

Mark 9:14-24  
September 2, '18

“DON'T STOP BELIEVIN'”

FOR THOSE WHO MAY NOT KNOW THE REST OF THE STORY, THE ANSWER IS “YES” - JESUS *DID* HEAL THIS MAN'S SON.

I HAD US STOP PRIOR TO THAT HEALING, THOUGH, BECAUSE I DON'T THINK THE HEALING ITSELF IS THE MOST IMPORTANT LESSON FOR US TO TAKE FROM THIS STORY.

I REALLY THINK IT'S THE VERSE WITH WHICH WE ENDED – THE ONE THAT GIVES US THAT HONEST CONFESSION FROM THE BOY'S FATHER – “*I BELIEVE – HELP MY UNBELIEF!*”

THESE ARE PROBABLY WORDS THAT MOST OF YOU KNOW.

YOU KNOW THESE ARE WORDS FROM THE BIBLE BUT I IMAGINE MOST OF YOU WOULDN'T HAVE BEEN ABLE TO SAY IN WHICH *BOOK* OF THE BIBLE THEY'RE FOUND.

THEY ARE WORDS THAT YOU HAVE, PERHAPS, REPEATED YOURSELF ON OCCASION IN YOUR OWN STRUGGLES WITH FAITH.

THESE WORDS HAVE ALWAYS BEEN AMONG MY FAVORITE WORDS IN THE BIBLE.

I LOVE THE HONESTY OF THIS MAN.

I LOVE HIS WILLINGNESS TO TRUTHFULLY TELL JESUS THAT HE'S STRUGGLING TO BELIEVE IN HIM – STRUGGLING TO BELIEVE THAT JESUS REALLY CAN HELP HIM & HIS SON.

THERE'S SOMETHING I FIND INTERESTING ABOUT THESE WORDS, THOUGH.

WHEN YOU READ THIS STORY IN THE OTHER TWO SYNOPTIC GOSPELS – MATTHEW & LUKE – THOSE WORDS AREN'T THERE.

NOW THIS SEEMS ODD TO ME.

**MARK WAS THE FIRST OF THE GOSPELS & WE KNOW THAT MATTHEW & LUKE BOTH FOLLOW HIS OUTLINE & VERY CLEARLY HAD A COPY OF HIS GOSPEL OR SOME KNOWLEDGE OF IT WHEN THEY WROTE THEIRS.**

**ORDINARILY, BOTH MATTHEW & LUKE EXPAND ON WHAT MARK HAS WRITTEN.**

**THEY MAKE HIS STORIES LONGER – USUALLY PROVIDING MORE DETAILS THAN MARK OFFERS.**

**BUT HERE IT'S EXACTLY THE OPPOSITE.**

**MARK INCLUDES THIS ENTIRE EXCHANGE BETWEEN JESUS & THE GRIEVING FATHER WHILE MATTHEW & LUKE INCLUDE NONE OF IT.**

**I HAVE ALWAYS BEEN BAFFLED AS TO WHY.**

**THIS PAST WEEK, I DECIDED TO GO TO SOMEONE WHO KNOWS A LOT MORE ABOUT THIS STUFF THAN I DO – I WENT TO OUR SON DEREK AT THE PITTSBURGH THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY.**

**I EMAILED HIM & ASKED FOR HIS THOUGHTS.**

**HERE'S WHAT HE WROTE BACK:**

***I FIND MYSELF WONDERING LESS WHY MARK INCLUDES IT AND MORE WHY MATTHEW AND LUKE DON'T.***

***WITHOUT SPECULATING AS TO THEIR REASONS, I TYPICALLY APPROACH ANOMALIES LIKE THIS IN MARK WITH CARE.***

***MARK IS SO SHORT AND COMPACT, ANYTIME HE INCLUDES SPECIFIC DETAILS - COLORS, PHYSICAL DESCRIPTIONS, AWKWARD QUOTATIONS - HE DOES IT ON PURPOSE.***

