

Signs or Service: Matthew 12:38-50

This morning we will be wrapping up Matthew 12 and the title of this message is signs or service.

- ✠ In other words are always looking for signs or are we looking to serve Jesus!
Amen!

One of the things that is always comes up when we talk about God is signs.

- People who want to believe in God want to see a sign.
- People that don't believe in God say there are no signs of Him anywhere.
- Even within Christianity we have the signs and wonders movement!
- And even we as Christian go through times when we cry out to God for a sign.
- I am sure that at one time or another each and every one of us has asked God for a sign.

And we are not alone because men that God has used in the past have asked God for a sign.

- Thomas said he would not believe in Jesus until he put his hand into His side and touched the nail prints.
- Gideon is no doubt the most famous one when it comes to asking for a sign.

Does God use signs to minister to people today? Absolutely!

- I have personally asked God for a sign or two and I have seen Him come through.
- And I personally know people where God has ministered to them through a sign as well.

People assume that if they got a sign from heaven then they would believe in God but that's not really true.

- The Children of Israel and Pharaoh both saw great miracles.
- Pharaoh did not believe even though he saw great signs.
- And even the Children of Israel vacillated and complained even though they saw many signs from God.
- Also even though many people were following Jesus and saw many miracles He performed, in John 6 where Jesus gives some hard teachings we are told that many departed from Him.

10 Commandments: I can still remember as a child watching the movie the Ten Commandments. And I would become so frustrated with the Children of Israel as I was watching that movie because no matter what God did for them they still did not believe.

- I would say to myself what else do you want God to do for you?
- But unfortunately down through the years I find myself acting much like the children of Israel did.
- Because no matter how many times God does something for me I still seem to complain when the trouble comes.

Please understand that signs are very important to the Christian faith when they are done in the right way for the right reasons.

- Jesus Himself used signs.
- He said destroy this body and in three days I will raise it up again.
- In Matthew 24 when the disciples were bragging to Jesus about the Temple, Jesus said I say to you, not one stone shall be left here upon another, that shall not be thrown down.

David Hocking story: David Hocking tells about one time when he was over in Israel and he was standing in line behind some ladies that were looking at the destruction of the Temple.

- And they said, look at all those stones down there, you think the Jews could have cleaned them up.
- And David said, I am glad they left those stones there because they show that Jesus was a true prophet because He said no one stone would remain upon another!

Service: Even though signs are very important to the Christian faith the thing that Jesus truly wants for us is our service.

- Jesus wants us to be about our Father's business!

Once we receive Jesus as our Lord and Savior our life is to be one of dedicated service to Him.

- Jesus is our example and He said He must be about His Father's business.
- And He also said the Son of Man did come to be served but to serve and give His life a ransom for many. Amen!

V38 read-slow;

Remember chapters 11-12 are really focused on the hostility that is coming against Jesus from the Pharisees and we see here that they are coming after Him once again.

- And we see that they are requesting a sign from Jesus.

If we go back to v22 we can see that this whole incident was started with a sign or a miracle that Jesus performed.

- And after Jesus rebukes them and sets them straight they have the gall to come up to Him again and ask Him to perform another sign!

Scribes: However this time we see that some of the scribes have come to join in on the conversation.

- The Scribes were really the scripture elites of that day.
- If you had any questions about a particular verse you went to see them.

The Scribes are basically saying, we know the scriptures and the Messiah is supposed to perform some signs, so if You are truly the Messiah then we want to see a sign from You!

Its not that asking for a sign is necessarily wrong but the scribes and Pharisees are asking for the wrong reasons.

- They are asking for a sign with absolutely no intention of looking to believe in Jesus but to trap Him or tempt Him.

This is not the only time people will ask for signs for the wrong reasons:

- Satan asked Jesus to perform signs for the wrong reasons while he tempted Him.
- The Roman Soldiers will put a hood over the face of Jesus and then punch Him and ask Him to prophesy about who had hit Him.
- Even when Jesus is on the cross people will yell out and mock Him and tell Him that if He comes down then they will believe in Him.

