

**Matthew 12:38-45:** Then some of the scribes and Pharisees answered him, saying, "Teacher, we wish to see a sign from you." <sup>39</sup> 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. <sup>40</sup> 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. <sup>41</sup> 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. <sup>42</sup> 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. <sup>43</sup> "When the unclean spirit has gone out of a person, it passes through waterless places seeking rest, but finds none. <sup>44</sup> 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. <sup>45</sup> 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."

**Intro:** Last Lord's Day, we saw Jesus address the hardness of the Pharisees hearts. Their hearts were bad, hard, & evil; they hated God; they totally rejected the work of God's Spirit & were planning to kill Jesus Christ! We saw that God really cares about the heart (1<sup>st</sup> & greatest commandment): all of our behavior & words flow from our hearts. Today, we see the scribes and Pharisees ask Jesus for a sign. Hard hearts want proof after proof after proof, & there will never be enough proof! The heart must be changed! They must be born again! And so must we!

**Luke 16:19-31:** There was a rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day. <sup>20</sup> And at his gate was laid a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, <sup>21</sup> who desired to be fed with what fell from the rich man's table. Moreover, even the dogs came and licked his sores. <sup>22</sup> The poor man died and was carried by the angels to Abraham's side. <sup>1</sup> The rich man also died and was buried, <sup>23</sup> and in Hades, being in torment, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham far off and Lazarus at his side. <sup>24</sup> And he called out, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the end of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am in anguish in this flame.' <sup>25</sup> But Abraham said, 'Child, remember that you in your lifetime received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner bad things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in anguish. <sup>26</sup> And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, in order that those who would pass from here to you may not be able, and none may cross from there to us.' <sup>27</sup> And he said, 'Then I beg you, father, to send him to my father's house - <sup>28</sup> for I have five brothers - so that he may warn them, lest they also come into this place of torment.' <sup>29</sup> But Abraham said, 'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.' <sup>30</sup> And he said, 'No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent.' <sup>31</sup> He said to him, 'If they do not hear Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead.'"

### **1. The Evil Desire For A Sign**

**Matthew 12:38-39:** Then some of the scribes and Pharisees answered him, saying, "Teacher, we wish to see a sign from you." <sup>39</sup> 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."

**a. The scribes and Pharisees ask for Jesus to give them a sign:** These were the religious leaders of Jesus' day. They taught God's Word and were thought of as the moral, religious, and upright examples that the Jews should listen to and imitate. But as we've seen over and over again in Matthew's Gospel, they worship God with their lips, but their hearts are far from Him. They had seen Jesus perform miracle after miracle! They had seen Him cast out demons, and they had just said Jesus did this by the power of Satan! They wanted a sign from Him to prove to them that He was from God, but they asked for this sign to test Him, and this revealed their bad hearts:

**Luke 11:15-16:** But some of them said, "He casts out demons by Beelze-bul, the prince of demons," <sup>16</sup> while others, **to test him, kept seeking from him a sign from heaven** . . .

**b. Jesus' answer:** An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah: Jesus calls out their evil, and He uses the same language God used so often in the prophets to call out rebellious Israel – language of sexual immorality against a spouse: adultery.

- **Ezekiel 16:28-32:** You played the whore also with the Assyrians, because you were not satisfied; yes, you played the whore with them, and still you were not satisfied. <sup>29</sup> You multiplied your whoring also with the trading land of Chaldea, and even with this you were not satisfied. <sup>30</sup> "How lovesick is your heart, declares the Lord GOD, because you did all these things, the deeds of a brazen prostitute, <sup>31</sup> building your vaulted chamber at the head of every street, and making your lofty place in every square. Yet you were not like a prostitute, because you scorned payment. <sup>32</sup> Adulterous wife, who receives strangers instead of her husband!

- **1 Corinthians 1:22-24:** For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, <sup>23</sup> but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, <sup>24</sup> but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.

## **2. The Sign Of Jonah**

**Matthew 12:40-41:** 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. <sup>41</sup> 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.

**a. The sign of Jonah:** Jonah was a prophet of God who disobeyed God & ran away from God's calling to go & preach to the Gentile city of Nineveh. Instead, Jonah went in the opposite direction, sailing away on a ship. But God chased Jonah down! There was a big storm & eventually the sailors threw Jonah overboard. But God sent a large fish to rescue Jonah, & he was in the belly of the fish three days & three nights.

In a similar way, Jesus Christ would die on that cross and be in the tomb (the heart of the earth) three days and three nights. (This was an idiom – a way to refer to three days). And He rose up!

