

Faith or Sight?
Jonah, Pt. 3
Jonah, Matthew 12:38-42, 16:1-4

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I. PRAYER

Would you fill our hearts with faith in Jesus.

II. INTRODUCTION

a. We'll be continuing our study in the book of Jonah this morning.

- i. And one of the reasons why the book of Jonah receives a lot of attention in the Bible and a lot of criticism from academics is this crazy fish story....
 - We've been reading this story together, but just in case you're not familiar, let me remind you.
 1. God tells Jonah to go preach to Nineveh...a great city in Assyria which is modern day Iraq.
 2. Rather than obey, Jonah jumps on a ship in the opposite direction.
 3. God sends a storm to toss the boat around and the sailors of that boat toss Jonah off because they realize that he is running from God and the reason for the big storm.
 4. This should have been certain death for Jonah.
 5. But the story picks up here in **Jonah 1:17**.
 6. Then...**read Jonah 2:10**.
 7. Then God would tell Jonah to go to Nineveh again, and Jonah would comply.
 - ii. I mean surely we don't believe that Jonah was actually swallowed by a fish, survived for three days inside, and then vomited out on dry land?
 - I have both a bachelor's and master's degree in Biblical Studies....



- My master's was done at an evangelical seminary...but my bachelors was done at a more liberal institution where the professors would scoff at anyone who would believe in the historicity of this account.
- iii. **And if you were to ask these well credentialed biblical scholars why they reject that this is an actual event...**
- One of the reasons they'll give is because it just doesn't compute up here.
 1. I can't wrap my mind around a man surviving in a fish for three days and three nights.
 2. That doesn't work in this material, physical, non-spiritual world.
 3. It doesn't make sense up here, therefore it didn't happen.

b. But isn't that the conflict between faith and reason?

- i. I know for many of you, this is why you have a hard time believing in a god who is personally involved in this world.
- Maybe you've said: "My experience in life and what I have seen does not verify that there is a god but quite the opposite."
 - "If there was a god personally involved in this world, how come I don't see supernatural things happen?"
 - "How come he doesn't answer my prayers."
 - "How come he doesn't give me a clear sign that he exists?"
- ii. It doesn't compute up here, therefore I have a lot of doubts.



- It doesn't make sense to live by faith...
 - ...it only makes sense to live by sight.
- c. Now, I believe that the incident with Jonah and the fish actually happened.**
- i. And the reason is because Jesus said it happened.
 - That's enough for me.
 - ii. But this morning, I want to study two passages in the gospel of Matthew where Jesus refers to this incident with Jonah and the fish.
 - And in referring to this incident, Jesus helps us to understand why it is better to live by faith and not by sight.

III. MATTHEW 12:38-41 (16:1-4)

- i. **Read Matthew 12:38-41**
- b. Now, I want us to study this passage together by asking three key questions.**
 - i. What kind of sign were the Scribes and Pharisees demanding from Jesus?
 - ii. What is the sign of Jonah and why is that significant?
 - iii. Why does Jesus call the Scribes and Pharisees an evil and adulterous generation?
- c. Let's start with the first question - What kind of sign were the Scribes and Pharisees demanding from Jesus?**



- i. Well, if we actually go over to Matthew 16:1-4, we see a similar incident with Jesus and the Pharisees.
 - They ask for a sign and Jesus mentions this sign of Jonah.
- ii. **Read Matthew 16:1-4.**
 - I think Jesus' specific response here when it comes to the weather helps us to understand what kind of sign the Pharisees and the Scribes were after in Matthew 12.
- iii. **In Matthew 16, Jesus talks about our ability to forecast the weather.**
 - Apparently, to these people a red sky in the evening was a sign of fair weather and a red sky earlier in the day was a sign of stormy weather.
 1. So, you could look to the sky and look at the signs.
 2. This was a sign that the Scribes and Pharisees could understand.
 3. It's a sign that they can wrap their head around.
 - So, Jesus refers to their weather forecasting ability, but then tells them that they are unable to discern the signs that are being given to them.
 1. Specifically, the sign of Jonah, which we'll talk about in a second.
 - But, the Pharisees want a sign that makes sense to them.
 1. And that is a reasonable request, right?
 2. Jesus you're making a lot of claims about a lot of things...
 3. Can you give us a sign that will prove to us that what you're saying is true?
- iv. **But, it's not as if Jesus had just come on the scene and he was unknown.**



