

## **“Show Us A Sign.”**

Text: Matt 16:1-12

Suggested Hymns:

485, 822, 47, 294, 50

1) The demand is nothing new

2) Signs already given

3) Seeking signs today

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is Matthew 16:1-12, *<sup>1</sup> Then the Pharisees and Sadducees came, and testing Him asked that He would show them a sign from heaven. <sup>2</sup> He answered and said to them, “When it is evening you say, ‘It will be fair weather, for the sky is red’; <sup>3</sup> “and 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.*

*<sup>4</sup> “A 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.*

*<sup>5</sup> Now when His disciples had come to the other side, they had forgotten to take bread. <sup>6</sup> Then Jesus said to them, “Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the Sadducees.” <sup>7</sup> And they reasoned among themselves, saying, “It is because we have taken no bread.” <sup>8</sup> But Jesus, being aware of it, said to them, “O you of little faith, why do you reason among yourselves because you have brought no bread? <sup>9</sup> “Do you not yet understand, or remember the five loaves of the five thousand and how many baskets you took up? <sup>10</sup> “Nor the seven loaves of the four thousand and how many large baskets you took up?*

*<sup>11</sup> “How is it you do not understand that I did not speak to you concerning bread? -- but to beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees.” <sup>12</sup> Then they understood that He did not tell them to beware of the leaven of bread, but of the doctrine of the Pharisees and Sadducees. (NKJV)*

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

There are certain signs which permit us to predict the weather, some more, some less accurately. The saying goes, *“Red sky at night, sailor’s delight; red sky in morning, sailor take warning.”* Similarly Jesus says, *“When it is evening you say, ‘It will be fair weather, for the sky is red’; <sup>3</sup> “and in the morning, ‘It will be foul weather today, for the sky is red and threatening.’*

Jesus does not condemn His hearers for paying attention to signs of the weather. He assumes that this is the usual thing, but what He does condemn them for, is their failure to discern the far more important *“signs of the times.”* This censure comes in response to their demand *“Show us a sign from heaven.”* Let us consider this demand. May the Lord bless our meditation.

### 1. **“Show Us a Sign” - The Demand Is Nothing New**

This demand for a sign was nothing new. When God gave Moses the command to lead His children out of Egypt, Moses asked, *“Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and that I should bring the children of Israel out of Egypt?”<sup>1</sup>* And again, *“But suppose they will not believe me or listen to my voice; suppose they say, ‘The LORD has not appeared to you.’<sup>2</sup>*

Moses was asking God, *“How will the people know that You have sent me?”* He was in effect saying, *“Show me a sign,”* and you will recall that God did give him a sign, in fact, several. He was able to do supernatural things in the name of Jehovah. God gave Moses the power to do two signs immediately. The first sign was the turning of his rod into a serpent and back into a rod again. The second sign was making his hand leprous and then healed again. Later Moses brought on the ten plagues which induced even Pharaoh to let Israel go.

When God called Gideon to lead His people against the Midianites, Gideon used these very words, *“Show me a sign,”<sup>3</sup>* and God showed him a sign, in fact, several. Even the disciples came with a similar demand, *“Show us the Father.”<sup>4</sup>*

When anybody asks for a sign, he himself has given a sign, the sign of doubt. Moses was not quite ready to go. Gideon hesitated to assume the task set before him. They showed their doubts. So when these people came to Jesus that day and said, *“Show us a sign from heaven,”* they showed by their demand that they did not believe that Jesus was what He claimed to be.

It is rather interesting to note who these people were who came to Jesus that day. They were the Pharisees and the Sadducees, and they came to Him to tempt, or test, Him. Someone has called this the “coalition of criticism.” When we read that phrase “the Pharisees and Sadducees,” we may be inclined to think of them as belonging in the same class. Far from it. They were alike in only one thing, their mutual opposition to the Saviour.

The Pharisees were the ritualists of that day, the traditionalists. They believed in certain spiritual realities, while the Sadducees, who were the rationalists of their day, eliminated everything supernatural from their religion. To them religion was merely an ethical code.

Ordinarily these two groups looked with utter contempt upon each other, but now they were united in their contempt for Christ. Jesus had condemned them both: the Pharisees for their meaningless ritualism and the Sadducees for their failure to recognise the spiritual.

Now these two groups, united in their opposition and united in their common unbelief, ask Jesus, “**Show us a sign from heaven.**” The Pharisees believed in signs from heaven, but did not believe that Jesus could show them such a sign. The Sadducees did not believe in the possibility of a sign from heaven. Denying the supernatural, they did not believe that Jesus could produce such a sign.

The sign they wanted was a sign from heaven. The feeding of the five thousand, the healing of the sick, these things the Pharisees thought could be done by demons or false deities; but if the sun would stand still, or fire drop from heaven, that would be a final proof of God’s working.

Then they would believe in Christ, they intimated. They wanted the spectacular, but Jesus would not satisfy their curiosity; for He said, ***Hypocrites! You know how to discern the face of the sky, but you cannot discern the signs of the times.*** In effect Jesus was saying, “*You see signs from heaven all the time, and you interpret them with reference to the weather; but you cannot discern the real signs from heaven, the signs of the times, which have already been given. Why should I add to them?*”

## 2. Signs Already Given

The Lord had already given such signs which would enable them to draw the necessary conclusions. The word “sign” includes more than the concept of a miracle. It means any kind of demonstration, or proof.