***SO REGARDLESS OF WHY MATTHEW AND LUKE LEAVE IT OUT, MARK UNCHARACTERISTICALLY INCLUDES THIS DETAIL.***

**HE GIVES UP VALUABLE SPACE FOR THIS PHRASE, WHICH MEANS IT'S IMPORTANT, WHICH MEANS IT'S WORTHY OF OUR ATTENTION.**

**SO TIME SPENT CONSIDERING THIS FATHER'S PRAYER WILL BE A WORTHY INVESTMENT.**

**THOSE ARE MY THOUGHTS.**

**I THINK THAT PHRASE IS CRITICAL FOR THE GOSPEL.**

**THINK ABOUT THE SHORTER ENDING OF MARK. THE PARADOX OF UNBELIEVING BELIEF IS SOMETHING OF A THEME FOR HIM.**

**“THE PARADOX OF UNBELIEVING BELIEF.”**

**IF WE'RE HONEST ABOUT IT, ISN'T THAT THE PARADOX WE ALL EXPERIENCE.**

**WE STRUGGLE WITH MATTERS OF FAITH BECAUSE – WELL, BECAUSE WE'RE SUPPOSED TO STRUGGLE WITH MATTERS OF FAITH.**

**IF WE DIDN'T STRUGGLE WITH IT – IF IT WAS ALL VERY CLEAR & VERY SIMPLE & VERY STRAIGHTFORWARD – IT WOULDN'T BE FAITH.**

**AND WE ALL KNOW HOW MUCH EASIER IT IS TO MAINTAIN OUR FAITH WHEN LIFE IS GOING ALONG SWIMMINGLY FOR US.**

**WHEN EVERYTHING FALLS IN PLACE IN LIFE, WHEN OUR HEALTH & THAT OF OUR FAMILY MEMBERS IS GOOD, WHEN OUR RELATIONSHIPS ARE EXACTLY AS WE WISH THEM TO BE, WHEN OUR INCOME EXCEEDS OUR “OUTGO,” WHEN OUR FUTURE POSSIBILITIES LOOK BRIGHTER THAN OUR PAST FAILURES – IT IS IN THOSE TIMES THAT WE HAVE NO DIFFICULTY AT ALL IN PROCLAIMING “*I BELIEVE!*”**

**BUT WHEN ANY ONE OF THOSE ISN'T TRUE – AND, HEAVEN FORBID, WHEN NOT A SINGLE ONE OF THEM IS TRUE – IT IS THEN THAT WE MUST CRY OUT IN HONEST AGONY, “*HELP MY UNBELIEF!*”**

**IN THOSE TIMES, WE HEAR A VOICE DEEP INSIDE OUR SOUL,  
BEGGING US WITH A CRY OF – “DON’T STOP BELIEVIN’.”**

**AND THERE’S OUR SONG FOR THIS MORNING.**

**WHEN WE BEGAN THIS SERIES LAST SUMMER – AS I THOUGHT  
ABOUT SONGS THAT MIGHT BE INCLUDED AS “*SECULAR SONGS THAT  
SPEAK TO THE SOUL*” – THE FIRST ONE THAT CAME TO MY MIND WAS  
JOURNEY’S “DON’T STOP BELIEVIN’.”**

**KNOWING A BIT ABOUT THE SONG, THOUGH – PRIMARILY THE  
LYRICS – IT REALLY DIDN’T SEEM TO FIT BECAUSE THERE DOESN’T  
SEEM TO BE ANYTHING OTHER THAN THE TITLE ITSELF THAT  
WORKS WITH OUR THEME.**

**BUT I KEPT COMING BACK TO IT & NOW WE’RE USING IT AS THE  
FINAL SONG OF THE EIGHT WE’VE USED OVER THE PAST TWO YEARS.**

**I’M GLAD I DIDN’T USE IT BEFORE BECAUSE I NOW KNOW A LOT  
MORE ABOUT THE SONG – AND THERE’S BEEN A LOT THAT HAS  
TRANSPIRED SINCE WE FIRST CONCEIVED THE SERIES – TO FINALLY  
MAKE IT A PERFECT FIT.**

**AS SOMEONE SAID TO ME THIS PAST WEEK, “*IT’S GOOD THAT YOU  
DIDN’T STOP BELIEVIN’ IN “DON’T STOP BELIEVIN’.*”**

**IN FACT, WE COULD HAVE SPENT THE ENTIRE FOUR WEEKS OF  
THE SONG SECTION OF THIS SERIES ON *THIS* ONE.**

**WE COULD FOCUS ON STEVE PERRY – THE LEAD SINGER OF  
EVERY “JOURNEY” SONG YOU’VE EVER HEARD – AND HIS DEPARTURE  
FROM THE GROUP & NOW HIS RE-EMERGENCE IN THE MUSIC WORLD  
IN JUST THE PAST SEVERAL WEEKS AFTER NEARLY 20 YEARS AWAY  
FROM IT.**