- We are very much into the ministry of Jesus and everyone, including the Pharisees and the Scribes, had witnessed Jesus do things like: (Just using the Gospel of Matthew)
 1. Heal Leprosy.
 2. Heal a man with paralysis from afar.
 3. Calm the storm.
 4. Raise a little girl from the dead.
 5. He restored sight to the blind.
 - Even earlier in Matthew 12, Jesus, with the Scribes and the Pharisees present with him, healed a man's crippled hand.
 1. Intentionally in view of the Scribes and Pharisees.
 2. He then intentionally in front of the Scribes and Pharisees cast out a demon in a man that caused the man to be blind and mute.
- v. **So, sure, asking for a sign is a reasonable request, but Jesus had spent the better part of his ministry giving signs from heaven that he indeed was the Son of God, the Messiah that they had been waiting for!**
- What else did they need to see?
- vi. **But the Pharisees and the Scribes wanted more.**
- They wanted a sign that they could have command over.
 1. You can become skilled at reading the signs of the sky and predicting the weather.
 2. You can have expertise over that.
 3. This is the kind of sign they wanted.



4. A sign where they could be the ones to verify to the masses that Jesus was actually who he says he is or is not who he says he is.

5. They wanted to be the judge.

vii. **It's the feeling I have whenever I see a magician perform.**

- I really like the show “America’s Got Talent” and they always have a lot of magicians do crazy stuff on that show.
 1. But, I am incredibly skeptical.
- I want to be the one to discover how they pull off their tricks
 1. So, let’s inspect the card deck.
 2. Let’s see what’s under the curtain.
 3. Let’s put cameras at every angle, on slow motion, with no editing.
- If you really had magic, you could perform an unmistakable sign that would be clear to me.
 1. But you obviously don’t have magic.

viii. **This is what the Scribes and Pharisees are doing.**

- They are asking for a sign on their own terms, so they can personally verify the authenticity of Jesus.
- I think we can all relate with the Scribes and Pharisees.
 1. We weren’t alive when Jesus was here in the flesh.
 2. We didn’t witness all the miracles.
 3. We would like for god to give us a sign that He is there.



- God, I don't want you to give a sign to someone else who will tell me of the sign.
 1. I don't want to hear a sermon about it.
 2. I don't want the sign to be ambiguous to the point where I can rationalize it in my mind.
 3. I want a personal, clear sign from you that is unmistakable to my mind that you are there.
- You can relate with that, right?

d. And what was Jesus' response to that request?

i. [Read Matthew 12:39.](#)

- So, our second question, what is this sign of Jonah?
 1. Because Jesus says that this is the sign that they are going to get...and frankly, this is the sign that we have as well.
 2. And it is sufficient.
- Here's how Jesus describes the sign of Jonah - [Read Matthew 12:40-41.](#)

ii. As we mentioned before, God had instructed his prophet, Jonah, to go to Nineveh and preach against it.

- Jonah disobeys, finds himself on a ship in the middle of the sea about to sink because of a massive storm, tossed overboard by the sailors because they found out he was the reason for the storm, and then swallowed by a sea monster!
- But before we scoff at the apparent ridiculousness of the story, you have to understand that all of this has thick biblical meaning attached to it.



1. In Jewish culture and literature, the sea was considered the place where evil dwelled.
 2. As Israel was located on the eastern side of the Mediterranean, it was the sea where the big storms would form and come ashore.
 3. It was the sea where the large sea monsters dwelled.
 4. The sea was the place of darkness and chaos.
- So, in Psalm 74. The Psalmist is crying out to God after Jerusalem had been destroyed by the Babylonians.
 1. It seemed that evil had won. And the people of God were looking for a sign that God would save them.
 2. Psalm 74:9-14 – *9 There are no signs for us to see. There is no longer a prophet. And none of us knows how long this will last. 10 God, how long will the enemy mock? Will the foe insult your name forever? 11 Why do you hold back your hand? Stretch out your right hand and destroy them! 12 God my King is from ancient times, performing saving acts on the earth. 13 You divided the sea with your strength; you smashed the heads of the sea monsters in the water; 14 you crushed the heads of Leviathan; you fed him to the creatures of the desert.*
 3. The Psalmist cries out to God because he knows God can defeat evil.
 4. And the imagery he uses in reference to evil and death is the sea and the creatures that live in it.



