

**Reading:** Matthew 12:38-42

**Theme:** One greater than Jonah.

We have looked at the book of Jonah in some detail and to finish our studies we will look at Jesus' words as He spoke to the religious bigwigs, rulers in His day and spoke of the prophet Jonah in Matthew 12:38-41. Jesus' words about Jonah were startling, astonishing to the men of His day. Those religious rulers went to Jesus, using what appeared to be an honouring title "*Teacher*", "*Master*" we want a miraculous sign,' but it was just a cover-up for their real intention to show He was not worth following, yet if He did so, He would have been able to prove once and for all that He was God who came as a man.

The Lord Jesus answered them in a blunt and forthright way (v39)! This may shake our little cosy picture of a meek and mild Jesus; as He scorned their request and condemned them! Why did Jesus deal so harshly with them? It was because He knew their hearts and motives. If He had given them a further miraculous sign they still would not have believed. In this chapter Jesus had healed a man who had a shrivelled hand; had cured a blind, mute, demon possessed man and, on both occasions, these religious bigwigs found fault - even accusing Him of being in partnership with the devil! Do not think they were interested in a miraculous sign, for they had already planned to kill Him (v14). They said they wanted to know, but were deliberately, spiritually blind and ignorant to all Jesus had said and done already!

Incredibly Jesus didn't dismiss them, but spoke of giving them a sign – the sign of the prophet Jonah. As Jonah was in the belly of the fish for three days and three nights, so the Son of Man would be in the heart of the earth i.e. dead and buried for 3 days.

Jonah was a sign to his generation and the Lord Jesus' death and resurrection would be a sign to His and to all generations, including our own. I hope we will see this as we go look at the last part of v41 "*now one greater than Jonah is here.*" I want us to consider some of the ways Jesus is greater than Jonah. The Lord Jesus in applying this statement emphasized that the pagan Ninevites responded to Jonah, turned to God and repented, but there He was, One greater than Jonah and the Jews did nothing of the sort! Let's see some of the ways Jesus is greater than Jonah:

### **1. He is greater in His person.**

Jonah was a great prophet, although we are told but a little about his family and background - he was the son of Ammitai, from a village called Gath Hopher (2 Kings 14:25). Jonah is presented to us as a man with weaknesses, failings and sin. He was a mortal creature just like us, had his ups and downs. Although we're not told when, there came a time when Jonah died, was buried and now his body has long since gone for he lived about 2,800 years ago.

When we come to find out about Jesus, we find we are confronted with someone totally different. The Bible tells us many wonderful things about Jesus - showing us something of His great person. The one thing the Bible makes clear is that Jesus was not just a mortal man, not even a Superman, or a great teacher or prophet only. The Bible tells us something incredible - as it shows us, He existed before He was ever born or even conceived! There was a time when we did not exist, there will be a time when physically we will no longer exist; but not so with Jesus. The Bible clearly teaches that He is God - fully equal

with God, possessing everything that makes God, God; He has forever existed and is and will forever be God.

As God He was involved in Creation and without Him was nothing made that was made. He is not pictured as a creature, as a lesser being, but as fully God, coequal and coexistent with God the Father and God the Holy Spirit. He is revealed to us as God the Son. The Bible shows us this divine One became fully human and all His God-ness, deity, was veiled, hidden away when He took to Himself human flesh. We are told the Word became flesh and dwelt among us. The angel said that God incarnate (as a man) was to be called Jesus - which means Saviour. He was at the one and the same time both fully God and fully man. He was perfect, had no fault, did, said, desired or thought no wrong. He is in complete contrast to Jonah - a mortal, rebellious man.

Jesus, the God-man, is immortal, perfect and, like Jonah, He too was a prophet, but Jesus perfectly revealed God's word and will to us. He is God's final word and revelation to mankind. Jesus not only spoke of God, but reveals God most clearly, so that Jesus could say if you've seen Him, you had seen His Father - they were that much alike because He was God, yes in human flesh and if you saw Him, you would see the Father.

What about us this evening? Have we seen anything of the greatness of Jesus' person? Have we seen that He's not just a man, a gifted, talented man, not just a great teacher or a great prophet? We cannot say those things and leave them there. He never claimed to be just such things! He claimed to be God who took to Himself a real human body. I know it's been said before, but if He is not God, then we have to brand Him either as a

madman or a liar! If He claimed to be God and was not, but did not know it, then He was mad, deluded and His teachings are the ramblings of a madman - so why follow Him? If He knew He was not God, then He deliberately lied and deceived people - which means He's definitely not worth following! The amazing thing is that His miracles, power, teachings and His own words authenticate and underline that He is God. This means He is far greater than Jonah and the Jews should have listened, as we should listen to His claims on our lives. Have we seen Him greater than Jonah in His glorious person?

## **2. He is greater in His sign.**

Jonah was a sign to the Ninevites as he had been in the belly of the fish for 3 days and 3 nights. Jonah suffered this because of his wrongdoing, his rebellion to God and was punished by seemingly "dying" - he was buried at sea, cut off from the land of the living, some say that he actually did die! Yet he was spared and came back from the "dead" and was seen by many.

