

January 22nd, 2012

The Sign of Jonah

Matthew 12:38-45

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Sovereign Lord, we come before You humbled by Your mighty hand and confessing You as the one who is the Creator of Heaven and earth, the one who has planned out history since from before the foundation of the world and the one who has extended His grace to us, here and now. Lord we thank You that You have made us partakers of this great salvation through the blood of Your Son. And Lord help us remember that Cross that was born by Him once and for all for the forgiveness of sins. And Father we do indeed serve a risen King and as we peer into your word Lord, help us understand these matters that our Master has announced to us. Open our hearts, our minds, our ears, may we receive the Word implanted. And may we not be mere hearers but we may we be doers of the Word, and thus may we bear fruit for Your Kingdom and bring glory to Your Son, our King Jesus. In His precious name we pray, Amen.

Well it is a story that most of us learned at a very young age. We heard of a man who was on a boat and he was cast over board and was swallowed up by a huge fish, spent three days in the belly of a beast before being spit up on shore. Now the story of Jonah is very well known because of how extremely in once sense unbelievable it is, though it is a true story. It sticks with us, we remember at a young age and thus we remember the story of Jonah and the “whale”. It is well known and world renown. And yet outside of these elements, a man being swallowed up and spit out on shore, most aren’t aware of the meaning of the Book of Jonah in the Old Testament, nor the significance of the true story of Jonah that we see Jesus’ place upon it in the New Testament. Now today we will back in the Book of Matthew and Jesus is going to declare that there is going to be a sign given to unbelieving Israel, and that is the sign of Jonah. And thus this sign has great significance. So we’re going to look at the dynamics of this passage where Jesus teaches on the sign of Jonah and we are going to also look at His teaching on what we should apply from our King for today.

But before we get into our text as is our way, we are going to consider the context. We are going to remember where we have been thus far. Now throughout the Book of Matthew we have seen from the out-set that Matthew is a book about fulfillment. Fulfillment that Jesus is this son of Abraham, He is the son of David. And thus both of these powerful prophecies in Genesis and 2 Samuel, that the son of Abraham would come and bless all the nations and that the son of David would come and be the heir to the eternal Kingdom of God, both of these come and find their fulfillment in the person and work of Jesus. But as we see this fulfillment, from the very out-set when the King is born, we see there is conflict. There is great conflict with the king of the kingdom, we see that right when He was born, Herod looks to seek the life of the child (Matthew 2), and as we continue to look at the Messianic works of Jesus of Nazareth we see there is conflict coming from the Pharisees.

One example we read it was in Matthew 9:32-34, "As they were going away, behold, a demon-oppressed man who was mute was brought to Him. And when the demon had been cast out, the mute man spoke. And the crowds marveled, saying, "Never was anything like this seen in Israel." But the Pharisees said, "He casts out demons by the prince of demons."

(Matthew 9:32-34 ESV)

So in Matthew 12 we see that there are these signs that Jesus is giving and He is ministering in this region of Galilee, going throughout all their cities healing and casting out demons. And if you recall just before our text today the Pharisees were accused of committing the unforgiveable sin because they attributed Jesus' works to Satan, to Beelzebub. And thus last time we were in Matthew (Ref. Matthew 12:15-37 - Sermon 12-18-2011), we looked at the dynamics of this unforgiveable sin.

So after this, so after Jesus declares their deep depravity by looking at these miraculous things and attributing them to Satan, we get to our text today and that is Matthew 12. We will read verses 38 and 39, "Then some of the scribes and Pharisees answered Him, saying, "Teacher, we wish to see a sign from you." But He answered them, "An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah.

(Matthew 12:38-39 ESV)

So first off we can see that there is something a-miss in the Pharisees thinking because if we have been reading Matthew's account so far, we have seen He is going throughout Galilee healing the sick, casting out demons, and even raising the dead. And so they come and what do they want, they want a sign. They are requesting a sign. They want a miraculous manifestation proving His authenticity. They want a miracle on-demand so to speak.

