

Matthew 12:38-50

"A Single Sign"

It's a much dreaded, lightly treaded topic: the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit. Yet it's critical to address it because it's the one sin that Jesus says will *never* (either in this age or the age to come) be forgiven man. So it's fairly important to get a grip on what that is; would you agree?

If you weren't w/us last time I'd encourage you to grab a copy of that study or download it online but in short it's not something you *say*; there are no words so cursed that they can keep you from heaven. It's found back in Vs 31 of Ch 12. Jesus said that *every sin & blasphemy* will be forgiven men. All sin is wrapped up & done away w/at the cross of J.C. The blood of J.C. is sufficient to cleanse all of mankind throughout all of human history of every sin & blasphemy.

However therein lies the caveat, or the qualification, right? If we're to have our sin forgiven, if we're to be washed clean before God & made right in His sight than we have to be *in Christ*. If the sin dilemma is only satisfied in Christ, than your sinfulness is only taken *from* you & His righteousness is only credited *to* you *in Christ*.

Therefore if you harden your heart *against* Christ, refuse to surrender your heart *to* Christ, there can be no forgiveness. It's the Holy Spirit's express agenda to testify of Jesus, that He is the Christ. He was sent to convict the world of sin, of righteousness & of judgment (all of which find the resolve we need before God in Jesus). But if you won't come to Jesus, you're in essence calling the Holy Spirit a liar, that you don't believe that Jesus is sufficient to save you & you'll take your chances on your own or by some other route. So you have in essence blasphemed Him, you have said you don't believe Him, therefore you won't receive Jesus, & in such case you can't be forgiven. Because when you reject God's only means for salvation, there's nothing left outside of condemnation.

So, blasphemy of the Holy Spirit roots itself in a fundamental problem w/the heart. & The heart will show itself in what we say. The religious leaders (in Matt 12) were exposing their heart in saying that Jesus was working miracles by the deceptive sorcery of Satan rather than simply acknowledging the power of the Holy Spirit in His life. & Jesus drew attention to that when He called them sons of the devil based upon the things that were coming out of their mouths.

He said in essence, you're showing me your heart by the things that you speak (Vs 34) for it's out of the abundance of the *heart* that the mouth speaks. It's w/in that same context that we read in **Vs 37**.

Paul picked up on this principle of how words reflect the heart when he said, *"...if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation."*¹ What's in our heart is made manifest by what comes out of our mouth.

Vs 38

Can we stop right here for a minute? I'm sorry but it's difficult for me to get passed our very 1st Vs w/out having to stop & say something☺. *Let's not be so naïve as to see their request to see a sign as them saying, "Look, we're open here. We just need to see something that proves to us that You are who You claim to be & then we'll throw ourselves down at your feet & worship You declaring openly that You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God."*

You know, if Jesus would just levitate for them, or cause a tree to sprout from the ground & grow to full strength right in front of them they'd believe. If He'd just cause fire to fall from heaven or vanish before them & reappear behind them they'd be convinced. No!

*Let's not be so quick to forget the 14th Vs of this same Ch. "Then the Pharisees went out & plotted against Him, how they might destroy Him." We need to understand this statement as further evidence of their settled unbelief & the fact that they're looking for ways to disqualify Him & justify their already *established rejection of Him*.*

I mean, let's be honest. The scriptures had foretold the kinds of things that Messiah's mission would involve when He was on the scene. Things like opening the eyes of the blind, healing lepers, opening deaf ears, freeing those held captive by the devil, the mute would sing for joy & the dead would be raised to life. *Jesus had done all those things & more, yet these men have the audacity (even after watching Him heal a man w/a withered hand & bring healing/deliverance to a man who was blind/mute & demon possessed just moments earlier) to ask for a sign!?*

¹ *The New King James Version*. (1982). [Ro 10:9-10]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

What further proof could He possibly have given? All that was left was for them to search the scripture, weighing the *words* of Jesus w/the *works* of Jesus & come to the conclusion that He was in fact the Christ. Instead they watched Him heal & deliver men right before their eyes & said, “This Man does these things through the deceptive power of satanic sorcery!” “Now, do something else!” Really? He wasn’t about to do this dance & cater to their unbelief.

