



The King's Ransom

Matthew 20:28

Text

Matthew 12:38-50

Topic

Jesus tells Israel's leaders they will get no further sign from Him until His resurrection from the dead

Title

"Signing Off"

Introduction

I'm sure you are aware of the sign-language snafu at Nelson Mandela's funeral. But did you follow the story to its conclusion to hear the reason the interpreter gave that he was signing gibberish?

Following the event, he said that he had "a history of violent schizophrenic episodes and may have hallucinated that angels were flying into the stadium."

Our text today in the Gospel of Matthew involves a problem with signs. In this case, the signs were perfectly clear, but the crowd was acting like they did not understand them.

The Jewish Scriptures indicated that when their Messiah came, the miracles He performed would be **signs** to them by which they would recognize Him. He would do things like heal lepers; exorcise demons; give hearing to the deaf and sight to the blind; and raise the dead.

Jesus had done all that and more. Nevertheless the religious leaders had the audacity to say to Him, "Teacher, we want to see a sign from you."

Asking for a further sign when Jesus had given them so many was evidence of their settled unbelief.

Their insincere request was a game changer. Jesus told them He **would** give them a sign - but when you understand what it was, you see it would be too late for them to stop the national consequences of their unbelief.

Their unbelief would put on hold God's program of establishing the kingdom of Heaven on earth that had been promised to the physical descendants of Abraham. Meanwhile Jesus would build a new, spiritual family by calling-out to whosoever would believe - Gentiles as well as Jews.

We will see how all this unfolded as we finish-up chapter twelve. As we do, we'll see ourselves in relation to the sign Jesus spoke of - His resurrection from the dead on the third day.

I'll organize my thoughts around two points: #1 The Third Day Is All The Sign You Need, and #2 Everyday, Jesus Is All The Savior You Need.

#1 The Third Day Is All The Sign You Need

(v38-45)

Our text is a significant turning point, not just for Israel as a nation, but for the whole world. It sets the stage for the age in which we live, the church age - the time between the first and the second comings of Jesus.

Mat 12:38 Then some of the scribes and Pharisees answered, saying, "Teacher, we want to see a sign from You."

Comedian Seth Meyers, announced as the new host of TV's *Late Night*, developed a recurring skit in which he mentions something outrageous from the news and then says, "*Really?*"

This verse would make for a great "Really?" segment. *Pharisees - after Jesus healed lepers, cast out legions of demons, made the deaf hear and the blind see - you wanted to see a sign.*

Really???

Mat 12:39 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.

If there was any doubt about their sincerity in asking to see a sign, Jesus dispels it by labeling them "evil and adulterous."

To emphasize how tragic unfaithfulness to God was, it was compared to adultery. It was spiritual adultery.

Since it was against God and His pure love, it was particularly bad, so it was further labeled "evil."

Notice, in passing, Jesus referred to Jonah and the incident with him being swallowed by a great fish as a true story. It resolves once-and-for-all any questions about whether it really happened.

What was "the sign of the prophet Jonah?"

Mat 12:40 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.

In the next verse Jesus describes the results of Jonah *emerging* from the "great fish." The "sign" of Jonah was his resuscitation after three days and three nights which enabled him to complete his mission.

Just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the great fish, then resuscitated, so Jesus would be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth, then resurrected.

Jesus knew He was going to the Cross. He knew He was born to die as the Substitute for every human being. By His death and resurrection He would save us from our sins.

A quick word about "three days and three nights." Although a Wednesday crucifixion has been suggested by some scholars, we believe Jesus was crucified on Friday, then raised on Sunday. He was in the tomb for a *portion* of three days; it is most accurate to say He rose "on the third day."

The Jews reckoned a portion of a day as a day. It shouldn't surprise us; we do it, too. If you make a hotel reservation for three days and two nights, you don't really spend a full seventy-two hours in the room. You're there a portion of three days.

For the Jews, the description "three days and three nights" could be as short a period as twenty-six hours, or as long as seventy-two hours.

Mat 12:41 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.

The full impact of this statement can be lost on us since we are not Jews. You'll recall that Jonah did not want to go to Nineveh because he didn't want God to save them. Jewish attitudes towards Gentiles had not changed all that much by the first century. For Jesus to indicate that the Gospel was going to go outside of Israel, to Gentiles who would be saved, was an incredible statement.

To further predict that the "men of Nineveh" were saved while the Jews hearing Jesus were lost and would be condemned, and that the Ninevites would be among those sitting in judgment over them, was heavy.

Jesus was "greater" than Jonah in every way. The thing I want to concentrate on is His greater compassion. Jonah was forced by God to complete his mission of taking the Gospel to people he hated. Jesus, moved with compassion, willingly left Heaven and came to earth, then died voluntarily to save people who were the enemies of God.

Mat 12:42 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.

The "queen of the south" is the Queen of Sheba, who travelled about a thousand miles to visit King Solomon just to hear his wisdom.

