

Mark 8: 11 and 12 and Matthew 12: 38-42; “Seeking for a Sign”, Sermon # 46 in the series – “Astonished at His Teaching”, Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall on November 15th, 2015, in the Morning Worship Service.

Here I believe that we see another indication that the gospel of Mark may have been written before the gospels of Matthew and Luke. It is the brevity of the statement here in the gospel of Mark; only two verses, which indicate that the Pharisees had come out to ask for a sign, and to dispute with the Lord Jesus over His authority to do the things that He was doing, and to teach the things that He was teaching. Both Matthew and Luke (in Luke 11: 29-32) add more information, and they build upon what Mark had so briefly written about. We should understand that this was God’s purpose in having the three synoptic gospels. The Holy Spirit directed these three men in such a way that they might complement each other in their witness to the truth of the ministry of Christ. Truth is confirmed by the mouth of two or three witnesses. The truth that we are being brought to this morning is this. In terms of your receiving the gift of eternal life, and in terms of living your living your Christian life, what the Lord Jesus is looking to build into your life is faith in Himself. Where He is the author of faith and sees faith, He will answer the requests which are brought to Him. But where there is unbelief He will not answer the request.

Here Jesus states categorically that He will not give these unbelieving Pharisees and scribes a sign because they are part of an evil and adulterous generation. He knew that if their teaching was followed, that it would lead people to eternal death and God’s everlasting judgment. He had come into the world to save men’s souls. But He also had come into the world as a light, to expose what was false. The person who comes to Him in faith, in sincerity and humility, will be rewarded with His miraculous help. But requests and demands, made of Him, just to gratify curiosity, will be met with refusal and even rebuke, as was given to these wicked men. So we must carefully learn to distinguish these things in order that we might be saved, and so that we might become holy, if we are a Christian. In this way we will make progress in our faith when we approach our Lord in the right way. What I want to do this morning is to give you 4 reasons why it was wrong for these men to have asked Jesus for a sign. The 1st reason that it was wrong, was because they asked with evil intent. The 2nd reason it was wrong was because their asking was not in order to more carefully consider Jesus and His mission. The 3rd reason that it was wrong was because, Jesus knew that even if He granted their request, it would not lead them to repentance. And the 4th reason that it was wrong for them to ask was because Jesus knew that they were not seeking wisdom. Let us ask God at this time to give us grace to understand these things correctly.

1st of all - These men, asking Jesus for a sign, were wrong because they asked it with evil intent. (Matthew Chapter 12, verse 39)

The kind of sign that we are talking about here, is a display of miraculous power to show to others that the one performing the sign has the authority to do what they are doing, or to teach what they are teaching. Moses was given signs by God to perform before Pharaoh to confirm that he should let the children of Israel go; to let them go out of bondage, and to let them go in order that they might worship God. Spiritually, there are different kinds of signs. There are signs that come from God, and there are signs which come from the exercise of Satan’s power through men; signs such as the Egyptian magicians did to duplicate the miracles which God gave Moses and Aaron the power to do, in the presence of Pharaoh. In these texts that we are looking at this morning, the demands of the scribes and Pharisees indicated that they were primarily looking for Jesus to prove to them that He had the authority from God to teach things contrary to the things that they taught the people. They thought that they were God’s true leaders in

Israel. They thought that they knew the Scriptures. But did they? They remembered, no doubt, that God had commanded in Deuteronomy 13: 1 and 2, "If there arises among you a prophet or a dreamer of dreams, and he gives you a sign or a wonder, and the sign or the wonder comes to pass, of which he spoke to you saying, "Let us go after other gods – which you have not known and let us serve them, you shall not listen to the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams, for the Lord your God is testing you to know whether you love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul."

They thought that they were right in demanding that Jesus prove His authority to them. They falsely thought that Jesus was leading the people astray when He taught that their traditions which men had made up around the word of God, were not to be followed. They did not believe in the many signs which Jesus had already performed in the healing of the sick and casting out of demons, and even the raising of the dead. They did not want to believe that Jesus was their Messiah sent by God. They had their opinions and they were going to hold on to all of their false observations on the Bible and upon Jesus Himself. We must notice that Jesus was not in one instance attempting to lead them away from God, or to serve other gods. He was the One sent from God to lead them back from their sinfulness to serve the one true and living God. Indeed, we know that He was and is their God made manifest in the flesh. Their hearts were not disposed to investigate His claims. Their hearts were prejudiced to hold to a false system of religion which they had developed and superimposed upon the truth of the word of God. In asking for a sign they were actually looking for an excuse to reject Christ's claims and not listen to Him. They wanted desperately to prove Jesus to be false, even though all the evidence was, that He was true. There are many people who are like this today as well; people who will ask for a sign that Christian people would do some dramatic thing to show them that Christianity is true. They will say that if people are helped and healed, then it might be good sign that Christianity is true. But if a Christian is able to point out false doctrine, and it is a doctrine that they hold, then the Christian who points this out should not be listened to.

