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Judgement of the Generation!

Matthew 12:38-42

Matthew 12:38-42, *Then some of the scribes and Pharisees answered, saying, "Teacher, we want to see a sign from You." ³⁹But 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. ⁴⁰For 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. ⁴¹The 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. ⁴²The 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.*

Matthew chapter 12 we have watch the Pharisees and their attempts to discredit Jesus in front of the people.

Characters in this section:

- **Scribes,**
- **Pharisees,**
- **Jonah,**
- **Ninevites,**
- **Queen of Sheba,**
- **Solomon,**
- **The crowd, and**
- **Son of Man.**

He is a Sabbath breaker.

They tried to point out that Jesus' disciples were also Sabbath breakers as they walked through the grain fields and ate some of the heads of grain. The Pharisees said they are breaking the Sabbath.

Jesus answered by basically saying, have not read about David?

Then they went to the Synagogue and there was a man with a withered hand. They tested Jesus in front of everyone by asking Him, is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?

Jesus healed the man and taught them that it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath and He said, I am Lord of the Sabbath.

He is Satanic

Jesus cast out a demon that rendered his host mute and blind. This was the type of demon they had no success with casting out. Their smear was that Jesus is satanic and did this miracle by the power of Satan.

Our Lord told them that their conclusion couldn't be further from the truth. He explained that they had crossed the line and would not find repentance or forgiveness.

Their final attempt to discredit and undermine Jesus' authority and power.

Show us a sign.

They wanted some miracle no one had ever seen before.

Jesus, write Your name in the sky.

Move this giant cedar tree from here to there.

Turn the sea to blood.

Do some sign and then we will believe.

Do you think they really would have faith if Jesus just did one more miracle?

1. Request for a Sign.

V 38, *Then some of the scribes and Pharisees answered, saying, "Teacher, we want to see a sign from You."*

Those who do not believe in Jesus' call for a miraculous sign. The Pharisees and teachers basically demanded a sign from Jesus.

What were they looking for in a sign, and why would Jesus not give them one?

A good word study book or full commentary on the text will help you to understand that they were looking for some amazing event or miracle that would convince them that He was Messiah.

Of course, He had been doing miracles right and left. But they seemed to want some other big thing that would be irrefutable.

But Jesus would not give one to them because they had already rejected Him out of unbelief.

A sign in the Bible is some event or activity, supernatural or not, that would authenticate the person and claims of Jesus.

A sign was usually a miracle with a clear meaning.
A miracle designed to reveal something specific.

However, in the Bible there are two ways that signs are used, to convince and to confirm.

For example, when Moses was sent back to the Israelites to lead them out of bondage, he was given some signs to do.

- His staff turning to a snake,
- His hand turning leprous, and
- The water turning to blood.

These were done in order to convince the people that they should believe Moses and follow him.

But Moses was given another sign, when he and the people returned to Mount Sinai after the exodus they would worship at the mountain. That was a sign that would confirm that God had done it, but it was not a sign to convince them to go to the mountain to worship. Once they got there, they would be assured that God had done just as He had promised.

These Pharisees and teachers clearly wanted the former type, a sign to convince them to believe.

But they were dishonest, and Jesus saw right through them. They had just seen a spectacular sign, the casting out of the

demon so that the man regained his abilities, and instead of believing they accused Him of doing it by Beelzebub.

They were not interested in a sign, only in trying to discredit Jesus.

If He could not do a sign for them, they could expose Him.
If He did one, they could discredit Him.

They were an evil lot.

Moreover, wanting a sign runs contrary to the nature of faith, which does not rely on a sign to convince people to believe.

If Jesus did a sign like that, it is unlikely that these people would have believed. They were merely challenging Jesus, and if He did a sign, they would likely have rejected it.

After all, they had frequently explained away some of the great miracles He had been performing.

We have seen how God gave Moses signs to do to authenticate His plan. The people needed to be sure that this man off the desert was truly sent by God. When they saw the signs, that was enough they accepted him as their leader.

It was not a question of coming to faith in God, but rather of testing the authenticity of a man who wanted to lead them out of bondage.

Another examples:

God through **Isaiah** told the king to ask a sign from the LORD, anything whatsoever (**Isaiah 7**). The king refused, being a wicked unbeliever.

