

Something Great is Here

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[0 : 00] Well, our passage today, Matthew 12, 38-45 on page 817, is a passage that is a stethoscope passage.

I didn't know it took that short a time to become a doctor, but you can all understand what a stethoscope passage would be. It's one that searches your hearts.

That's what Jesus is doing in Matthew 12, 38-45. He is asking you what is in your heart so that you will see what he sees.

What do you think? What are you thinking about Jesus? What place does he have in your life right now? The Pharisees' hearts were very clear.

They were hard towards Jesus. And the wonder of this passage is that as Jesus speaks to hard-hearted people who are Pharisees, he also speaks to us and really causes us to take stock about what is happening for us in relationship to Jesus Christ.

[1 : 07] What he does in this passage is he responds to a request that the Pharisees make.

They had just seen Jesus heal the deaf and blind, demon-possessed man. And in this passage today they say, show us a sign to really make us believe in you.

As if healing that man was not evidence enough as to who he was. And so Jesus says in verse 39, an evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign, meaning they represent people that are unfaithful to God.

They say that they belong to God, but in rejecting Jesus they are like a husband who is betraying a wife if he has an affair. They are betraying God and his love for them.

That's what's going on in their hearts. And he says in verse 40, therefore, I'm not going to give you a sign. I will not give you a sign. Instead what he does is he gives them the sign of Jonah.

[2 : 16] And then he gives them two challenges about that sign that he's going to give them. To really make them search their hearts. To really think about where they are in relationship to Jesus.

And I want to start with the sign of Jonah. Because the sign of Jonah comes from the story in the book of Jonah in the Old Testament.

And in that story Jonah is a prophet who runs away from God in a ship. It's a very fishy story. God sends a storm that was going to wreck that ship.

And Jonah tells the ship's crew, look, you have to throw me overboard. God is telling me that has to happen. God is telling you that Jonah is going to do it. God is telling you that Jonah is going to do it. So they did that.

They thought that Jonah was dead when they threw him overboard. But a great fish swallowed him up. For three days he was in there with all of the other sardines and seaweed.

[3 : 17] All of the things that you would expect in a fish. And he was there three days, three nights. And then the fish took him to land and threw him up. And he goes directly from there to the great city of Nineveh.

And he preaches, hoping and hoping and hoping that people would not receive his message. He was a different kind of preacher. And sure enough, they did respond in the way that very few people have done before or since.

And Jonah gets very upset, of course. He wants to die because he said, I knew you were going to be kind and gracious and get them to repent. And now look at what's going to happen.

You know, all my, the glorious judgment is not going to happen on this city. I just want to die. Now the end of Jonah's own repentance in the heart of that whale was very interesting.

Because he says at the end of there, salvation belongs to the Lord. And this is our clue as to what the sign of Jonah is. Pharisees must have wondered, what is Jesus talking about?

[4 : 29] But Jesus was talking about his own death and his own resurrection. It's the sign of Jesus dying on the cross for the sins of the world.

It is the sign of Jesus being buried in a tomb. It is the sign that he rose victorious over sin and death and now is revealed as the Lord of all who brings eternal life to the world.

And that's why Jesus says, 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.

So you see, the sign of Jonah is the good news of Jesus, who saves us from judgment of God into a permanent and reconciled relationship with God the Father who made us.

Salvation belongs to the Lord. That is the sign of Jonah. And the Pharisees must have wondered what he's talking about. They wouldn't see that sign until Jesus was on a cross crucified and until they heard reports of him being raised from the dead.

[5 : 42] But this is the one sign that matters. Because it says to the Pharisees, and it says to all of us, what Jesus is all about. He came for one purpose only.

It is to powerfully save you and me and those Pharisees from God's judgment into God's love through his sacrifice. If we will be saved.

That is what Jesus preaching, his healings, his miraculous works all point to. And that sign makes the Pharisees one day and us today ask about where our heart is towards this Jesus.

This Jesus who has saved us. If you're not a Christian today, this sign of Jonah is a strong invitation. It is an invitation for you to trust Jesus, to forgive you of your sins so that you know God's immeasurable love permanently.

The sign of Jonah invites you in to Jesus' life. But if you are like me, a Christian who follows Jesus for many years, there is also a great challenge that comes with this invitation.

[7 : 01] A deep challenge. And in fact, he gives two challenges Jesus does. Profound challenges about our relationship with Jesus. About where our hearts are towards him. One challenge is the people of Nineveh and the second one is the Queen of the South.

And I want to look at the people of Nineveh, first of all. The challenge of Nineveh. Because we Christians sometimes resemble, in some ways, resemble Pharisees and scribes that Jesus is talking about.

Because like them, we have the gift of God's word. We know God's word. We hear it preached week by week. We study God's word. We talk to people about who God is as well.