So again, let’s not place too much weight; let’s not overestimate the power of miracles to persuade people to believe. More times than not throughout the bible we find that’s not the case at all. I won’t say that no one ever responds categorically, that wouldn’t be true. But generally it’s not the case. It certainly wasn’t the case for these men. Notice.

Vs 39-40

You see, Jesus affirms their misguided motives for seeking a sign back in Vs 39 when He calls them an, “evil & adulterous generation”. He didn’t say, “Well you know what fellas, I’m feeling your sincerity so I’m going to show you a sign so that you might see & believe.” There was none of that... He said, “You *evil & adulterous* generation!” He knew they were only looking to trap Him, somehow accuse Him & turn the nation against Him.

So they’re “evil” in the sense that they’ve taken their stance (really w/Satan) against God, His goodness, His love, the fact that He sent to them a Savior Whom they are rejecting. “Adulterous” in their spiritual unfaithfulness to God through their religious formality & not receiving to themselves His Son Personally. When a person or people aren’t truly faithful to God, God considers it spiritual adultery. Because we belong to Him, & when we’re not faithful to Him than we commit spiritual adultery against Him. Jesus says that spiritual unfaithfulness blankets & defines these men & this generation that He’s seeking to minister to.

They’re seeking a sign, He’s given them more than enough, He’s not going to play their games or jump through their hoops. “No ‘sign’ will be given.” With 1 exception, it’s not healing someone, opening blind eyes, raising the dead... none of that. Jesus says, “All My validation, all My confirmation, all the ratification of My life, My mission & My ministry will be based on *a single sign*, the sign of the prophet Jonah.”

Wait, what? What’s that? Isn’t he the guy who was swallowed by a gargantuan fish?

Yep. What's that have to do w/You Jesus? What's that have to do w/any of this?

Vs 40

Family, we need to focus in here, we need not miss this. Jesus is saying that there is a picture, a veiled prophecy (if you will) of His ministry & His mission that was foreshadowed in the life & ministry of the prophet Jonah.

Now this is a big deal, for more than one reason. #1 It shows that Jesus believed the narrative of Jonah. Some people have a real problem believing that Jonah was a real man, swallowed by a real fish & then 3 days later was regurgitated & went on about his business. (Of course some of these same people have no problem believing we *evolved* from fish, but that's a study for another time☺). Listen, Jesus believed it; & even went as far as to validate His claim to be the Messiah on the basis of it.

But 2^{ndly} I want you to realize that for those who struggle to believe that Jonah was a real man, that he was swallowed by a real fish & that he "surfaced" alive after 3 days to fulfill the ministry to which God had called him, their problem runs deeper than the thought of an impossible story that they think could never happen. Their problem goes far beyond that, their problem lies in their concept of God. My question is, "how big is your God?"

Because if you can get past Gen 1:1 the rest of the bible is easy. If you can believe, "In the beginning God created the heavens & the earth." Than for God to prepare a great fish to swallow Jonah & bring him up from the deep alive 3 days later is no problem at all. If for your god some things are impossible, than we don't serve the same God... not at all!

Evidently you've got things reversed, rather than realize you've been created after *God's* image, you've created a god after *your own* image. & Since you can't fathom it, it can't be done... how sad. You see, a proper concept of God changes everything. But people who don't know the God of the bible have a tendency to fashion a god in their own mind after their own likeness therefore their god is limited.

The Psalmist picked up on this. Leave Matt's gospel & turn quickly to Psalm 115 (Vs1-8)

Do you know why people fashion gods w/eyes? Because *they* have eyes.

They place ears on them because *they* have ears, they give them legs & feet because they're fashioning them in their own likeness. But here's the deal, they have eyes, but they can't see, they have hands but they can't handle, they don't walk, they can't talk, they don't feel... & Those who make them are like them, blind, deaf to the things of God, going nowhere, doing nothing of eternal value. You will become like your God.