If only they had taken notice, the Lord had given them signs; the coming of John the Baptist, the fulfilment of Old Testament prophecies, and the very coming of Christ Himself to fulfil all that the prophets had said about the Messiah.

If they had discerned these signs, they would have said: “*It is fair weather,*” that is, a day of God’s grace and blessing. On the other hand the Lord had also given them signs which heralded the coming storm of His wrath. There were the stubbornness of the Jewish nation at that time, the worst type of hypocrisy, and the complete refusal of God’s grace. These were signs of the impending doom and judgment of God. These signs they did not discern.

Do we discern the signs of our times? Are we any better? We are expert today in observing the signs of the physical heavens. Every weather map is evidence of the fact that weather forecasting is no “hocus-pocus,” but a scientific study of the factors which make weather. We can discern these signs.

We are also able to discern the political and economic trends, and we act accordingly. But how many actually see the signs in the realm of the spiritual, which can be found all around us? Or how many see them but find no meaning in them? They do not discern the signs of the times. They do not recognise God’s hand in history.

They do not see any meaning in the spread of the Gospel into all the world, the publication of the Bible in one language after another, the renewed interest in the Bible which we find today, especially in China. The revival of interest in the Bible is a sign of spiritual “fair weather.”

On the other hand the storm signals are up. The rise of those hostile powers which would destroy religion, rule God out of the picture, and do away with the Bible, the increase of lawlessness, the spread of Christless altars, the open attacks on Christianity, as well as the defection of some Christian churches and their members from the truth of God’s Word. These are also signs that must be read.

To the people of His day Jesus said, *A wicked and adulterous generation seeks after a sign.* Jesus would also be able to characterise the generation also of our day as evil and “adulterous” in the sense of being unfaithful to God.

### 3. Seeking Signs Today

Our generation, too, seeks after a sign. Over and over we hear doubters and unbelievers calling for some sign from heaven. *“If God is in the heavens, why doesn’t He do something? If God is a God of love, why doesn’t He show His power? How do you know that the Bible is God’s Word to men? How can you prove that there is a God? How do you know there is a life hereafter?”* In effect, they are saying, *“Show us a sign.”*

Sometimes we Christians fall into the same error and almost unconsciously ask God for proof. We do not quite believe. We have our doubts, and we want God to show us, and prove something to us. Doubt and the insistence upon signs go together. It was doubting Thomas, who said, *“Unless I see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe.”*<sup>5</sup> Jesus replied, *“Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”*<sup>6</sup>

Jesus had shown many signs, also signs from heaven. At His very birth there was the star that led the Wise Men to find Him. During His public ministry Jesus had stilled the storm, *“So the men marveled, saying, “Who can this be, that even the winds and the sea obey Him?”*<sup>7</sup> There would come a time for a real sign from heaven. In His dying moments on the cross, as He would pay the price of the world’s redemption through His blood, the sun would hide its face, and darkness would cover the earth.

At this time Jesus in His wisdom refused the sign requested and said, *and no sign shall be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. “ And He left them and departed.*

What a tragic result of their requiring a sign. It must always be so. There are those today who require a sign and as a result lose the salvation that Christ has come to offer them and the blessing of fellowship with Him. For He cannot but leave those who instead of believing require a sign. The one condition for His blessing is unconditional faith.

What did Jesus mean by the one sign He would give them, the sign of the Prophet Jonah? He used the same expression at another time, saying, <sup>40</sup> ***“For 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>8</sup>

Jesus did not say that He would not give any sign at all, but that He would not now give them a sign of the type they asked. But He would give them the greatest of all signs.

Just as Jonah was flung out to death and came back to Nineveh to preach the message that God had given him, so Jesus would come back from death to proclaim the message of salvation from sin through that very death He would die, the death of the cross. That was a sign to end the need of all signs. That was the complete vindication of all that Christ had said and done.

There is no better sign to which we can refer people today than the sign of Jonah, that is, the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

Today when people still seek signs of us who represent Christ, we cannot, being ordinary people, perform the supernatural. So no startling sign from heaven can be given. But that does not mean there are no signs.

There are signs of the times which can be read by those who are willing to read them and learn their meaning; and those who will not read these signs would not be impressed even though there would be a sign from heaven. In the words of Scripture, ***“neither will they be persuaded though one rise from the dead.”***<sup>9</sup>

There is still the sign of the Prophet Jonah today, that is, the fact of Christ's resurrection, and the sign of the living Christ in the Church and in the lives of His own, the sign of the Christ who came back from the death He died that men might live not only in eternity, but live also for Him now.

As you see that Christ, that living Christ, reflected in the life of the Church, in its zeal to bring His message of salvation into all the world, and see it reflected in the lives of His followers who love Him and give themselves in faith completely to Him, you have the sign of Jonah, you have a proof that the Christ we know is the Christ who lives and reigns. It is a sign no person can deny.

Let us hold forth the Word of Life, and the living Saviour it proclaims, and to go on demonstrating in our own lives the power of Christ's resurrection in

such a positive way that people will seek no further sign because they will need no further proof. Let us be living examples of the sign Christ promised; the sign of Jonah, which is the proof of the living Christ. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> Exodus 3:11

<sup>2</sup> Exodus 4:1

<sup>3</sup> Judges 6:17

<sup>4</sup> John 14:8

<sup>5</sup> John 20:25

<sup>6</sup> John 20:29

<sup>7</sup> Matthew 8:27

<sup>8</sup> Matthew 12:40

<sup>9</sup> Luke 16:31