So, God gave a sign anyway. A virgin would conceive and give birth to a son known as Immanuel. The supernatural birth of Jesus would be a sign that the Davidic Covenant would still be fulfilled.

The point in **Isaiah 7:9** is that if Ahaz had believed, he would have been confirmed. So, asking a sign in faith is different than challenging God to convince us to believe.

Gideon put out the fleece for a sign that God would go with him to battle. The text never condemns Gideon for this. Because he was a devout believer, but more importantly, he had already decided to go, and what he wanted was a sign that God would be with him. So again, faith was already operative.

The Pharisees confront Jesus, and they are defeated at every turn. They simply cannot take it. Their entire livelihood revolves around their controlling the masses. When the

people start learning truth and are not simply puppets the control their system of tradition and manmade laws and rules will come crumbling down.

1 Corinthians 1:22–25, *For Jews request a sign, and Greeks seek after wisdom; ²³but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness, ²⁴but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. ²⁵Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.*

In Paul's assessment, the Jews are always looking for a sign.

According to these Jews, none of the thousands of healings were enough.

Jesus could point to the people in the crowd whom He healed from blindness, lameness, and demon possession.

He could say, don't remember when he was blind and mute?

There's someone, he does not have the withered hand anymore.

Jesus even raised the dead. He singlehandedly eradicated sickness from Jerusalem.

They still would not believe. Miracles are not good enough, now they ask for a sign.

The sign they were asking for was a sign from Heaven.

Matthew 16:1–4, *Then the Pharisees and Sadducees came, and testing Him asked that He would show them a sign from heaven. ²He answered and said to them, “When it is evening you say, ‘It will be fair weather, for the sky is red’; ³and 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. ⁴A wicked and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and no sign shall be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah.” And He left them and departed.*

So, he left them and departed.

John 12:37, *But although He had done so many signs before them, they did not believe in Him,*

To call Him “Teacher”! They despised Him and were determined not to listen to His teachings.

Now this was probably a specially appointed committee who were prepared with the right approach the whole snake pit of Pharisees and scribes. They were the lawyers.

They had to have spent at least 30 years of age and have spent years and years of that time studying the law, until finally they

were granted the right to be a lawyer or an interpreter of the law. The Scribes must be expert in the oral and written traditions of Jewish teaching, namely **Mishnah and Talmud**.

They were recognized as authorized experts in the law, those who were able to understand and interpret and apply the law of God.

The recognized experts, the scribes, and the Pharisees with them.

“Pharisees” were a specific group of people devoted to the idea that the purity laws for the priests should extend to all Israel. They meticulously followed the smallest laws and taught everyone to do the same. There were probably only about 6,000 Pharisees in Jesus’ day, but they were very prominent.

After seeing the miracles and credentials they still call Jesus as Teacher not anything else.

Jesus, can you make the stars move?

Can you turn the moon red?

Can you write Your name in the clouds?

You know why they asked this question of Him?

They want to embarrass and discredit Him in front of everybody, so that nobody will believe Him.

They have now not only personally rejected, personally blasphemed, but they now take on the ministry of getting everybody else to reject Him.

The Holy Spirit was at work in the ministry of Jesus and their ministry, if you will, is to discredit Jesus. They hated Jesus with a vengeance.

2. Rebukes the unbelief.

Jesus answers their question requesting a sign. He refuses to show them a sign.

V 39-40, *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. ⁴⁰For 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.*

A wicked and adulterous generation.

The word "generation" is often used in the Bible for any group of people who share beliefs and traits.

So, this group of opponents was “wicked” and “adulterous”.

“Wicked” speaks of their nature and dealings with other people.

“Adulterous” speaks of their relationship with God.

In looking into the biblical usage of this language you will eventually connect with the **Book of Hosea**.

That book was written to a generation of Israelites in the **800 B.C.** who were unfaithful to God.

That does not mean that they simply did not measure up to His standards. Rather, it means that they deliberately chose to reject the LORD and go after other religious forms, usually false gods.

Hosea described the covenant of the LORD in terms of a marriage. To break the covenant with God was to be unfaithful to the covenant, especially if they followed other gods instead of God.

