

³⁸ Then some of the scribes and Pharisees answered, saying, “Teacher, we want to see a sign from You.” ³⁹ But He answered and said to them, “An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. ⁴⁰ For 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. ⁴¹ The men of Nineveh will rise up in the judgment with this generation and condemn it, because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and indeed a greater than Jonah is here. ⁴² The queen of the South will rise up in the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and indeed a greater than Solomon is here.”

Text: Matthew 12:38-42 A 4/23/17 Job 19:25-27 Romans 1:1-6 Psalm 16 Resp. Psalm: 98
Hymns: 193, 198, 245, 203

BELIEVE IN THE CRUCIFIED, RISEN JESUS

Dear fellow believers in Christ,

If you ask people how they think we get to heaven, what do you suppose many of them will say? “You get to heaven by being good.” Many people believe that most people are basically good. They think we can make up for the bad things we do by doing enough good things, or that overall the goodness in us outweighs the bad.

Just before our text we’re told, “One was brought to [Jesus] who was demon-possessed, blind and mute; and He healed him, so that the blind and mute man both spoke and saw. And all the multitudes were amazed and said, ‘Could this be the Son of David?’” – their promised Messiah. A group of scribes and Pharisees also witnessed Jesus’ miracle. They accuse Jesus of getting His power from Satan. Why couldn’t they just join the crowd in rejoicing over Jesus’ wonderful miracle, and in believing that Jesus could well be the Messiah? They couldn’t because they had already made up their minds that Jesus was a false messiah. They refused to really listen to anything Jesus said, and be moved by anything He did. They tell Jesus, “Teacher, we want to see a sign from You;” challenging Jesus to perform a miracle that would prove to them that He is the Messiah. (As if the miracle they had just seen Him do, and all His other miracles, weren’t enough proof!).

Jesus responds, “An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign.” Jesus calls the **scribes and Pharisees** “evil” (very sinful), and “adulterous” (unfaithful to God). The scribes and Pharisees thought they were super religious and good, so they took great offense at what Jesus said about them. But it was the truth. Jesus didn’t say it to be mean to them. He said it because He knew they needed to hear it. He knew that the only way they could be saved is by coming to see the truth about themselves, and the truth about Him.

Jesus gives them the sign they need: “No sign will be given to [you] except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For 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.” Jesus reminds them of the miracle of Jonah surviving in the stomach of the huge fish for three days. Then Jesus tells

them about His greatest miracle as proof that He is the Messiah and Son of God: His resurrection from the dead.

Jesus tells them, *“The men of Nineveh will rise up in the judgment with this generation and condemn it, because they repented at the preaching of Jonah.”* When Jonah warned the people of Nineveh that God was going to destroy them if they didn’t repent of their evil, they repented. Jesus then says, *“Indeed a greater than Jonah is here.”* Jesus, the Son of God Himself, is telling the scribes and Pharisees that like the people of Nineveh, they, too, were sinful and needed to repent of their sins, or they would face God’s judgment.

Jesus tells them, *“The queen of the South will rise up in the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon.”* The queen of the south traveled a great distance so she could hear Solomon’s wisdom. Jesus adds, *“Indeed a greater than Solomon is here.”* Jesus, the Son of God Himself, is telling the scribes and Pharisees to listen to Him and His wisdom: to repent of their sins and believe in Him and be saved.

Some people say, “If I could experience a real miracle from God, I would believe in Him.” Jesus’ miracles did lead some people to listen to His words and believe in Him. But while His enemies didn’t deny that His miracles were real, they still refused to believe in Him.

Some people say, “If I could see God I would believe in Him.” But even if they could see God, simply acknowledging that He exists isn’t saving faith. James says, *“You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe – and tremble!”* (2:19). The devil and his evil angels have seen God and know that He truly exists, but that doesn’t do them any good.

Jesus said to His Father, *“This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent”* (Jn. 17:3). The only way to know and believe in God is to know and believe in His Son, Jesus Christ. The scribes and Pharisees were absolutely convinced that they believed in God. But all of them who rejected Jesus, God’s Son, also rejected God.

Like the scribes and Pharisees, a lot of people think we get to heaven by being good. But **we** don’t decide how we get to heaven, **God** does. The Bible says, *“All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God”* (Ro. 3:23). We can’t be good enough to make up for all of our sins and get to heaven. Suppose a child gets in trouble and tells his parents, “Nobody’s perfect. Mom and Dad, you have to look at the big picture here. My overall goodness makes up for the occasional things I do wrong.” Would that be acceptable to his parents? And yet plenty of people think that such a ‘confession of sin’ on their part should be acceptable to God. We need to understand our sinfulness as it looks to God. In His Word God says about us **by nature**, *“There is none righteous, no, not one. ... There is none who does good, no, not one”* (Ro. 3:10b, 12b). *“Your iniquities have separated you from ... God”* (Is. 59:2). *“The wages of sin is death”* (Ro. 6:23a). God, who is perfect and holy, says that **by nature** we are completely sinful in His eyes, and that because of our sins the only thing we deserve is hell.

As Jesus tried to get the scribes and Pharisees to see, **by nature** we’re all “evil” (very sinful in God’s eyes), and we’re all “adulterous” (straying from God). Like a doctor who has to hurt us in

order to heal us, God has to lead us to understand our sinfulness before Him so He can show us our need for Jesus to save us. Jesus says, *“The Son of Man [will] be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.”* Jesus was put to death, and lay in the tomb for three days. He died on the cross for sins. After being dead for three days He came back to life again. The Bible says, *“[Jesus] was delivered up for our offenses, and was raised for our justification”* (Ro. 4:25). Because Jesus rose from the dead, our sins are forgiven. Jesus says, *“Because I live, you will live also”* (Jn. 14:19). Because Jesus rose from the dead He will raise us from the dead and take us to heaven.

We don't believe in God and Jesus because we can see them. The Bible says, *“Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen”* (He. 11:1). Jesus says, *“The queen of the South ... came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and indeed a greater than Solomon is here.”* Hearing Solomon's wisdom was very important to the queen of the South. Hearing the wisdom of the Son of God in His Word is so much more important. Jesus says, *“If you abide in My Word ... you will know the truth”* (Jn. 8:31-32). The Bible says, *“Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God”* (Ro. 10:17). We learn the truth about God and our salvation in Jesus and receive the faith to know it's true through hearing and studying what the Bible says. Paul says, *“I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes”* (Ro. 1:17a).

Trusting in the good things they do isn't going to get anyone into heaven. Believe in Jesus Christ, crucified for your sins and risen from the dead, and you are saved, and you are going to heaven! Amen.