

AN EVIL GENERATION SEEKS A SIGN

(Matt. 12:38-39)

Matthew 12 brings us to a major turning point in Christ's ministry. Here Jesus said that to slanderously blaspheme by saying that He cast out demons by the power of Satan was really blasphemy against the Spirit, which was unforgivable. Jesus then showed that a person's words are an indicator of the heart, saying, "**out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks**" (Mt. 12:34). Jesus says by a person's words they will be justified and by their words they will likewise be condemned (v. 37). The mouth tells on the heart and thus reveals the spiritual condition of the person. And that brings us to Matthew 12:38.

Matthew 12:38 (NKJV)

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

Recall the thematic context here. Jesus had just done an extraordinarily unique miracle by healing a demon-possessed man who had been blind and mute, which the Pharisees ascribed to the power of Satan. Now they are demanding yet another sign.

Goodness, it's not like they hadn't seen SIGNS! They were everywhere in Christ's public ministry in overwhelming abundance.

Matthew 4:23 (NKJV)

23 And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and **healing all** kinds of sickness and **all** kinds of disease among the people.

Matthew 9:35 (NKJV)

35 Then Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and **healing every** sickness and **every disease** among the people.

And they ask for a sign? Here a sign, there a sign, everywhere a sign. Signs were in overabundance in Christ's ministry all over the place! And yet they ask for yet another sign? This is crazy talk – really evil talk as Jesus will go on to show.

In the gospel of John in particular, the word SIGN is constantly used in reference to a miracle that had meaning. Jesus did not just do miracles for miracles' sake. They had meaning. They were signs! They pointed to the

TRUTH of Who He was as the Messiah. They fulfilled OT prophecy – so they were not just done in a vacuum. The miracles Christ did had special Messianic sign value related to the kingdom, showing He was indeed the promised Messianic King.

Some time back I had a really fast-talking guy call me up and wondered if I would go up to the hospital and pray for someone.

As I started to get name of the person, he wanted me to pray for he told me she was not able to use her arms and so forth and he wanted to know if I believed in healing. So, he was really pressing me on my theology of healing. I told him that I did not think the sign gifts were operative today, but certainly God works through prayer. He took issue with this. I told him that in the Gospels, Jesus' miracles are called SIGNS because they pointed to Him as being the Messiah King who brings in the kingdom - and no one is doing Messianic signs today.

It was like he didn't hear me. He insisted (with a little bit of vulgarity) that such signs were still operative. I challenged him, asking him if he had seen people raised from the dead, and he assured me that he had (I am not sure why he didn't just go to the hospital himself). At that point he said something like: *"You don't believe in the Holy Ghost and are just dried up with no life."* And as he was hanging up, he said, ***"I got the wrong guy"***.

Yes indeed! If you are looking for someone to perform SIGN MIRACLES and you are calling me – then for sure you got the wrong guy. In fact, you are 2000 years too late. Sign miracles were unique to Christ and His apostles – and especially to Christ, who gave authority to do them.

But again, some of the scribes and Pharisees followed up on the event of blaspheming against the Spirit, which claimed Jesus did miracles by the power of Satan, by asking for yet ANOTHER SIGN.

So, in this thematic context, the sense of what they were saying seems to be this: "We claim you are doing miracles by the power of Satan, but if you are really doing them by the power of God, prove it by doing a GOD-THING that even we can't deny."

They were demanding a special spectacular miracle that would be an over-the-top, blow-your-mind kind of evidence that the power Jesus was demonstrating was truly that of God. Thus, they were asking for a SPECIAL KIND OF SIGN MIRACLE, even more sensational than what Jesus had previously done.

Here is the thing with unbelief. It never has enough evidence because it doesn't really want to accept the truth. They are not really honest with the obvious truth!

Some Christians try to make the case for sign miracles today, saying that unless they are performed, people won't come to believe. But they completely miss the point. God has given all the evidence needed. The issue is not a lack of evidence. The issue is hardened hearts that won't respond to the ample evidence given. There is NEVER enough evidence for willful unbelief.

People sometimes say things like, "*If I could just see a real miracle, I would believe.*" But that is contrary to what Jesus taught - contrary to Scripture.

Luke 16:27–31 (NKJV)

27 "Then he said, 'I beg you therefore, father, that you would send him to my father's house,

28 for I have five brothers, that he may testify to them, lest they also come to this place of torment.'

29 Abraham said to him, 'They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them.'

30 And he said, 'No, father Abraham; but if one goes to them from the dead, they will repent.'

31 But he said to him, 'If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rise from the dead.' "

There is the reality of the Spirit convicting people. There is the reality that the Word of God is living and powerful, working in people's hearts.

Jeremiah 23:29 (NKJV)

29 "Is not My word like a fire?" says the Lord, "And like a hammer that breaks the rock in pieces?"

Hebrews 4:12 (NKJV)

12 For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.

If the living God, working through the living Word, can't get through, then there is no hope. More signs would not be more effective! God's way of working is through His Word. It is not a secondary thing – it is the essential

thing. Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God (Rom. 10:17).