So, they were fornicators and adulterers spiritually according to Hosea.

People who should be believers,
They had the Scriptures,
The temple,

The priests,
The prophets.
They rejected the prophets.
They rejected the Messiah.

They were unfaithful to God.

Jesus describes these people in the same terms that Hosea used because they refused to believe in Him and chose rather to follow their own religious ideas.

By doing so they were proving to be unfaithful to God and His covenant program. They were spiritual adulterers.

Jesus points out that a wilful and rebellious people do not really believe, but they do demand a spectacular sign.

They have made up their minds about Jesus, and it would take something big to change their minds.

Jesus made it clear that such people who do not believe in God's revelation would not believe even if one came back from the dead. Rich man and beggar Lazarus.

Luke 16:31, *But he said to him, 'If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rise from the dead.'* ”

Their refusal to believe made them an adulterous generation, like their ancestors who killed the prophets.

But a sign would be given to them later, albeit a confirming sign.

Jesus was telling them that they would have one more opportunity to be convinced.

The sign of His resurrection would prove who He is and what His death was all about. They had rejected every other sign that Jesus had given them, so there was one more, but they would have to wait for it.

This was the sign of Jonah.

Jonah was a prophet of Israel who was appointed by God to go to Nineveh, the capital of Israel's enemies, the Assyrians. To warn them of God's coming judgment if they did not repent.

Jonah did not want to go. The Assyrians were a wicked and violent nation, and nothing would have pleased Jonah more than to have God destroy them.

So, Jonah, instead of going to Nineveh, goes the opposite direction and gets on a ship heading for Tarshish (Spain).

God causes a severe storm to arise, eventually Jonah is tossed overboard, and he is swallowed by great fish prepared by God for the occasion.

After three days and nights in the belly of this sea monster it spits him out on land. Jonah then goes to Nineveh and completes what God told him to do in the first place.

Just as Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights, so the Messiah would be in the grave three days and three nights before rising from the dead.

This sign: The death and resurrection would confirm that Jesus indeed is the Messiah, the Son of God. That is truly a miraculous sign.

However, it would come later for these opponents of Jesus, for they were the ones who were plotting to kill Him.

So, the sign, the evidence, that these people wanted concerning Jesus would come with His resurrection, giving them far more to be guilty of than they now had.

Jesus' certainty of judgment.

V 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 mention of Jonah brings the story of Jonah to mind, and so Jesus makes a point of the heart of that account.

If you are not familiar with the story of Jonah, you need to read it through--it is only 44 verses long.

The people of Israel were both affluent and indifferent to the call of God on their lives to be a light to the nation.

God called the reluctant prophet to go and preach to the hated enemies of Israel, the Assyrians who lived in Nineveh.

Ninevites were Gentiles, pagans, and idolaters.

They had no law of God.

They were outside the covenants and the promises.

They were living in dark.

They were alienated from God, without understanding.

Into their midst comes a prophet by the name of Jonah.

Do you know what his own testimony is?

I am sinful. I am foolish. I am rebellious.

We have got people with no advantages, sinful, rebellious, foolish, disobedient man who just got vomited up by a big fish, doing something he didn't want to do in the beginning.

Jonah's whole message is a message of doom.

Doom, devastation, destruction, and damnation.

Do you know something else?

Jonah didn't do any miracles either!

There were no signs.

Yet do you know what happened?

Jonah 3:5-10, *So the people of Nineveh believed God, proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest to the least of them. ⁶Then word came to the king of Nineveh; and he arose from his throne and laid aside his robe, covered himself with sackcloth and sat in ashes. And he caused it to be proclaimed and published throughout Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles, saying, Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste anything; do not let them eat, or drink water. ⁸But let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and cry mightily to God; yes, let every one turn from his evil way and from the violence that is in his hands. ⁹Who can tell if God will turn and relent, and turn away from His fierce anger, so that we may not perish? ¹⁰Then God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God relented*

from the disaster that He had said He would bring upon them, and He did not do it.

But the point of the story is that those people repented at the preaching of Jonah, and God spared that generation the judgment.

