

The Sign of Jonah; Matthew 12:38-40

I. Signs

- a. We are a society of signs
 - i. It is a primary means of communication
 - ii. We use pole signs that are up to 70 feet in the air
 - iii. We use monument signs, flag signs, temporary cardboard signs, yard signs, landmarks, and there are many more types
- b. We look for signs just about everywhere
- c. Some people look for signs that they are doing the right thing, going the right way (figuratively)
- d. Some people, while looking for a sign, ignore the signs in front of them
- e. Matthew 12:38–40 (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.

II. Nineveh

- a. Matthew 12:41 (ESV); 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.
- b. God told Jonah to go and preach against Nineveh
- c. Nineveh was a city in Assyria
 - i. In Jonah’s time Assyria’s power was almost nonexistent (most scholars date the book around 793-753 BC)
 - ii. Their vassal states ruled themselves and Assyria did not hold much, if any, sway over these states
 - iii. Assyria was responsible for carrying off Israel (the northern 10 tribes) into captivity in 722 BC, just 31 years after Jonah preached to Nineveh
 - iv. Nahum describes God’s wrath against Nineveh after they carried Israel off into captivity
 - v. Nahum 3:5–7 (ESV); ⁵ Behold, I am against you, declares the LORD of hosts, and will lift up your skirts over your face; and I will make nations look at your nakedness and kingdoms at your shame. ⁶ I will throw filth at you and treat you with contempt and make you a spectacle. ⁷ And all who look at you will shrink from you and say, “Wasted is Nineveh; who will grieve for her?”
Where shall I seek comforters for you?
- d. Most of us are familiar with the story of Jonah
 - i. But we focus on Jonah running from God and being swallowed by a great fish – that is not the lesson of Jonah
 - ii. Jesus uses the event of Jonah to talk about repentance – Not Jonah’s, but the people of Nineveh’s

- iii. Jonah 3:6–10 (ESV); ⁶ The word reached the king of Nineveh, and he arose from his throne, removed his robe, covered himself with sackcloth, and sat in ashes. ⁷ And he issued a proclamation and published through Nineveh, “By the decree of the king and his nobles: Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste anything. Let them not feed or drink water, ⁸ but let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and let them call out mightily to God. Let everyone turn from his evil way and from the violence that is in his hands. ⁹ Who knows? God may turn and relent and turn from his fierce anger, so that we may not perish.” 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.
 - iv. Jesus shows us the true lesson – repentance
 - v. When faced with a prophet from God, the king of Nineveh and all the people repented of their wickedness
 - e. When faced with the Messiah, God’s chosen and anointed one, we should repent of our unbelief
 - f. Acts 20:20–21 (ESV); ²⁰ how I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you in public and from house to house, ²¹ testifying both to Jews and to Greeks of repentance toward God and of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.
 - g. Jesus himself tells us in Luke 13:3 and 5 repent or perish
 - h. Jesus’ signs are meant to bring us to repentance
- III. The Queen of the South
 - a. Matthew 12:42 (ESV); 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.
 - b. The “Queen of the South” is not a very familiar event for us
 - i. It is about the Queen of Sheba’s visit to Solomon
 - ii. 1 Kings 10:1–8 (ESV); ¹ Now when the queen of Sheba heard of the fame of Solomon concerning the name of the LORD, she came to test him with hard questions. ² She came to Jerusalem with a very great retinue, with camels bearing spices and very much gold and precious stones. And when she came to Solomon, she told him all that was on her mind. ³ And Solomon answered all her questions; there was nothing hidden from the king that he could not explain to her. ⁴ And when the queen of Sheba had seen all the wisdom of Solomon, the house that he had built, ⁵ the food of his table, the seating of his officials, and the attendance of his servants, their clothing, his cupbearers, and his burnt offerings that he offered at the house of the LORD, there was no more breath in her. ⁶ And she said to the king, “The report was true that I heard in my own land of your words and of your wisdom, ⁷ but I did not believe the reports until I came and my own eyes had seen it. And behold, the half was not told me. Your wisdom and prosperity surpass the report that I heard. ⁸ Happy are your men! Happy are your servants, who continually stand before you and hear your wisdom!
 - iii. Often we get caught up in Solomon’s wealth

- iv. But it was all of Solomon's wisdom that took the very breath away from the Queen of the South ("there was no more breath left in her")
- c. The wisdom of Jesus ought to do the same to us
 - i. The religious leaders and scholars of the day did everything they could to trip him up
 - ii. Matthew 16:1–4 (ESV); ¹ And the Pharisees and Sadducees came, and to test him they asked him to show them a sign from heaven. ² He answered them, "When it is evening, you say, 'It will be fair weather, for the sky is red.' ³ And in the morning, 'It will be stormy today, for the sky is red and threatening.' You know how to interpret the appearance of the sky, but you cannot interpret the signs of the times. ⁴ An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of Jonah." So he left them and departed.
 - iii. "Red sky at night sailors delight; red sky in the morning sailors take warning"
 - iv. Joe Sienkiewicz, chief of the Ocean Applications Branch and a science and operations officer with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA)/National Weather Service (NWS) Ocean Prediction Center says there is scientific validity to this adage
 - v. Mark 12:15–17 (ESV); ¹⁵ But, knowing their hypocrisy, he said to them, "Why put me to the test? Bring me a denarius and let me look at it." ¹⁶ And they brought one. And he said to them, "Whose likeness and inscription is this?" They said to him, "Caesar's." ¹⁷ Jesus said to them, "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's." And they marveled at him.
 - vi. Mark 12:24–27 (ESV); ²⁴ Jesus said to them, "Is this not the reason you are wrong, because you know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God? ²⁵ For when they rise from the dead, they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven. ²⁶ And as for the dead being raised, have you not read in the book of Moses, in the passage about the bush, how God spoke to him, saying, 'I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'? ²⁷ He is not God of the dead, but of the living. You are quite wrong."
 - vii. Mark 12:28–34 (ESV); ²⁸ And one of the scribes came up and heard them disputing with one another, and seeing that he answered them well, asked him, "Which commandment is the most important of all?" ²⁹ Jesus answered, "The most important is, 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. ³⁰ And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' ³¹ The second is this: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these." ³² And the scribe said to him, "You are right, Teacher. You have truly said that he is one, and there is no other besides him. ³³ And to love him with all the heart and with all the understanding and with all the strength, and to love one's neighbor as oneself, is much more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices." ³⁴ And when Jesus saw that he answered

wisely, he said to him, "You are not far from the kingdom of God." And after that no one dared to ask him any more questions.

- d. Passages like these are designed to show us the wisdom of Jesus and to take our breath away ("there was no more breath left in her" *[us]*)

IV. The Sign of Jonah

- a. Have we repented of our unbelief?
- b. Do we recognize the wisdom of Jesus?
- c. The sign Jesus is speaking of is his death, burial, and resurrection
- d. The empty tomb should change our unbelief to belief!