

Rev. Dustin Daniels | River Bible Church
Matthew 12:38-42 | Jesus is Greater
Sunday February 4, 2024

WELCOME:

- Please turn your Bibles to Matthew 12.
- Bibles in the back—our gift to you.
- Notes in the foyer—take home with you.

REVIEW:

We have been studying Matthew chapter 12 for the past six weeks—and we still have two more sections ahead of us.

The whole chapter is depressing.

Why? Because Jesus is fighting with religious people.

Fighting, in general, is exhausting—but fighting with people who insist that they're the smartest guys in the room is maddening.

Flip back to verse one. *of Matt 12*

Matthew, our Gospel writer, begins chapter 12:1-8 with religious people not happy with Jesus because the disciples supposedly were working on the Sabbath day by walking through a field and eating grain.

Then, 9-14, the religious people became angry with Jesus because Jesus healed a disabled man in church on the Sabbath day.

In 22-32, the religious people were angry with Jesus because Jesus healed a demon-possessed man who couldn't see or hear.

And the crowd responded by asking a legitimate question:

“Is this the Son of David?” In other words, *Is this the Messiah/Savior/King we’ve been waiting for?*

The Scribes and Pharisees say, “NO!”

They tell their congregation that Jesus’ miracles that are good, healthy and holy—come from the Prince of Darkness.

I imagine Satan wasn’t pleased to get thrown under the bus with such stupidity.

And then last week, in 33-37, we learned how Jesus is still trying to minister to these angry religious folks (known as the Scribes and Pharisees) by taking a different approach to His teaching.

Jesus starts to teach in parables—a story with a hidden meaning.

So Jesus taught in parables about trees, fruit, snakes, and judgment.

And the hidden meaning in Jesus’ parables shocked these religious men.

The newsflash was this—they are not good men.

They are not even close to being good—because Scripture teaches us that none of us are good—not one. (Rom. 3:10).

And the proof came out of their own mouth

These religious men slandered Jesus because slander was in their hearts.

The same goes for us today because the human heart hasn’t changed from Genesis 3—The Fall.

It’s called *The Fall* for a reason.

The application to all of that is this—if we’re angry, it’s because we’re harboring anger in our hearts.

If we're bitter, jealous, and filled/consumed with lust—it's because we have been feeding ourselves those worldly things.

It's no accident what then comes out of our mouths.

LW KEYPOINT:

Our words are outward evidence of our inward character.

INTRODUCTION:

Today, unfortunately, the religious people are at it again.

Their language continues to reveal the wickedness in their hearts.

The way Matthew puts his Gospel together, is like today is an interruption to what Jesus is trying to teach the Scribes and Pharisees.

Next week, we'll see Jesus conclude thoughts good fruit and good deeds.

Today, however, Matthew really shows us the audacity and nerve of these religious people.

Religion - self defined morality - living by our own rules of standards

They demand a supernatural sign from Jesus to prove that He is the Messiah.

Remember the comedian who had his whole bit, "Here's your sign!"

That's where we are today—talking about signs.

Application

Question: Are we supposed to ask for signs and miracles?

Let's find out.

Please stand for the reading and honoring of God's Word.

SCRIPTURE:

Matthew 12:38— Then some of the scribes and Pharisees said to him, "Teacher, we want to see a sign from you."

Matthew 12:39— He answered them, "An evil and adulterous generation demands a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah."

Matthew 12:40— For as Jonah was in the belly of the huge fish, three days and three nights, so the Son of Man will be in the heart of the earth three days and three nights.

Matthew 12:41— The men of Nineveh will stand up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, because they repented at Jonah's preaching; and look—something greater than Jonah is here.

Matthew 12:42— The queen of the south will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, because she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and look—something greater than Solomon is here.

These are the very words from the authoritative, inerrant, inspired, and infallible Word of Almighty God.

PRAY:

So Christ has now become the High Priest over all the good things that have come. He has entered that greater, more perfect Tabernacle in heaven, which was not made by human hands and is not part of this created world.

With his own blood—not the blood of goats and calves—he entered the Most Holy Place once for all time and secured our redemption forever. (Hebrews 9:11-12)

EXEGESIS:

Matthew 12:38— Then some of the scribes and Pharisees said to him, "Teacher, we want to see a sign from you."