Gentile, pagan, idolatrous people outside the covenants, outside the law of God got a disobedient, foolish, rebellious, and wicked prophet who came and preached nothing but doom to them, gave no miracles, and the whole place repented and believed God.

V 41, *A greater than Jonah is here.*

Contrast:

These are Jews, not Gentiles.

These are the people of God, people of the covenant, of the promises, of the adoption, people of the fathers.

This is God's people who had the law.

One came to them greater than Jonah.

It was the God of Jonah in human flesh.

- Jonah was an unwilling prophet,
- Jesus was willingly submitted Himself.

- Jonah had no heart of mercy for his enemies,
- Jesus was full of grace and mercy.

- Jonah needed to be disciplined.
- Jesus was disciplined because of enemies.

- Jonah was thrown overboard to save himself.
- Jesus willingly hurled Himself headfirst into the wrath of God despite His innocence.

- Jonah declared an incomplete message, one only of the judgment for sins.
- Jesus came and delivered the perfect message of salvation.

- ❖ Jonah ends up out of sync with the heart and mission of God.
- ❖ Jesus had a heart completely in sync with the will of God.

- ✓ He was perfect,
- ✓ He was sinless,
- ✓ He was compassionate,
- ✓ He was powerful,
- ✓ His message was not a message of unmitigated doom but a message of grace, mercy, forgiveness, and salvation.

He did miracle after miracle and sign after sign.

They hated Him.

They killed Him.

Our Lord says that in judgment, the people of Nineveh will rise up and condemn this people, for with much less did they believe and repent. They act as a historical condemnation of the unbelief of Israel.

Jesus says that those people of Nineveh will “stand up” at the judgment and “condemn” these unbelievers.

It will be God who condemns unbelieving sinners!

Jesus was making was that here were people from other nations who had far less revelation than Jesus’ opponents, but they believed the word of the LORD.

They will “rise up” in the judgment will be evidence that people of Jesus’ day could have believed without all this convincing. Their conversion will be a condemnation for unbelieving Israel.

If they could believe, why could not the Jews?

The Queen of the Sheba.

V 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.*

1 Kings 10:1–10, *Now when the queen of Sheba heard of the fame of Solomon concerning the name of the Lord, she came to test him with hard questions. ²She 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. ³So Solomon answered all her questions; there was nothing so difficult for the king that he could not explain it to her. ⁴And when the queen of Sheba had seen all the wisdom of Solomon, the house that he had built, ⁵the food on his table, the seating of his servants, the service of his waiters and their apparel, his cupbearers, and his entryway by which he went up to the house of the Lord, there was no more spirit in her. ⁶Then she said to the king: “It was a true report which I heard in my own land about your words and your wisdom. ⁷However 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. ⁸Happy are your men and happy are these your servants, who stand continually before you and hear your wisdom! ⁹Blessed be the Lord your God,*

who delighted in you, setting you on the throne of Israel! Because the Lord has loved Israel forever, therefore He made you king, to do justice and righteousness.”¹⁰ Then she gave the king one hundred and twenty talents of gold, spices in great quantity, and precious stones. There never again came such abundance of spices as the queen of Sheba gave to King Solomon.

The queen of Sheba who came to challenge Solomon's wisdom. Of course, he made a believer out of her by answering all her questions. Here was a queen from another land, not an Israelite, who had very little information other than that the wisdom of God was in this king, and she came, she heard, and she was convinced.

The Queen of the South, as Jesus calls her, travelled 1200 miles or more to speak with Solomon concerning the Lord. She came to listen to Solomon's teaching and wisdom. She heard his wisdom and saw all God had done for him and she was amazed.

Queen Sheba was so astounded that she started unloading on Solomon treasure after treasure after treasure.

Of course, Solomon didn't need that. That was her way of honouring him and thanking him.

Her presence in the kingdom will also condemn Israel, for if she could believe what she heard about God's wisdom in Solomon after a brief visit, if she could believe with what she had, they should have believed with all that they had. For Christ is far greater than Solomon.

"A greater than Solomon is here."

You don't even have to take a journey.
Jesus is here.

Here is a Gentile woman with no advantages and no invitation who crossed the desert with all this stuff to hear wisdom from the lips of a man who speaks the truth of God.