Solomon was a son of David, but Jesus was the greater Son of David, the Messiah. The Jews would not come to Him even though He travelled so much farther than a thousand miles to share the ultimate wisdom of God's plan to save sinners.

Once again a Gentile received the Gospel, through Solomon, while the Jews rejected it in Jesus Christ. These examples are setting us up for the coming chapters in Matthew in which we will see the shift in God's program on the earth between the two comings of Jesus.

Jesus followed with an illustration:

Mat 12:43 "When an unclean spirit goes out of a man, he goes through dry places, seeking rest, and finds none.

Mat 12:44 Then 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.

Mat 12:45 Then 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."

There may be insights here into the psychology and activity of demons - but that is not the point of the illustration. Demons may feel uncomfortable in "dry places" and be unable to "rest" wandering through them; but that doesn't mean we'd all be better off in Arizona.

Jesus was illustrating the state of Israel as a nation. Earlier in this same chapter He claimed to be able to "bind the strong man" and "plunder his goods" and take over his "house." The strong man was Satan, and by extension all his nefarious, dry-place hating demons.

Jesus had, in effect, *cleaned house* in Israel. The nation was empty of demons in the sense that Jesus defeated them. The house was ready to be occupied by The Lord, their Messiah. He was ready to establish His reign of righteousness on the earth with Jerusalem as His headquarters.

But the leaders of the nation would reject Jesus. He wasn't welcome in His own house. They would hand Him over to Rome to be crucified.

He would rise from the dead, but instead of setting up the kingdom, He would ascend into Heaven to await His Second Coming.

The word for "empty," describing the house in the story, can be translated "unoccupied." When the nation of Israel said "No" to Jesus, it left the house He would have established unoccupied.

It was a limited time offer, this offer to establish the kingdom. That's why you read at the end of the Book of Acts,

Act 28:28 "Therefore let it be known to you that the salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles, and they will hear it!"

In other passages we are told that Israel's kingdom will be delayed until the fullness of the Gentiles comes in.

In the void left after the nation refused their King and His kingdom, the devil remains unbound and, in one sense, he continues to occupy the house, and even be a worse occupant than ever.

Fewer than forty years after Jesus ascended into Heaven, in 70AD, Titus and the Roman legions sacked and burned Jerusalem and the Temple. The Jews were scattered all over the earth, and persecuted, for the next almost two thousand years before miraculously returning to their land.

The whole world became a much worse place than ever as Satan, who could have been bound, instead continues to roam about as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour.

The Pharisees asked for a sign. Jesus would give them a sign. His death, burial, and resurrection was the sign. It would, however, be too late to avoid the national consequences that would come upon Israel for having rejected their Messiah in the face of overwhelming testimony and evidence, the signs, of Who He was.

Pause for a moment to realize something precious. Everyone after Jesus rose from the dead is able to 'see' that great sign. It is the physical, historic evidence and proof that Jesus is Who He says He is and that He finished what He was sent to do.

I think it was Christian recording artist Don Francisco who had a song that proclaimed, *He's alive! He's alive! He's alive and I'm forgiven; Heavens gates are opened wide.*

Nonbelievers have their objections to the Gospel; they have their questions. But, end of the day, **we have the ultimate proof.** The third day is all the sign you need to know Jesus is the God-man, the Savior of all men - especially those who believe.

#2 Everyday, Jesus Is All The Savior You Need

(v46-50)

Chapter twelve closes with an incident in which Jesus might be seen to be disrespecting His mother and brothers.

He wasn't. He simply took advantage of their arrival to finish His thoughts about this new age that was beginning in which the kingdom on earth was being delayed. It wouldn't be so much about the physical descendants of Abraham by birth as it would be about the spiritual descendants of Abraham - both Jews and Gentiles - who experience the new birth.

Mat 12:46 While He was still talking to the multitudes, behold, His mother and brothers stood outside, seeking to speak with Him.

Mat 12:47 Then one said to Him, "Look, Your mother and Your brothers are standing outside, seeking to speak with You."

Another Gospel (I believe it's Mark) tells us that Jesus' earthly family thought He was over-stressed. It's been suggested that the Pharisees sent for them and exaggerated the situation.

If you were saved later in life, and have family members who are nonbelievers, it's not uncommon for them to think you've gone too far into this Jesus-thing; that you are a Jesus freak.

I don't want to get distracted from the main message, but let me say a word about Jesus' mother and brothers. There is a false teaching that Mary remained a virgin after Jesus was born; it's called the perpetual virginity of Mary.

There's a companion teaching - just as false - that Mary was herself conceived immaculately in her mother's womb.

