

Reading: Matthew 12:38-50

Theme: One greater than Jonah and Solomon.

There is much focus on saving the planet, on ecology and climate change. Our world is an amazing world, it has so much beauty in it, as is the universe around us. While it is right to be concerned for our planet and that its beauty and ecosystems are maintained, yet generally mankind ignores that there is a God behind it all, above and beyond it all. Sadly, people can worship science, their own achievements, the achievements of others, but very few have time for God and the Saviour He has provided for people like us. I sometimes wonder what it would take for people generally to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. To be honest, I have to question what it would take to cause some gathered here to believe in the Lord Jesus as your own Saviour!

Some of us here can so easily be like the Pharisees and Jews of Jesus' own day; who had so much evidence and yet demanded even more by having this or that shown to them. Yet if we had such, some would find more excuses to prevent them believing! That is what the Pharisees and Jews of Jesus' day did and we are to be warned from them so that we will not be like them. This morning I want us to consider v38-42, using 3 points to help us understand the passage and to see how it applies to us in our days:

1. A Question of Signs. (v38-40)

Jesus had said some amazing things and had shown that the Pharisees' accusations against Him concerning the casting out of demons were absurd, inconsistent, obscured the truth and denied the evidence they witnessed; even being an unpardonable sin and exposed their hearts and lives as being corrupt. It is easy to understand why they wouldn't have liked

this and probably went away with their tails between their legs and their anger hitting boiling point! Yet they did not leave it there, for we read some of the Pharisees and teachers of the law came back with a different approach. They came respectfully and called Him “*Teacher*” asking to see a miraculous sign from Him!

This was reasonable - for Moses had come with signs, someone like Elijah or Elisha had also performed miraculous signs. Probably they felt justified, reasonable in requesting such from the Lord Jesus, but their question, their request was a respectable veneer for their hatred! They were in reality saying that they had dismissed all Jesus’ other miracles as tricks, as being done with the aid of the devil and now they wanted Him to really show them something that would convince them once and for all that He was from God!

What further signs could He do to cause them to believe - He had healed the man with leprosy, healed a centurion’s servant from a distance; healed Peter’s mother-in-law and many others at that time. He had calmed a great storm, cast out demons, healed the woman with the issue of blood, even raised Jairus’ daughter from the dead. His disciples had done great things in their ministry tour. Recently and locally He had healed the man with the withered hand and cured the demon possessed deaf and dumb man. Surely, these were signs in abundance, miraculous signs enough to show that He was from God and was doing such things by the Spirit of God. As we have seen, they had a different explanation (v24) and this makes their request, though polite, highly insulting and was based on unbelief or an unwillingness to believe.

The sign they requested here was to be astoundingly different, something spectacular and sensational! We do not know what they wanted - stars rearranged, angels appearing, deliverance from the Romans, pots of gold in everyone's houses... They asked for signs through unbelief and yet were being hypocritical for they did not expect Him to be able to do anything! I wonder how many people have told God what He has to do before they will believe in Him; yet do so, knowing full well that if their demands are met, they would not believe anyway, but would then explain it away! Is there someone like that here this morning? God could have answered your demands, questions and yet you raise another smokescreen and stubbornly refuse to believe!

Jesus gives an answer to such imprudent, insolent questions and gives them an indication of the miraculous sign above all others that would sensationally point to and prove who He was. He calls their generation a wicked and adulterous one, for they had sought to undermine His ministry, even to distract Him from His ministry and get Him to be a performing magician doing tricks to satisfy their curiosity and unbelief. It would appear that not only the Pharisees and teachers of the law wanted something spectacular, but also many others in their generation. They had become a wicked, evil and adulterous generation who had departed from true faith and dependence upon the Lord, wanting signs and wonders rather than **God's word** taught to them. Doing this they ignored through malice, the signs already done and given.

Jesus tells them they would be given one sign - that of the prophet Jonah. Just as he was 3 days and nights in the belly of the huge fish, so also would Jesus be 3 days and nights in the

earth. What does He mean? Well, to all intents and purposes, Jonah was ‘dead’ and buried in the fish for 3 days and nights, but he came back very much alive. Here Jesus says He would eclipse that, for He would really die, be buried for 3 days and nights in the grave and then He would come back really and truly alive.

The sign He spoke of was His death and resurrection. Here is the great and glorious proof of who He is. He speaks of His death and resurrection as **the** sign they say they required! Sadly, we know that when news of it actually happening is told to their leaders, they do not believe, but disbelieve and ordered soldiers to lie and say His disciples took His body! The truth of His resurrection was evaded and ignored.

Have we ever considered the sign of Jesus’ resurrection from the dead? Do we realise that by it He is declared to be the Son of God with power? Do we realise His sacrifice and accomplishment on the cross was shown to be accepted, that His death is sufficient to save us? It is so convenient to dismiss such and then go on to ask for more, but no more will be given. If you will not believe what God’s word says, then you will not be convinced even if someone you knew came back from the dead and told you so!

If the evidence, the proofs you have now are not used correctly, then these will be used as evidence to condemn you one day. Jesus went on to speak of this to His generation specifically, but it applies to us in our days. So, we see:

2. A Greater Than Jonah. (v41)

Jesus moves away from signs to the hearing of the word of God. That was so important then and is so important now. Jesus points out the fact that the Ninevites repented at Jonah's preaching and they would rise up and condemn Jesus' generation for not repenting at the preaching of someone greater than Jonah. Jesus intended this as a contrast, to cause them to realise the great privileges they had and yet they were not using such privileges.

