

What's the Sign?
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Matthew 12:38-42

- Let's set the scene: As we move into Matthew chapter twelve the friction between the Jewish religious establishment and Jesus has escalated.
- Their irritation and resentment had grown into hatred and conspiracy.
- After a confrontation over keeping the Sabbath, 12:14-15 tell us: *14 But the Pharisees went out and conspired against him, how to destroy him. 15 Jesus, aware of this, withdrew from there. And many followed him, and he healed them all (ESV)*
- When Jesus cast out a demon, people asked if He was the Messiah.
- In response the Pharisees blasphemed by accusing Jesus of being an agent of Satan. Jesus responded in 12:32, *32 ... whoever speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come. (ESV)*
- The battle lines were drawn and the religious leaders shifted to a new strategy to try to trap and destroy Jesus.

Matthew 12:38–42 (ESV)

³⁸ Then some of the scribes and Pharisees answered him, saying, "Teacher, we wish to see a sign from you." ³⁹ But he answered them, "An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. ⁴⁰ For just 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.

- They asked Jesus to do something big and supernatural to prove His authority. In Luke's account of this episode he writes: *16 while others, to test him, kept seeking from him a sign from heaven. (Luke 11:16 - ESV)*
- **Do you see a conflict between seeking a sign and having faith to believe? What are some conditions that people**

- want to see or experience before believing God? Is waiting for a “certain feeling” comparable to waiting for a sign? ¹
- **Do you think the Pharisees were sincerely asking for a sign so they could believe? Why?**
 - They weren’t seeking a sign so they could believe. They were setting a trap so they could pounce!
 - John MacArthur writes: *“They wanted a spectacular, sensual display of control over the celestial sphere...They would have loved to have seen Joel’s prophecy come to pass and have Him turn the moon into blood, and black out the sun,...They wanted a Fourth of July fireworks show in Heaven...You know why they asked this question of Him? Because they believed He couldn’t do it, and they wanted to discredit Him in front of the people when He didn’t. That was their whole intent. They were saying, “If He is the Messiah, let Him do...[a spectacular display]... They did it to embarrass Him and discredit Him.”*² They did it to cause others NOT to believe in Him.
 - Verse 39: (NLT) ³⁹ ...Jesus replied, *“Only an evil, adulterous generation would demand a miraculous sign;* Important to note, Jesus says this about that whole “generation” of Jewish people. **What did Jesus mean by saying the Jewish people were “adulterous?”**
 - History tells us the Jews of Jesus’ generation no longer worshiped idols (objects) per se. **What was their NEW form of idolatry?**
 - **How are people in our generation “evil and adulterous” when it comes to Christ’s claim to be the Son of God?**
 - Look at verses 39 and 40: Jesus refused to give them an “on-demand” sign. He knew they wouldn’t believe in Him no matter what He did.
 - He responded by foreshadowing the ultimate proof that He IS the Son of God. **How did Jesus compare Himself to Jonah in these verses?”**
 - **In what other ways was Jesus like Jonah? How were they different?**
 - With the miracles of Jesus right before their eyes, these Jewish Pharisees were too hard-hearted to believe. But, Jesus said one day some Gentiles who DID believe would actually judge these learned Pharisees.

⁴¹ The men of Nineveh will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and behold, something greater than Jonah is here. ⁴² The queen of the South will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon, and behold, something greater than Solomon is here.

- Picture the scene on judgment day...the Jewish establishment who conspired to destroy Jesus plead their case: *“We kept the law. We even added some new rules and regulations to make people holier. We’re descended by blood from Abraham. How could we NOT enter Heaven?”*
- *“Bring in the first group of witnesses, the people from Nineveh.”*
- Verse 41: **What will the people of Nineveh testify to?**

Jonah 3:5 (ESV)

⁵ And the people of Nineveh believed God. They called for a fast and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them to the least of them.

Jonah 3:10 (ESV)

¹⁰ When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil way, God relented of the disaster that he had said he would do to them, and he did not do it.