And Jesus says, "An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign". Now what is this "evil and adulterous generation". Now this is a term we are going to see throughout the Book of Matthew, this term "this generation", and it always given in the pejorative or in the negative, "this generation" is always coupled with something that is negative. And here we see that they are evil and adulterous. Now I believe Jesus is referring back to the time of the Exodus when He is using this term. That generation was referred to as a wicked and evil generation because they were delivered out of Egypt, saw all these miraculous wonders. But yet what happened? They died in unbelief in the wilderness. Therefore, Jesus is using this to describe unbelieving Israel. And we are going to see Him re-address this concept of "this generation" later on our text. But He says "an evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign". So they were seeking for a sign even though they were surrounded, as we have seen, even read from the lips of the people, nothing like this has ever been seen in Israel as that light shown in Galilee.

So to unbelieving Israel, He says, "no sign will be given to this evil and adulterous generation" like the evil and adulterous generation of their fore-fathers that were delivered out of Egypt, he will be given the sign of Jonah. He will give the sign of Jonah to this evil and adulterous generation.

Now what is this sign? Now Jesus gives us the dynamics of this sign when He continues in verses 40 and 41, "For just 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. The men of Nineveh will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and behold, something greater than Jonah is here."

(Matthew 12:40-41 ESV)

So really what we see here, and we will look at the specifics, but the sign of Jonah is the sign of Jesus' death and Resurrection. Now Jesus relates this to Jonah. Now again we well know

the story of Jonah, at least we know the spectacular dynamics of it. The reason why Jonah was on that boat was because he was fleeing from God, because God called him to go preach to the Ninevites. Now the Ninevites were up north near Assyria or in Assyria and this was considered a godless city and did great harm and opposed God's people.

So Jonah did not want to go and preach there, because he did not want to see them repent. So he jumped on a boat and tried to flee but there is no way that you can flee from the Lord of Heaven and earth. Therefore a storm comes and the people on the boat realize it is because of this guy, so they toss him overboard, and thus he is swallowed and he is in the belly of a great fish for three days and three nights, and then he comes out, and he proceeds to go forth and preach to the Gentiles. And the Gentiles repent. And that's what we see, "The men of Nineveh will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it".

Now let's look at the parallels between what's going to happen with Jesus going into the heart of the earth. Now "heart of the earth" isn't speaking of Jesus going down into Hell or to the core of the earth. It's simply a figure of speech for the grave. He is going to be in the tomb for three days nights and then come out just like Jonah was in the belly of a fish and came out. So both come out of their dwelling place of being in either the belly of the fish or the heart of the earth, both are going to proceed and bring forth a message, and both are going to have Gentiles repenting at the message. And thus this is the "sign of Jonah". There is an analogy here.

And Jesus now tells the people, the men of Nineveh "are going to rise up with this generation at the judgment and condemn it". And this again is a figure of speech, this is declaring that at the judgment that what happened at the time of Jonah is going to condemn this generation, why, because something greater is here. Now Jonah was a prophet in the 8th century B.C, and this going to make these men more accountable because Jonah's preaching and Jonah's power paled in comparison to the preaching and the power of the King of Kings. Thus something greater than Jonah was in their midst, and what were they doing? They were saying He has a demon. Thus the men of Nineveh are going to rise up at the judgment because they repented and that example is going to bring greater accountability to the generation that saw all of Jesus' works and refused to repent. So that is one of the first object lessons that Jesus gives in regards to the coming judgment of those within Israel that reject Him.

Now He gives another one. In verse 42 we read, “The queen of the South will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon, and behold, something greater than Solomon is here.”

(Matthew 12:42 ESV) So in 1 Kings 10 we read of the queen of the South journeying up, eagerly wanting to hear of this great wisdom of the king of Israel, King Solomon. (1 Kings 10:1-13) Now she is going to be used as an example at the judgment because she flocked from Egypt, she made the journey to hear the wisdom of the king of Israel, the son of David.

And here we have the King of Kings in their very backyard, in Israel, preaching in Galilee and they refused to submit to Him. And instead rather than coming and submitting to His wisdom, again they blaspheme and say He has a demon. So again we have two of these instances given by the word of our King, the men of Ninevah and the queen of the South are going to be used as evidence to bring further accountability to those who are hearing the words of Christ.

