

Sunday 24-April-22

Looking for a Sign?

Jonah Flees From the LORD

1 The word of the LORD came to Jonah son of Amittai: **2** "Go to the great city of Nineveh and preach against it, because its wickedness has come up before me."

3 But Jonah ran away from the LORD and headed for Tarshish. He went down to Joppa, where he found a ship bound for that port. After paying the fare, he went aboard and sailed for Tarshish to flee from the LORD.

4 Then the LORD sent a great wind on the sea, and such a violent storm arose that the ship threatened to break up. **5** All the sailors were afraid and each cried out to his own god. And they threw the cargo into the sea to lighten the ship.

But Jonah had gone below deck, where he lay down and fell into a deep sleep. **6** The captain went to him and said, "How can you sleep? Get up and call on your god! Maybe he will take notice of us so that we will not perish."

7 Then the sailors said to each other, "Come, let us cast lots to find out who is responsible for this calamity." They cast lots and the lot fell on Jonah. **8** So they asked him, "Tell us, who is responsible for making all this trouble for us? What kind of work do you do? Where do you come from? What is your country? From what people are you?"

9 He answered, "I am a Hebrew and I worship the LORD, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land."

10 This terrified them and they asked, "What have you done?" (They knew he was running away from the LORD, because he had already told them so.)

11 The sea was getting rougher and rougher. So, they asked him, "What should we do to you to make the sea calm down for us?"

12 "Pick me up and throw me into the sea," he replied, "and it will become calm. I know that it is my fault that this great storm has come upon you."

¹³ Instead, the men did their best to row back to land. But they could not, for the sea grew even wilder than before. ¹⁴ Then they cried out to the LORD, "Please, LORD, do not let us die for taking this man's life. Do not hold us accountable for killing an innocent man, for you, LORD, have done as you pleased." ¹⁵ Then they took Jonah and threw him overboard, and the raging sea grew calm. ¹⁶ At this the men greatly feared the LORD, and they offered a sacrifice to the LORD and made vows to him.

Jonah's Prayer

¹⁷ Now the LORD provided a huge fish to swallow Jonah, and Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.

Matthew 12:38-50

The Sign of Jonah

³⁸ Then some of the Pharisees and teachers of the law said to him, "Teacher, we want to see a sign from you."

³⁹ He answered, "A wicked and adulterous generation asks for a sign! But none will be given it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. ⁴⁰ For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. ⁴¹ The men of Nineveh will stand up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it; for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and now something greater than Jonah is here. ⁴² The Queen of the South will rise at the judgment with this generation and condemn it; for she came from the ends of the earth to listen to Solomon's wisdom, and now something greater than Solomon is here.

⁴³ "When an impure spirit comes out of a person, it goes through arid places seeking rest and does not find it. ⁴⁴ Then it says, 'I will return to the house I left.' When it arrives, it finds the house unoccupied, swept clean and put in order. ⁴⁵ Then it goes and takes with it seven other spirits more wicked than itself, and they go in and live there. And the final condition of that person is worse than the first. That is how it will be with this wicked generation."

Jesus' Mother and Brothers

⁴⁶ While Jesus was still talking to the crowd, his mother and brothers stood outside, wanting to speak to him. ⁴⁷ Someone told him, "Your mother and brothers are standing outside, wanting to speak to you."

⁴⁸ He replied to him, "Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?" ⁴⁹ Pointing to his disciples, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers. ⁵⁰ For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother."

Sermon: Looking for a Sign

We're **continuing** our **series** on **Matthew's Gospel** – and we'll be **starting from Matthew chapter 12 – verse 38**. We'll briefly look at our **Old Testament reading from Jonah chapter 1 first** – to see how it relates.

Let me **ask God for His guidance** and **understanding**

Let's pray...

Intro (Four life positions)

There's a **branch of psychology** – called **Transactional Analysis**

It sees that every relationship we have – is a transaction

And for every relationship we have – there are 4 life positions

[Slide 1-Transactional Analysis]



So, for example in any relationship I have with one of you – there are **4 life positions**:

Either – I'm not OK – but you're OK

Or – I'm not OK – and you're not OK

Or – I'm OK – and you're OK

Or – I'm OK – but you're not OK

So, any relationship we have **cycles around** those **4 life positions** – depending on circumstances and **how we're coping** etc.

The **best scenario** is - I'm OK - and you're OK

[Slide 1a-Smiley]



And the **worst scenario** is - I'm not OK - and you're not OK

[Slide 2-Sad]



Sometimes – our **relationships** – are where **one of us is not okay**

[Slide 3]



Jonah and the Ninevites (Jonah 1:1-17)

Which brings us to our **Old Testament** (OT) reading from **Jonah chapter 1**

The **prophet Jonah** thinks he's okay.

[Slide 4 – Jonah & Ninevites]



After all he's **one of God's prophets**.