Time out! Before we even get started there's a flag on the field.

These religious men just saw a Messianic sign about ten minutes ago— when Jesus cast out a demon from a blind and deaf man!

Messianic meaning that a sign was foretold in the OT regarding what the Savior would do. (Isa 35:5, 43:8)

Given that they just saw a sign from God and credited that sign to Satan—these guys have considerable nerve.

It's interesting because Jewish leadership tends to demand signs throughout Scripture.

Starting in the OT...

Moses, was given supernatural power because he asked God what happens when people don't believe him. (Exod 4:1-9, 29-31; 7:8-22);

Gideon asked for a sign to confirm God's promise (Judg 6:36-40);

In one of the most spectacular signs, Elijah called down fire from heaven (1 Kings 18:36-39);

Ahaz and Hezekiah were given signs to prove Isaiah's prophecies were true. (Isa 7:10-14; 38:7-8).

All four Gospels report Jesus performing countless signs and miracles.

The book of Acts explodes with more signs and miracles.

The apostle Paul has trouble with his Corinthian church and says this:

1 Corinthians 1:22— *For the Jews ask for signs and the Greeks seek wisdom,*

1 Corinthians 1:23— *but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to the Jews and foolishness to the Gentiles.*

The reason that these Scribes and Pharisees are asking for signs is because they claim that all of Jesus' miracles are not sufficient to prove that He is who He says He is.

This request could be idiotic, manipulative, wicked, or all the above.

We don't know their tone of voice when asking for this sign, but we do understand that this is the same group of men who are planning to kill Jesus—so it's a safe assumption to say it's wicked.

But it's also manipulative, and here's why...

Matthew 12:38— *"Teacher, we want to see a sign from you."*

Matthew gives us a clue by the title they use for Jesus.

In Matt's Gospel, people who call Jesus "Lord" respond to Jesus in a favorable manner.

While the title of "teacher" is used for those who are hostile and opposed to Jesus.

These religious men are smug and proud of their degrees and pedigrees.

They don't consider Jesus a teacher—they consider nobody a teacher who was outside their religious club.

We have the same problem with all of our different denominations today—people think we can't learn anything from anyone outside our denomination.

That's a shame/tragedy.

So, the Scribes and Pharisees are being sarcastic by calling Jesus a 'teacher' because they think He's a heretic.

Their motive of asking for this sign is to shame Jesus.

They want to expose Jesus as a false teacher to the crowd.

Matthew 12:38— "Teacher, we want to see a sign from you."

I always like learning hard lessons that happened to other people.

Here we have a great lesson on what not to do.

It doesn't matter what we wish, desire or want— it only matters what God says.

Look how Jesus peels the lipstick off the pig...

Matthew 12:39— (Jesus) answered them, "An evil and adulterous generation demands a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah.

Jesus does not play religious games.

If we don't come before the Lord Jesus in humility, He will humiliate us.

God hates proud people and especially proud Bible Teachers.



Proverbs 8:13—To fear the Lord is to hate evil.
I hate arrogant pride, evil conduct,
and perverse speech.

And religious people check every box.

They not *asking* to see a sign—they are making demands on God.

He continues to call a spade a spade—these men are evil and adulterous.

Evil—morally sick and diseased.

There is also nothing good about adultery.

Here, Jesus is referring to spiritual adultery.

As an unfaithful man commits the sin of adultery against his wife—the unfaithful Jews commit the sin of spiritual adultery against God the Father by refusing to believe in God the Son.

As an unfaithful man refuses to repent of his sexual sin—the unfaithful nation of Israel also lacks repentance. (Hosea 2).

Therefore, these men are evil and spiritually adulterous—but wait it gets worse.

These men are Bible Teachers—who have also led their congregations into spiritual adultery.

They're not teaching truth, grace and mercy—but man made morality.

→ To love faithfulness is to walk humbly w/ their God. —Mish 6:8

So what kind of sign must Jesus perform for them to believe?

Evidently, they wanted to see something different than Jesus had done before.

Matthew 16:1—The Pharisees and Sadducees approached, and tested (Jesus) him, asking him to show them a sign from heaven.