**Ligon Duncan:** Christ was in the grave as Jonah was in the belly of the fish; Christ was in the ground for three natural days, & Jonah was in the belly of the fish for three natural days in part thereof; Jonah was expelled from that fish to preach repentance to Nineveh, so also Jesus Christ was raised from the dead to confirm the gospel & to preach that truth to the nations.

- **Acts 13:32-33:** we bring you the good news that what God promised to the fathers, this he has fulfilled to us their children by raising Jesus, as also it is written in the second Psalm, "You are my Son, today I have begotten you."

- **Rom 1:3-4:** concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh & was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord

**b. V. 41: Something greater than Jonah is here: Shai Linne:** God told Jonah to preach to a wicked city. Jonah disobeyed. God sent Jesus to die for a wicked world. Jesus obeyed. Jesus Christ is greater than Jonah!

- When Jonah slept in the boat, he unintentionally increased the sailors fear of God. When Jesus slept in the boat, He did it intentionally to increase the disciples faith in Him. Jesus is greater than Jonah!

- Jonah was guilty, he went down into the water, and God delivered him from death despite his own sins. Jesus was innocent, He went to the cross, and God gave Him over to death for the sins of others. Jesus is greater than Jonah.

- God rescued Jonah so that He could spare a city and a few sailors. God resurrected Jesus and saved a multitude that no one can count. Jesus is greater than Jonah!

- [Jonah was a mere man. Jesus is both God and man – the God-Man! Jesus is greater than Jonah!]

**Dan Doriani:** Jonah came with words; Jesus came with words and with deeds that verified them.

Jonah preached reluctantly, hoping for judgment; Jesus paid the greatest price so we would have mercy & grace!

**Ian Duguid:** Jonah was ready to die out of his anger. Jesus was ready to die out of His compassion. Jesus went outside the city that rejected Him and submitted Himself to his Father's burning wrath . . . Jesus hung on that cross without shelter and without shade as God's wrath was poured out upon him in order to deliver us from our evil so that He Himself might become the shelter that we need from the judgment of God that we deserve. And in the process, He provided that strict justice for which our hearts cry out!

**c. V. 41: 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:** Nineveh repented after hearing the preaching of the much lesser prophet Jonah. The generation Jesus spoke to has the greatest prophet Who is more than a prophet – the God-Man, and they don't repent! Judgment will be worse for them! With greater knowledge comes greater responsibility!

### **3. Something Greater Than Solomon Is Here**

**Matthew 12:42:** The queen of the South will rise up at the judgment with this generation & condemn it, for she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon, & behold, something greater than Solomon is here

**a. The queen of Sheba will condemn this generation:** She came from a long distance to hear the wisdom of Solomon! How could those to whom Christ came (He's right there in front of them!) reject Him Who is so much greater than Solomon! She will be a witness against them and condemn them!

**b. Jesus is greater than Solomon:** Bruce Waltke lists 18 ways Jesus is greater than Solomon and his wisdom:

- 1) The Queen of Sheba testified to her amazement of Solomon's wisdom in this world, but she will rise up in judgment over those who reject Christ's superior wisdom.
- 2) Solomon taught his disciples to wait for God to repay the wrongdoer, but Christ Himself will repay them.
- 3) Solomon depended on God to discipline those he loves, but Christ Himself disciplines those he loves.
- 4) Solomon taught that those who share with the poor will be rewarded by God, but Christ identifies himself with and as the poor and as the one who rewards those who sacrifice for them.
- 5) Solomon focused on health and wealth now and minimized present sufferings; Christ focused on present suffering for righteousness and maximized future, eternal glory.
- 6) Solomon offers eternal life opaquely, but Christ by his resurrection brought immortality into the full light of day.
- 7) Solomon motivates his disciples to please their parents, but Christ, while upholding the honor of parents, teaches his disciples to love the triune God more.
- 8) Solomon's wisdom is a bubbling brook, but Christ offers streams of water from within.
- 9) Solomon offers a banquet of food and drink, but Christ himself is the Christian's food and drink.
- 10) No human ascended into heaven to comprehend the whole, but Christ both descended from heaven & ascended into it.
- 11) Solomon depended in part on the sayings of others, but Christ speaks as the authoritative Son of Man from heaven.
- 12) Solomon calls on his disciples to write his teachings on their hearts, but Christ sends his Spirit to write God's Word on their hearts.
- 13) Solomon calls for obedience, but Christ's Spirit empowers his elect to obey.
- 14) Solomon anticipates a future ideal king, but Christ is the Messiah.
- 15) Solomon pointed to atonement by showing reliable love to others, but Christ showed such reliable love to his own [in] that he died to atone for their sin.
- 16) Solomon failed to obey his wisdom, but Christ is the perfect example of his.
- 17) Solomon lost his kingdom, but Christ builds his [an everlasting kingdom that will have no end!].
- 18) Solomon called on his disciples to feed their enemies, but Christ died for his enemies.
- [19] Solomon was a great and wise King of Israel, but Christ is the greatest of the great, the wisest of the wise, and the King of all kings and LORD of all Lords!]
- [20] Jesus gave Solomon his wisdom and inspired every wise saying he ever wrote]
- [21] Solomon had the wisdom of God as a gift, but Jesus Christ was and is the very wisdom of God!]