It's a horrible curse that man becomes like his god if his god is false. It's a tremendous blessing that a man would become like his God if his God is true...

*"Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is."*² A man become like his God. *"But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord."*³ You & me, we should be becoming more like J.C. everyday by the power of the Spirit of God in our lives, & we *will be* as we worship & serve Him & learn of Him.

So Jesus affirms the narrative, the life story of Jonah. & He tells us that what happened w/Jonah was a foreshadowing of what would be fulfilled in Him, namely His death & resurrection. The resurrection would be the single sign that Jesus would give to mankind verifying/ratifying that He is the Son of God, the Savior of the world. It is the one hinge upon which the entirety of our faith swings. How can you know that the work of the cross really "took"? That it was accepted & God was satisfied w/the sacrifice of Jesus? That it was sufficient to cleanse me of my sin? The resurrection. If Jesus didn't rise than our faith is futile & we're still in our sins. However Christ *is* risen from the dead, God did affirm His sacrifice validating, demonstrating that He is indeed the sinless Son of God, the Lamb slain for the sins of the world. (Interesting though isn't it, even though Jesus rose from the dead, they still didn't believe. The indisputable sign, still rejected).

Jonah & Jesus, an unlikely parallel & a glorious picture of Jesus in an unexpected place. Think about it, Jonah gave his life to appease the wrath of God coming upon others. Have you ever thought about that?

² *The New King James Version*. (1982). [1 Jn 3:2]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

³ *The New King James Version*. (1982). [2 Co 3:18]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

There they were in the boat, the storm was upon them, they were *all* going to perish. Jonah said, “Throw me over board & you’ll be saved. I’ll bear the wrath of God so you won’t perish.” He sacrificed himself for the sake of others. But after 3 days & nights of being in the deep, he “surfaced” alive & through his ministry salvation came to the city of Nineveh.

So Jesus says, “That’s the sign, I’ll be crucified & put in the grave, but on the 3rd day I’ll rise again & salvation will come to the nations because of it.” Now had He risen on day 1 or day 4 we could disqualify Him, say He was a false prophet, but He rose on day 3 & now we have a choice don’t we? Like these men, to accept Him or reject Him.

Vs 41-42

Family, it’s important to see what Jesus is saying here. He is affirming the resurrection of which we will *all* take part in, & that there will be a day of judgment of which people from every tribe, tongue, nation & generation will be there!

He says, “*The men of Nineveh will rise up in the judgment with this generation.*” He’s speaking of the resurrection, he’s speaking of the day of judgment, He’s placing Jew & Gentile together & a people who lived in different periods of time, *all together on that day.* Not only that, He’s saying that the Gentiles of Nineveh will condemn these Jews of His generation sitting right there listening to Him (like a double slam) why? Because they repented at the preaching of Jonah & One greater than Jonah was right there w/them & they didn’t repent, they rejected His message & His mission.

We’ve compared Jesus & Jonah, now consider the contrast. Jesus was greater than Jonah in every way. Jonah didn’t want to go to Nineveh, Jesus willfully came to this earth. Jonah was moving in disobedience when he got on that boat. Jesus always *did those things that pleased the Father.* Jonah wanted those people to perish, He didn’t want God to have compassion upon them. Jesus loved us & gave Himself for us, said that He didn’t come to condemn the world but that the world through Him might be saved... *Jonah preached a very monotonous message of wrath, 40 days then comes judgment. Jesus preached a message of love, grace, compassion; how we could be forgiven of our sin & find life in His name. Jonah did no miracles, Jesus worked innumerable miracles.*

Jonah's message was to a city, Jesus' was for the world. When Jonah appeased God's wrath it calmed the seas for the sailors. When Jesus appeased God's wrath it brought all who would call upon Him peace w/God through the blood of His cross.

Yet for all of that when Jonah went to Nineveh (the Gentiles) they responded & repented (w/lesser light). But when Jesus came to His own, they rejected Him & refused to receive Him.