Jesus could have easily performed a sign for them and He will continue to perform signs to show that He truly is the Messiah.

- But He will not perform signs for those who have the wrong intentions.

Remember Jesus told us not to cast our pearls before swine, nor give what is holy to the dogs.

- And He is following His own teaching by not giving what is holy to the dogs.

Danger in looking for signs:

- Even though signs are an important part of the Christian faith it can also be dangerous in always looking for a sign.

Last week Denny came here and helped us to understand what Ezekiel 38 was saying. And that chapter gives us a great sign from God to help us have confidence in our faith.

Let's reexamine it for a moment: First this chapter was written 575 years before the time of Jesus; which is about 2600 yrs ago and yet it speaks to our time.

- Second this chapter was written while the Jews were in exile and it predicts that they will be back in the land some day. And it actually happened.
- Third it mentions actually countries that will be giving Israel trouble in the future and we see that happening today.

Please understand: The chances of these things coming true are unbelievable yet we are observing them today.

- If we were to ask anyone to name some countries that are causing the world trouble today, no doubt Libya and Iran would be at the top of the list.
- And Ezekiel 38:5 mentions by name Libya and Persia which is Iran. Iran is the country's new name. It has always been called Persia for thousands of years and it wasn't until 1935 that they started to call the country Iran.
- So that sign helps us to have confidence in the bible and it ought to cause anyone with an open heart to believe in the God of the bible.

Trouble: But simply looking for signs can cause people trouble.

- For people who are simply looking for signs the bible says that in the end the anti-christ will mislead people with many lying signs and wonders.
- People in the church are looking to follow signs and wonders when in reality signs and wonders ought to be following Christians.
- So the people who are looking for signs are setting themselves up for deception.

No growth: Also if we are continually asking God for a sign in our relationship with Him it is going to hinder us from growing.

- Because looking for signs will give us an unhealthy craving for more.
- And when more signs don't come we revert back to dissatisfaction, doubt, and denial.

God however wants us to grow in our faith in Him. When God has given us a sign we need to remember it, and then move on and learn to trust Him when more trials come down the road.

- We will never grow in our relationship with Him if we are always looking for a sign.

V39-40 read-slow;

Evil and adulterous generation; Jesus tells us the reason why He won't give them a sign and that is because He says they are an evil and adulterous generation.

Secondly: I also want to point out the fact that Jesus calls them an evil and adulterous generation. And He will wrap up of this discourse by calling them a wicked generation.

- The reason I mention this again is because we need to have the right view of Jesus.
- Many people in the church and the world simply think Jesus would never say anything bad about anyone.
- But we see very clearly that Jesus calls these people evil and wicked and He says they are adulterous.

Please understand that Jesus is not just calling them evil and adulterous because they are sinners by nature like the rest of us.

- He is calling them evil and adulterous because they are attacking Him and willingly rejecting the work that He is doing.

Theologically Jesus could call everyone evil and adulterous but He doesn't do that because He came to minister to people and to seek and save that which is lost.

- But He will call those on the table for doing what they are doing.

Jonah: even though Jesus will not perform a sign for these people at their whim, He tells them a sign will be given to them.

- At the sign that will be given to them is from the Prophet Jonah.

The first thing we need to notice is that Jesus believes that Jonah was an actual person who was actually in a great fish, and that he actually went and preached to people.

- In other words Jesus believes in a literal interpretation of Jonah.

When people attack these types of stories in the bible or when Christians doubt they are literal, they are really not thinking very deeply.

- If we believe that God does exist than it's no big deal to have a great fish swallow Jonah.
- If God wanted to He could have caused a guppy to swallow Jonah, He is all powerful remember.
- But He made the miracle take place in the realm of the believable or the possible.