So, these religious people are not looking for another earthly miracle.

They don't ask for a miracle—they ask for a sign.

They want a supernatural act that only God can do straight from Heaven.

They don't want to see Jesus feed the five thousand; they want to see manna fall from Heaven.

They don't want to witness the Red Sea part; they want to see a cloud of smoke and a pillar of fire.

They don't want to see people healed; they want the sun to stand still.

They wanted something—sensational.

As a side note, that's why many people go to church today!

Preachers get everyone worked into some type of emotional frenzy, claiming that it's the Holy Spirit.

Christian, beware.

KEYPOINT 1:

Signs are gifts of mercy; therefore, God doesn't perform them on demand.

Jesus is NOT A COSMIC VENDING MACHINE —put A nickel in
What kind of person demands anything? Let alone mercy?

The purpose of a sign is not the sign itself—signs point beyond itself to something else.

Prescott

For example, driving over the hill through Jerome, there are many signs that point to a dangerous curve coming up.

if you ignore those signs and
There is a real danger coming if you're driving too fast.

That's an important lesson for us today.

Asking God for a sign is placing us in dangerous territory.

There's a lot of people asking for signs and miracles today.

Now, praying for a miracle is something entirely different—and we'll get to that.

KEYPOINT 2:

Asking (demanding) for a sign is a sign of our unbelief.

Asking God to provide a sign is not so much a request— but an excuse.

The Scribes and Pharisees are 'exhibit A' in verse 39.

When we ask for a sign from God, we're putting conditions on Him—just like the Scribes and Pharisees.

We're demanding a prerequisite—just like the evil and adulterous generation of the first century!

"God, *if* you do this or *if* you do that...*if* you show me...*if* you tell me—"

Those conditions (if, if if) are tests that proved our unbelief, regardless of what we say.

When we test God, we tell Him to prove Himself to us.

Deuteronomy 6:16— Do not test the Lord your God.

only one exception = Money
Hearts & pocketbook are connected Mal 3:8-12

God is the one who does the testing—we're the ones who do the obeying.

God is the Creator, we are the creature and by God's grace He has given us an amazing gift.

God has not only given us a sign in the OT—but fulfilled the significance of the signs in the Gospels—and then He explained the meaning of these signs in the Epistles.

In other words...we are to handle *The Holy* with reverence, learn what it says, repent from our sins, and apply the knowledge and wisdom that it brings—so that we may mature in Christ.

Mature people don't demand anything—especially from God.

People want signs that ~~God exists~~ but they always want *their* signs rather than the ones God provides. HAS ALREADY PROVIDED

ψετ Everything we need is in this Book.

Sola scriptura—Scripture alone is not only the sign but also explains it.

+ **2 Timothy 3:16**—All Scripture is inspired by God, and is profitable for teaching, for rebuking, for correcting, for training in righteousness,

+ **2 Timothy 3:17**—so that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

And many people today act just like the Scribes and Pharisees—I need more than just an old book.

+ **Matthew 12:39**—He answered them, "An evil and adulterous generation demands a sign,

Remember what Jesus told John the Baptizer when John started to doubt as he was rotting away in prison?

Matthew 11:3—“Are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else?”

Matthew 11:4— Jesus replied to them, “Go and report to John what you hear and see:

Did Jesus stop what He was doing at that moment to do a special supernatural sign only for John so that his faith would be strengthened?

No! And were talking John the Baptizer!

John is the greatest prophet who ever lived!

So if Jesus is not going to give John a special sign, why do we think today that God will do that for me?

Now, let’s look at what Jesus does do for John—

Matthew 11:5— *The blind receive their sight, the lame walk, those with leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor are told the good news,*

Matthew 11:6— *and blessed is the one who isn’t offended by me.”*

Jesus provides a sense of reality for John.

All of Jesus miracles were all messianic signs—every single one!

The OT said with certainty that the Savior would do all these things.

So Jesus tells John to examine the evidence that God has already provided.

And we are to do the very same thing today through His Word.

So Jesus continues—

Matthew 12:39— but no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah.

In other words, the Scribes and Pharisees completely insult Jesus.

The crowds that Jesus was ministering to also insulted him by doing the same thing.

