

## Seeking After A Sign.

Text: Matt 12:38-42

Suggested Hymns:  
53, 155, 175, 51, 304

- 1) Jesus Refuses To Give Them The Sign They Seek
- 2) Jesus Promises To Give Them The Sign Of  
The Prophet Jonah

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 12:38-42, <sup>38</sup> *Then some of the scribes and Pharisees answered, saying, "Teacher, we want to see a sign from You."* <sup>39</sup> *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."* <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>41</sup> *"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."* <sup>42</sup> *"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."* (NKJV)

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

Dear friends in Christ,

The scribes and Pharisees requested from Jesus a sign, a miracle, to prove His claim of possessing divine power and authority. The Bible records many miracles, events, and acts contrary to the natural, established order.

Moses made a path through the waters of the Red Sea. Elijah caused fire to fall from heaven and consume his sacrifice. Jesus healed the sick and stilled the storm by speaking a few words. Signs and wonders were performed also by the apostles of our Lord.

Many people these days do not hesitate to declare that the records of these miracles are not history but fiction. The unbelieving scientists maintain that the laws of nature are unalterably fixed and that therefore a real miracle is impossible.

But to deny the possibility of a miracle is tantamount to a denial of the existence of an almighty God. If you believe that an almighty God created this world, you must also admit that He has the power to suspend, if He chooses to do so, the laws made by Him.

The scribes and Pharisees did not question the possibility of miracles, but they did not admit the ability of Jesus to perform a real miracle because they refused to believe that He was God.

So they challenged Him to perform a miracle right then and there to substantiate His claim of being the Son of God. Likewise many people today refuse to accept as true the claims of the Bible and of the Christian religion, but assure us that they would believe if we could prove these claims to be true by doing today the wonderful things ascribed to the prophets, to Christ, and His apostles.

Yes, there are Christians who “*seek after a sign,*” demanding that every true Christian be able to heal the sick, speak in tongues, etc. In our text we have *Christ’s Answer to the Sign-Seekers*. May the Lord bless our meditation.

### 1. Jesus Refuses To Give Them The Sign They Seek

Our text begins, <sup>38</sup> *Then some of the scribes and Pharisees answered, saying, “Teacher, we want to see a sign from You.”* <sup>39</sup> *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.*

These people were not sincere truth-seekers, honest doubters, and open to conviction, even if Jesus could give them sufficient evidence in support of His claims. Rather, they were the representatives of an “*evil and adulterous generation,*” which had committed spiritual adultery by forsaking God,<sup>1</sup> and by unbelief had rejected His Son, the Christ of God.<sup>2</sup>

They had hardened their hearts against the truth which Jesus proclaimed and they closed their minds to the convincing evidence of the great miracles performed by Him.

Since they were unable to deny the fact of Jesus’ miracles, they explained them as witchcraft, and works of the devil.<sup>3</sup> Now they came to Him, requesting that He perform a greater miracle, to give them a sign directly from heaven,<sup>4</sup>

maybe to cause fire to fall from heaven like Elijah, but their purpose was to tempt and embarrass Jesus.

We still have the sign-seekers with us. Unbelievers, scoffers, sceptics, tell us that they are open to conviction, but are unwilling to accept the Bible, the Christian religion, on the basis of miracles performed by the prophets in the Old Testament, and Jesus and the Apostles in the New Testament.

They demand that we Christians of today prove the truth of our doctrines by doing signs and wonders ourselves, such as stopping fires, cyclones, and floods by prayer. They really do not want to believe. If such miracles were performed, they would explain them as sleight-of-hand tricks, optical illusions, or coincidences.

Another type of sign-seeker professes most emphatically to believe in all the mysteries and miracles of the Bible, and for this very reason teaches and demands that Christians today must possess and exercise miracle-working powers. Many Pentecostal churches hold to this. They conclude, where the Church cannot produce these miracles, there is no faith. Whoever is not able to heal the sick is not a true believer.