Someone has said Jonah's first prayer was to get out of the fish, and his second prayer was God please let me to go out the same way I came in!

Jesus is telling these scribes that the last sign that will be given to this wicked generation is His Resurrection.

- These scribes are going to contribute and observe His crucifixion and death.
- And the final sign to these people will be when Jesus rises from the dead on the third day.
- **What greater proof could be given to a people than to see a person rise again from the dead!**

These scribes obviously knew the story of Jonah and when they hear Jesus say that He will be in the earth three days like Jonah was three days in the fish, they know exactly what happened to Jonah after three days.

- Jesus is like you guys want a sign? Well I am going to give you one. And I am going to tell you way in advance of what will take place.
- Making them without excuse!

And we know they understood that Jesus said He would rise again because they go to Pilate and ask for a guard because Jesus said He would rise again.

- And if the disciples steal His body it will be worse in the end than at the beginning.

The resurrection of Jesus is the crux of the Christian faith.

- We are told by the Apostle Paul that if Jesus did not rise our faith is futile and we are of people to be most pitied.

Testimony: one of the things that really helped solidify my commitment to Jesus was when I read of how the disciple's lives were totally turned around after the resurrection.

- We read in the gospels how they all fled when Jesus was arrested and that they were hiding because they were afraid.
- But then something amazing took place with these men.
- They went from cowards to being bold and filling all of Jerusalem with the teaching of Jesus and how they turned the know world upside down.
- And 10 out of the 11 died a martyr's death and not one of them recanted on their commitment to Jesus!

When I read how it was the resurrected Christ that turned these men's lives around I was like I want the resurrected Jesus to turn my life around.

- And I praise God that He did!

Three days and three nights: now when people look at what Jesus is saying here about three days and three nights there is a lot of confusion.

- And the reason there is a lot of confusion is because we don't understand the Jewish mind set of that day.

Masterpiece: I am telling everyone that the more I study the bible I see that it is an absolute masterpiece.

- Matthew includes this part about three days and three nights because he is writing to a Jewish audience that would perfectly understand what he is speaking about. Amen!
- However when Luke mentions this story he omits the part with the three day and the three nights.
- And the reason he does that is because he is writing to Gentiles. And they would not understand Jewish thought and they would be confused.
- And that is precisely what we are doing.

According to Jewish tradition three days and three nights need mean no more than three days or the combination of any part of three separate days.

Rabbi Eleazar ben Azariah around the year AD 100 explained this way of speaking when he wrote: "A day and a night make a whole day, and a portion of a whole day is reckoned as a whole day."

V41-42 read-slow;

We have to remember that Jesus is speaking to the scribes who are the experts of the law and the OT.

- And it's great to see that Jesus is going to answer these scribes the experts in the law with examples from the very books they are supposed experts in.

And Jesus is using these two stories as a rebuke because of their lack of response.

- These leaders were given so much and yet they did not respond to what they were given.
- And the bible states that to whom much is given much is required.
- And they will be required much because sever judgment is coming their way.

Jesus movie: The other day we were watching the Jesus movie that was done for children.

- And in the movie the one of the children kept coming home and telling his parents that he believes Jesus is the Messiah because he saw all of the work He was doing.

- And even the mother was starting to believe.
- But the father just kept saying, that Jesus is not the Messiah.
- And I was watching I was like why doesn't he just go and read the bible and find out for himself.
- In other words he kept saying Jesus wasn't the Messiah but he wasn't giving and effort to find out.

And Jesus is rebuking these people because they did not even give an effort to find out the truth.

Responded: The men of Nineveh and the Queen of the south both responded in some way to the information they were given.

- The men of Nineveh repented when they heard the preaching of Jonah.
- And the Queen of the south traveled thousands of miles simply to hear for herself the Wisdom of Solomon.

The men of Nineveh and the Queen of the South were given far less to go on yet they responded in some fashion.