And again this something when we are clothed with a 21st century context, with 20 centuries of preaching history behind us, when Jesus says “someone greater than Solomon is here” we think oh of course, of course Jesus is greater Solomon”. But clothe yourself with a 1st century context. Solomon and his kingdom was seen as a pinnacle of all of Israel, because of all of the land was at peace and they were full of bounty and riches and beauty in the kingdom. And Jesus arises, this lowly carpenter in the region of Galilee with His fishermen accompanying Him, and He says “behold something greater than Solomon is here”. They would of scoffed and that would have been a radical statement at that time. But instead indeed we see, in hindsight now, of course the Messiah, His person, His work, His power, is far greater than Solomon in all what came with His Kingdom.

And Jesus now proceeds to direct His analogy again to specifically to this generation. And again I want to remind everyone I think “this generation” is speaking to a people group, unbelieving Israelites. And let’s see that as we progress here in this text 43-45, “When the unclean spirit has gone out of a person, it passes through waterless places seeking rest, but finds none. Then it says, ‘I will return to my house from which I came.’ And when it comes, it finds the house empty, swept, and put in order. Then it goes and brings with it seven other spirits more evil than itself, and they enter and dwell there, and the last state of that person is worse than the first. So also will it be with this evil generation.”

(Matthew 12:43-45 ESV).

Ok now a lot of people read this and try to think that they can look at this text and figure out all of the dynamics and specifics of how demons work and therefore we can somehow intervene and stop these things. That's not the point of the text. Again, Jesus is giving an analogy here relating what goes on with this instance that He cites to what will be with this evil generation.

Now what happens here? Now an unclean spirit has gone out of a person and what's interesting is remember the context. They had just accused Jesus of having a demon. But Jesus truly was the one by the Spirit of the living God, was working these wonders. And now Jesus uses an analogy about them and basically declares "no, it is this evil generation that is in league with Satan and his minions". And thus He uses this "an unclean spirit has gone out of a person, it passes through waterless places seeking rest, but finds none". So the point here is that there is one unclean spirit, it goes out seeking to find rest, the house was swept clean, there's no evil spirits in a person anymore, it comes and finds the house empty, swept, and put in order but there is no protection there. There is no protection there. Thus it brings seven other worse spirits than itself and enter and dwells there. And this is the point, the point, the general point we want to see here. The last state of that person is worse than the first, so it will be with this evil generation. So how does this relate to what Jesus is stating? It has to do with the history of Israel. Remember that this evil generation extends back to the Exodus and there always been within Israel people who have opposed God and His purposes. We see that throughout the Old Testament. That is why the exile happened, because they failed to keep God's covenant. They opposed Him. Jerusalem became a whore, a prostitute.

And notice Israel has her problems. The Messiah comes and preaches the Gospel of the Kingdom and by and large He is rejected by Israel. And what Jesus is saying is that the coming of the Messiah is a problem for ethnic Israel. Because they have not received Him, thus the latter state is worse than what it was before.

Now we know that is not the end of the matter. And in fact if you have your Bibles, please turn with me to Matthew 23. In Matthew 23 we see Jesus, this was when He had arrived in Jerusalem. And note here in verse 34-36 to the ungodly leadership notice the terms He uses again here, He'll talk about "this generation" . "Therefore I send you prophets and wise men

and scribes, some of whom you will kill and crucify, and some you will flog in your synagogues and persecute from town to town, so that on you may come all the righteous blood shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah the son of Barachiah, whom you murdered between the sanctuary and the altar. Truly, I say to you, all these things will come upon this generation.” (Matthew 23:34-36 ESV)

So we see a judgment coming upon the house of Israel. Indeed a greater judgment than was before because they did not recognize the time of their visitation. And then Jesus stands over Jerusalem, the King of the great city, and says in verse 37, “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not. See, your house is left to you desolate! For I tell you, you will not see me again, until you say, ‘Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord’.” (Matthew 23:37-39)

So we see here the pronouncement of the King, the latter state being worse than before. He leaves her house desolate. And thus we see the house of Israel, the ethnic people of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, going through the cycles of discipline from the Lord because they opposed His Son. But we know that’s the end of the matter. And in Romans 11 (Romans 11:26-27) we read of that glorious day when the Lord will return and pour out His Spirit upon the House of Jacob and they will return to Him in repentance and faith in the Messiah and thus finally they will be purged and cleansed of all the things that plagued them. So that is what we see here in Jesus’ analogy of the unclean spirits because it is the worsening state of the coming and rejection of the Messiah.