- Important note: The whole city of Nineveh as a group turned to God; yet the whole “generation” of Jews in Jesus’ day [as a group] rejected Him.
- The people of Nineveh weren’t the only Gentiles who responded to God.
- *“Let’s bring in the next witness. State your name.” “Queen of Sheba.”*
- *“Queen, we understand you traveled a great distance to confirm the source of the wisdom of King Solomon (1 Kings 10:1-13; 2 Chron. 9:1-12.) What did you learn and what affect did it have on you, Queen?”*
- *“My testimony is recorded in 2 Chronicles 9:8 (ESV) Here is what I said to King Solomon: ⁸ Blessed be the Lord your God, who has delighted in you and set you on his throne as king for the Lord your God! Because your God loved Israel and would*

establish them forever, he has made you king over them, that you may execute justice and righteousness.”

- The Queen of Sheba saw that Solomon’s greatness came from the greatness of his God.
- The people who rejected Jesus had heard of Jonah. They revered King Solomon. Jesus said: *“behold, something greater than Solomon is here.”*
- This was the “stumbling block” for the Jewish religious leaders. What could be greater than the law and tradition? What could be greater than the temple? Surely not this carpenter from Galilee!
- Jesus had already answered those questions in Matthew 12:6 (ESV) ⁶I tell you, something greater than the temple is here.
- The very Son of God was right before their eyes, yet they asked for further evidence!
- Isn’t it like that today? Many people refuse to believe Jesus is the resurrected Son of God. Most are secular, and sadly some claim to be “religious” yet, they don’t believe in Christ’s resurrection.
- Some disregard Him altogether. Others acknowledge Him as just a historical figure. **What do those people usually say about Jesus?**
- People are deceived into thinking if they believe Jesus was a “good, moral teacher,” or even a “martyr,” that will get them into Heaven.
- Then, there are those who claim to be “religious” but when you proclaim Jesus as risen Son of God, and the ONLY way to Heaven, they have a problem.
- MacArthur: *“...the Pharisees had kept up the charade, the facade, the hypocrisy. The masquerade was very successful until Jesus showed up. That’s true today in many ways; there are many religious people who seem to go along very well with their religious masquerade until someone confronts them with the truth of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and when they reject it, the real truth is made manifest. They don’t love God at all... Mormons, the Jehovah’s Witnesses, and others - who appear so religious, so good, so holy, so righteous, and so obedient to the laws as they believe or proclaim God gives them. When you confront them with Jesus Christ, all of a sudden the hypocrisy is*

revealed, the mask is off. They don't love God; they hate God, despise Him, because they hate His Son.”³

- Romans 10:9-10 (Amplified Version) tells us what we really must believe: ⁹ *because if you acknowledge and confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord [recognizing His power, authority, and majesty as God], and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. ¹⁰ For with the heart a person believes [in Christ as Savior] resulting in his justification [that is, being made righteous—being freed of the guilt of sin and made acceptable to God]; and with the mouth he acknowledges and confesses [his faith openly], resulting in and confirming [his] salvation.*
- Having eternal life doesn't come by being impressed by the miracles of Jesus or even grateful that He died for us. It's about believing His position as the Son of God, as proven by His death, burial, AND resurrection.
- You can't get to Heaven without believing in the resurrection!

So, What's the Takeaway?

- Even followers of Christ sometimes have a tendency to put so much emphasis on the crucifixion that we sort of ignore the “power” of the resurrection.
- Do you ever think about what Jesus' resurrection does for us?
- His resurrection saves us (regeneration)!⁴
Ephesians 2:5–6 (ESV)
⁵ *even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved — ⁶ and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus,*
- His resurrection declares us not-guilty of our sin (justification)!⁵
Romans 4:24b–25 (ESV)
^{24b} *...Jesus our Lord, ²⁵ who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification.*
- His resurrection gives us power to live for Him!⁶
Ephesians 1:19–20 (NLT)
¹⁹ *I also pray that you will understand the incredible greatness of God's power for us who believe him. This is*

the same mighty power²⁰ that raised Christ from the dead and seated him in the place of honor at God's right hand in the heavenly realms.