Another Gentile (the queen of Sheba, 1 Kings 10) travelled by caravan for 1,000 miles or more to hear the wisdom, see wealth & the works of Solomon; she was blessed & blown away! These men didn't have to go anywhere, One greater than Solomon came to *them*. Solomon *had* wisdom *from* God, Jesus *is* the wisdom of God. Solomon was a great king, Jesus is the King of kings! Again, Solomon worked no miracles, Jesus worked more miracles than could be recorded.

The pattern here is that Gentiles were receiving the message, the Jews were rejecting it even though they'd been given so much more & the greater the rejected revelation, the greater the degree of condemnation. Notice.

Vs 43-45

Ok, even though Jesus gives us some interesting principles of demon possession here, we need to realize that His main point was the exponential damage that's done when we refuse to receive Him. We know that because after He explains this scenario He likens it to the way it's going to be w/that generation who has completely/fully & finally rejected Him.

Jesus had come to this nation, He'd been "cleaning house", there was "void" if you will. He'd been dealing w/the enemy, casting him out relentlessly but unfortunately rather than receiving Jesus they rejected Him nationally. Ultimately the enemy swept in & by 70 A.D. Jerusalem was in total ruins, the temple destroyed & they were disbanded as a nation until as recently as May 14th 1948. The last state immeasurably worse than the 1st.

Here's the point, *reformation* apart from *regeneration* will ultimately/eternally only make things worse. It's great when someone goes from an alcoholic to a sober life, from drug addiction to dry/clean. But something has to fill that void, & if it's not Jesus how will that help you ultimately/eternally?

Now, on the spiritual side. Evidently demons (at least some of them) desire a human host.

& They look for a place among the empty, it's like an open invitation to them. They don't mind if the house is swept & put in order, morally upright or whatever. If you're not filled w/the Spirit of God, you can be inhabited by a demonic spirit at will & there's really nothing you can do to stop it.

This is why it's so important that when a demon is cast out of a human host that, that person have a desire to surrender their lives to Christ. If not, after that demon leaves, he'll come back. & He'll return w/7 of his buddies more foul than himself (a whole new meaning to 8 is enough!).

Of course we're offended that he considers it "his house" as if he built it, bought it or anything else. He really has no right to it, but it's open to his squatting there because if the *Holy Spirit* doesn't reside there, the *demonic* spirit can invade that space... & it only gets worse from there. Here's the point, don't reject J.C., receive J.C. or things will only go from bad to worse. It's not about *reform* outwardly, it's about *rebirth* inwardly.

Vs 46-50

Mark's gospel tells us that they thought that Jesus was getting a little out there, a little over the top fanatical in his ministry. Perhaps He was crazy or something. It wasn't until after the resurrection that even His own brothers believed in Him... They were thinking, "Jesus is going to get Himself killed if He keeps talking to the leaders this way, we better go get Him."

It's not uncommon to get saved & have your family (if they're not saved) feel like you've fallen off the deep end.

But what we take from this is that His family didn't have any special privileges before Him. He didn't give Mary (His mother) any special standing or favor. & It's not that He was disrespecting His physical kinship. It was that He was saying there's a deeper bond still & that's a spiritual kinship, characterized by obedience to the will of the Father.

Listen, the invitation goes out. You can be apart of the family of God. The invitation goes out to "whoever." Just submit yourself to the will of God & do it. "What is it?" Jn 6:29, "...that you *believe* in Him whom He sent." Turn from your sin, believe on the Lord J.C. Enter the family of God through faith in the finished work of the cross; the death & resurrection of J.C. for me, & for you. Amen? Amen.

Prayer Points:

God, we thank You that You're *not willing* that any should perish, but it's Your desire that *all* should come to repentance. You've demonstrated & validated Your Son through the resurrection & God we believe... it's our desire to receive the fullness of what You have for us & to walk in obedience to Your word, Your will. Be glorified in us.

Entering the family of God happens through faith in J.C. It's not complicated so let's not complicate it. It doesn't do any good to simply "clean up" your life. God wants to fill you w/His Spirit. Are you ready to turn from your sin? To trust in Jesus & receive Him today? Don't put it off till tomorrow, receive J.C. today.