Now I have three points that I want us to consider as we look at this text. The first one is do not chase signs and wonders. There is a phenomenon not just in our country but across the world, there is this preoccupation to chase signs and wonders. And it often pops up in our country, we hear of some sort of great revival going on, whether it be to Pensacola, whether it be in Florida, whether it be in Texas, we heard of such things in Toronto. We are not called to chase signs and wonders. Remember what Jesus said “even an adulterous generation seeks after a sign” (Matthew 12:39) The Lord has given us signs! He has given us wonders and they are recorded in His Holy Word. And thus we are called as His people to be content in what He has already given. And there is a danger in chasing after signs and wonders. Because signs and

wonders certainly can point to that which is true. And I am not saying that signs and wonders, legitimate signs and wonders don't happen, they indeed do, but they always need to be pointing to the person and work of Jesus of Nazareth. And if they don't, they are a lying sign and wonder.

Now in Matthew 24, Jesus warned us about these things, which is why it is important that we have to become trained in His Word. In Matthew 24, Jesus talks about the end of the age and declares "Then (He means at that time) if anyone says to you, 'Look, here is the Christ!' or 'There he is!' do not believe it. For false christs and false prophets will arise and perform great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect. See, I have told you in advance." (Matthew 24:23-25 ESV) And that "see" is a word, there is more force there, it's behold, take heed, "I have told you in advance." In 2 Thessalonians 2, we read of those false signs and wonders again "and they will mislead those who don't love the truth".

(2 Thessalonians 2:10)

So again we are called do not chase signs and wonders and we are called to be rooted in the King, because even right here is wisdom has told us in advance. We are not to be deceived when signs and wonders may arise. Because we see this throughout the Scriptures that the enemy has the ability to produce that what is supernatural.

So our calling is to be rooted in the King and His wisdom and that is my next point of application. Listen to the wisdom of the King. Remember in our text, we saw that the queen of Sheba, the queen of the South journeyed to King Solomon. And we saw the people of Israel rejecting, at least some of those in Israel rejecting and not fleeing to hearing the wisdom of Christ and submitting to Him.

And let's not become proud in our own standing, because we need to ask ourselves how often do we walk over to the bed-side to pick up our Scriptures and read the wisdom of the King. We have it. We have, out of any generation that has been alive on earth, we have the most abundance of God's Word that has ever been around. And even speaking of countries, I mean we have dozens and dozens of different translations to choose from, where other tongues have maybe small fragments and oral tradition to depend on. We have treasure at our disposal, and it is our calling to avail ourselves of it, to hear His Word, to learn His Word, and

listen to it. And we see in 1 Corinthians 2:12-16 the beauty of the wisdom and the mind of Christ that has been given to us in His Word, we read from the pen of Paul, “Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God. And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual. The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned. The spiritual person judges all things, but is himself to be judged by no one. “For who has understood the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?” But we have the mind of Christ.” (1 Corinthians 2:12-16 ESV)

We have been given the Spirit of the living God and the Spirit of the living God illuminates our hearts and minds to understand His Word but also to apply His Word. That is the work of the Holy Spirit in us and we have the mind of Christ and it's speaking of His teachings granted to us, inspired by the Holy Spirit, illuminated by the Holy Spirit, and applied by the Holy Spirit. And we have His Word readily available with the seal of the Spirit of God upon it. Thus all of us are called to throw off that is what is worldly and flee to listen to the wisdom of the King, the Son of David.

