

Three Lessons

Matthew 12:38-50

Intro

By way of introduction, let's turn to...

Matthew 4:23-25 (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.

24 Then His fame went throughout all Syria; and they brought to Him all sick people who were afflicted with various diseases and torments, and those who were demon-possessed, epileptics, and paralytics; and He healed them.

25 Great multitudes followed Him—from Galilee, and from Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea, and beyond the Jordan.

With these verses in mind, we could argue that the focus of the Lord Jesus' public ministry was ***teaching***, ***preaching*** and ***healing***...[expand]

- And what we are going to focus on today is what the Lord ***teaches*** in the last three sections of Matthew 12...

*In these three sections that Lord Jesus ***teaches*** three lessons for us to learn...*

But, as always, the ***teaching*** of the Lord Jesus will only bear fruit in our lives if we actually apply it — if we actually chose to live it out...

James, the brother of Jesus, put it best when he wrote the following words in...

James 1:22 (NKJV)

But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.

With this in mind, let's turn to the passage we will be studying this morning...

Matthew 12:38-50 (NKJV)

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

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."

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.

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.

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.

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

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."

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."

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

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

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

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

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

Let's move into our first section...

Lesson #1 - Jesus' resurrection is the greatest sign...

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

Now, in the context of the Gospel of Matthew, we understand that the scribes and Pharisees have seen the Lord Jesus do plenty of things...

Jesus has done all kinds of healings and he has delivered many who were tormented by demons...

And most recently, they have seen Jesus heal a man who was blind, mute and demon-possessed...

- Tragically, the scribes and the Pharisees attributed that miraculous event to the power of the devil — instead of to the power of the Holy Spirit...

The scribes and Pharisees had *refused to trust* Jesus even though He taught like no one had ever taught **before** or **since**...

- They *refused to trust* Him even though He preached the good news of the Kingdom...

They *refused to trust* Him even though He was able to heal every kind of disease and deliver those who were held captive by the demonic...

- *And now they demanded a **sign** from the Lord Jesus...*

sign — *an event that is an indication or confirmation of intervention by transcendent powers, a miracle...*

So, even though the Lord Jesus had gone around Israel teaching, preaching, healing and casting out demons, that wasn't enough for the scribes and Pharisees...

- They wanted to see a miraculous sign that wowed them — they wanted Jesus do some new thing because said so...

And the scribes and the Pharisees are implying that they would believe if they just saw a sign from the Lord Jesus...

- *If He would just prove it to them then they would believe and follow...*

But this is a common misconception — it is a self-deception — *“if only I saw a miracle then I would believe”...*

- *However, history tells a different story...*

The greatest example of people seeing miracles but failing to believe was the generation of Israelites who escaped from Egyptian captivity...

To see the Apostle Paul’s inspired commentary on that generation, please turn to...

1 Corinthians 10:1-11 (NKJV)

1 Moreover, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware that all our fathers were under the cloud, all passed through the sea,

2 all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea,

All experienced the pillar of cloud by day / escaped through the Red Sea / *also saw all the plagues in Egypt*...]

3 all ate the same spiritual food,

All ate manna...

4 and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ.

All drank the water from the rock — on two occasions...

5 But with most of them God was not well pleased, for their bodies were scattered in the wilderness.

Perhaps the greatest understatement in the NT — because out of that entire generation — only 2 — Joshua and Caleb — were allowed to enter the Promised Land...

6 Now these things became our examples, to the intent that we should not lust after evil things as they also lusted.

7 And do not become idolaters as were some of them. As it is written, "The people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play."

8 Nor let us commit sexual immorality, as some of them did, and in one day twenty-three thousand fell;

- This is a reference to the golden calf incident...[*Mt. Sinai was also enshrouded in thunder and lightning*...]

9 nor let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed by serpents;

10 nor complain, as some of them also complained, and were destroyed by the destroyer.

Venomous serpent incident / the rebellion of Korah...

11 Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come.

The big idea here is that miracles do not change the heart...

It doesn't matter how many signs and wonders a person witnesses — if they are unwilling to submit to God then the miraculous will not move them to obedience...

Let's turn back to Matthew 12 as we move into vs 39 where the Lord Jesus responds to the scribes and Pharisees...

39 But He answered and said to them, "An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign,

evil — *morally or socially worthless, wicked, vicious, degenerate...*

adulterous — *unfaithful to God...*

- [ex. picture of someone who is unwilling to take another person at their word — continually demanding new and extravagant displays of devotion...]

Jesus continues in vs 39-40...

and no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah.

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.

The sign that will be given — the greatest sign of all — will be the bodily resurrection of the Lord Jesus...

- [expand — compare Jonah in whale / Jesus in the tomb...]

Now, the phrase “three days and three nights” raises questions...

If Jesus died on Friday afternoon and was raised on Sunday morning — how can that be three days and three nights?...

- *Well, it is important to understand that the phrase “three days and three nights” was an figure of speech in the ancient world...*

Rabbi Eleazar ben Azariah (writing around the year AD 100) explained this figure of speech *“A day and a night make a whole day, and a portion of a whole day is reckoned as a whole day.”*
[expand]

- Now, we also see that the Lord Jesus is using a figure of speech when He says that He will be **in the heart of the earth**...[expand]

With that said, if the resurrection is the greatest sign — and the NT makes it clear that it is — then we would be wise to study the resurrection...[expand - study the NT with a focus on resurrection]

- [expand — The Case for Christ / books by Gary Habermas / Christian apologetics youtubers and podcasters...]

