

Why would Jesus compare Himself to Jonah?

The Pharisees ask for a sign.

Then some of the scribes and Pharisees answered him, saying, "Teacher, we wish to see a sign from you."³⁹ 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.⁴⁰ 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."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. Matthew 12:38-41

- They want Jesus to prove Himself on their terms.

Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?"¹⁴ And they said, "Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets."¹⁵ He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?"¹⁶ Simon Peter replied, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." Matthew 16:13-16

Jesus tells Peter what the sign is.

From that time Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised.²² And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, "Far be it from you, Lord! This shall never happen to you."²³ But he turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man." Matthew 16:21-23

- Peter wants Jesus to be Messiah on his terms.

The sign of Jonah isn't just something Jesus does; it reshapes our lives.

Then Jesus told his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me."²⁵ For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. Matthew 16:24-25

- Jesus calls us to follow Him on His terms, not ours.

Let's Talk About It

Throughout this series, Jonah has been a mirror, showing us parts of ourselves we may not always want to see. But when Jesus talks about Jonah, He points us to something much greater—the cross and His resurrection. The religious leaders wanted Jesus to prove Himself on their terms, and even Peter struggled when Jesus wasn't the kind of Messiah he expected. We can do the same thing when we want more proof, more answers, or for Jesus to work the way we think He should. But Jesus doesn't just invite us to believe in Him—He calls us to deny ourselves, take up our cross, and follow Him on His terms, not ours.

Matthew 12:38-42; 16:1-3, 13-25

Discussion questions:

- Which part of the message impacted or challenged you?
- Read Matthew 12:38-42. The religious leaders had already seen Jesus do incredible things, yet they still asked for another sign. Why do you think we sometimes ask God for more proof, clarity, or answers before we're willing to trust Him?
- The people of Nineveh had far less evidence than the religious leaders, yet they responded to what God had given them. Is there something God has already made clear to you that you may be delaying your response to?
- Read Matthew 16:13-16, 21-25. Peter believed Jesus was the Messiah, but he struggled when Jesus wasn't the kind of Messiah he expected. In what ways can we want Jesus—but still want Him to work on our terms? Where are you still asking Jesus to follow you instead of surrendering yourself to follow Him?
- Jesus says following Him means denying ourselves and taking up our cross. What happens when the Jesus you believe in leads you somewhere you don't want to go? How do you get my heart in the right place?

Take a Step

Where is following Jesus on His terms—not yours—challenging for you right now? What step can you take this week toward greater surrender?

Here's My Prayer

Lord, thank You for sending Jesus to die and rise again for me. Help me trust what You've already revealed and stop trying to follow You on my own terms. Give me the courage to deny myself, take up my cross, and follow You wherever You lead. Shape my life to look more like Jesus. In Jesus' name, Amen.