

Matthew 12:38-50 – “Opposition To Opportunity”

We’ve been in this section where Jesus is confronting the Pharisees for their continued rejection of Him. They’re opposing Him and denying Him when everything He’s done has been good. Then they have the audacity to ask Him this next question.

12:38-39 - *Then some of the scribes and Pharisees answered, saying, “Teacher, we want to see a sign from You.”³⁹ But He answered and said to them, “An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah.*

These religious leaders have already witnessed some significant signs from Jesus. The blind given their sight, people cleansed from leprosy, miraculous feeding of 5,000. These aren’t every day occurrences. This is not normal stuff. This is clearly a work of God. And yet, with all these things that have already been witnessed, these religious leaders have the audacity to ask to see another sign from Jesus.

Jesus called them ***an evil and adulterous generation***. This was evil because it revealed the hardness of their hearts. They saw clear proof of Jesus’ power and deity, but they refused to accept Him. This was in line with the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit we looked at last week.

Adultery is unfaithfulness. In this case it’s tied to their spiritual unfaithfulness. They had plenty of reason to believe, but they continued to walk in unbelief and unfaithfulness by rejecting their Messiah.

Seeking after and relying on signs to build your faith is shaky ground. Listen, I love a good sign or evidence of God as much as the next person. Show me a miracle and I’m not going to be upset by that. But my faith doesn’t rely on these things.

In fact, the Bible says, *“So then faith come by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Romans 10:17).*

- Miracles will leave an emotional, or experiential, shaky foundation. You’re not being built upon something solid. You’ll always be looking for the next experience or high. But the Word is lasting and stable. It will keep you balanced and secure.
- **1 Peter 1:24–25**, *“All flesh is as grass, And all the glory of man as the flower of the grass. The grass withers, And its flower falls away,²⁵ But the word of*

the Lord endures forever.” Now this is the word which by the gospel was preached to you.”

So Jesus says there will be no more signs done to prove who He is, except for one – **the sign of the prophet Jonah**. What is the sign of the prophet Jonah? We find out in the next verse...

12:40 - 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.

Jesus likens the sign of Jonah being in the fish to the significant work He will do. Jonah was called to preach to the city of Ninevah. He didn't want to. He tried to go the opposite direction. But you can't outrun God. God has Jonah overthrown in the Sea and a great fish eats him up. Jonah is so stubborn it takes him 3 days to actually repent and see what a fool he's been. So God causes the fish to spit him out on dry ground. So as Jonah goes into Ninevah and preaches this 8 word sermon: *“Yet forty days, and Ninevah shall be overthrown”*, it caused the whole city to repent.

But this is pretty wild stuff. Jonah spent 3 days and 3 nights in the belly of a fish. I'm not sure which is more remarkable – that God preserved Jonah for 3 days in the fish, or that it took 3 days for Jonah to repent!?

But either way, the main point of this is just as Jonah was in the belly of the fish as good as gone, so Jesus will suffer, be killed, and placed in a tomb, but will rise again 3 days later.

“By Jewish reckoning, a part of a day was considered to be a whole day. And it was common Jewish idiom to refer to even a part of a day as “a day and night.” So **three days and three nights** might refer to as much as seventy-two hours, or as little as twenty-six hours (one full twenty-four-hour day, together with one hour of the preceding day and one hour of the following day). This explains why Jesus could be said to be in the tomb “three days and three nights,” when he was buried late Friday and arose early Sunday.”¹

If the men of Ninevah repented with a message lacking hope from Jonah, how much more should the people of Jesus' day be ready to embrace Him?

¹ Weber, S. K. (2000). *Matthew* (Vol. 1, p. 179). Broadman & Holman Publishers.

Jesus has already done significant, tell-tale, Messianic signs that authenticated and validated who He was. Nobody had reason to not believe except for their own prideful hearts that chose not to believe.

But Jesus will show the greatest of miracles that will truly validate who He is through His death and resurrection. This is the final sign that should erase all doubt. This is what sets Jesus apart from all other religious leaders or false Messiah's. How many people can suffer the brutal beating and crucifixion He endured and then rise from the grave – 3 days later! That's huge!!

The resurrection of Jesus authenticates everything Jesus did and said. It's the resurrection of Jesus that gives us confidence that we are in the truth. I don't need Jesus to do anything else for me or prove Himself in anyway because He's already done that through His death and resurrection.

- I heard someone say, If you're walking down the street and you come to a dead end and it branches into 2 opposite ways and you're not sure which way to go, and there's 2 people lying there, one is dead and the other is alive, which one are you going to ask for directions?
- The reason any of us are here is because Jesus is alive! We don't need to wonder, or doubt, or ask for a sign, the greatest sign has already been done. And He's alive today to prove that He is worthy of our devotion.

12:41 - *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.*

Jonah went in bitterness; Jesus came in love.

Jonah preached judgment; Jesus preached grace.

Jonah went to one city; Jesus came for the whole world.

Jesus is indeed greater!