1 Corinthians 1:21–24 (NKJV)

21 For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, **it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe.**

22 For Jews request **a sign**, and Greeks seek after wisdom;

23 but **we preach** Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness,

24 but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, **Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.**

What God has given in the Word is sufficient! It is what we call the sufficiency of Scripture! This is how God works by the Holy Spirit and what God has given is enough.

Are SIGNS or SCRIPTURE more convincing evidence? In truth, even signs are to be understood through the prism of Scripture – all pointing to the truth of the Christ and Who He is. It ALL goes back to Scripture.

They were looking for an additional SIGN that would be astonishing, breathtaking, off the charts clearly of God, and instead Jesus gave them A SIGN from Scripture! How is that for a sign? The signs in Jesus' ministry all tied to Scripture. They were all a fulfillment of Scripture. They weren't just done in a vacuum. They had meaning and purpose specifically tied to WHO He is as the Messiah, as rooted in Scripture.

By the way, in contrast to Jesus who came operating in total harmony with Scripture, one day will come another Christ –who is commonly known as the antichrist. And how will he come?

John 5:43 (NKJV)

43 I have come in My Father's name, and you do not receive Me; if **another comes in his own name**, him you will receive.

The antichrist will come in a vacuum, not claiming any Scriptural basis, not claiming any authority from God. No tie to anything – just championing himself to be God on the basis of his own claims. Jesus did NOT do that. He came with Bible credentials – prophetic credentials – the Father's credentials. His whole ministry was interwoven with and tethered to God's prophetic truth as found in the Scriptures. The really BIG thing is the Scripture.

They said we want another SUPER-SIGN...

Matthew 12:39 (NKJV)

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.

This is really a powerful verse that I think has much application to where we are today in a context where *Charismania* has huge influence and sway over so much of professing Christendom.

Sometimes seeking for a SIGN is downright sinful! When the evidence is already more than sufficient, it is plain evil and sinful to demand more. When Scripture is fully sufficient, it is sinful to demand more evidence!

“This rebuke from Christ seems applicable to those Christians today who are continually looking for miraculous manifestations of one kind or another. We already have the completed Word of God with abundant testimony to its inherent authority, not to mention the tremendous scientific evidence of creation and the historical evidence of Christ’s victory over death. So there is no need for further miraculous confirmation of our faith.” – **Henry M. Morris**

Frankly, all this clamoring for extra miraculous signs signifies unbelief and a lack of understanding concerning God, His ways, and His Word.

“One of the most alarming trends in evangelicalism is the desire to experience God outside of Scripture via signs, wonders, and emotive mysticism.” – **Anthony Wood**

This appetite for the miraculous that is sensational is really nothing new. John Calvin who lived about 500 years ago, said this:

“Their requiring miracles of us is unreasonable; for we forge no new gospel but retain the very same whose truth was confirmed by all the miracles ever wrought by Christ and the Apostles.” – **John Calvin**

“It is well known that evangelical (fundamentalist) leaders of the 20th century diligently defended the Scripture from modernists aiming to “**cut out**” portions of the Bible. Now we live in a period of history where Scripture must be protected from mystics seeking to “**add**” upon the Bible. The battle for inerrancy is now the battle for sufficiency.” – **Anthony Wood**

An especially egregious movement has arisen out of the Charismatic movement which is called “**The New Apostolic Reformation**”. It goes back to C. Peter Wagner at Fuller Seminary, but in our day is popularized by people such as pastor Bill Johnson of Bethel Church in Redding, CA, which boasts 10,000 regular attendees.

The first great issue is that people like Johnson do not have a high view of Scripture and therefore say we need MORE than Scripture!

“We’ve gone as far as we can with our present understanding of Scripture. It’s time to let signs have their place...” – **Bill Johnson**

To insist on the need for more signs and wonders today is to grossly misunderstand their purpose in relationship to the Messiah and His kingdom. And frankly, it is a denigration of a HIGH VIEW of Scripture which in effect says the Bible is not sufficient – it is not enough!

Indeed, I think it is a legitimate application to say in this context that, “**An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign**”.

The idea of “**evil**” (Gk. *poneros*) is that which is morally bad or wicked. “**Adulterous**” speaks of unfaithfulness – unfaithful to God and His truth (cf. Jer. 3:10; Hos. 7:13-16; Isa. 57:3-8).

The Babylonian Exile essentially broke Israel of formal outward idolatry, and yet here we find a problem of spiritual adultery in the hearts of the people was still very much in existence. Their legalistic hypocrisy that steered their hearts away from God and His truth was a form of spiritual adultery.

The evil and adulterous generation in view was the Jews of Christ’s time who in spite of all the evidence that He was the Messiah, yet refused to believe in Him. They flagrantly sinned against the most brilliant LIGHT possible, as seen in the person and ministry of Christ.

Yes, they sought after a SIGN, but only because they were wicked! They were not sincere truth seekers. They were wicked, not accepting the light given! Consequently, NO further sign would be given to them.

They were not in charge. Who were they to demand a sign – especially coming from a position of perverse and unfaithful wickedness? But Christ did indicate there would be ONE more sign given for them which, as it turns out, is the ULTIMATE SIGN – namely the sign of Christ’s death, burial, and resurrection as illustrated in the prophet Jonah’s experience.

This would be the forever end-all SIGN!