That this generation was an evil and adulterous generation is evident, because they thought evil of the Lord Jesus, who was perfectly pure and holy. That generation was adulterous because they were not serving the true and living God in accordance with His word, from right motives. They were rather consumed with their lusts for money and power and position over other people. They were characterized as our generation is now, with a preoccupation with sexual immorality. You will understand that this must have been true when you remember that in John Chapter 8 it was the scribes and Pharisees who brought to Jesus a woman caught in the act of adultery, in the very act, and tested Jesus to see what he would do about it. Would He say that she should be stoned, according to the law of Moses? This is what they wanted. But we must ask ourselves another question: How could it be possible that they could catch this couple in the very act? It was because they laid a trap for this woman. And when we read the account in John 8: 6, we find these revealing words: "This they said, testing Jesus, that they might have something of which to accuse Him." They were not interested in mercy or even in true justice being done. They were interested in finding some way to accuse Jesus. Their hearts, their thoughts, and their motives for what they did were not right. Jesus said to them, "He who is without sin among you, let him throw a stone at her first." And you will remember how they responded to Jesus' words? "Those who heard it, being convicted by their conscience, went out one by one, beginning with the oldest even to the last."

If you turn over to Matthew 16: 1-4, you will see that not only did they ask a sign of Jesus once; they also asked him again, and they became more particular about it. "Then the Pharisees and Sadducees came, and testing Him asked that He would show them a sign from heaven." In this second attempt to get Jesus to perform a sign, they are asking not only for a sign, but a sign from heaven. They were looking for a sign which would indicate that He was doing God's

bidding and that God would indicate this to them through something dramatic, like Elijah's calling down fire from heaven. Religious, but carnal men, are always looking for such proofs because they are only concerned with their own power and authority. When they see the exercise of power, then they will say, "The Lord, He is God." "The Lord He is God." But still they will not change in their hearts to cease to want to control others, to force them to their own opinions of God and religion. They are not so much interested in showing compassion, goodness, love, and mercy. They are not concerned with a heart religion. They want control over others. In Mark 8, it says that they began to dispute with Him. It is evident that they wanted control over Jesus. They were envious of His influence upon the people. They were afraid that they would lose their influence upon the people. They were furious that He would not fall in line with their false interpretations of God's word and his Law. The ultimate motive of their hearts was not love to God and love to other people; it was found in their having control over other people in religious matters. They had built their own false system of religion and now they were going to defend it to the hilt, even when the Son of God is standing right in front of them.

Look at what the Lord Jesus says to them in verse 2. "He answered and said to them, 'When it is evening you say, 'It will be fair weather, for the sky is red'; and in the morning, 'It will be foul weather today, for the sky is red and threatening.'" "Hypocrites!" "You know how to discern the face of the sky, but you cannot discern the signs of the times." "A wicked and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and no sign shall be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah." Let us take notice of this and examine ourselves, this morning, to see whether we are true or false in our understanding. What will it take for you to believe in Christ? What will it take for you to trust in Him and to know that every word of His is true? What will it take Him doing, for you to begin to build your life upon His words? How many of us know that old saying, "Red sky at night, sailor's delight." Or, "Red sky in the morning, sailor take warning." If we are able to discern the sky and make the observation, and draw the right conclusion, then why cannot we read the times that we are living in now? The God of all Nature gives us His signs of deliverance and blessing in the rainbow and in the sunshine after rain, that He is a God of grace. And He gives us His signs of warning that in the sudden coming of the winds and the storm that He is a just judge and can suddenly bring judgments and calamities upon sinners who are careless of their ways before Him.

These men should have been able to have read the signs of their generation being the generation that would see the first coming of their Messiah, but instead they were found fighting against Him. You and I ought to be able to see that we are living in times when men and women in general, around us, are rejecting the good Word of God to live in accordance with their own thoughts, desires, and lusts. They are willing to throw off the idea that they need to be converted to Christ. They are willing to ignore all the evidences that the Word of God is true when it speaks of a judgment that is coming, and that people need to change, to repent, and to turn from their wicked ways if they would know God's rich blessings, and live forever. And yet they do not turn, but instead they find many ways of arguing with us when we preach the gospel to them. They look for some sign that we have the authority which we say that we do; to preach the word of God to them as absolutely true. And we can give them none, except to tell them that Jesus died for us and He was raised from the dead on our behalf. This leads me to give you the second reason why it was wrong for these men to ask Jesus for a sign.

