



Matthew 12:38–42

38 Then some of the Pharisees and teachers of the law said to him, “Teacher, we want to see a sign from you.” 39 He answered, “A wicked and adulterous generation asks for a sign! But none will be given it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. 40 For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart

of the earth.⁴¹ The men of Nineveh will stand up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it; for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and now something greater than Jonah is here. ⁴² The Queen of the South will rise at the judgment with this generation and condemn it; for she came from the ends of the earth to listen to Solomon's wisdom, and now something greater than Solomon is here.

Reflection

After yesterday's exchange it's a wonder that the Pharisees are still questioning Jesus. After accusing Jesus of working for Satan, Jesus turned the tables on the Pharisees yesterday addressing them as

‘a brood of vipers’ which was tantamount to describing them as Satan’s spawn – a brood of vipers being newborn snakes, and Satan since, Genesis 3 often referred to as the serpent. You can imagine the crowds shrinking back at this exchange. Jesus went on to question how anything good could come out of their mouths at all, since they are evil, and ended with another stern warning that ‘by their words they will be acquitted or they will be condemned.’

It’s with that warning still hanging in the air, that the Pharisees and the teachers of the law today ask Jesus another question.

“Teacher, we want to see a sign from you.”

They're out to kill him, they've accused him of working for Satan, he's just publicly humiliated them, proving how ridiculous their claim is, and demonstrating that whether they know it or not they are actually the ones who are in league with Satan. This question is a trap.

But Jesus is having no part of it. In John 8 Jesus is even more explicit than here where he openly tells the Pharisees and the teachers of the law that their father is the devil. The apple doesn't fall very far from the tree. So it's interesting here to see the Jewish religious leaders testing Jesus, just like their father the devil did in the wilderness in Matthew chapter 4 when Satan twice asked Jesus to perform a miracle for him.

Now, as then, Jesus is having no part of Satan's games. He has performed signs, which is just another word for miracles, all over Galilee. In John the Baptist's moment of weakness, when from prison, he sent his followers to ask Jesus if he really was the Messiah, this was Jesus' reply:

“Go back and report to John what you hear and see: 5 The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor.”

There have been enough signs for the whole world to see that Jesus is the Messiah, God's anointed king, here to fulfil all the Old Testament prophecies about him.

Even Gentiles have fallen on their knees in faith, and demonstrated faith that put the Jewish nation to shame. And the Jewish religious leaders who knew the Scriptures better than anyone should have been the first to identify Jesus as the Messiah, the miracles should have brought them to their knees in worship, instead they've sided with Satan and are plotting to murder the Son of God.

Jesus responds.

“A wicked and adulterous generation asks for a sign! But none will be given it except the sign of the prophet Jonah.

In their evil, the Pharisees and teachers of the law have taken Jesus' miracles and

tried to use them against him so Jesus says the only miracle left that he will give them is the sign of the prophet Jonah, a sign of God's coming judgment. Jonah was sent by God to the people of Nineveh as a sign of God's coming judgement. When he appeared among them, he himself was a sign to them that his message was from the God because God had rescued him from death. Jonah had spent three days in the belly of a huge fish, as good as dead, until God brought him back to from the dead to them.

The sign of Jonah, the sign of God's judgment on them that Jesus is referring to, is his death and resurrection. It will seal their fate. They will kill him, and he will rise again. Only ,even at this, Jesus' most incredible miracle, they will not repent and

their fate will be sealed.

Even the Gentiles will put them to shame. The Ninevites at the sign of Jonah, repented man, woman and child. Someone far greater than Jonah is here but this wicked generation, which includes not just the Pharisees and teachers of the law but also Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum, and the so many who ultimately turn against Jesus; this wicked generation will not repent. The death and resurrection of Jesus is a far greater witness than the sign of Jonah but this wicked generation will not repent. Similarly, the Queen of the South, a great pagan Queen in the time of King Solomon came to faith through his wisdom. She too, along with the Ninevites will rise up to condemn this wicked generation on Judgement Day for not turning

and repenting to the one far greater than Jonah and far greater than Solomon who walked amongst them.

Think

One far greater than Jonah is here. One far greater than Solomon is here. In 2013 Time Magazine voted Jesus Christ the most influential person in all of human history. Yet this wicked generation will not repent. More than twenty specific prophecies were fulfilled in the last twenty-four hours of Jesus' life on earth alone. Yet this wicked generation will not repent. A homeless unemployed carpenter, with no formal education, speaks with wisdom the likes of which the world has never seen, no human author's ever since written anything like it, he turns water to wine, heals the sick,

calms storms with a word, raises people from the dead, all in his early 30's, only three years in the public eye, then beaten beyond recognition, killed as a criminal, nailed to a cross. Less than 300 years later the entire world's declared Christian. And here we are talking about him 2000 years later, in another language, on the other side of the world, billions of people having lived and died convinced that he is God. Jesus has profoundly changed the shape of our world. Our legal system, the printing press, world literacy, education, the equality of men and women, the rights of children, the abolition of slavery, world charities, the red 'cross,' aid agencies, some of our most beautiful art, literature and architecture, our annual holidays – even today's date the 16 June 2016 AD – anno Domini, in the year of our Lord.

Just look at all the signs. This man has profoundly changed the shape of our entire world. We have far more signs today than they had back then, which means that even more than theirs, our generation too stands condemned.

Pray

Please pray now for our generation. Pray that God would rain down grace and mercy on all people everywhere and that his Spirit would draw huge numbers to Jesus in repentance and faith. Pray that God would bless your life and ministry and mine as well as we do everything we can with his blessing and power to seek and save the lost. Be the sign to our generation that points them to the risen Lord Jesus.