- And these leaders have Jesus right before their very eyes and He says He is greater than Jonah and greater than the Queen of the south.
- And yet they simply won't give an effort to find out the truth!

Judged: And because they will not give an effort to find out the truth they are going to be judged accordingly!

Jesus has already told the Jewish leaders that Tyre, Sidon and Sodom will rise up and judge them and now He is adding Nineveh to the list.

- Jesus is taking the most wicked Gentile nations and telling the Jewish leaders that they will rise up in judgment against them.
- And to add fuel to the fire Jesus also tells them they will be judged and condemned by a woman.

Breaks my heart: It totally breaks my heart to see when people won't give an effort to try and find out the truth about Jesus!

- I have a man I have been witnessing to and he totally hostile to the gospel, but to his credit he listens to whatever I give him. And I believe he listens because he is searching.

But what I find really difficult to understand is the people that are indifferent.

- They will listen to what we say they will even agree with us but they will give no effort whatsoever to find out the truth about Jesus.

Testimony: I can say that I was dying to find something to believe in!

- I wanted my life to be worthwhile I wanted it to count for something.
- You can say there was a void in my life that nothing could totally fill.
- And I praise God that through my searching I came to receive Jesus as my Savior.
- And once I found Him I discovered that there is something and someone worth believing in. amen!
- And what a great blessing it was to my soul to find someone worth believing in.
- Jesus is the person we can give everything we have for and we will have no regrets whatsoever.

But the point I am trying to make is that I was giving an effort to search.

- And God wants us to give an effort to search.

Believers: What is also sad is that I see Christians that have received Jesus and know Him yet they stop giving an effort in getting into that deeper relationship with Him.

- These scribes and Pharisees had Jesus right before their very eyes and they would not give an effort.
- Yet we have Jesus in our hearts and we stop giving an effort.

My wife: I have to say that the Lord gives my wife great insight at times. This week she was reading the Sermon on the Mount and she was talking to me about what it meant to hunger and thirst for righteousness.

- And she said it hard to hunger and thirst for the things of God if we are full of other things.

V43-45 read-slow;

Jesus is now wrapping up His argument against the scribes and Pharisees.

- And Jesus is basically telling them what the results will be for them in the end for not responding to Him!
- And it's not a pretty picture.

Once again we need to understand that Jesus is telling people that they will suffer severely in hell for what they have done with their lives.

- Specifically what they have done with Him.

Jesus is not giving us a lesson on demon possession here though these principles may apply in the spiritual realm.

Jesus is simply using this story to show the Jewish leaders and all people of all time the serious results for rejecting Him.

When people reject Jesus for one reason or another the reality is the last state will be worse than the first.

- In other words things are going to get worse for them in the end.

Ray Comfort story: remember when I shared that story about Ray Comfort and the man he had been witnessing to in New Zealand right before the earthquake.

- Well he survived and he replied back to Ray and said, "Tell your God I am sorry and please don't do that again." This time he used a capital for "God."

These Jewish leaders are no doubt going to receive the harshest of Judgment in hell for all eternity.

- They have studied the scriptures and they have Jesus right in front of them and they have seen sign after sign and yet they are rejecting Him.
- No one can be any more guilty than they are.

So when people reject Jesus for one reason or another Jesus tell us that their last state will be worse than their first.

V46-50 read-slow;

Jesus is still in the midst of addressing the crowd when His family comes out to see Him.

Now Matthew does not tell us why Jesus family wanted to come and speak with Him, but Mark fills in the details.

- Mark tells us they came to lay hold of Him because they thought He was out of His mind.
- Also it doesn't seem that any of Jesus brothers or sisters came to believe in Him until after He was resurrected.

The first thing we need to understand is that Jesus is not diminishing His mother in any way, because if He were doing that He would be breaking the commandment of honoring our mother and father.

- Jesus is simply demonstrating the superiority of doing our Father's will.

In other words; The key to having a right relationship with Jesus is by doing the will of our Father in heaven.

