

**“Now Something Greater”
Ephesians 1:12-20; Matthew 12:38-41**

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.

Introduction

Who have been and who are the most significant people in your life? For me, I remember with great appreciation my high school and college choral teachers, Mr. K and Mr. Simpson. They were God’s “signs” to me about music, meaning, mentoring, and finally, faith. Today, my three adult children (Mike, Lisa and Sarah) bring me the joy, entertainment, and meaning of the significant, adult/dad relationship and of course, faith.

Take a moment as this message about Jesus moves ahead. Who are the significant persons in your life?

Some of the Pharisees and teachers of the law said to Jesus, “Teacher, we want to see a sign from you.” A sign is in very word “significant.” It comes from two words joined together: signa/factum, a sign made (signa/factum), significant. And, as we will see, Jesus is himself the sign, the sign of God.

I. Many Need/Want Proof

By the time we get to chapter 12, Matthew has already provided an account of signs and wonders along with Jesus’ teachings and discussions of the kingdom of heaven and Messiah’s identity. The genealogy of Jesus back to David and Abraham; the Immanuel “God is with us” birth of Jesus (in chapters 1 and 2); fulfillment of promise after promise, scripture after scripture; “teaching in synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people” (see Matthew 4:23); ministering to Jews and Gentiles; offering God’s forgiveness; and Jesus being “Lord of the Sabbath” (just earlier in chapter 12).

Wow! And now, after all that, some of the Pharisees and teachers of the law want to see a sign from Jesus? It’s like the atheist or skeptic who says, “I won’t believe in God unless a lightning bolt splits that huge tree.” And then, FLASH/BANG, half the tree falls one way and half the tree falls the other. And the atheist/skeptic says, “Unbelievable! What a coincidence!”

Every growing, maturing believer can look back in life and see the hand of God’s providence and the presence of Christ and Spirit. Yes, I have 20/20... hindsight! I didn’t acknowledge Mr. K and Mr.

Simpson until after I had been a Christian for a while. Most of the whole Bible does this: looking back, later realizing the creative and redemptive plan of God. Remember what God did in Genesis and Exodus? Look at how the New Testament Gospels look back and tell the story of how Jesus became the significant one.

II. You Want a Sign, Do You?

It says that Jesus answered, “A wicked and adulterous generation asks for a sign! But none will be given it... except the sign of the prophet Jonah. 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.”

“OK, you wicked, unfaithful, disingenuous, two-faced people...” Signs are not delivered on demand (like Comcast movies, TV shows, or concerts). Signs are not for show or for sale. Not even for the first-month-free special.

But then Jesus said, “Here’s a sign for you... Here’s yet another chance to see... you religious people should already know this... it’s the sign of the prophet Jonah.”

“Oh, come on, Jesus! What does that mean? What in the world are you talking about?”

We just had a fabulous week sharing with children (and all the adult leaders and helpers) the story of Jonah and the Whale. With 20/20 hindsight, we can see the parallel stories: Jonah and Jesus.

Jonah was a prophet. He didn’t want to go to Nineveh for the Assyrians were hated enemies of Israel. He was thrown off the boat. One man sacrificed to save all the others. Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish. He did go to Nineveh and all the people were saved including the king.

Jesus is Prophet, Priest, and King: prophet preaching the kingdom of heaven; priest and sacrifice, one man sacrificed for the saving of the people; “the Son of Man three days and three nights in the heart of the earth;” and King Messiah Savior in his death and resurrection.

Pastor Chris and I did a sermon series on the book of Jonah about a year ago. Miss Christin chose “Go, Go, Jonah” for Vacation Bible School. I certainly hope that you adults and our children alike (the Pharisees and teachers of the law) will know Jonah less for the “whale” and more for the story’s meaning: God’s love, mercy, and grace in Jesus Christ. The point surely is that already in Jesus’ life God has given all of his signs. Jesus is the Significant One. He is the sign. There is no need for any other.

In alphabetical order, here are a few of the many, many ways that Jesus as the way, the truth, the life and his gospel have been ignored, rejected, altered, or perverted. Atheism. Baha’i, Christadelphia, Christian Science, Eckankar, Islam, Jehovah’s Witnesses, Kabbalah, Mormonism, the New Age Movement, the Unification Church, Unitarian Universalism, and Wicca, to name a few.

III. Now Something Greater

Here Jesus insists, “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.”

Read all of Matthew chapter 12. Three times, Jesus says, “And there is more here.” In verse 6, “I tell you that one greater than the temple is here.” Jesus alone holds the priesthood and Jesus himself is the Temple. In verse 41 that we read, “And now something greater than Jonah is here.” Jesus is the fulfillment of all trustworthy prophecy. And the next verse (42), “And now one greater than Solomon is here.” Jesus is wisdom himself and himself the great king. Prophet, Priest, and King.

Conclusion

In real life, how significant is Jesus for you? In politics or world events, in business and fluctuations in the economy, with family and friends, how significant is Jesus? In all of human history, where Jesus is known, accepted and celebrated, amazing blessings are the result. Where Jesus is unknown, ill-judged, refuted, even hated, the results are devastating.

Author Eric Metaxis says, “Quick! What do Joseph Stalin, Kim-Jong Un and American library-goers all have in common? (Hint: It has nothing to do with their hair.) Did you guess? It’s that they all find the Bible more threatening than most other books.” Metaxis asks, “Surprised?” Don’t be.

Every year the Bible is the world’s best-selling book. In fact, it’s the number one best-selling book in history. But recently it made another list: the American Library Association’s “top 10 most-challenged books of 2015.” This means the Bible is among the most frequently requested to be removed from public libraries.

But what’s so threatening about it? Metaxis notes, “Why could owning one in Stalin’s Russia get you sent to the Gulag, and why is owning one today in North Korea punishable by death? What makes it scarier to some people than anything by Stephen King?”

Actually, quite a bit. Words and ideas have power, and the words and ideas in the Bible have so much power that a recent History Channel documentary said the single thing that changed the world more than anything else was the Bible.

Jesus kept saying, “There’s something greater here...” Jesus has and will continue to change the world for good. But watch out for the biblical Jesus being barred from our culture. “The people 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.”