It is because, 2ndly; Their asking for a sign was not in order to more carefully consider Jesus and His Mission. (Verses 39 and 40 of Matthew 12)

"An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah." "For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth." "For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be

three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.” What a mighty sign this was that Jesus gave to them. He might have righteously left them all in the dark, but even in His giving them this exception, He shows His compassion and mercy. He draws a parallel between the prophet Jonah and Himself in relation to the length of time that both of them would remain in the grave. Jonah suffered an apparent death when he was swallowed by the great fish and its belly became his grave for 3 days and 3 nights. Christ's would be a real death having died the cruel death on the cross, and then buried in the tomb of Nicodemus for 3 days and 3 nights, which is here pictured as being, “in the heart of the earth”. Some people stumble over the fact that Christ died on Friday afternoon and was raised on Sunday morning. It seems like He was in the tomb only 2 days instead of three. They forget the fact that in the Jewish culture of that day that a part of a day was taken for a whole day. Those hours from the ninth hour on Friday afternoon until midnight were considered one day in their thinking. Those hours from midnight Saturday until the early morning resurrection are considered as one day in their reckoning. Do not stumble over such things.

There are some who believe that Jonah actually died when he was swallowed by the great fish. They believe that God brought him back from death by His raising him from the dead in the fish, and then having the fish vomit him up on the dry land. But our Lord Jesus says, “For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish...” I do not believe that Jonah ever actually died physically while he was in the great fish. But he did suffer a tremendous affliction which was a real sort of death, in his having this dreadful experience of being swallowed and having to be in the belly of the great fish. But you should know that the Lord Jesus really did suffer tremendous affliction and sufferings at the hands of wicked men; probably from some of the very ones who asked Him for a sign on that day; and He really did die. He did not die for Himself. He died for you if you will believe in Him. “The death that He died, He died to sin, once for all,” it says in Romans Chapter 6. It was a real death on behalf of real sinful people. When the merits of His death are applied to you, you experience a real spiritual death to sin, which takes place in your mind and heart. Sin's power is broken over you. Its ruling reigning power is dethroned. You do not die physically yet, but you do die spiritually to sin, in this sense that I have just described. Then when it comes your time to die physically, the sting of death which is sin, is removed; and death is swallowed up in the victory which Christ won on the cross.

Jonah was a prophet who ran from doing the Lord's will when God told him to go to Nineveh and preach to the people that God's judgment was coming to them. He was supposed to go to that great city and cry out against it; for their wickedness had come up before God. (Ch. 1: 2) But He fled and got on board a ship bound for Tarshish. He did not go back and do God's will until he had first experienced this death to His sin. But Christ not only did not shrink back from going to do His Father's will; but when He came, He pursued God's will with all of His heart, and actually laid down His life in doing it. I would assert to you this morning that if you want to be saved from your sins and come to the place where you will do the will of God, that you must look more carefully into the mission of the Lord Jesus Christ. God so loved the world that He sent His only-begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life. This “should not” or “might not” perish is related to a person's thinking deeply about the reasons that Christ came, and the reasons that He died. This, the Pharisees did not do. Instead they asked for a sign. They should have carefully inquired into and considered the facts of His life. They thought that He was born in Nazareth, but actually He fulfilled the prophecy that the Christ was to be born in Bethlehem Ephrathah. They thought that His father was Joseph, but actually it was God. They thought that His mother had been unfaithful to Joseph but actually Jesus was born of a virgin.

It is the gospel of Jesus Christ which is a sign to you this day. Look carefully into it. Keep all that you learn in your heart. Ponder the great things that Christ has done for sinners in His life, and in His death, and what He is doing now by His resurrection power to give you faith, and to uphold your faith. And believe in Him for the salvation of your eternal soul.

The 3rd reason that it was wrong for these men to ask Jesus for a sign was because Jesus knew that even if He granted their request, it would not lead them to repentance. (Verse 41)

“The men of Nineveh will rise up in the judgment with this generation and condemn it, because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and indeed a greater than Jonah is here.” The purpose of signs being given was so that men might believe. But to demand a sign, when other signs which God had given were being ignored or downplayed showed a bad heart and a dull mind in them. Jesus had fed the four thousand just before these men came to Him asking for a sign. He had healed many sick people and cast demons out of people. Some of the Pharisees hearts were so bad and so hard that when they saw these miracles they said, “He casts out demons by the power of the demons.” This was the sin unto death. But those who come to Jesus in this incident are more respectable; more refined. They call Jesus “Teacher” in Matthew 12: 38. In Mark 8: 12, it says that Jesus “sighed deeply in His spirit and said, ‘Why does this generation seek a sign?’” The reason that He sighed deeply, I believe, was because He had already shown enough of Himself and His power to heal and deliver, that they should have been able to receive His teaching ministry. He knew that they must repent of this unbelieving attitude if they were ever to avoid the condemnation of hell. You know, there were things which I believe brought grief and weariness to the heart of the Lord Jesus. And that was when He had done so many things to show people His power to save and heal, and still people looked on with skepticism and disdain. The proof is there in the lives of those whom He has saved and healed, and still people look for some other kind of signs before they will become a Christian, and before they will join a Bible-believing church.