God gives **Jonah** a **job** to do – to **preach against the wickedness** of the people of **Nineveh** (a city in ancient Assyria – now modern-day Iraq)

But Jonah sees that **Ninevites are not okay**

And he doesn't care that they are **not okay**

As far as Jonah is concerned – the **Ninevites** are **so bad** – they are **not worth saving** – and they are **beyond God's grace and mercy**

Jonah thinks the **Ninevites** **don't deserve** to be **forgiven by God!**

So, **Jonah runs away**.

He jumps on a **ship** at **Joppa** and heads as far west as he can to a place called **Tarshish**
[Spain]

[Slide 5 – Map]



But you can't hide from God or run away from God.

The **voyage** becomes **treacherous** and Jonah's **shipmates discover Jonah is running away from God**; and Jonah tells them their **best option** is to **sacrifice him** – to save the ship – by **throwing Him overboard**. Here we have a hint of what Jesus does when He calms the storm when He's in a boat on the lake with His disciples and we have a hint of Jesus' sacrifice – to save us from the danger of the punishment of our sins!

But **God is not done with Jonah yet**. When **Jonah is thrown overboard**. **God** provides a **huge fish** (not a whale) and **Jonah spends three days and nights** in the **belly** of this big fish.

He's having a **whale of a time!**

God is not finished with Jonah yet, **after 3 days**, Jonah is **vomited out of the big fish onto dry land** (Jonah 2:10).

Jonah is not okay like he thinks he is!

He's actually – not okay – **because he's not doing God's will**.

So actually, **Jonah is not okay** - and the **Ninevites are not okay**.

[Slide 6-Jonah and Ninevites]

I'm not OK, You're OK	I'm OK, You're OK
Jonah I'm not OK, You're not OK Ninevites	I'm OK, You're not OK

For **Jonah** and the **Ninevites** to both be okay

Jonah has to do God's will and **preach to the Ninevites** – and give them the opportunity to **repent**.

Application: For us then – **Jonah wrote off the Ninevites** as being too bad – who are we writing off as being too bad – thinking they are beyond **God's grace and mercy?**

Jonah and us – are meant to be messengers for God – not the **judge!**

(pause)

Jesus and the Pharisees and the Teachers of the Law (Matthew 12:28-45)

Which brings us to our **New Testament** (NT) passage from **Matthew 12:38-50** and a similar problem.

Here we have the **Pharisees and the teachers of the law**

They think they are okay – and that **Jesus** is not okay

[Slide 7-Pharisees & Jesus]

I'm not OK, You're OK	I'm OK, You're OK
I'm not OK, You're not OK	Pharisees and teachers of the law I'm OK, You're not OK Jesus

The Pharisees and teachers of the law **ask Jesus for a sign** (v38)

How many signs has **Jesus already done**? Aren't they enough?

They already asked Jesus for a sign in Matthew 8:11-12; and that was **immediately after Jesus had fed 4000 people with 7 loaves** (Matthew 8:1-10). Are they kidding?

Because the Pharisees and teachers of the law's think they are okay and Jesus is not – their **real motivation in asking for a sign** is most likely looking for another way to try to catch Jesus out or another way to reject Him– they have already previously - **accused Jesus of breaking the Sabbath by working on the Sabbath** (Matthew 12:1-14) and **healing on the Sabbath** (Mark 3:1-6) and they have even attributed His powers as being from Satan (Matthew 12:22-37. So, they're not fair dinkum – and it's actually Jesus - **who is okay** - and the *Pharisees and teachers of the law* who are not okay.

[Slide 8 – Jesus and Pharisees]



So, **Jesus condemns them** for asking for a sign.

He **calls** them a **wicked and adulterous generation** (v39). They are **adulterous** in that they are being **unfaithful God** - by rejecting and doubting God's Son.

Jesus says the only sign He will give them – is a **sign** from our OT passage – the **prophet Jonah**.

Jesus says v40: *For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.*

The sign Jesus is referring to is that just like Jonah spent 3 days and 3 nights in the belly of the fish; Jesus Himself will spend 3 days and nights in the Earth, after His death – before He rises again - just like Jonah “rose again” so to speak – when he was vomited out of the big fish onto dry land (Jonah 2:10).

Jesus continues to make His point by referring to two OT events in verses 41 and 42.

Jesus **mentions** the **people of Nineveh** who repented when Jonah (finally) delivered God's message; and Jesus **mentions** the **Queen of Sheba** who came from the ends of the Earth to see listen to the wisdom of God's anointed King, Solomon.

Jesus is making **several points** here:

- He is a greater prophet than the prophet Jonah
- He is wiser than King Solomon and a greater King than Solomon
- In fact, He is The **Prophet, Priest and King!**

d. And He's saying to the Pharisees and teachers of the Law *"You are asking for a sign – I am God's sign. You have failed to recognize me. The Ninevites recognized (and listened to) God's warning in Jonah; the Queen of Sheba recognized (and listened to) God's wisdom in Solomon."* (Barclay)

And because the Pharisees and teachers of the law have not listened to Jesus – both **the Ninevites and the Queen of Sheba will be in the courtroom on Judgement Day** – condemning the Pharisees and teachers of the law for not listening and rejecting Jesus!
So, the **Pharisees and teachers of the law** – are definitely not okay!