If the men of Ninevah repented with a message of judgment from a judgmental prophet, how much more should the people of Jesus' day repent with a message of forgiveness, grace, and love? Greater light brings greater responsibility and judgment when not heeded. The men of Ninevah will stand in condemnation towards this generation and say, "*Why would you not believe at the clear message and signs Jesus gave!?*"

Jesus brings up another Old Testament figure that will also stand in condemnation with this generation who is failing to believe Jesus.

12:42 - *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.*

Interesting, these two examples (the people of Ninevah and the queen of Sheba) were Gentiles. They didn't have the same revelation Israel had. And yet this queen of the south was moved to check out the glory and wisdom of Solomon. And Solomon had 700 wives and 300 concubines. How wise could he be? She didn't believe that what she was told could really be true (1 Kings 10:7). But she went and looked into it herself and was amazed. The half was not even told her. Yet Jesus is still greater. The incredible splendour of Solomon pales in comparison to the wonder, wisdom, majesty, and grace of Jesus.

So this queen of Sheba, who became a believer in the God of Israel, will be standing in the righteousness of Jesus condemning this generation in Jesus' day for not believing when they had the very Son of God revealing the truth to them.

12:43-45 - *When an unclean spirit goes out of a man, he goes through dry places, seeking rest, and finds none. ⁴⁴ Then he says, 'I will return to my house from which I came.' And when he comes, he finds it empty, swept, and put in order. ⁴⁵ Then he goes and takes with him seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter and dwell there; and the last state of that man is worse than the first. So shall it also be with this wicked generation.*"

Now at first glance these verses look as though they're teaching a principal about spiritual warfare and demon possession. But in the context of this chapter, we're dealing with a wicked and adulterous generation – the unbelieving Jews and especially the religious leaders. This generation has been dismissing Jesus as their Messiah and denying His deity. So, Jesus shares this parable to communicate that Israel is going to end up in worse shape than when they began. They may have had a time of reformation, which they did through their exile. It was there that they left their idolatrous practices behind. Though the house was swept clean and put in order, they never let Jesus in. They never worshipped God from a true heart of obedience. They thought outer reformation would make them right with God, but they were still empty. Because of their hard hearts and unbelief, they were in a worse place than they were previously. They will be brought under greater judgment.

Now there are some clear analogies that can be raised from this account. Demons are unclean spirits, and they are real and they seek to inhabit a host. There has been a lot of fixation on demons and deliverance in these days we live. Now first off, I believe that a Christian cannot be demon possessed. There is typically some sort of opening that is given for the demon to be given access to a life. This doesn't happen apart from a person's allowance or provision through some sort of activity. But when a person is born again, the Holy Spirit is now indwelling their lives. You're sealed. And there's no way the Holy Spirit is going to share you with a demon.

- Now yes, Christians can be oppressed and influenced, but not possessed. And we do not need to be focussed on trying to figure out what hold a demon has on our life and why it must be the reason for all our problems and sin.
- We need rather to be focused on who we are in Christ and be abiding in Him, because He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world (1 John 4:4).
- Our victorious life does not come by seeking out what demons may be attached to us, or seeking to reform your life through religious activity. Victorious living comes by being filled with the Holy Spirit and walking in obedience to Him.

This is what Jesus points out for us and for these religious leaders. We need inner transformation that is brought about through an intimate relationship with Jesus. This is what He desires!

12:46-50 - *While He was still talking to the multitudes, behold, His mother and brothers stood outside, seeking to speak with Him. ⁴⁷ Then one said to Him, "Look, Your mother and Your brothers are standing outside, seeking to speak with You." ⁴⁸ But He answered and said to the one who told Him, "Who is My mother and who are My brothers?" ⁴⁹ And He stretched out His hand toward His disciples and said, "Here are My mother and My brothers! ⁵⁰ For whoever does the will of My Father in heaven is My brother and sister and mother."*

This is a tough passage for Catholics who elevate Mary to the point of worship. Jesus certainly never did. They also teach that Mary was a perpetual virgin, which goes against Scripture. For here we read that Jesus had brothers.

Have you ever been ridiculed or despised by family and friends for your faith? Maybe you've gotten to a point where you wonder, *'What's the use. Is it worth it?'* Well, Jesus went through rejection (John 7:5; Mark 3:21).

- But Jesus experienced a bond with believers that went beyond natural blood ties. Those that seek to follow Jesus and obey His Word are tied to Him and linked with millions of other believers in a special bond. What a blessing!

“Hear the **humbling invitations** given throughout this chapter in Matthew. For all who have worked hard to try to be righteous, rest in the Lord of the Sabbath who is righteous for you. To all who are bruised and broken, whose light is struggling to find life, humble yourself before the One who brings hope to the hurting and ask Him to heal you. To all who are struggling under the weight of sin, come to the One who is the Power of God—to the One who is stronger than your enemy. To all who fear death, come to the greater Prophet who conquers death. To all who seek wisdom, come to the only wise King. And to all who long to be loved, come to your Elder Brother, who brings you into the family where God is Father.”²

² Platt, D. (2013). *Exalting Jesus in Matthew* (D. L. Akin, D. Platt, & T. Merida, Eds.; pp. 168–169). Holman Reference.