But Christ's refused to give a sign and said, *no sign will be given* to this evil and adulterous generation. This was not the only occasion on which Christ refused to grant the request for a sign from Him.<sup>5</sup> To perform miracles for the benefit of unbelievers, scoffers, hypocrites, and despisers of His Word, would be casting pearls before the swine,<sup>6</sup> and would not convince or convert them.<sup>7</sup>

But how about the sign-seeking Christians? Does Christ approve of them? Jesus says to them what He said to the nobleman who came seeking help for his mortally sick son, as we read in John 4:48, "*Unless you people see signs and wonders, you will by no means believe.*" Listen to what Jesus said to doubting Thomas, "*Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.*"<sup>8</sup>

It is not true that the Bible teaches that all true believers have wonder-working powers as we read in 1 Corinthians 12:7-11, <sup>7</sup> *But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all: <sup>8</sup> for to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, to another the word of knowledge through the same Spirit, <sup>9</sup> to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healings by*

*the same Spirit,<sup>10</sup> to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another discerning of spirits, to another different kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues.*

The answer is in the next verse <sup>11</sup> *But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually as He wills.*

1 Corinthians 12:29-30 asks, <sup>29</sup> *Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Are all workers of miracles?* <sup>30</sup> *Do all have gifts of healings? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret?* The answer is No, not even in the apostolic age.

The purpose of Christ's miracles was to convince people that He was the Christ, the Son of God.<sup>9</sup> The purpose of the miracles performed by the apostles was to *"confirm the Word."*<sup>10</sup> They were their divine credentials. Their word has been confirmed. We have their inspired record in the New Testament. We no longer need further signs and wonders.

Today it necessary for us to be on our guard against the *"signs and lying wonders"* of false prophets.<sup>11</sup> Today Christ wants us to trust in His Word alone, without the need for seeing.<sup>12</sup>

We read in Matthew 8:8, <sup>8</sup> *The centurion answered and said, "Lord, I am not worthy that You should come under my roof. But only speak a word, and my servant will be healed.* And in Romans 10:17, <sup>17</sup> *So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.*

## **2. Jesus Promises To Give Them The Sign Of The Prophet Jonah**

Our text says, *no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah.* <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*

Jesus refers to the strange experience of one of the Old Testament prophets, Jonah. For three days and three nights Jonas was in the stomach of a great fish. Under ordinary conditions Jonah would have perished. But God miraculously preserved the life of His renegade servant and caused the great fish to spew him out on dry land.

Thus, says Jesus, He will spend three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. He makes no further explanation. Let them puzzle it out for themselves. He intentionally uses veiled language; why? The answer is in Luke 8:10, <sup>10</sup> *And Jesus said, "To you it has been given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God, but to the rest it is given in parables, that 'Seeing they may not see, And hearing they may not understand.'*

We know what Jesus meant. The experience of Jonah is a symbol of Christ's death, burial, and resurrection. Jesus will be swallowed up by death and the grave, but on the third day He will rise from the dead. This will be for His own and all future generations a sign, a miracle, of such stupendous importance as to prove beyond the shadow of a doubt that He is the Messiah, the Son of the living God, the almighty Conqueror of death, the only Saviour of the world.

Unwittingly Jesus' enemies are instrumental in bringing about the fulfilment of this prophecy. They crucify Him. He dies and is buried. But like Jonah's great fish, death and the grave cannot hold Jesus. After three days He appears alive among His friends again and again, during a period of forty days. Jesus does not appear to His enemies, but He is seen by five hundred believers at one time.<sup>13</sup>

His enemies have not forgotten that Jesus said something about rising again on the third day; so they did everything humanly possible to prevent the friends of Jesus from perpetrating a deception.<sup>14</sup> When the terrified guards report what has happened at that Easter dawn, they resort to bribery and falsehood to explain the empty tomb.<sup>15</sup> When, a few weeks later, His disciples publicly declare that Jesus, whom the Jewish leaders had crucified was risen, the Jewish leaders do not produce the dead body of Jesus, but try to silence the apostles with threats, imprisonment, and death.<sup>16</sup>

The resurrection of Christ is the one great sign from heaven also for our own generation. Christ's enemies are more keenly aware of its importance than most Christians. Their fiercest assaults are directed against this great basic fact of Christianity. But all their attempts to disprove the fact and discredit the witnesses of His resurrection are futile.

