

Trends

A recent survey found that scientists, on the whole, are much less religious than the general public. In fact, scientists are roughly half as likely as the general public to believe in God or a higher power. According to the poll, just over half of scientists (51%) believe in some form of deity or higher power; specifically, 33% of scientists say they believe in God, while 18% believe in a universal spirit or higher power. By contrast, 95% of Americans believe in some form of deity or higher power. Specifically, more than eight-in-ten Americans (83%) say they believe in God and 12% believe in a universal spirit or higher power. Finally, the poll of scientists finds that four-in-ten scientists (41%) say they do not believe in God or a higher power, while the poll of the public finds that only 4% of Americans share this view.

- via Pew Research

Psalm 14:1: "The fool has said in his heart, 'There is no God.'"

Sentence Sermons

"There have been men before now who got so interested in proving the existence of God that they came to care nothing for God Himself."

—C.S. Lewis

Matthew 22:37: "Jesus said to him, 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.'"

News & Notes

Please pray for those mentioned in the announcements after services and others listed on the bulletin board in the foyer of the church building.

Please pray for my son and his wife as they seek to start a new congregation in northern Michigan. Please pray Ryan can raise enough support to do this important work. Please read his recent report on the foyer bulletin board.

Please pray for one another! "comfort each other and edify one another, just as you also are doing." 1 Thessalonians 5:11

Please pray for Rody and Tessie Gumapd. They are suffering from a variety of health problems.

Please keep sisters Virginia Brown and Wilma Cardwell in your prayers. Their faithfulness sets such a good example and gives encouragement to all! Ditto for Al (our Barnabas!).

Pray for all the lost souls, especially those in the greater Bloomington area. Pray that Westside might be an influence for good in this community.

Pray for the all of our students: elementary, secondary and college. Our young people are now back to school.

There are many needy saints, including preachers! Can you help?! Let me know.

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Words of Life

Westside
church of Christ

"Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life."

John 6:68



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"Redemption Point"

Craig Thomas

I'm an avid collector of quotations. The really good ones always make me say, "Why didn't I think of that?" I recently found one of those while reading the book *Fire In My Heart*, when Connie Adams described much modern preaching as being a lot...

"Like grapenuts, it is neither grapes nor nuts. It is heavy on Lucado, Swindoll, McGregor, Baxter, and the like, but light on the prophets, Jesus, Peter, Paul, James, and John." (*Changing Attitudes*, p. 23)

He went on rightly describing such preaching as nothing more than "spiritual pep talks" that result in the hearers knowing "little basic truth." He also pointed out a prime fallacy of this "watered-down preaching" being its dedication to the mindset that we "accentuate the positive" and eliminate the negative from our preaching.

Brother Adam's thoughts really struck me as I recently prepared for a class on Ezekiel chapters 8 and 9. But first, perhaps a bit of historical background is in order. Those chapters were written after the first and second captives had been taken from Judah to Babylon in 605 and 597 B.C. In fact, Ezekiel was one of the many taken captive by Nebuchadnezzar in 597 B.C. (2 Kgs. 24:14; Ezek. 1:1-2) Judah and Jerusalem had been repeatedly told by God to repent or face the coming doom (e.g., Jeremiah's 40+ year's of preaching). These people should have known better since they had seen their northern brethren carried away as punishment for similar transgressions by the Assyrians over a century earlier (Jer. 3:6-10). God's next move was to send the Babylonians against them for a third and final time with a horrific siege. In fact, the Bible records a nearly two year siege that culminated in 586 B.C. (2 Kgs. 25) The gravity and extent of the siege can be seen as the people of Jerusalem even resorted to cannibalism (Lam. 2:20; 4:10; Ezek. 5:10).