**WE COULD TALK ABOUT THE INSPIRING STORY OF ARNEL  
PINEDA – THE YOUNG FILIPINO SINGER WHO REPLACED STEVE**

**PERRY AS “JOURNEY’S” LEAD SINGER AFTER BEING DISCOVERED BY THE GROUP IN A YOUTUBE VIDEO.**

**WE COULD TALK ABOUT THE INCREDIBLE POPULARITY OF “DON’T STOP BELIEVIN’.”**

**IT’S THE ALL-TIME MOST DOWNLOADED SONG ON ITUNES.**

**FROM ITS ORIGINAL RELEASE IN 1981, IT’S HAD ONE REVIVAL AFTER ANOTHER - BEING THE THEME SONG OF COUNTLESS SPORTS TEAMS, FEATURED ON A NUMBER OF TV SHOWS, INCLUDING “GLEE” AND BEING THE FOCAL SONG IN THE FINAL SCENE OF THE FINAL EPISODE OF THE FINAL SEASON OF “THE SOPRANOS.”**

**LET’S FORGET ALL OF THOSE OTHER DIRECTIONS, THOUGH, AND FOCUS ON THE SONG ITSELF, BECAUSE I THINK THAT’S WHERE THE CONNECTION WITH OUR SCRIPTURE THIS MORNING FITS MOST CLEARLY.**

**FIRST OF ALL, MOST OF THE LYRICS AREN’T WHAT’S IMPORTANT ABOUT THIS SONG.**

**IN FACT, THEY’RE JUST A COMBINATION OF MEMORIES & EXPERIENCES JOURNEY HAD OVER THE YEARS & THEY BASICALLY PUT IT ALL TOGETHER BECAUSE SOME OF THE WORDS SOUNDED GOOD.**

**FOR EXAMPLE, ONE OF JONATHAN CAIN’S FAVORITE SONGS WAS “*MIDNIGHT TRAIN TO GEORGIA*” BY GLADYS KNIGHT & THE PIPS AND THAT’S WHERE “*MIDNIGHT TRAIN GOING ANYWHERE*” COMES FROM.**

**WHEN JOURNEY WAS ON TOUR IN DETROIT, STEVE PERRY LOOKED OUT HIS HOTEL ROOM WINDOW & SAW WHAT HE CALLED “*STREETLIGHTS PEOPLE UP & DOWN THE BOULEVARD, CASTING THEIR SHADOWS IN THE NIGHT.*”**

**HE WANTED TO USE THE NAME OF THE CITY IN A SONG BUT NEEDED AN EXTRA SYLLABLE & HE DIDN'T THINK NORTH, EAST OR WEST HAD THE RIGHT SOUND SO HE CAME UP WITH "*JUST A CITY BOY RAISED IN SOUTH DETROIT.*"**

**THE FACT THAT SOUTH OF DETROIT IS WINDSOR, ONTARIO DIDN'T REALLY MATTER BECAUSE IT SOUNDED RIGHT!**

**THEY ALL REMEMBERED THE ATMOSPHERE IN THE LITTLE CLUBS THEY USED TO PLAY, HOW THEIR SONGS WERE JUST A ROLL OF THE DICE & HOW IT ALL JUST WENT ON & ON & ON.**

**SO THE OVER-ALL LYRICS OF THE SONG – POETIC AS THEY MAY BE – AREN'T REALLY IMPORTANT.**

**IT'S REALLY ONLY THE THREE WORDS THAT SERVE AS THE TITLE THAT MATTER & THEY'RE PROBABLY THE ONLY THREE WORDS OF THE SONG THAT MOST PEOPLE KNOW – "*DON'T STOP BELIEVIN'.*"**

**IT'S INTERESTING, THOUGH, THAT THOSE THREE WORDS ARE NEVER HEARD UNTIL THE FINAL 50 SECONDS OF THE ENTIRE SONG & THEY'RE REPEATED JUST THREE TIMES.**