We get encouragement from other Christians. Yet our response and our heart towards Jesus can very easily go wrong. We don't reject Jesus as the Pharisees are doing, but we can very easily keep him at arm's length.

We can be lukewarm towards Jesus. Not really listening to his living voice in our lives. Our busy lives can crowd out Jesus' rightful and central place in our lives.

[8 : 18] Jesus reveals our heart towards him. Now the first challenge, the people of Nineveh, is in verse 41. Nineveh was a huge city, as I said, where present-day Mosul Iraq is.

And the thing that we know from history is that those people were a lot like the ISIS terrorists who were around Mosul until recently. They were violent.

They were fearsome. They were immoral. They were godless. But Jesus says, those people, those people of Nineveh are going to rise up at the judgment with this generation, and they will condemn it.

It's an amazing thing to say. How can those people judge the Pharisees? And remember, now Jesus is saying there is a true judgment happening.

There is a day that will come when Jesus will call everyone from their tombs and there will be a general resurrection, a resurrection to judgment and a resurrection to life.

[9 : 21] This will happen. And on that day, Jesus says, all of these Ninevites are going to be there and they will be condemning the Pharisees who are rejecting Jesus.

Just their presence will do that. People will know that they were wrong to reject Jesus. But the Ninevites stand on that day not because they knew a lot about God, not because they were upright or religious or were moral.

No. The reason they are there is because they repented at the voice of God. They repented at the preaching of Jonah.

And in reading the book of Jonah, you can see that Jonah's sermon to Nineveh was the world's worst sermon ever preached. It was a short sermon and all it said was, in 40 days, Nineveh is going to be overthrown.

God is going to overthrow it. And this preacher didn't care much at all for his congregation, which was that whole city. In fact, he very much hoped and relished the thought of judgment coming onto that city.

[10 : 35] But of course, the amazing thing happened. The whole city knew that Jonah was speaking God's words, that God was speaking directly to them.

And they believed God. They knew they were wicked. They asked for mercy. And an incredible change came over their lives and that city because they knew that God had spoken and they acted on it.

God saved them from judgment through their repentance. Jesus says to us today that someone greater than Jonah is here. It is Jesus.

He is God's word. He speaks God's word. The Ninevites confront us with this searching question, is there change in your life because of what you read and hear from Jesus?

They had no scriptures. They did not know the true God. They lived godless lives. Yet they are utterly changed because they responded to God's speech, speaking to them.

[11 : 40] And that convicts me. It convicts you. It should convict you as well because Jesus is the word of God. He is far greater than Jonah and he is here now in our midst.

Unlike Nineveh, we have the gospel of grace. We know his salvation that Jesus gives. He has given to you and me his Holy Spirit. I have the Bible. I have many people who have helped me to grow in knowing God.

I have resources to help me understand. I hear God's word faithfully preached week to week. It's great being up here. Often I hear two sermons every Sunday so I can actually understand it.

And David is preaching to a sermon that he, to a congregation, he actually cares about. He wants the best for you. And he doesn't look like he's just been thrown up from a fish being in there for three days.

On most Sundays anyway. The people of Nineveh did not have any of this. They convict me because they show me how crucial it is to respond actively to God's word.

[12 : 46] How is my heart towards God as I read his, as I read his word? You know, as you read, as you hear God's word, there are questions that you can ask to actively respond to God's word.

You can ask, is there a promise for me to hold on to? Is there a command here that I can obey? Is there a correction that I can follow with real repentance?

And those are the hard ones, the corrections. Can I follow them with repentance? Is there a glorious truth that I see here that I can praise God for? Is there love and grace and forgiveness in God that I can reflect in my own relationship?

God's word searches our hearts. Do we respond to him? The Bible can become very familiar to us, so familiar that we don't make much of a response to God as he speaks to us.

But the Ninevites, the challenge of the Ninevites is that they take away all of our excuses. They ask us that most important of questions, where is your heart towards Jesus?

[13 : 54] How is his voice changing you day by day, little by little? Now there's a second challenge that comes out of that sign of Jonah.

And that second challenge is the Queen of Sheba. Jesus says, this woman is also going to be there on the Day of Judgment when everyone's gathered before the throne of Jesus.

And there she is going to condemn every unfaithful generation by her presence. Well, how is she going to do that? Her life, when you consider who she is, her life makes you think about how serious you are about seeking the living God.

Now, you can read about Queen of Sheba in 1 Kings 10. This is who the Queen of South is. Her kingdom was a long ways away from Jerusalem.

It's about 3,000 kilometers if you take a road that goes there. And it is all desert. She's down near Yemen where she's from. She heard a rumor, it was only a rumor, that there was a living God who was in Israel, who cared for Israel.