The really sad part is that all of this destruction, devastation, and degrada-

tion was avoidable. Time and time again, even unto the eleventh hour, God called these people to repentance through the preaching of the prophets (e.g., Jer. 22:1-9). Furthermore, the message of the prophets was not new, for God had warned of such potential punishments from the nation's very beginning (e.g., Deut. 28; Lev. 26). But all of God's words and all the preaching was to no avail as the people hardened their hearts, stopped their ears, and seared their consciences (Ezek. 3:7; 1 Tim. 4:2). As a result, God's patience ran out. There would be no more calls to repentance. No more divine hand extended in tender mercy. No more prophets sent preaching either the thunderous message of doom or the compassionate message of potential forgiveness. Instead, God said, *"Therefore I also will act in fury. My eye will not spare nor will I have pity; and though they cry in My ears with a loud voice, I will not hear them."* (Ezek. 8:18) As Jim McGuiggan said, "Judah had passed 'Redemption Point.'" (Ezekiel, p. 10) What a situation of utter hopelessness! (Cf. Matt. 13:42; 24:51; 25:30)

No doubt God gave these people their just deserts. However, Ezekiel was still bowed down with grief as the slaughter even extended to the women and children (Ezek. 9:6). The text tells us Ezekiel fell on his face *"and cried out, and said, 'Ah, Lord GOD! Will You destroy all the remnant of Israel in pouring out Your fury on Jerusalem?'"* (Ezek. 9:8) I believe Ezekiel reacted as any true and tenderhearted man or woman of God would react. Jeremiah expressed this attitude when he said, *"My eyes overflow with rivers of water for the destruction of the daughter of my people."* (Lam. 3:48) Even God, who sends such judgments, takes *"no pleasure in the death of the wicked"* (Ezek. 33:11).

There are so many lessons we can learn from this passage. And, certainly the Lord expects us to learn something from it! *"For whatever things were written before*

"For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope." (Rom. 15:4)

"Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come." (1 Cor. 10:11)

One important thing I learn is that brother Adams was right: much preaching is "neither grapes nor nuts"! Any man who would call himself a gospel preacher or an evangelist and would not—OFTEN—include the message of doom God promises sinners (Matt. 7:13-14; 2 Thess. 1:7-9; Rev. 20:15; 21:8) should quit preaching...immediately! Men, women, boys, and girls need a frequent and clarion wake-up call to the ultimate reality that *"we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad"* (2 Cor. 5:10). Sooner, rather

than later, we all may pass beyond our own personal "Redemption Point." A point beyond which we find only troubled waters and treacherous shoals; a point beyond which there is no mercy but only *"a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries"* (Heb. 10:27). The deceitfulness of sin can easily lead us to sear our conscience and steer our spiritual ship beyond that fateful point!

Any gospel preacher worth his salt will remind us often and vividly of this unsavory, but profoundly important fact. We need preachers brave and faithful enough to keep this aspect of God's character and our relationship with Him ever fresh in our minds. To ever remind us that *"It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God."* (Heb. 10:31) So fresh in our minds that each time we are tempted to sin we recall such passages as Ezekiel 8 and 9. So fresh in our minds that anytime we are enticed to indulge the lusts of the flesh, forsake the assembly, or disobey in anyway; we instead fall on our faces and pray for that precious *"way of escape"* and the courage to take it (1 Cor. 10:13). So fresh in our minds we can't wait to teach God's truth to our children, to our family, to our friends, to our neighbors, and, yea, to anyone who will listen.

I thank God for those faithful few gospel preachers willing to ignore the popular trend to "accentuate the positive and eliminate the negative." I love a "positive" message as well as the next man, but I don't find such in the *"smooth words and flattering speech"* offered by the many (Rom. 16:18). Instead, I find it a much more "positive" message when I'm reminded I have my own personal "Redemption Point" beyond which I dare not pass. Bless those who warn me to steer clear.

Water Fountains And Donuts

Larry Ray Hafley

"Larry, give me a few ideas on the old argument of the liberal that if you can have a water fountain, you can have donuts or a common meal. I have some of the standard Scriptures, but need a neat illustration and I thought you might have something on this. Any help would be appreciated."

REPLY: As to the water cooler justifying donuts, ask them if a nursery, where babies are fed and allowed to sleep, would justify the church going into the "Bed 'n Breakfast" business. Would rest rooms justify pay toilets? Does a coat rack justify a clothing store? Does the fact that children play tag in the parking lot justify building a gymnasium? Does a bulletin board in the vestibule, where meetings are posted and advertised, authorize the church to go into the advertising business?

If the water cooler authorizes donuts, why did Jesus react as he did in John 6 to those who sought him for the loaves and fishes? If a church had no water cooler, would it then be unscriptural for the church to provide donuts?