**THOSE THREE WORDS, THOUGH, HAVE A VERY INTERESTING ORIGIN.**

**JONATHAN CAIN – "JOURNEY'S" KEYBOARDIST – GREW UP IN CHICAGO.**

**THE FIRST TIME HE PLAYED BEFORE AN AUDIENCE WAS IN A BAR WHEN HE WAS TEN YEARS OLD, PLAYING HIS FIRST INSTRUMENT – AN ACCORDION.**

**HE STARTED PLAYING THE ORGAN FOR CATHOLIC MASSES WHEN HE WAS IN JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL.**

**BEFORE THAT, THOUGH, JONATHAN CAIN EXPERIENCED SOMETHING THAT WOULD HAUNT HIM THROUGHOUT HIS LIFE.**

**WHEN HE WAS IN THIRD GRADE, THERE WAS A TERRIBLE FIRE IN HIS SCHOOL – A FIRE THAT BURNED THE SCHOOL TO THE GROUND & TOOK THE LIVES OF 92 CHILDREN & THREE TEACHERS.**

**JONATHAN & THOSE IN HIS OWN CLASSROOM ESCAPED, BUT THEY WATCHED HELPLESSLY AS CHILDREN JUMPED TO THEIR DEATHS FROM THE SECOND FLOOR OF THE BURNING BUILDING.**

**THE CHILDLIKE FAITH HE HAD AT THAT AGE WAS SHAKEN TO ITS CORE & IT TOOK HIM YEARS BEFORE HE WAS ABLE TO HAVE THAT FAITH RE-KINDLED IN HIS LIFE.**

**WHEN THAT FINALLY HAPPENED FOR JONATHAN CAIN, HE DESCRIBES IT LIKE THIS:**

***“GOD HADN’T ABANDONED ME, EVEN THOUGH I HAD ABANDONED HIM. ALL THIS TIME, HE WAS STILL THERE – STILL WATCHING OVER ME & LOVING ME & WAITING FOR ME TO COME BACK TO HIM.***

***LIKE AN ALBUM I ONCE LISTENED TO OVER & OVER AGAIN, I HAD SLID GOD BACK INTO A SLEEVE & THEN FORGOTTEN WHERE I PLACED THE RECORD.***

***IT HAD BEEN TOO LONG SINCE I’D LISTENED TO HIS VOICE.***

***I DIDN’T WANT TO NEGLECT IT EVER AGAIN.***

***I COULDN’T.”***

**BUT THAT’S NOT WHERE THAT ONE LINE - “DON’T STOP BELIEVIN’” – ORIGINATES.**

**IT WAS ACTUALLY LONG BEFORE JONATHAN’S RENEWED FAITH. HIS DAD HAD ALWAYS BEEN SUPPORTIVE OF HIM AS A MUSICIAN.**

**JONATHAN HAD MOVED TO CALIFORNIA TO TRY TO MAKE IT IN THE MUSIC BUSINESS BUT THINGS WEREN'T GOING WELL FOR HIM.**

**HE EXPLAINS IT THIS WAY:**

***“MY DOG GOT HIT BY A CAR & I HAD TO PAY THE VET BILL. I CALLED MY DAD FOR ANOTHER LOAN. AND I HATED DOING THAT.***

***I SAID, ‘DAD, SHOULD I JUST GIVE UP ON THIS THING & COME HOME?’***

***MY DAD SAID, ‘NO, NO, DON’T COME HOME. STICK TO YOUR GUNS. DON’T STOP BELIEVIN.’***

***NOW, EVERYTHING MY DAD WOULD SAY TO ME I’D DOODLE IN A LITTLE NOTEBOOK WHERE I WROTE LYRICS.***

***THAT ONE SAT THERE FOR YEARS UNTIL, ONE DAY, WE NEEDED ANOTHER SONG FOR A JOURNEY ALBUM & STEVE PERRY ASKED ME IF HAD ANYTHING.***

***I LOOKED IN THE BACK OF THAT NOTEBOOK & THERE WERE THOSE THREE WORDS THAT MY DAD HAD SPOKEN TO ME YEARS BEFORE.”***

**BOTH JONATHAN CAIN & STEVE PERRY ARE MEN OF DEEP CHRISTIAN FAITH.**

**THOUGH THE REST OF THE SONG DOESN'T AT ALL SOUND LIKE SOMETHING THAT MIGHT “SPEAK TO THE SOUL,” THAT POWERFUL THREE-WORD TITLE DOES, BECAUSE FOR THE TWO OF THEM, THOSE WORDS HAVE RESONATED IN THEIR LIVES THROUGH A MULTITUDE OF UPS & DOWNS.**

