

**Text:** Matthew 16:1-4

**Title:** Seeking Signs

**Truth:** Be an expert in the things of God, not of the world.

**Date/Location:** March 23, 2022 at FBC

## **Introduction**

The last time we encountered the Pharisees and company was at the beginning of chapter 15, where they were criticizing the Lord's disciples for not washing their hands before eating. In their way of thinking, this caused ceremonial defilement. The Lord corrected two errors in their thinking. First, eating with unwashed hands does not cause defilement; rather, defilement comes from a person's inner nature. Second, they placed more weight on their traditions than they did on the words of God, with the effect that they voided God's word.

Now they come with another test.

### **I. A Sign Sought from Heaven, v. 1**

- A. The Scripture says the Pharisees and Sadducees were testing Jesus. We know they were not testing him with a view toward validating His ministry. Rather, this was a test with the hope that He would fail. They were "putting God to the test," something which the Lord would not even do (Matthew 4:7) but which the people of Israel had done generations earlier (Numbers 14:22).
- B. They had done this before—if you remember from our exposition of chapter 12 in early December 2021. Review it in 12:38-40.
- C. It is valid to test the prophets, as indicated in Deuteronomy 13 (the entire chapter) and 18:22. If their

teaching supports a false god, or their signs do not come to pass, then they are not from the true God. We are called by the apostle John to test the spirits (1 John 4:1). In the NT context, we know the person/teacher/angel who is from God by the fact that they confess Jesus Christ has come in the flesh. That implies they agree that Christ existed before He came, then He came, and then He left. If the spirit does not acknowledge Jesus (person, work, coming from heaven, etc.) then that person is *not* from God.

- D. The Pharisees wanted a sign. They wanted one even though they were unbelieving—*because* they were unbelieving. They did not accept the Lord’s person, or the multiple testimonies about Him from John the Baptist, God the Father, Moses and the rest of the Scriptures, and Jesus’s works that He had already done. Why did they want a sign when He had already done so many signs in their presence (John 12:37-40)?
- E. It is noteworthy that they asked for a sign from heaven. This sign was not necessarily *in* the heavens, but from heaven. They wanted something *big*.
- F. “I just wish God would give me a sign.” Whether it is seeking guidance on some perplexing question, or some provision that you wish you had, or some problem, perhaps you have asked for a sign from heaven as well. Do you really mean that you will believe God *more* (or *at all*) if He answers your request for the sign you want? Have you considered that God already may have given you what is required to meet that need and you are just not recognizing it?

## II. A Rebuke From Heaven v. 2-4

- A. The first thing I want you remember is that Jesus Himself *is* a sign from Heaven.
- B. The Jews were looking about for a sign, but the signs were all around them, and in fact, standing in front of them.
- C. The Lord admonished them because they knew how to predict the weather to a fair degree (hah!). A reddish evening sky portended fair weather the next day. On the other hand, if in the morning the sky did not look good, that is, it had a reddish gloom to it. I'm not familiar with weather in Israel. But we have some similar things. If it is clear in the afternoon or early evening in the winter, we can predict that it will be very cold overnight. Certain mornings in the dog days of summer you wake up early and you can see and feel in the air that it is going to be a scorcher. This all is not very scientific, we might say, but it has some ability to make helpful predictions.
- D. But the Jewish *leaders* did not know how to discern the signs of the times. Their ability to sense what is going on in the world around them was even worse than their weather predicting ability.

Here is the thing: people spend more time figuring out the weather than they do what is happening in the world. They know meteorology better than Bible; they know their traditions better than the Word of God; they care more about their own being right than obeying God.

They are hypocrites because they claim before the people to know the things of God, but they only know the weather, if that. They do not know the things of God! They did not know that Jesus came from Nazareth; they did not see that He was a perfect fulfillment of all the

prophetic Scriptures about the Messiah; they did not believe the signs that He had already done; they were not tuned into the timing of Daniel 9's prophecy about the Messiah being cut off, to the very time period in which they were living (Luke 19:42).

- E. The Lord continues His rebuke by calling the present leadership and those favorable to them a "wicked and adulterous generation." They were evil through and through, perhaps physically adulterous and certainly spiritually adulterous.
- F. The Lord would only give them one sign: that of Jonah the prophet. He explained it before: as he was in the fish for three days and nights, so the Son of Man would be in the heart of the earth. (Maybe that indicates more than merely the tomb?)

Jesus was righteously exasperated with them. They had asked before, now again the same thing. They refused to believe under any sway of information provided in the circumstances of Jesus's life.

## **Conclusion**

Hard-hearted unbelief is shown here in the lives of the Pharisees and Sadducees. We must make sure that we do not have any scraps of that kind of attitude in our hearts.

There is a lesson not just in avoiding the example of the Pharisees, but more positively in how the Lord answers their inquiry. He rebukes them for being focused on the wrong things. How often we too are wrongly focused—not on the things of Jesus, but on the things of the world.

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