Moving on to vs...

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.

Here Jesus says that in the final judgment the repentant Ninevites will condemn the generation that Jesus is speaking to...

*Why? — Because the Ninevites repented at the **preaching of Jonah** — and Jesus was greater than Jonah...*

- This is very interesting — the Lord Jesus doesn't say that the people of Nineveh repented at the *sign of Jonah* — they repented at the **preaching of Jonah**...

You see, signs can be a useful confirmation of the truth of the message but they are no good without the message — the message is always primary...

A message works without a sign but a sign does not work without a message...

Let's move on to vs...

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.

This time, the Lord Jesus proclaims Himself to be **greater than Solomon** — the wisest and richest king of all time...

- And the queen of the South (queen of Sheba) will, in the final judgment, condemn the generation that Jesus is speaking to because she traveled a great distance to hear the wisdom of Solomon but Jesus' wisdom is greater than Solomon's...[expand]

Notice, the Queen of Sheba traveled a great distance — *not for a sign* — but for wisdom — for insight on how to live life well...
[expand]

We move on now to...

Lesson #2 — Reformation without Regeneration is worse than useless...

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

In this illustration, an unclean spirit leaves a man and goes looking for a better place to live...

44 Then he says, 'I will return to my house from which I came.'

The unclean spirit doesn't find a better place to live so he decides to go back to the man he possessed before...

And when he comes, he finds it empty, swept, and put in order.

In the absence of the unclean spirit, the man has undergone a ***reformation*** — things are neat and organized and set in order...

- But there is a big problem — the man remains empty on the inside...

He has been ***reformed*** but not ***regenerated*** — he has *turned over a new leaf* but he has *not been born again*...

This is the picture of the scribe and the Pharisee — of the legalist — systems and rules and regulations are established — but it is lifeless formality...

- The man has no divine Person living within him — he is just an empty shell...

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.”

The unclean spirit returns to the empty man and brings seven spirits who are even more wicked than he is...

- The eight of them take up residence in the empty man — and as the Lord Jesus says — the last state of that man is worse than the first...

Now, I see this illustration as a scathing indictment of empty formalism — of legalism...

- The greatest tragedy of legalism is that it makes a person **worse than they were before** because they are now not only empty but also insulated — they are inoculated against the truth...

Because the legalist can point to all their *reformation* — their organization — their rules and regulations — all the things that they do or don't do — and so they see no need for *regeneration*...

They do not need to be born again by the Spirit — they do not need the fulness of God — because they are getting it done themselves...

- The legalist — the empty formalist — has believed the lie that things are ok because things are set in order...

For more on this subject, please turn to...

Luke 18:9-14 (NKJV)

9 Also He spoke this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others:

10 "Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector.

11 The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, 'God, I thank You that I am not like other men—extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector.

12 I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess.'

13 And the tax collector, standing afar off, would not so much as raise his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me a sinner!'

14 I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."

Let's turn back now to Matthew 12 as we consider...

Lesson #3 — The family of God is revealed by their obedience to God...

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

Now, as we put the pieces together from the four gospels, it seems likely that Mary and the brothers of Jesus were coming to get Jesus and take Him home...

- We know that His family did not understand His ministry, His brothers did not yet believe in Him, we are told in Mark's gospel that His own people (family?) thought He was out of His mind...

When we consider this, it is actually comforting to know that the Lord Jesus' physical family did not understand Him — because our physical family doesn't always understand us...[expand]

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

Now, the expectation in that culture would be for the Lord Jesus to drop everything and see what His mother and brothers had to say...

But the Lord Jesus is not bound by culture — He is above culture...

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

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

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

This is very interesting — the Lord Jesus is putting the priority on ***spiritual family*** over ***physical family***...

- And this is a very important truth — that those who ***walk in obedience to God the Father*** have ***God as their Father***...

This reminds us that every true believer in human history is a brother or sister — and each and every one of them have God as their father...

- And sharing God as our Father is the most important of all familial relations...

Now, it is true that we should honor our physical father and mother — we should love our siblings, our spouse, and our children...

But those relationships are secondary to our primary familial relationship to God...

As Jesus Himself said in...

Matthew 10:37 (NKJV)

“He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me.”

The great irony is that we cannot love our physical family properly if we are not in right relationship with the Lord Jesus...

- Because if we fail to walk with Jesus then we will not understand the meaning of life...

We will not understand the purpose of life — and we will inevitably seek to control and manipulate our family members...

- However, if we seek to live a life of discipleship to the Lord Jesus then we will be able to love and serve our physical families in a godly way...

And prayerfully, our physical family members will become our spiritual family members as well...

Conclusion

Well, we will stop here for today and Lord-willing pick up in Matthew 13 next week...

And as we close I'll remind you of the three primary lessons of this passage...

Lesson #1 - Jesus' resurrection is the greatest sign...[expand]

Lesson #2 — Reformation without Regeneration is worse than useless...[expand]

Lesson #3 — The family of God is revealed by their obedience to God...[expand]