**THEY'RE LIKE THE FATHER IN MARK'S STORY – THEY EMBODY THE PARADOX OF “UNBELIEVING BELIEF.”**

**I THINK THAT'S WHY THIS SONG HAS MAINTAINED ITS POPULARITY.**



**IT'S THOSE 3 WORDS - "*DON'T STOP BELIEVIN'*" – AND THE FIVE THAT FOLLOW – "*HOLD ON TO THE FEELING.*"**

**WHEN ARNEL PINEDA WAS STRUGGLING IN THE PHILIPPINES TO EVEN MAKE ENOUGH MONEY TO SURVIVE, HE HAD TO HANG ON TO HOPE THAT A BRIGHTER FUTURE AWAITED HIM.**

**THERE WAS A VOICE INSIDE THAT KEPT SAYING, "*DON'T STOP BELIEVIN'. HOLD ON TO THE FEELING.*"**

**WHEN STEVE PERRY WENT THROUGH PHYSICAL & EMOTIONAL TRAUMA THAT DROVE HIM AWAY FROM MUSIC FOR TWO DECADES, THAT VOICE CRIED OUT "*DON'T STOP BELIEVIN'. HOLD ON TO THE FEELING.*"**

**WHEN JONATHAN CAIN WAS READY TO GIVE UP ON HIS MUSICAL DREAMS & WHEN HE FOUND HIMSELF HAVING RECURRING NIGHTMARES OF THE CHILDHOOD TRAGEDY THAT HAD UPENDED HIS ENTIRE WORLD, THERE WAS A VOICE THAT WENT FROM BEING HIS EARTHLY FATHER TO HIS HEAVENLY FATHER, WHISPERING THOSE WORDS OF ENCOURAGEMENT – "*DON'T STOP BELIEVIN'. HOLD ON TO THE FEELING.*"**

**FOR EVERY ONE OF US HERE TODAY, WE WAVER BETWEEN FAITH & DOUBT.**

**WE ALL EXPERIENCE THE PARADOX OF "*DISBELIEVING BELIEF.*" IN VIRTUALLY EVERY PRAYER WE UTTER, WE CAN INCLUDE THE PLEA OF THAT FATHER IN MARK'S STORY – A PLEA THAT MARK INTENTIONALLY INCLUDES BECAUSE HE CONSIDERS IT VITALLY IMPORTANT – "*I BELIEVE – HELP MY UNBELIEF.*"**

**WHEN WE UTTER THAT HONEST, HEARTFELT PLEA - IF WE LISTEN CLOSELY TO THE VOICE OF GOD ANSWERING OUR PRAYERS, WE CAN HEAR A DIVINE WORD OF ASSURANCE & ENCOURAGEMENT**

**AS JESUS HIMSELF SAYS TO US –“DON’T STOP BELIEVIN’’. HOLD ON TO THE FEELING.” AMEN.**

***The Reverend Dr. Dennis R. Davenport  
Eastminster Presbyterian Church  
Evansville, Indiana***

**“Don’t Stop Believin’”**

**Just a small town girl, livin' in a lonely world  
She took the midnight train goin' anywhere  
Just a city boy, born and raised in south Detroit  
He took the midnight train goin' anywhere  
A singer in a smokey room  
A smell of wine and cheap perfume  
For a smile they can share the night  
It goes on and on and on and on  
Strangers waiting, up and down the boulevard  
Their shadows searching in the night  
Streetlights people, living just to find emotion  
Hiding, somewhere in the night.  
Working hard to get my fill,  
Everybody wants a thrill  
Payin' anything to roll the dice,  
Just one more time  
Some will win, some will lose  
Some were born to sing the blues  
Oh, the movie never ends  
It goes on and on and on and on  
Strangers waiting, up and down the boulevard  
Their shadows searching in the night  
Streetlights people, living just to find emotion  
Hiding, somewhere in the night.  
Don't stop believin'  
Hold on to the feelin'  
Streetlights people  
Don't stop believin'  
Hold on  
Streetlight people**

**Don't stop believin'  
Hold on to the feelin'  
Streetlights people**

**Songwriters: STEVE PERRY, JONATHAN CAIN, NEAL SCHON**