[15 : 09] And this living God was not just a local God, he was the one who created the world, who was Lord over all the world as well. And he had chosen a king, Solomon, to speak his word of wisdom too.

That's all she had to go on. But something in her heart said, I must see if there really is a living God who speaks to people. She had a kingdom to run, she was very wealthy, she lived in luxury, yet that thing in her heart pushed her to go on a difficult and extremely inconvenient journey to seek after God.

And when she arrived, she told Solomon everything that was on her mind. The Bible said that nothing that she said was hidden from Solomon. And he could explain everything to her.

Her response is wonderful. She praises God to Solomon instead of praising Solomon. She says, Blessed be the Lord your God who has delighted in you, who has put you on the throne of Israel.

And she gives him great wealth as a tribute to the living God. She sought after God. And Jesus says again to the Pharisees and to us, something far greater than Solomon is here standing before you.

[16 : 34] The queen of Sheba came from the ends of the earth to seek Solomon because she wanted to hear the living God. How much more should we seek after Jesus?

Because he is the wisdom of God. God chose to save the world through him, through his sacrifice and resurrection, perfectly bringing people into the family of God.

Jesus has done this in God's wisdom. He has brought you out of darkness into his marvelous light. So you and I have much more to go on than the queen of Sheba.

Yet how serious are you about seeking after God? How serious are you? It's a terrible temptation that we all face to allow the business of life, the cares of the world as Jesus put it, to keep you from seeking Jesus.

It's a temptation because our schedules are filled with very good things. You have all had somebody come and ask you how you are. How many times have you answered I'm really busy?

[17 : 43] And we say that and kind of expect some approval from the person you're talking to because it means we're being productive. We are doing the good things. But the queen of Sheba reminds us that it is a terrible thing to allow our busyness, the responsibilities we have, the things that are really crowding into our lives to push Jesus out of that seeking place, the place where we seek after him.

This was the problem of the Pharisees, the problem religious people face. They fill their life with great activity, doing all kinds of good things, but they have actually stopped seeking the living God.

This is what happened for the Pharisees. Jesus threatened their busyness. They felt inconvenienced by them because their religious busyness had become their God.

Well, the queen of Sheba condemns this by her life. Her example asks us, how are you seeking God? And Jesus showed us how to seek.

In his life, he sought God, the Father, in his prayers, in his reading of God's word, in his wanting to love him by obeying him and serving him in all the areas of his life. Are you growing in knowing God in this way too?

[19 : 02] Or has busyness slowed that down or crowded that out? If we don't have time to seek God, and I have to ask myself all the time, then we have stopped seeing that he is important.

If growing in your discipleship has stopped in your life, you have stopped seeking Jesus. But the central thing we are to do is to seek Jesus and his kingdom. And all the things we need are added unto you.

Now I close this sermon with a story that Jesus told in verses 43 through 45 that really brings home how crucial it is that we are always responding to Jesus' voice and seeking him.

It's a parable about an unclean or evil spirit that's forced to leave. And he leaves the person, he goes and wanders for a long time and comes back.

And he finds that this person's life is very orderly and clean but also empty. And it brings back seven spirits with it to live there. Jesus calls it a house that's empty.

[20 : 10] And the last state of that person is worse than it was before the bad spirit was sent away. Jesus says this is like it is with this evil generation. He's saying you Pharisees are thinking about how to stop what is negative.

How not to sin. How to make sure you're looking good and righteous. But it's not they are not thinking about what are the positive things I do.

How do I seek after the living God? How do I repent? How do I turn to him? And this is a teaching this story that when God frees a person to know him we are meant to fill our lives with Jesus.

We cannot be an empty house that looks so good and orderly but doesn't have Jesus in the center of it. It is not filled with our responding to the Jesus who has saved us.

This is the place of great spiritual danger for us because good intention our moral effort to make ourselves appear orderly will never set us free. We need the gospel at the center of our house.

[21 : 20] We need to hear Jesus. We need to hear his voice. We have this great sign. Jesus, the sign of Jonah, Jesus crucified and risen for us and for our salvation.

And I think as we leave this passage, not only do the people of Nineveh and the queen of Sheba challenge us deeply to repent, to actively respond and to seek, they also encourage us deeply.

With the Ninevites, with them, let's respond to Jesus and his word actively and wholeheartedly. With the queen of the south, the queen of Sheba, let's seek him through all of the obstacles and the inconveniences that are in our life, the busyness that pushes in on us.

And may God the Holy Spirit strengthen you to seek Jesus above all the things in your life. He is that sign of Jonah. May he open your heart and your ears each day to hear Jesus' voice with a glad joy, with a glad active obedience.

For to him belongs all honor, glory, praise, and thanksgiving now and forever. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

[22 : 41] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.