They still leave unanswered questions such as these: What would have moved the disciples to spend their lives and suffer death to preach Christ's

resurrection if they knew He was still dead? What power transformed these timid, cowardly, despairing men into fearless heroes of faith and courage? How do they explain the radical change in the character of Saul of Tarsus, an enemy and persecutor, into Paul, the apostle of Christ? Or the marvellous growth and spread of Christianity in spite of three centuries of terrible persecution, until it became a power that entirely changed the course of human history?

All these effects, without the fact of Christ's resurrection as the underlying cause, is more miraculous than the resurrection itself. What better evidence is any one justified in demanding for the truth of Christ's Gospel? No other sign will be given to those who refuse to accept this sign as conclusive. No other sign, not a thousand of them, would convince them.

In our text Jesus warns them of the condemnation that awaits them on the Day of Judgment, <sup>41</sup> ***"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.*** <sup>42</sup> ***"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.***

The witnesses who will appear against them are the men of Nineveh. Nineveh was a great heathen city. The people of Nineveh wallowed in all pagan vices; their wickedness cried to heaven for vengeance. God sent them His prophet, Jonah, to warn them and call them to repentance, and they repented in sackcloth and ashes.

These people will rise up as witnesses against the unbelieving Jews. The Ninevites heeded the words of Jonah, a mere man, and repented; but the Jews would not heed the words of One far greater than Jonah; they would not believe the testimony of the Son of God, nor be convinced by His mighty works, but insisted on a greater sign. Surely they could expect nothing but condemnation.

The queen of the South had heard reports of the great wisdom of Solomon. So eager was she to see and hear this great man that she undertook the long and perilous journey from Arabia to Jerusalem. She also will appear as a damaging witness against the miracle-seeking generation of Christ's contemporaries.

One greater than Solomon, Jesus Christ, in whom are hid all the treasures of divine wisdom and knowledge,<sup>17</sup> had dwelt in their very midst, and yet they despised and rejected Him. Surely their condemnation on the day of Judgment will be just.

There will be not only the men of Nineveh and the queen of the South, but millions of people. Every true Christian you ever knew, heard, or read about is a witness to the fact that Christ is not a myth, but a great living reality.

Not one of them can or would believe in Christ by his own reason or strength. The fact that wherever the Gospel is preached sinners are brought to repentance, unbelievers to faith in Christ, slaves of sin are transformed into consecrated servants of God, proves that the risen, living, exalted Christ and His Spirit are at work, performing spiritual miracles of regeneration in the hearts of men, not by breath-taking signs and wonders, but by the simple preaching of Christ's Word.

If you refuse to accept Christ and His Gospel because you do not see signs and wonders, you will certainly be without excuse. It will be entirely your own fault that you will appear among the condemned on the day of Judgment.

Let us not seek signs and wonders. Let us accept the simple Gospel-message of free grace and salvation through faith in Christ Jesus, which was so powerfully witnessed by His resurrection from the dead, and the power of which has been experienced by millions of despairing sinners.

May we never forget these words of our Saviour, as written in John 20:29, ***“Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”*** Then some day we shall also taste the inexpressible joy of seeing Jesus face to face in everlasting life and glory. 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> Hos. 2:2-4; Jer. 13:27

<sup>2</sup> John 10:24-26

<sup>3</sup> Luke 11:15

<sup>4</sup> Matt. 16:1; Luke 11:16

<sup>5</sup> Luke 11:16; Luke 23:8-9

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- <sup>6</sup> Matt. 7:6  
<sup>7</sup> Luke 16:27-31  
<sup>8</sup> John 20:29  
<sup>9</sup> Matt. 11:2-5; cf. Isa. 35:5-6, 8; John 10:25, 36, 38; John 20:30-31  
<sup>10</sup> Mark 16:20  
<sup>11</sup> Matt. 24:24; 2 Thess. 2:9  
<sup>12</sup> John 4:50, John 20:19-20  
<sup>13</sup> 1 Cor. 15:6  
<sup>14</sup> Matt. 27:62-66  
<sup>15</sup> Matt. 28:11-15  
<sup>16</sup> Acts 4-7  
<sup>17</sup> Col. 2:3