Finally, know that the sign of Jonah still stands. Remember Jesus said that there will be a sign given to this evil generation, this adulterous generation. And that sign will be the sign of Jonah which is the death, burial, and indeed the Resurrection of Jesus. Brothers and sisters here is the Good News. That sign still stands because the tomb is still empty, the tomb is still empty. Jesus is raised from the dead. He was crucified, that was a sign. His very crucifixion was a sign that He was the Son of David, that He was the King of the Jews as He fulfilled the prophecies as we read in the prophet Isaiah 53 and Psalm 22. He was buried for three days, that was a sign, because it was written in the Word that the “Lord would not allow Him to see decay”. (Psalm 16:10) And He was raised, and this is a sign. And it is a sign not just for unbelieving Israel, it is a sign for all humanity. It is proof that Jesus was who He said He was.

And in Acts 17:30-31, Paul declares, “The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now He commands all people everywhere to repent, because He has fixed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom He has appointed; and of this He has given assurance to all by raising Him from the dead.” (Acts 17:30-31 ESV)

He has given assurance to all because that sign is truly a miracle. It is truly a sign because it demonstrates. Now what is a sign? A sign points to something. Jesus being raised from the dead points to the truth in that He is who He said He was. God raised Him from the dead. He is interceding right now at the right hand of the Father and He is returning to gather His people and set up His Kingdom on earth. So this sign of Jonah still stands and thus this is a miracle. It is a sign and is the essence of our testimony preaching Jesus crucified, died, and raised forever more.

And thus Jesus sent forth His messengers, and Paul here declares “that He has fixed a day on which He will judge”. That is speaking of God’s wrath, it is coming. He will judge world in righteousness and it’s going to be through the same one who was crucified, Jesus of Nazareth, true God, true man, was crucified, died, and He was raised. And this is in accordance of what we read in Isaiah, and what read in Psalm 22. And he is going to suffer but then go forth and see the bounty that His suffering produces and that is purchasing Himself a people, purchasing Himself a Kingdom.

So that sign, that message, that the people heard on the Resurrection morning “go for He is not here”, (Matthew 28:6), He is still is not there. That tomb will forever be empty and that is Good News. He is ascended to the right hand and He is coming again and all eyes will see Him, even those who pierced Him.

So brothers and sisters it is our calling, as we look at this, to cling to the Cross and the Resurrection, and if you have not believe in this Jesus, the call has reached you today to repent and believe in this one true Gospel and you will be saved. And He has given us assurance. We know it’s going to come to pass. We know He is returning because He is raised. And we see this sign of Jonah but there is this other sign and we read of that sign in Matthew 24. In Matthew 24, Jesus says when the Son of Man comes in the clouds, when the sky has gone dark, what are they going to see, what are all going to see, they are going to see the sign of the Son of Man. The Son of Man Himself is going to be the sign, when all eyes see Him and recognized, He is the sovereign ruler of Heaven and earth. (Matthew 24:29-31) so the question is, are you ready.

Let's pray. Father, we read these glorious truths from Your Word and we are humbled by the mighty wisdom and power of Your Son. Lord help us hear these things well and we thank You for preserving them. We thank you for gathering us together here today to consider these things. Lord help us keep our hearts and our minds fixed on the Cross, fixed on our Savior. We know He has all that is sufficient for our every need. Help us rest in Him, Lord, and not chase things that are for our ruin. Lord we ask that You would cause the Holy Spirit to enable us, to eagerly desire Your Word, to discipline ourselves, to read it, to drink it, and to learn, and to move beyond to that which is milk to the meaty realms of Your Word so that we might learn the glorious matters pertaining to the Messiah. And precious Lord, we long for Your Son to return. We eagerly anticipate the return, when we will see Him, when we will be raised forever more, when He will usher us into Your Kingdom and we will feast with all of Your people, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Daniel, Paul, John, and most of all, all of us fixing our eyes on the King whom we love and whom purchased us all. Prepare us for His return, Father. We love You and we thank You for Him. In His name we pray, Amen!

Sermon By

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Delivered On

January 22nd, 2012

Delivered At

Conquering King Fellowship

Black Hawk Middle School

1540 Deerwood Drive

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Service

Sundays, 10:00am CST

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