- His resurrection gives us power over sin!⁷
Romans 6:14 (NLT)
¹⁴ Sin is no longer your master, for you no longer live under the requirements of the law. Instead, you live under the freedom of God's grace.
1 Corinthians 15:17 (NLT)
¹⁷ And if Christ has not been raised, then your faith is useless and you are still guilty of your sins.
- His resurrection gives us the promise of a new, perfect body!⁸
1 Corinthians 15:20 (NLT)
²⁰ But in fact, Christ has been raised from the dead. He is the first of a great harvest of all who have died.
1 Corinthians 15:53 (NLT)
⁵³ For our dying bodies must be transformed into bodies that will never die; our mortal bodies must be transformed into immortal bodies.
- His resurrection gives us the promise of Heaven!⁹
Colossians 3:1–4 (NLT)
Living the New Life Since you have been raised to new life with Christ, set your sights on the realities of heaven, where Christ sits in the place of honor at God's right hand. ² Think about the things of heaven, not the things of earth. ³ For you died to this life, and your real life is hidden with Christ in God. ⁴ And when Christ, who is your life, is revealed to the whole world, you will share in all his glory.*
- I'm grateful that Jesus died for me; even more grateful that He rose again!
- Followers of Christ don't honor a historical figure; we worship a living Lord!

¹ Lifeway. (n.d.). *Explore the Bible Adult Leader Commentary Session 13 Explore the Bible Adult Leader Commentary Session 13 Explore the Bible Commentary.*

² John MacArthur: Judgment on the Rejectors of Christ. <http://www.gty.org/Resources/Sermons/2295>

³ *ibid*

⁴ Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine (Making Sense of Series) by Wayne A. Grudem

⁵ - *ibid*

⁶ - *ibid*

⁷ - *ibid*

⁸ - *ibid*

⁹ - *ibid*

Doctrinal Significance of the Resurrection. a. Christ's Resurrection Insures Our Regeneration:

- *This is why Paul can say that God "made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with him" (Eph. 2:5–6; cf. Col. 3:1).*
- *(Eph. 1:19–20). Here Paul says that the power by which God raised Christ from the dead is the same power at work within us.*
- *This new resurrection power in us includes power to gain more and more victory over remaining sin in our lives—"sin will have no dominion over you" (Rom. 6:14; cf. 1 Cor. 15:17)*
- *This resurrection power also includes power for ministry in the work of the kingdom.*
- *Christ's Resurrection Insures Our Justification: In only one passage does Paul explicitly connect Christ's resurrection with our justification (or our receiving a declaration that we are not guilty but righteous before God).¹⁹ Paul says that Jesus "was put to death for our trespasses and raised for our justification" (Rom. 4:25).*
- *When Christ was raised from the dead, it was God's declaration of approval of Christ's work of redemption.*
- *By raising Christ from the dead, God the Father was in effect saying that he approved of Christ's work of suffering and dying for our sins, that his work was completed, and that Christ no longer had any need to remain dead.*
- *This explains how Paul can say that Christ was "raised for our justification" (Rom. 4:25).*
- *Christ's Resurrection Insures That We Will Receive Perfect Resurrection Bodies As Well:*
- *"And God raised the Lord and will also raise us up by his power" (1 Cor. 6:14).*
- *most extensive discussion of the connection between Christ's resurrection and our own is found in 1 Corinthians 15:12–58. There Paul says that Christ is the "first fruits of those who have fallen asleep"*
- *Paul also sees that the resurrection has application to our obedience to God in this life.*
- *It is because Christ was raised from the dead, and we too shall be raised from the dead, that we should continue steadfastly in the Lord's work.*
- *...resurrection, to focus on our future heavenly reward as our goal. He sees the resurrection as a time when all the struggles of this life will be repaid.*
- *If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. (Col. 3:1–4)*