

The Sign of the Prophet Jonah

Jonah, Part IV

Jonah 2:17 with Matthew 12:22-45

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An Outline of Jonah

1:1-3	<i>Jonah Disobeys God</i>
1:4-17	<i>God Pursues Jonah</i>
2:1-10	<i>Jonah Turns to God</i>
3:1-4	<i>Jonah Obeys God</i>
3:5-10	<i>God Delivers Nineveh</i>
4:1-11	<i>Jonah Complains Against God</i>

I. Give us a king like the other nations!

When Samuel was serving as a judge in Israel, our fathers demanded that he appoint for them a king like unto the other nations. In doing so, they revealed their deep idolatry: they were rejecting God as king over them. They concluded that they were suffering affliction because they lacked a competent political ruler not because they had rebelled against God. They believed, in other words, that their problems were primarily _____ not *personal*. And it is a perennial temptation to think this way.

³⁸Then some of the scribes and Pharisees answered, saying, "Teacher, we want to see a sign from You." ³⁹But 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. ⁴⁰For 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. ⁴¹The 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. (Matthew 12:38-41)

II. The Context of the Sign of Jonah

A. The blind and mute man both spoke and saw (12:22-37)

The scribes and Pharisees are not demanding a simple miracle. Rather, they want a tangible, demonstrable proof that rather than being a demonic agent (12:24), Jesus is in fact God's Messiah, *the Son of David* come to establish God's rule (12:23). They want Jesus to demonstrate His power. Like their fathers, they believed that the problem with the world is primarily _____ not *personal*. They believed that the problem is who is in power not the corruption of men's hearts. Jesus repudiates this:

³³"Either make the tree good and its fruit good, or else make the tree bad and its fruit bad; for a tree is known by its fruit. ³⁴Brood of vipers! How can you, being evil, speak good things? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. ³⁵A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good things, and an evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth evil things. (Mt 12:33-35)

B. A House Swept Clean but Not Transformed (12:43-45)

So why is this heart transformation necessary? Because our problem as human beings is not primarily *external* but *internal, personal* not _____. Hence, social change without personal transformation is ultimately useless:

⁴³"When an unclean spirit goes out of a man, he goes through dry places, seeking rest, and finds none. ⁴⁴Then he says, 'I will return to my house from which I came.' And when he comes, he finds it empty, swept, and put in order. ⁴⁵Then he goes and takes with him seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter and dwell there; and the last state of that man is worse than the first. So shall it also be with this wicked generation." (Mt 12:43-45)

III. An evil and adulterous generation

The Pharisees' request for a sign reflects their idolatry and wickedness. They were *an evil and adulterous generation* (38), a *brood of vipers* (34), in need of a heart transformation.

- A. No sign shall be given to you (cf. Mk 8:11-12)
- B. Except the sign of the prophet Jonah (cf. Jonah 2)

What happened to Jonah when he was in the belly of the fish and how does this help us understand Jesus' ministry? In the belly of the fish, Jonah finally turned *from sin to God* and God rescued Him. *The sign of the prophet Jonah*, therefore, was the sign of a prophet who turned to God in the face of death, experienced the Lord's salvation, and became a light to the Gentiles. And this, Jesus insists, is the sign that shall be given to His generation. They would observe Jesus entrusting Himself to God in the face of death and rejection and then being vindicated by God and made a light to the Gentiles. The sign God would give, in other words, is Jesus' _____ and resurrection.

IV. Offering Hope within our Social Unrest

- A. Christ the Power of God and the Wisdom of God (1 Cor 1:22-25)

So what do we preach as the only hope for humanity? The only hope for individuals, communities, and nations? Jesus' death and resurrection. As Paul declares:

²²For Jews request a sign, and Greeks seek after wisdom; ²³but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness, ²⁴but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. ²⁵Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men. (1 Cor 1:22-25)

We want to say that the problem is *outside* of us, not *inside*. So *the Jews request a sign*: "Send us a militaristic Messiah to crush our enemies; our problem is that we lack _____." And *the Greeks seek after wisdom*: "Send us a wise teacher to tell us what to do; our problem is that we lack _____." But *we preach Christ crucified* – Christ the *power of God* and Christ the *wisdom of God* – Christ the One who can deliver us from our bondage to sin and death by His death and resurrection.

- B. The Source of Social Turmoil

Political fruit is the result of specific types of trees. The peace and prosperity we have enjoyed are the fruit of a respect for life and property that reflect a fear for God. "It is the conscience or the constable," as Chuck Colson used to say. Remember Jonah's hymn, "Those who regard worthless idols Forsake their own Mercy" (2:8).

- C. Our Calling

V. Conclusion