✠ Jesus taught us to pray in the Sermon on the Mount, Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done.

The cry of our heart ought to be that our Father's will, will be done!

✠ If we desire our lives to be better and our culture to be better than our heart's cry would be, Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done.

Yet, so many times when we hear people talk about Christianity they think it is simply based on all the don'ts.

✠ Don't do this and don't do that.

But what people need to understand about Christianity is that there is so much to do! Amen!

✠ We get to go out and help people and minister to people and witness to people and make disciples of people and feed people and cloth people and visit people and give to people and on and on it goes.

Jesus told us earlier that the harvest is plentiful but the laborers are few!

✠ In other words there is so much work to be done and Jesus is looking for people to do it!

We even get to fight in spiritual battles.

✠ Before we were Christians we walked according to the course of Satan but now we get to fight against the course of Satan.

If we want to add excitement and drama to our Christian life then start serving Jesus and you will enter into a battle you never knew existed before.

✠ I believed the devil was real, but I never knew how real he was until I started to do this church plant.

God wants us to be active in doing His will where as the Devil wants us to do nothing.

✠ The devil loves when we are doing nothing or when we are about the world's will and not our Father's.

People that claim Christianity is boring have never entered the battle.

So many Christians even struggle in their walk with Jesus because they are so focused on what they can't do instead of focusing on what they can do.

- ✠ The best cure for an addiction is to get addicted to Christ.
- ✠ The best cure for struggling with sin is to start serving the Savior.
- ✠ The best cure for boredom is to be about our Father's business!

Even our children are bored with Christianity because all they think Christianity is, is going to church on Sunday and going to youth group on Friday night.

- ✠ But when is the last time we took our children out witnessing on the streets.
- ✠ We need to get our children involved in the battle and service of Christ!

Jesus is saying that if we want to be rightly related to Him than we need to be doing the will of our Father in heaven.

Discipleship group: this week in the men's discipleship group we were discussing the calling that God has on our lives.

- ✠ And the reality is God has a specific calling for each of our lives.
- ✠ And part of doing our Father's will is discovering and fulfilling His calling on our life!

Douglas Thorton wrote to the Church Missionary Society:

- But I am weary! I have only written because I am too weary to be working now, and too tired to sleep. I am getting prematurely old, they tell me, and doctors do not give me long to live unless the strain is eased a bit. My wife is wearier than I am. She needs complete rest.
- Oh that the church at home but realized half of the opportunities today! Will no one hear the call? Please do your best to help us.

Our church family is so important.

- ✠ Testimony on Focus on the family.

F.B. Meyer: listen to what F.B. Meyer said concerning his calling to the Pastorate!

- ✠ For friendship's sake I do not like to conceal from you, or in fact from any one else, the decision to which I have come. So to be frank, I have decided my future course, and am going, with help from above, to be a minister of the Gospel. Now I can imagine your astonishment, but it is a fact. I need only add that it appears to me to be the noblest aim in life to live entirely devoted to the one object of bringing others to know Him who has accomplished so much for us. When weighed against the hereafter, earth and its careers sink into insignificance.

Conclusion: God's will. In the end it comes down to simply wanting to please God.
Amen!

✠ We should simply want to please the One that gave everything He had for us!

The Apostle Paul had such an experience with Jesus that he sought to serve Him with everything in his being!

Francis Chan said in Crazy Love: I knew God wanted all of me, yet I feared what complete surrender to Him would mean. Trying harder doesn't work for me. Slowly I've learned to pray for God's help, and He has become my greatest love and desire!

Obedience: What we think of being obedient to the Lord we see it in the wrong light.

✠ Obedience is an opportunity to demonstrate that we love Jesus!

We would all say Jesus knows we love Him. But obedience is saying Jesus let me do something to show You that I love You. Amen!

And showing Jesus that we love Him is being about our Father's will. Amen!

Let's Pray!