

Matthew 12:38-42. He Refuses to Give a Sign to the Pharisees.

by Favell Lee Mortimer

Jesus refused to grant the Pharisees' demand for a sign from heaven, instead pointing to His own resurrection as the sign of Jonah.

Scripture: Psalm 27:4

Topics: "Unbelief And Repentance", "Jesus Christ"

Description

Favell Lee Mortimer delves into the Pharisees' refusal to believe in Jesus despite witnessing miracles, exposing their sinful and malicious hearts. Jesus declined their demand for a sign from heaven, pointing to his resurrection as the ultimate sign. Despite knowing that the Pharisees would not acknowledge him even after rising from the dead, Jesus contrasts their unbelief with the repentance of the Ninevites and the seeking of wisdom by the queen of Sheba, highlighting the humility and thirst for truth displayed by these Gentiles.

Transcript

It was not with a sincere desire to be convinced of the truth that the Pharisees wished for a sign. They had already witnessed so many miracles that they could not avoid knowing that Jesus was the Son of God. This was their great sin, that when they knew the truth they would not confess it. As our Savior afterwards said, (in John 15:24,) "If I had not done among them the works that no other man did, they had not had sin--but now they have both seen and hated both me and my Father."

The Pharisees were determined not to believe in Jesus. Whatever miracles he might perform, whatever signs he might show, they had made up their minds already; they would not believe on him themselves, nor let others believe on him. It is evident that this was their state of mind from their conversation when together. (See John 11:47, 48.) "Then gathered the chief priests and the Pharisees a council, and said, What do we? for this man does many miracles. If we let him thus alone, all men will believe on him, and the Romans shall come and take away both our place and nation." Did not these words betray a dreadful state of mind? It was worse than unbelieving; it was malicious. It is in this spirit that Satan himself opposes the kingdom of God.

And what was this sign from heaven for which the Pharisees asked? Probably it was one of those displays of glory that God once made on Mount Sinai, when He spoke from the midst of the fire, surrounded by

clouds and darkness, thunderings and lightnings. Christ could easily have manifested his glory in the same manner, and he will do so when he comes again to judge the world. But he refused to grant the Pharisees' arrogant demand, and told them that they should have no other sign than the sign of the prophet Jonas. And what was that sign? It was his own resurrection; for Jonah's burial in the midst of the whale was a type of his burial in the heart of the earth; and Jonah's escape through the mouth of the fish, was a type of his bursting the barriers of the tomb.

It may surprise us to know that Jesus would be three days and three nights in his grave, seeing he only lay there from Friday evening to Sunday morning. But the Jews had a peculiar way of reckoning time--they considered a day and night as one period, and they counted a part of this period, as if it were the whole. Therefore, as Jesus was part of three days in the grave, he was there three days and three nights, according to the Jewish mode of speaking.

The Savior well knew that the Pharisees would not acknowledge him to be the Son of God, even when he rose from the dead; and so it proved; for when he did rise, and when the history of his resurrection was repeated to the chief priests and elders, how did they act? They bribed the soldiers who had guarded the tomb to deny the fact, and to say that the disciples had stolen his body away while they slept.

Well, therefore, might Jesus contrast the men of Nineveh with the Pharisees. The Ninevites repented when Jonah declared that in forty days their city should be destroyed. It is remarkable that in forty years from the time of our Savior's resurrection, Jerusalem was destroyed, because the Jews repented not. The Pharisees despised the Ninevites on account of their being Gentiles, yet these Gentiles were far better than themselves.

The Lord then brought forward an instance of another Gentile who acted in an opposite manner from the Pharisees--it was the queen of Sheba, who came from a distant country to receive instruction from Solomon. There have been heathens in later days who have resembled this ancient sovereign in her desire to obtain heavenly wisdom. Some years ago, two natives of Ceylon left their spicy isle, and came to dwell for awhile in our cold climate, that they might learn the gospel of the blessed God. When they were about to return home, a friend presented to them a magnificent mirror, but they refused to accept it. They said to their venerable teacher, Dr. Adam Clarke, "Tell our friend we cannot accept the mirror. We will take nothing home with us but the Bible you gave us and the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. To learn that gospel we crossed the ocean, and with it alone will we cross it again."

How unlike these unselfish Cingalese are those who for worldly reasons forsake the preaching of the truth! Whatever may be the advantages for which they give up that joyful sound, they make a poor exchange. Happy are those who can say with David, "One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after, that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in his temple." (Ps. 27:4.)

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