

Text: Matthew 12:38-42

Title: The Sign of Jonah

Truth: A greater prophet than Jonah will get a greater sign.

Date/Location: Wednesday December 1, 2021 at FBC

Introduction

The back and forth interaction between the Pharisees and the Lord Jesus continues.

I. A Sign Sought, v. 38

A. The Pharisees and scribes responded to the Lord's teaching about the tongue with a complete *non sequitur*. What they said was an abrupt change of subject that was entirely inappropriate to the situation. What they said had nothing to do with what the Lord just talked about.

They did not want to deal with anything the Lord said: (1) the issue of judgment for their terrible speech, or (2) the fact that their hearts were full of evil, or (3) that they had not repented, or (4) that they were deep into a sin that would not be pardoned, or (5) that they were wrong about the Sabbath, or (6) that they were actively plotting to destroy Christ. They were wrong on so many counts, just in chapter 12, that it is almost hard to keep track of all the ways they had gone astray.

That's what sin does, dear friends: it makes a mess that is so deep that you cannot get out. In it, you are not thinking rightly. The only way you can get out or that mire is by crying out to God.

B. It may be that the Jewish leaders were asking for "earth-shattering" kind of sign that would be on the order of the parting the Red Sea. But what was the point? They were just going to refuse to believe anyway.

Centuries earlier, God had the prophet Isaiah tell King Ahaz, "Ask a sign for yourself from the LORD your God; ask it either in the depth or in the height above." He would not ask, even though he was effectively commanded to do so. God chose to give him a sign anyway—the sign of a virgin birth. This sign was of the earth-

shattering variety, and the then-present-day leaders of Israel could have known about that sign in the life of Mary, Joseph, and Jesus—if they really cared. Put it another way, they were asking for a sign; but *the sign was standing there in front of them* because He was the sign through the virgin birth. They should have asked for nothing else.

- C. It is hard to imagine from where we sit today what exactly they could want, because they had seen many miraculous healings and the removal of demons and powerful preaching. How could they ask for a sign when they had seen a multitude of signs already? What was going on in them? Most certainly, they were not asking with a genuine heart. Their track record gives us no reason to think that they really wanted to see if Jesus was the Messiah. The Pharisees evidently ignored what Jesus had done and asked for more, as if what He *had* done was not significant or not enough or in some other way it was unsatisfactory. It is like the situation in John 9 where the Pharisees repeatedly asked the formerly blind man what had happened to him (John 9:15, 17, 24, 26-27). They would not accept his initial or repeated testimony. And so it was with their hardheartedness toward Jesus. He wrought sign and after sign and taught as one with authority and did more miracles and raised people from the dead and caused blind people to see, and still the Pharisees would not receive it.
- D. A note of application here: If we do not welcome what God *has* already done for us, we cannot bother to ask Him for more. If He has poured out upon you blessing after blessing, and the open door of salvation and so much that you do not deserve, and you complain or simply ignore it, and then turn around and ask God for something, you cannot expect an affirmative answer. That would be an offense to the living God.

Examples: If you ask God to provide but He is already providing, what are you really asking? If you ask God for guidance and He has already provided it in the Scriptures but you are not paying attention to them, what do you expect?

II. No Sign Given Except a Future One

A. The Lord knew their quest was sinful. He called them evil and adulterous. They may well have been adulterers in their hearts (Matt. 5:27-30), and perhaps in body as well. But as often the case, the Lord is speaking of spiritual adultery. They were supposed to be united to the one true God, yet they had run off after idols.

They were the leadership of the current nation, thus an evil “generation.”

B. Because of their evil heart of unbelief, Jesus was not going to give them a sign. There is no way He would be responsive to their calling for this kind of thing.

C. He did however promise them a future sign: the sign of the prophet Jonah. If you are not familiar with the history of the prophet Jonah, go read the book with his name in your Bible.

D. The meaning of the future sign is given “as” the historical account. That is, what the Lord will give as a sign is *like* what happened before. What was that? Jonah was three days and nights in the fish. The likeness is that the Lord Jesus will be three days and nights in the heart of the earth. We can take this to mean “three days” without specifying it has to be exactly three 24-hour periods for a total of exactly 72 hours. If you take a Friday crucifixion, it would be fair to include Thursday night in the throes of anticipatory agony, arrest, trials, beatings, mockings, etc. followed by a day of hanging on a cross, burial, Friday night, Saturday, Saturday night, and then arising Sunday morning.

If we continued the likeness to Jonah’s situation beyond what our Lord did, we would say that the earth “spit out” Jesus because He could not be held by death.

E. The sign miracle that Jesus was about to do would be way bigger than what God did with Jonah. But when Jonah went to Nineveh as an acid-washed prophet, the Ninevites repented. They turned from their wicked ways and received a reprieve from divine judgment.

The only proper response for the people before Jesus was for them to repent. And yet what the leadership was doing was saying their modern-day Jonah (Jesus) was possessed by the Devil.

Whether figuratively or literally, the (Gentile) Ninevites will stand as witnesses in the judgment against the Pharisees and condemn them because Jesus is a thousand times greater than the prophet Jonah. Their judgment will be severe, because they were entrusted with much.

F. Jesus offers another lesser-to-greater argument, this one about the Queen of Sheba (1 Kings 10:1-13). She heard Solomon's wisdom and saw his wealth and was flabbergasted. The point here is that the Pharisees were standing before One who was far greater than Solomon. This One is the greater Son of David, the Messiah, the God-man, the Son of God. And they treated Him like trash.

The Queen of Sheba found out something else: the fact that the God of Israel had set Solomon on the throne indicated God's love for the nation of Israel. She was ultimately pointed to God, not just to the man Solomon.

Conclusion

There is a small debate about whether Jonah died and resurrected to life. I do not believe so. The point of the likeness between Jonah and Jesus is not death → resurrection, but the similar period of time in the belly of the fish/belly of the earth. So even if Jonah did not die and rise again, there is no reduction in significance of the similarity between the prophet's fish sign and the resurrection sign of the Son of God.

In the end, Jesus gave them a stupendous sign. But they still did not believe it—just like Luke 16:31 predicted.

Why ask God for something if you will still refuse to believe in Him?

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