Example: Feeding of the Five Thousand. (John 6)

Jesus is hosting a retreat in the desert—He's teaching and preaching the Gospel—after a day or so, people started to get a little hungry.

Jesus supernaturally feeds five thousand men and their families with a boy's sack lunch—there could have been more than 20,000 people that day.

These folks are so excited because Jesus is providing free social security they try and force him to be king—but Jesus isn't having any of that, so Jesus leaves the area. (John 6:15).

The next day, a large group of people tracks Jesus down, wanting more food.

John 6:26— Jesus answered, "Truly I tell you, you are looking for me, not because you saw the signs ~~(the food points to Jesus)~~, but because you ate the loaves and were filled." → *the physical food that points to spiritual nourishment*

John 6:28— "What can we do to perform the works of God?" they asked.

In other words, "what does God want us to do?"

John 6:29— Jesus replied, “This is the work of God—that you believe in the one he has sent.”

Pause— “Believe?!” That’s it? No we need something better than that.

John 6:30— “What sign, then, are you going to do so that we may see and believe you?”

Pause— what’s changed today?

How many people demand signs from God today because they refuse to do the very thing He’s already commanded in His Word?

We’ve all done this.

Lord, please give me a sign if I should take this new job?

And yet, because he doesn’t read his Bible, he’s not a member of a healthy church, he doesn’t attend Bible studies or small groups because he’s too busy—

He doesn’t know that the answer has already been provided in God’s Book.

Proverbs 16:3 ESV—Commit your work to the LORD, and your plans will be established.

Psalms 90:17 CSB—Let the favor of the Lord our God be on us; establish for us the work of our hands— establish the work of our hands!

Colossians 3:23 ESV—Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men,

Time out! None of those verses tells us to take the job!

That’s where our faith in God comes in.

Man says, “show me first.”

God says, “no, seek first the Kingdom of God.” (Matt. 6:33)

Here’s the irony and tragedy of the situation—most of our lives are spent as Christians building our own kingdom telling/demanding God bless it.

Example:

Lord, should we buy this house?

+ **Proverbs 22:7**—*The rich rule over the poor, and the borrower is a slave to the lender.*

In other words, can you afford it?

□ Or are you trying to impress people you don’t even like with money you don’t have?

And when God doesn’t cater to our demands—

When we treat God as a cosmic genie (rather than *The Great I AM*) and we believe in the false doctrine that God wants me happy, healthy and wealthy—

And yet, I’m bitter, broke and broken, what happens to our faith?

We become bitter and angry at God—we blame God for something that is our fault.

God has already given us enough evidence to believe and thrive as a Christian.

We have the incredible privilege of having the whole counsel of Almighty God in our hands.

Jesus said this to His disciples:

+ **Luke 10:23**—*“Blessed are the eyes that see the things you see!*

Luke 10:24—For I tell you that many prophets and kings wanted to see the things you see but didn't see them; to hear the things you hear but didn't hear them."

And even though the disciples did see those things with their own eyes—

Today, we have the privilege of having A Bible that says everything God wanted to say—the whole picture.

Matthew 12:39— but no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah.

The crowd is very familiar with the story of Jonah.

It is read every year at Yom Kippur, the most holy day of the Jewish calendar.

Even though the crowd is familiar with Jonah—notice the cryptic response that Jesus gives these religious men.

Jesus does not accommodate them—Jesus confuses them and frustrates them even more. *intentionality*

BTW, the same thing can happen to us if we test God in this way.

Jesus says, *you want to see a sign? Try this—*

Matthew 12:40— For as Jonah was in the belly of the huge fish, three days and three nights, so the Son of Man will be in the heart of the earth three days and three nights.

Jonah was a prophetic sign to the people of Nineveh—think Las Vegas, San Francisco, and New York City combined.

Nineveh was a very large and very wealthy worldly city.

How is Jonah a sign ~~because~~ *because*

Jonah was a prophet with a bad attitude.

He did one thing—and one thing reluctantly.

He preached judgment to the Ninevites?

Jonah himself gave no signs. He didn't perform any miracles either.

So what does Jesus mean that Jonah is a sign?

Jonah himself is the sign ~~that~~ *that* points to Jesus.

Jonah's a sign because he lived three days and three nights in the belly of a whale.

