' position and power
 - 2. Abandoning "self-sovereignty"—the "oldest religion"
 - 3. AA prerequisite—bottom-out acknowledgement re need for "higher power"

IV. THEY BELIEVED HIS WORD

- A. Official believed (after Jesus warned re "signs") and went home, perhaps thinking: "I believe, LORD help my unbelief."
- B. Centurion's response: "only speak a word" elicited certainty commended by Jesus—"great faith"
- C. Taking Jesus *at His Word* crucial factor
 - 1. Reason: no other ever spoke as did He! Arresting statements in Gospels!
 - 2. Faith: trusting Him implicitly. Gospels testify to His trustworthiness.
 - 3. Heart assurance, inner confirmation re rightness of His teaching, commands, etc.

V. THEY CONFIRMED HIS EFFICACY

- A. Healings took place at distance, when Jesus spoke
 - 1. Official's son, it was reported, "lives" because Jesus had spoken
 - 2. Centurion's servant, simultaneous with Jesus' pronouncement, was healed
- B. Faith's confirmation—"proof in the pudding"—illustrated throughout history
 - 1. George Mueller's orphanages
 - 2. Hudson's Taylor's mission

VI. THEY ENCOURAGED OTHERS TO BELIEVE HIM

- A. Official's "whole household" converted—importance of masculine leaders
- B. Centurion's example extended by Jesus—many will come from east and west
- C. Corporate dimension to faith: Church/ecclesia vital; Missionary lesson re chiefs

Stanton, Glenn G., *The Myth of the Dying Church*

“But I have good news for you: IT’S SIMPLY NOT TRUE! It is important to understand what is really, truly happening with the church today. In this book, I explore and present in an understandable way data from leading academic sources today that provides a broad array of the best evidence for significant hopefulness. Our exploration will also help us understand how and why so many smart and well-intentioned people have gotten it so wrong in their understanding of the state of the church today. Let me provide you with a quick summary of the truth on the matter in plain language:

1. Liberal churches are hemorrhaging members. Churches that are bailing on Christian orthodoxy— those denying the deity of Christ; rejecting the reality of sin; doubting the historical reality of Christ’s death and resurrection; and embracing abortion, gay, and gender politics— are all in a drastic free fall. People are leaving those churches as though the buildings were on fire. They can’t get out fast enough.
2. Biblical churches are holding strong. Churches that are faithfully preaching, teaching, and practicing biblical truths and conservative theology are holding stable overall. Some are seeing steady growth and others are exploding. No small number are pressed thin with the good problem of figuring out how to manage their growing crowds. You likely know of a few in your own community; perhaps you even attend one of these churches.
3. Church attendance is at an all-time high. More Americans, in raw numbers and as a percentage of the population, attend church today than at any other time in our nation’s history, including the colonial days.
4. More young adults attend biblically faithful churches today than attended nearly fifty years ago. According to some of the best sociological data, the percentage of young adults regularly attending evangelical and nondenominational churches has roughly doubled between 1972 and today.
5. Atheism and agnosticism are not growing wildly. Both have grown in the last few years, but they are an extreme minority, counting for just about 7 percent of all US adults.
6. The Nones are not new unbelievers.
7. Global growth of Christianity is booming. The number of Christians in the world today is larger than it has ever been in the history of the world and will continue to increase through the coming decades. The story here is incredibly positive. Scholars studying this phenomenon use words like explosive and mushrooming to describe Christianity’s global growth, particularly in China and Southern Asia, Africa, and South America” (pp. xxi-xx).

“Greg Smith has long worked as the associate director of research for the Pew Research Center, one of the most trusted and respected institutions on this topic. In an interview with Christianity Today a few years ago, Smith was asked by Dr. Ed Stetzer of Wheaton College if evangelicalism was dying. He said simply, “Absolutely not,” and went on to explain, “There’s nothing in these data to suggest that Christianity is dying. That Evangelicalism is dying. That Catholicism is dying. That is not the case whatsoever” (p. 13).

“The Indiana University/ Harvard research, in agreement with Pew’s Greg Smith, says that ‘evangelicals are not on the decline’ but actually “grew from 1972 when they were 18 percent of the population, to a steady level of about 28 percent from 1989 to 2016” (p. 17).

“In contrast, the Indiana/ Harvard research showed that mainline Protestants⁵ have declined precipitously from 35 percent of the American population in 1972 to 12 percent of the population in 2016. This is Chicken Little territory. The decline of the mainline churches began in 1960s and early 1970s as they started to question and even officially change their positions on historic Christian basics like the existence of miracles, the reality of sin, and the actual atoning death of Christ and His resurrection, as well jettisoning biblical convictions about sex, gender issues, and abortion” (p. 18).

“In this report, Pew presented a very detailed chart of the growth and decline by Christian denominations as a percentage of the overall US population. The Southern Baptist Convention churches were the only conservative ones that showed a decline between 2007 and 2014” (p. 28).

“He [Dr. Kosmin] explained, ‘The rise of nondenominational Christianity is probably one of the strongest [religious growth] trends in the last two decades’ in the United States. He added that the percentage gain is ‘many times larger’ compared to those we have come to know as the nones” (p. 30).