And Jesus goes on to say just how "not okay" they are – in verses 42 to 45.

Jesus **uses the analogy of an impure (evil) spirit coming out of a person** – and the impure spirit looks for somewhere else to go. But when it can't find anywhere - it returns to the house it left – and finds the house empty and swept – so the impure spirit takes 7 more impure spirits with it – and reoccupies the house and the person it left with greater intensity

The point is: the impure spirit is only able to return because the house is empty. Jesus is referring to the fact that the Pharisees and teachers of the law will be empty of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit of Jesus by rejecting Him! And because they are empty, they run the risk of being occupied by Satan.

Application: If we are filled with Jesus – being born again by the Spirit of God – then we cannot be empty and therefore inhabited by demons. ***"Though he shakes his chain at us, he cannot fasten his fangs in us."*** (Trapp)

Jesus ends His condemnation of the Pharisees and teachers of the law in v45 by saying:
the final condition of that person is worse than the first.

What Jesus means is their first condition was ***"being empty by rejecting Jesus"*** – but their final condition will be ***"filled with Satan's impure spirit instead of the Holy Spirit"***

Application: **Jesus** is stressing the urgency of people believing in Him and receiving the Holy Spirit (born again – born from above – John 3).

Jesus' True Family (Matthew 12:46-50)

This brings us to our **final section of the passage** – verses 46 to 50.

Jesus' family – His mother and brothers **come to speak to Him**.

We know from Mark's version of this same story (Mark 3:21) – that **His family have come to take charge of Jesus** – they think He's out of his mind – taking on the religious leaders, head on!

Jesus' family think - they are **okay** - and **Jesus** is not okay

[Slide 9 – Jesus family and Jesus]



As always – **Jesus turns things upside down**

He asks – v48 – *“who is my mother, and who are my brothers?”*

What Jesus is asking is how do we get to the ideal scenario – in our relationship with Jesus?

How do we get to the point where - **Jesus is okay** – and we are okay?

[Slide 10 – Jesus and us]



The answer Jesus gives is in v49-50 – we are okay – and we are part of Jesus' family - if we do the will of God the Father?

And what's the **will of the Father?**

Jesus tells us in John 6:40 - *For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day.*"

Jesus' true family (the ones that do His Father's will) stand in stark contrast to Jonah (who ran away from God initially) and stand in stark contrast to the Pharisees and teachers of the law (who ask for a sign, and do not believe in Him - and are a wicked and adulterous generation)

Application: For us then it means – we don't run away from God (like Jonah), we don't doubt God's message of repentance (like Jonah), we don't write people off (like Jonah), we don't doubt Jesus credentials by asking for more and more signs (like the Pharisees and teachers of the law) – instead - **we do the Father's will** – when we look to God's Son Jesus – and believe.

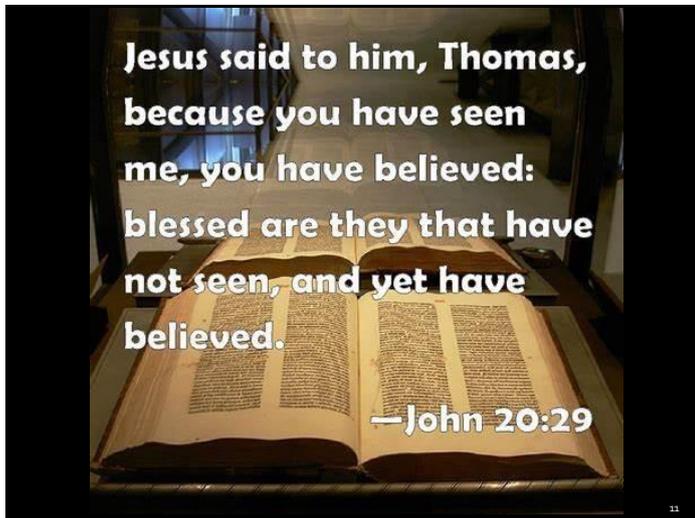
Conclusion

To finish up then: signs and miracles are not necessary. We don't necessarily need proof of who Jesus is. We have His Word and His Spirit – and we can simply have faith without ANY proof. Just simply believe God's Word is the absolute truth.

The **Apostle Thomas** doubted Jesus had risen from the dead and refused to believe Jesus had risen - until He saw Jesus' face to face alive!

When Thomas finally saw Jesus – **Thomas believed.**

[Slide 11 – John 20:29]



Jesus' reply says it all: "*Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.*" (John 20:29)

Friends, we need to walk by faith and not by what we see (2 Corinthians 5:7)

Let's pray...

Father God, we are sorry for the times we doubt you – and we're sorry for the times when we write people off.

We acknowledge we can't hide anything from you.

Thank you for sending Jesus and allowing us to be part of His family.

Help us to do your will – and look to Jesus and believe.

Help us to walk by faith and not be what we see.

In Jesus name, we pray. Amen.