The Lord Jesus said this was the sign He would give the Jews - not of powerful miracles, but the sign of being really dead for 3 days and coming back to life. There is a great contrast between His death and Jonah's. Jonah "died" as punishment for his own sin, but Jesus had no sin, indeed He was immortal, eternal and yet He died! How can the immortal, the eternal One die? We are told that on the cross the Lord Jesus took our sin on Him, more than that He became sin - not a sinner, but He was made all the sin of the world throughout history and that sin was on Him and He became sin. Note that if He was only a mere man, or a lesser being than God, He could not have taken this upon Himself. Yet upon Himself He took our punishment, in our place on the cross of Calvary. He really died because of what we had done wrong.

His death was recognised and attested to by trained Roman soldiers as a fact. He was taken from the cross and buried by His friends and if they had seen any hope or sign of life, they would not have buried Him! He was buried in a borrowed grave, but on the third day He rose from the dead, escaping death and conquering it forever as He was never more to die. Paul told us of the importance of this sign in Romans 1:4 (NKJV) *"and declared to be the Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead."* The sign of the Lord Jesus is greater.

### **3. He is greater in His ministry.**

Jonah had to go and proclaim judgement on Nineveh *"40 days and Nineveh will be destroyed."* Why then did Jesus come? We are told in John 3:16-18 *"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him **shall not perish** but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son."* By His life and death Jesus came to give us life, life in abundance - LIFE! It involved the tremendous sacrifice which He gave willingly as He took our punishment in our place on the cross. Jonah proclaimed death, destruction and hopelessness; Jesus still proclaims life, new life and hope to all those who will believe in Him, trust in Him and what He has done. Jesus has a far greater ministry than Jonah ever did!

### **4. He is greater in His love.**

Jonah did his job and work in a cold-hearted way as he didn't want the people of Nineveh to be spared. Even as God showed

His love to them, Jonah was upset, sulked and stormed out of the city to wait, callously wait to see it destroyed as he wanted, demanded. God had to deal with Jonah to teach him of His love, compassion and mercy.

In contrast to this, realise the Lord Jesus was not forced into being the Saviour, into coming to earth as a man, to live a perfect life and to die such an awful death in our place. No, He was moved by love, just as God the Father was moved by love to send His Son - it was love toward us. This is amazing because we are unlovely, detestable and are God's enemies and by nature hate Him. How and why did He do all this for us? Because He loved us - Romans 5:6-8 *"You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us."* The Bible speaks of this being done, not because we deserved it, or earned it, for we most certainly do not or could not, but it is all of God's love, His grace – to the old, foul-mouthed blasphemer, former sea captain and slave trader John Newton it was incredible and wrote of it as Amazing Grace!

Here is Jesus, great in His person, in the sign He has given, great in His ministry, great in His love and yet in stark contrast to that, here we are - deserving nothing is done for us, no love shown to us, no opportunity given for us to be spared our punishment and yet the Grace of God comes in the gospel and offers all this to us. God wants us to, more strongly, He commands us to turn to Him, trust His Son as our own Saviour, have all our wrong (sin) pardoned, have a new life given us and have a secure home in

heaven. That is not too bad an offer for us who certainly do not deserve it!

Jesus is far greater than Jonah - the people of Nineveh turned to God and repented. This evening we need to turn to God and repent if we are not right with Him. I know the Lord Jesus Himself is not physically speaking to us, but as a preacher of the gospel I am aware of His commission and tell us all of Him, of our need to be right with Him by trusting Him. Would we not rather choose life than death, heaven than hell? If you do not know the Lord Jesus, then I would urge you in the name of Jesus, by God Himself to believe on Him as your Saviour. Could God have sent anyone greater? Can He do any more for us? Can He tell us more or show us more of His love? No - He cannot! The trouble is we can still neglect or reject such a Saviour. If we do, then be warned, for not only is Jesus greater in His love than Jonah, but

### **5. He is greater in His judgement.**

Jonah wanted to see Nineveh destroyed, but it wasn't. God showed mercy on Nineveh and Jonah couldn't do anything about it! Nineveh was given God's pardon. That generation listened to God, but sadly succeeding generations didn't and 150 years later, when Nineveh was even stronger than at Jonah's time, it was utterly destroyed as a judgement from God.

In the gospel, the Lord Jesus is offered to us as our Saviour and if we do not believe in Him for whatever reason, we may think it will not matter, but one day it will. One day we will come to the judgement seat of heaven and we will have to face, not God the Father, but God the Son, the Lord Jesus. We will see Him there in all His greatness, power and glory; we will realise all

the greatness of what He went through when He died for sinners like us and it will not be a pleasant sight, for we will be terrified by Him - as we didn't think in our lifetime that He was worth bothering about or believing in. Yet that same One will judge us and have to condemn us to hell for ever. There will be no need for witnesses, as all the evidence will be there and we ourselves will agree with the verdict!

Yet the people of Nineveh will be there and condemn us, the Queen of Sheba will also condemn us, many from all parts of the world and throughout time will condemn us - because we heard and deliberately did not believe when they believed with far less light and knowledge. The greater our light and understanding, the greater our sorrow and condemnation if we do not believe.

Yet tonight the Lord Jesus has been presented as the One we can call to, ask to be our Saviour and incredibly He will take us as His people, His child. I urge us all to make the One greater than Jonah our own Saviour. If we know Him as our Saviour, then we are to delight to live for Him in the life abundant that only He can give and then we are to be willing messengers in both what we say and do and so tell others of One far greater than Jonah, far greater than anyone ever could be, the One who could be the greatest to them.