Somehow, word got around what happened to Jonah.

Maybe someone saw ~~the whole thing~~.

Wow, what a coincidence ~~that~~ *that* the whale vomit Jonah on the shore close to Nineveh.

So Jonah has everyone's attention—which is strange because Nineveh is a godless place—and now they're listening to God's messenger—why?

Because Jonah experienced a “death, burial, and resurrection” all in the belly of a whale.

The prophet Jonah is the sign that points to Jesus in his death, burial, and resurrection.

And guess what...

Jonah 3:5—Then the people of Nineveh believed God. (Where's the proof?) They proclaimed a fast and dressed in sackcloth—from the greatest of them to the least.
↳ Mourning/repentance

This godless and hopeless city believed Jonah the prophet, and they were saved from their sin!

It's like the first great Assyrian awakening!

And that's why Jesus says...because Nineveh believed—

Matthew 12:41(a)— The men of Nineveh will stand up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, because they repented at Jonah's preaching;
↳ Scribes & Pharisees

Jesus is saying that on the day of judgment, these godless pagan people will find you, the chosen nation of Israel, guilty of unbelief.

I would have loved to see the scowl on their faces...

Matthew 12:41(b)— and look—something greater than Jonah is here.
↳ Look at what's in front of you!

It's like Jesus said this to the Scribes and Pharisees...

How is it possible that an angry, sinful, foolish and rebellious person like Jonah can preach a message for people to believe, but I'm standing right in front of you—completely sinless, filled with all wisdom and compassion...and yet you don't believe?

How is it that Jonah's message was a message of doom and people still believed—yet my' message is of grace, freedom and eternal salvation... and yet you still don't believe?

How is it that Jonah's ministry contained no miracles and people believed,—yet here I am performing countless miracles before your very eyes...and you refuse to believe?

Something greater than Jonah is here! You have no excuse.

In other words, Jesus says, *The only sign that I'm giving you is Easter— take it or leave it.*

Matthew 12:42(a)— *The queen of the south will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, because she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon;*

So Jesus provides exhibit B in a courtroom of law on the day of judgment.

The queen of the south is slang terminology for the queen of Sheba.

Sheba is modern-day Yemen, which is as far south as you can go—south of Saudi Arabia.

The queen of Sheba heard about Solomon's wisdom and wanted to see him for herself because she thought, "No one can be that wise,"

So she travels 1,588 miles! And remember, Henry Ford wasn't around back then.

She brought treasure upon treasure to King Solomon— and tested him with hard questions (1 Kings 10:1).

That Gentile woman came on her own initiative to learn God's truth from Solomon.

Jesus loves to use the most unlikely people to rile up the religious snobs of His day.

- Solomon had wisdom from God—but Jesus is the wisdom of God.
- Solomon was a great king—but Jesus is the King of kings.

Matthew 12:42(b)— and look—something greater than Solomon is here.

Isaiah 45:22 NKJV—“Look to Me, and be saved, All you ends of the earth!
For I am God, and there is no other.

PREACH:

Question: Are we supposed to ask/demand for signs and miracles today?—No.

Are we supposed to pray for miracles?—Yes,

Does God still do miracles?—Yes, but in a different way.

Today’s passage teaches us to be careful—

So that we’re not making the same mistakes as the Scribes and Pharisees—
frustrating ourselves when God has already given us the answers in His Word.

God has a plan—and His plan is moving forward.

God is not like our high school buddies who revel in the glory days.

God is not going to do the same thing over and over for new generations of people.

There are four over-arching themes in God’s plan.

1. Mankind’s responsibility
2. Mankind’s failure in that responsibility.
3. Mankind’s judgement
4. God’s grace to make all things new.

Praise God that we live in an era of grace!

We are not stranded in the desert walking around Mount Sinai for 40 years!

God is doing a new thing and it's our job to trust Him as much as we say we love Him.

And the primary way to trust God is to believe in His Son, Jesus—

To be baptized, discipled and share Jesus day by day.

PRAYER

COMMISSIONING:

1 Tim 3

- Brad Kesler: Elder
- Bobbie Davis: Deaconess
- John Culver: Deacon

BENEDICTION

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. (2 Cor. 13:14)

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