If that's the case, who were these "brothers?" Two possibilities have been suggested by those who worship Mary:

1. The first is that they were sons of Joseph from a previous marriage. That cannot be true, or Jesus would not be the rightful, legal heir to the throne of David. Joseph's firstborn son must be the rightful, legal heir. If there were previous sons, it would disqualify Jesus.
2. The second possibility is that the word for "brothers" simply means "relatives," and that these guys could be cousins. Possible, but very unlikely. While the word *can* refer to other relatives, its normal and literal meaning is a physical brother. There was a Greek word for "cousin," and it was not used. Further, if they were Jesus' cousins, why would they so often be described as being with Mary, Jesus' mother? There is nothing in the context of His mother and brothers coming to see Him that even hints that they were anyone other than His literal, blood-related, half-brothers.

The simple, obvious explanation is that after Jesus was born, Joseph and Mary had other children. She was not immaculately conceived and she did not remain a virgin.

More important to notice is that Mary had no special access to Jesus. In the words that follow we will see that Jesus didn't drop what He was doing to listen to her. If you're trying to approach Jesus through Mary, *she won't be any help.*

Mat 12:48 But He answered and said to the one who told Him, "Who is My mother and who are My brothers?"

Mat 12:49 And He stretched out His hand toward His disciples and said, "Here are My mother and My brothers!"

This was not disrespectful; not at all. It was powerful - a powerful illustration of a shift in God's dealings with Israel, with Gentiles, and with the Gospel.

Jesus came to His own - to the Jews. They rejected Him. The kingdom would have to wait. In the mean time, the Gospel would go out beyond Israel to the whole world. Jesus would establish a spiritual family based on faith in Him that knows no racial or ethnic distinctions. It will be distinct from Israel. He will call it, in chapter sixteen, the church.

Mat 12:50 For whoever does the will of My Father in heaven is My brother and sister and mother."

This doesn't mean you earn or maintain a spot in the spiritual family by working hard to do God's will. You enter the family by believing in Jesus:

Joh 6:29 Jesus answered and said to them, "This is the work of God, that you **believe** in Him whom He sent."

Once you are a believer, once you've been born-again, born from above, born spiritually, you are enabled by God the Holy Spirit to "do God's will."

In context, this is the perfect close to the events of this chapter. It ties it all up. Rejected by the nation, Jesus would return to Heaven, to await His Second Coming; and in the mean time, the Gospel would go out to "whosoever will believe," and "whoever" does believe will be indwelt by God the Holy Spirit to be enabled to do the will of God.

If you are a Jew by physical descent from Abraham, everyday Jesus is all the Savior you need. You shouldn't be looking for your Messiah anywhere else because He's already come and is coming again. You get saved just like we Gentiles get saved - by grace through faith in Jesus Christ, receiving the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

Tragically, Israel *will* continue to reject Jesus into the Great Tribulation. They will welcome and receive, instead, a political and military leader who will turn out to be the antichrist and their nemesis.

In the end the Bible says "all Israel will be saved." A remnant will survive and they will look upon Jesus and receive Him as their Messiah as He returns to the earth.

In the mean time... in-between time... **We ain't got fun!** By that I mean to highlight once again that we live in a war zone - a spiritual war zone. The strong man is not bound, nor are his demon followers. The unoccupied house that is our world has a squatter living in it and ruling over it.

In this conflict we are described as "more than conquerors through Him who loved us." Let me read the entire Bible passage in which our status as conquerors is highlighted:

Rom 8:35 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?

Rom 8:36 As it is written: "FOR YOUR SAKE WE ARE KILLED ALL DAY LONG; WE ARE ACCOUNTED AS SHEEP FOR THE SLAUGHTER."

Rom 8:37 Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us.

Rom 8:38 For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come,

Rom 8:39 nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

These things *can* and *do* all occur and yet they cannot in any way alter Jesus Christ's love for you. You may not 'feel' the love, but it is always just as present, just as powerful, as ever.

Absolute confidence in His great love is how you conquer.

Charles Spurgeon spoke of the confidence great men and women of God had in God's love in ages past:

They did not speak of Christ's love as though it were a myth to be respected, a tradition to be revered; they viewed it as a blessed reality, and they cast their whole confidence upon it, being persuaded that it would bear them up as upon eagles' wings, and carry them all their days; resting assured that it would be to them a foundation of rock, against which the waves might beat, and the winds blow, but their soul's habitation would stand securely if founded upon it.

Everyday, with Jesus, you are **more** than conquerors. So much more.

- For one thing, you have His sweet fellowship 24/7.
- For another thing, He has prepared good works for you to discover as you follow Him.
- For another thing, He has given you the promised Holy Spirit to indwell you, to give you the enabling to obey God and deny the flesh.
- For another thing, Jesus has promised you that He will complete in you the work He has begun.
- For another thing, He is preparing for you a glorious entrance into Heaven, where He's been building you a custom mansion.

The United States Army has had several slogans over the years. You probably remember *Army of One*, and the current slogan, *Army Strong*.

From 1980 until 2001 their slogan was *Be All that You Can Be*.

A good slogan for us, as the Lord's army, would be *More than Conquerors*. Look any of the troubles and afflictions listed in that passage in the face and say, "I am more than a conqueror through Jesus Who loves me."