Jonah was a mere man, a prophet yes, one who was prone to sin and even rebellion. He preached a message of doom, possibly with glee. There were no miracles or signs to confirm his message to a pagan people who had no background or knowledge of the Lord and His ways and yet they repented. On the other hand, Jesus' generation had the pure, spotless, perfect Son of God address them time and time again. He brought them a message of grace, pardon, of salvation and His message was driven home by many amazing miracles. All this was to people who had so many privileges and honours given them through the centuries and who were looking for the Messiah. Yet they did not repent and turn to God.

The less enlightened, the less privileged people of Nineveh repented at lesser preaching. Shouldn't the Pharisees, the Jews have repented at Jesus' preaching? The answer has to be "*Yes they should have!*". The Pharisees etc. should have realised their privileges and turned to God at Jesus' ministry.

What of us today? You don't have Jonah preaching here today, nor the Lord Jesus in person. I feel my own weaknesses so often and willingly own them. You probably see my weaknesses much more often than I realise them and you are gracious not to

tell me of them - very often! Yet I seek and try to tell you of the Lord Jesus - who He is, what He has accomplished, why you need to trust Him as your Saviour. Perhaps I should teach more often on how to trust Him as your Saviour, be assured that if you feel your needs to do that, I, as well as others, will be willing to speak to you about trusting Jesus.

My aim is to present to you, to remind you of your privileges of hearing the gospel - if you are a young person from a Christian home then you have greater privileges, amazing privileges of hearing about the Lord Jesus and yet I have to warn you that if you do not use these privileges correctly and trust Jesus as your Saviour, then many, many others will condemn you who have believed after hearing a lot less. I urge you as young people, plead with you not to neglect or to waste these privileges. Do not be like these foolish Jews who went to hell with their heads full of God's word, minds stuffed with sermons and even quoting what God had done for others and yet they did not know the reality of salvation for themselves.

I urge you, young people, to stop breaking your parents' hearts, stop trampling their prayers under your feet, stop breaking my heart as you ignore my preaching and pleading, but more importantly stop ignoring Jesus' own pleadings with you to trust Him as your Saviour. Jesus is greater than Jonah - we are to hear Him calling us through His word preached and turn to Him in repentance and trust.

3. A Greater Than Solomon. (v42)

We read of the Queen of Sheba in 2 Chronicles 9:1-9 and it is assumed that the Queen of the South = the Queen of Sheba. She came from a great distance, although we do not know where

Sheba was, but it is usually identified with either Ethiopia or Yemen by scholars and so was some 1,200 miles away. She travelled a great distance, had no invitation to do so, but went to hear the wisdom of this man Solomon; she may have gone through many hardships to get there and yet didn't know if she would be seen or welcomed. She came because she heard of Solomon's wisdom, listened and saw amazing things, then gave him great wealth and returned home.

Jesus told His generation that the Queen of the South would rise up and condemn that generation for a greater than Solomon was there and they blew their privileges by not bothering to pay attention to Him and what He said. They had no distance to travel - more often than not Jesus went to them in their towns and villages, yet He was no mere man who was wise, but He was the wisdom of God, for He was God in human flesh. He invited and welcomed all to go to Him whosoever they were and He would not turn them away. There were no obstacles laid in their way to going to Him, He was there among them. Jesus Himself would give them not only wise teaching, but true riches and make them wise and give them eternal life. He indeed is one greater than Solomon and yet they did not use their privileges.

Do we use the privileges we have? We have God's word in our own language, preached in our own language! I try to present the Lord Jesus in all His loveliness, all His beauty and that He deserves to be trusted. In the Lord Jesus are all the treasures of wisdom (*Colossians 2:3*). The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, for it leads us to seek God's forgiveness, to make sure our sin and its guilt is truly forgiven and it leads us to make peace with God through the Lord Jesus Christ. There are no obstacles to us seeking Him, even trusting Him. There are no

great distances to go to make Him our own. When He is your Saviour, you will see He is wisdom from God for us (1 Corinthians 1:30) and we will realise He is our righteousness, holiness and redemption.

In salvation the wisdom of God is revealed at its highest. Yet strangely, the cross and its preaching, the preaching of the Lord Jesus who died there, is often regarded as foolishness – to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God to salvation, it is the preaching of the wisdom of God and it is something in which we can glory and boast.

Do we consider Jesus greater than Jonah and greater than Solomon? He has given us a sensational sign that stands through the ages - His death and resurrection. Now then, what more do you need to convince you? What more can be done and proclaimed to bring you to trust Jesus as your Saviour? You really have no excuse. The Saviour calls, commands you, has hedged you into a corner with the privileges you have had, the things you have heard and read of Him. Now is the time to make Him yours, to seriously seek Him and accept Him as your Lord and Saviour and then go on to live for Him in every area of your life.

For those of us who know Him, isn't He a lovely and glorious Saviour. We should be bold in our speaking of Him and of His love - to fellow believers and also to those who do not know Him. I pray God Himself would make us bold to speak of our lovely Saviour, all He's done for us, is doing for us and will do for us and that we will do so for His glory.