You won't even listen when He is in your midst, and He is a greater than Solomon.
He is the God of Solomon.

No wonder she will rise up and condemn you in judgment.

She would have had an excuse for not attaining the wisdom of Solomon, but the Jews didn't have any excuse for not attaining the wisdom of Christ.

So, Jonah and the queen will rise up and condemn the unbelieving and unrepentant Jews of Jesus' day.

So, Jesus made this striking point that the stakes are now much higher. Pagans believed in the Lord at the preaching of Jonah--but Jesus is much greater than Jonah. He preached far more profound things and did amazing miracles to authenticate His words. They should have believed.

A pagan queen believed because she heard wise sayings from the king of Israel--but Jesus is far greater than Solomon. His wisdom and His knowledge surpasses them all. They should have believed.

In the judgment they will be condemned for their unbelief very convincingly because people like this with little or no information believed, whereas they with the presence of the Lord in their very midst refused to believe.

Jesus uses the Jonah account to picture His resurrection. Our Lord calls it the sign of Jonah.

According to Jesus there is only one sign left and it is more powerful and more magnificent than any heavenly sign.

His resurrection would be the sign of all signs/miracle of all miracles. The mighty event of Jesus' resurrection should by means of its magnitude cause all people to repent.

Conclusion:

Do people repent because of the sign of Jonah the resurrection?

No!

Would these Pharisees and Scribes repent at the resurrection? No!

Beloved, no miracle or sign will change a lost hardened heart. There is not enough visible miracles to give a stony heart life.

I am sure you have heard people say, If God would just do some miracle so I could see it then I would believe. That's not true. Here, the religious leaders of Jerusalem saw thousands of Jesus' miracles and they did not believe for one second. After a miracle they said, Jesus show us one more then we will believe. No more would be given. Their fate is sealed.

If you are an unbeliever today what does God have to do in order for you to believe?

Are you waiting on some sign or miracle?

What are you waiting for?

Is not the sign of Jonah/the resurrection of Jesus enough?

What else will God need to do?

Jonah was no miracle worker. Jonah was a reluctant prophet at best. He did not shed any tears for the Ninevites, in fact, the main reason he did not want to go preach to them was that he knew if he did, God would forgive them.

The Jews did not have a reluctant prophet with a half-hearted message. The Jews didn't have a preacher who did not want them to repent. The Jews had the very Son of God preaching the Kingdom of God, forgiveness of sin and repentance. He came with signs and miracles. His message was proven repeatedly as He showed His authority over every realm.

Surely, if the Ninevites repented those Jews hearing Jesus should have repented long before this day. Yet, they did not.

So, our Lord declares that, in fact, the Ninevites will condemn this generation. In some way God will hold them up as an example of belief and their example will serve as condemnation to the Jews.

The Jews had the Son of God, infinitely wise compared to Solomon. Jesus' healings and other miracles far exceeded anything the Queen saw as she visited Solomon. She became a believer as Solomon spoke to her concerning the Lord.

The Jews had so much more than she did, and they remained hard hearted and in unbelief.

Her passion to learn about Solomon's Lord and her belief will be held up as evidence against these unbelieving Jews who had everything.

At this point, we should pause and look inwardly.

It's easy to point our fingers at the Pharisees and the Scribes and shake our heads in disgust.

They had such a wonderful opportunity to believe. They had Jesus right there for 3 years teaching, preaching, and healing. What a waste.

What more could Jesus do?

This generation is no different.

Most people today remain unbelievers. They act like the sinless Saviour, His miracles and teaching, the cross and His resurrection are no big deal. Jesus, what else you got?

Here lies a generation who is unconvinced, blind, and dead.

This text is not just a call for the lost to awaken to the truth, but it is also a call for Christians to examine themselves as well.

Has Jesus become normal to you?

Has He become just something you can take or leave. You fit Him in if you have time or if there is nothing better going on.

Have you become lukewarm in your Christian walk?

The Queen of the South had just heard a few bits and pieces about the God of Solomon, and she travelled from the ends of the earth to hear more.

She was willing to make the very hard journey.

Many today have a hard time getting out of bed on Sunday mornings.

How important is Jesus to you?

How important is His Word?

What would God have you do because of hearing His Word today?