**There's no one like Jesus! C. S. Lewis:** A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things that Jesus said here wouldn't be a great moral teacher. He'd either be a lunatic on the level of a man who says he's a poached egg or else he'd be the devil in hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was and is the Son of God or else He was a mad man or something worse. But don't come up with any patronizing nonsense about Him being a great human teacher. He hasn't left that option open to you. He didn't intend to.

#### **4. The Terrible State Of The Evil Generation In Jesus' Day**

**Matt 12:43-45:** When the unclean spirit has gone out of a person, it passes through waterless places seeking rest, but finds none. <sup>44</sup> Then it says, 'I will return to my house from which I came.' & when it comes, it finds the house empty, swept, & put in order. <sup>45</sup> Then it goes and brings with it seven other spirits more evil than itself, & they enter & dwell there, & the last state of that person is worse than the first. So also will it be with this evil generation

**Ligon Duncan:** Jesus is warning about the dangerous spiritual consequences of the partial awakening that had occurred in the lives of some of these very people to whom He was speaking under the preaching of John the Baptist. Many of these people had gone out in the wilderness to hear John the Baptist. They had gone out and had been baptized with the baptism of repentance by John the Baptist. They had publicly repented. They were attempting to put their spiritual lives in order. They were attempting to do business with God. But Jesus says it was only superficial. There was a superficial turning. They seemed to repent, but it obviously didn't change their lives. God wasn't living in their hearts. They were outwardly moral. They were outwardly changed, but inwardly they were still empty. And so He tells the story about the demon. The demon leaves during their time of spiritual renewal. He decides it isn't so good in the desert. He comes back and, lo and behold, everything is in order in their house. They look good. There's been some moral reform. There's been some external behavior change. But the heart is empty. In fact the room is swept and the demon says, 'This is great, I'll bring back seven of my friends.' . . . He's saying it would have been better for them never to have made any external profession of faith that was false than for them to be deceived that they were truly in fellowship with God and yet be dead in formalism. Listen to what J.C. Ryle says: "There are men who seem at one time of their lives to be under the influence of strong religious feelings. They reform their ways. They lay aside many things that were bad. They take up many things that are good. But they stop there. They go no further. And by and by they give up religion all together. None proved so hopelessly wicked as those who after experiencing strong religious convictions have gone back again to sin in the world." They appeared to be changed but they are empty. Jesus' warning is a warning to us as . . . a church not to play games. Our hearts will either be filled with the fellowship with God which is only through faith in Christ or they will be desperately empty and the haunt of demons. That is the only option. To believe in the resurrected Lord and to find in Him resurrection life for our lives or to be bereft in Him.

**Michael Horton:** What would things look like if Satan really took control of a city? Over half a century ago, Presbyterian minister Donald Grey Barnhouse offered his own scenario in his weekly sermon that was also broadcast nationwide on CBS radio. Barnhouse speculated that if Satan took over Philadelphia (the city where Barnhouse pastored), all of the bars would be closed, pornography banished, and pristine streets would be filled with tidy pedestrians who smiled at each other. There would be no swearing. The children would say "Yes, sir" and "No, ma'am," and the churches would be full every Sunday . . . where Christ was not preached.

**Jesus Christ & His glory & beauty must fill the house! We must delight ourselves in Him & find joy in Him!**

Christ Jesus Is The Greatest Sign  
Greater Than Jonah's Story Line  
Greater Than Solomon's Wise Mind  
He's Here By God's Perfect Design  
He's Holy, Blameless Brightness Shine  
He's God And Man, Truly Divine  
He Is God's Wisdom, Truth Defined  
Yet He Would Suffer, They'd Malign  
Struck Down By God, Drank Fury Wine  
He Died But Never Will Resign  
He Rose To Start A New Bloodline  
By Faith Alone We Join His Vine  
We're Filled With Joy On Cloud Nine  
Our Everlasting Treasure Mine  
All Hopes And Dreams In Him Combine!