The judgment day is going to make a number of things plain to unbelieving people. Those people who, like the Ninevites, have repented when they heard the simple warning of God's judgment which is coming upon the world, will rise up to condemn those who had much greater light and a greater understanding of the gospel in the days of Christ all the way down to our day as well. What more could God have done than He has done? Our land is filled with Bibles and yet many people do not read them. It is filled with gospel teachers and preachers, but are people listening to them? A greater than Jonah has come! A greater than Jonah has been raised from the dead. Every person must repent of their own particular sins. You must turn away from all your worldliness, and pride, and selfish ambition. You must turn away from sensuality and pornography, and fornication; living with your girlfriend and not thinking of marriage. You must repent and turn away from your malice and anger toward those who try to tell you that you cannot enter the kingdom of heaven when you have greed, and envy, and foolishness all bound up in your heart. You think that the answer is to go to the casino or go to the mall and spend money. You think that life consists in the abundance of your possessions. But O how wrong you are.

But the worst of sins is your unbelief. You think that the world is going to hell in a hand-basket, and you yourself will not repent. You complain about homosexual marriage and you wonder if this is a sign of the end of the world and the Day of judgment coming, and yet you do not repent of your own sins. How many will think of all these things that are wrong in our society, as being dreadful and bad, and yet they themselves will not have personal dealings with God over their own sins, and they will not come to church because they have other things to do. The Judgment Day is going to surprise many people. It will especially surprise the careless and the negligent, because neither those who are careless or negligent of what God expects of them

will enter into the kingdom. It is not a casual faith that will save. It is not a superficial repentance which will turn away God's wrath. It is not seeing signs that will give you the power to repent of all of your sins. It is only the blood of Christ that will do that. You need to paint His blood on the doorposts of your heart today, just as the Israelites of old painted the doorposts of their houses when the death angel went through Egypt that fateful first Passover night so long ago. Everyone who did not paint the blood; their first born son died. But you will know that you are beginning the journey of a real repentance, and coming out of spiritual bondage, when you trust in the blood of Christ; when you realize what it cost Him to give you the power to become a child of God and to repent of all of your sins. You say, "Show me a sign that I should repent." I show you Christ on the cross at Calvary. And I show you Christ risen from the dead. I show you Christ telling his disciples in Luke 24: 46: "Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day, and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all the nations, beginning at Jerusalem." "And you are witnesses to these things." A greater than Jonah is here. Will you not heed His words? "Unless you repent, you shall all likewise perish."

And the last reason that it was wrong for these men to ask for a sign was because Jesus knew that they were not interested in seeking wisdom. (Verse 42)

"The queen of the South will rise up in the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and indeed a greater than Solomon is here." Now here we have a woman who came from a long distance to hear the wisdom of Solomon. She is the queen of Sheba, the queen of the South, the queen of Ethiopia before it was called that. Turn with me to 1 Kings Chapter 10. "Now when the queen of Sheba heard of the fame of Solomon she came to test him with hard questions." "She came to Jerusalem with a very great retinue, with camels that bore spices, very much gold, and precious stones; and when she came to Solomon, she spoke with him about all that was in her heart." "So Solomon answered all her questions; there was nothing so difficult for the king that he could explain it to her." "And when the queen of Sheba had seen all the wisdom of Solomon, the house that he had built, the food on his table, the seating of his servants, the service of his waiters and their apparel, his cup-bearers, and his entryway by which he went up the house of the Lord, there was no more spirit in her." "Then she said to the king: 'It was a true report which heard in my own land about your words and your wisdom.'" "However I did not believe the words until I came and saw with my own eyes; and indeed the half was not told me." "Your wisdom and prosperity exceed the fame of which I heard." "Happy are your men and happy are these your servants, who stand continually before you and hear your wisdom!"

Now this is a very significant way to close our sermon and our time together this morning. Jesus is much greater than Solomon. All the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are found in Him. By faith in Him you receive these treasures of His wisdom and His grace. This lady came from the ends of the earth to hear his wisdom, and yet these men of our text look for a sign from Jesus when everything He said and everything He did was already a sign to them. They were very stupid and foolish spiritually speaking. But I pray that none of you would be like them. Come to Jesus with your hard questions. He will answer them. Come to Him and tell Him everything that is in your heart. There will be nothing too difficult for Jesus to answer in your life. If any man lacks wisdom, let him ask. Come see the house that He is building (His Church). Come and see the seating of His servants and their apparel, the robe of righteousness which He has woven by His own finished work on the cross. Come and see and believe the report that you read of Him in the Word of God and the report which is spoken to you by His servants. It will take your breath away when you discover that a greater than Solomon is here.