- This is also why in Revelation 21, when we get a description of the New Heavens and New Earth after the return of Christ, it's described this way...
 1. Revelation 21:1 - *"Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more"*
 2. It was a way of saying that the New Heavens and New Earth will not contain any evil or any death.
- So, when Jonah spends three days and three nights in the belly of the fish in the sea...a Jewish audience reading this story would feel in their gut that Jonah is passing through evil and death itself.
- And God then commands the fish to vomit Jonah back onto dry land, so Jonah could go and do what he was called to do...preach to Nineveh.
 1. Jonah passed through death and evil itself on his journey to preach his message to the Ninevites, and through that message, the Ninevites would believe and repent.
 2. The sign of Jonah is that God, in His grace, sends his prophet through evil and death to bring about salvation for the sinner.

iii. **And Jesus is the true and better Jonah.**

- Just as Jonah was sent to an evil people... Jesus was sent to an evil world.
- Just as Jonah spent three days in what symbolized death...Jesus spent three days in actual death.



- Just as Jonah emerged from the sea and preached to Nineveh...Jesus defeated death, emerged from the grave, and accomplished redemption for all who would put their faith in him.
- iv. **So, as Jesus is talking to these Scribes and Pharisees, what Jesus is telling them is that it will be His resurrection that will be their sign.**
- Yet, look again with me at **v.41**.
 1. Jesus is commenting on how the Scribes and the Pharisees can't even discern, like they do the weather, that the Messiah Himself is standing right in front of them.
 2. And Jesus predicts that in the future, they still won't believe despite the sign of Jonah, the resurrection of Jesus.
 3. And due to this, at the end of the age, these Scribes and Pharisees will be found guilty and the people of Nineveh will be found forgiven because they believed at the preaching of Jonah and these Scribes and Pharisees won't even believe after witnessing the life, death, and resurrection of the Son of God.
- v. **See, when we began this study in Jonah, we said that we would get a front row seat at the sin in Jonah's heart and it would cause us to look in the mirror to see where we see that in our own hearts.**
- Well, today, it is the heart of these Scribes and Pharisees that we need to evaluate our own hearts against.



- vi. See, as you read the Gospel of Matthew, you encounter all of these stories of these ordinary people who had faith in Jesus.
 - And the miracles in the Gospel of Matthew are usually linked with someone who is said to have faith in Jesus.
 - Yet, it is the Scribes and Pharisees that Jesus refuses to give a sign.
 1. And the reason for this is because the Scribes and the Pharisees lived by sight and not by faith.
 2. They demanded a sign precisely because they did not have faith.

e. It is better to live by faith and not by sight.

- i. See, the Scriptures tell us that God created us with a mind and a heart.
 - Our mind is our intellect and how we reason in the world. Our heart is the core of our motivations.
 1. So, our mind processes information, our heart turns that information into behavior and action.
 2. And there is a disconnect between the two.
- ii. Let me prove it to you.
 - You can be convinced of something in your mind and yet not live according to it.
 1. I am convinced, in my mind, that my Sunday morning routine of getting a sausage biscuit off the dollar menu at McDonalds before church is not good for me.
 2. But my heart wants it, and I still do it.



3. I am convinced that my marriage will be better if I relentlessly served my wife and didn't fret over her serving me.
 4. But my heart still wants her to serve me more than I have to serve her.
 5. Isn't this also addiction.
 6. When your mind is convinced that something is bad for you, but you keep going back to it.
- But, the flip side is true too. You can live according to something and your mind not fully understand.
 1. You do this every time you fly in a plane.
 2. You trust the people who designed that plane, built that plane, maintain that plane, and fly that plane more than yourself.
 3. You trust them enough to get into an aluminum tube and fly 600mph at 30,000 feet safely knowing that if something goes wrong, you will not survive.
 4. This is faith. Living according to something where you don't have all of the information.
 5. But you trust the object of your faith.
 6. You trust what you're living according to over and above your own intellect.
- iii. **And here is why it is better to live by faith and not by sight when it comes to your belief in God.**
- Because to live by sight, is to place your faith in yourself.
 1. On your own intellect. On your own ability to reason. On your own ability to make yourself right with God.



2. And we live in a fallen world and we have a fallen intellect.
 3. If you're in Christ, God is redeeming and renewing your mind, but your sinful flesh is still there and will be till he brings us home.
- So, we live by faith. To live by faith is to live not by trusting in yourself but by trusting in someone else.
- iv. **And it can be dangerous to live by faith if the object of your faith is a fraud.**
- And this is why the sign of Jonah (i.e. the Resurrection of Jesus Christ) is sufficient for us to live fully by faith.
 - Because the resurrection of Jesus Christ, the sign of Jonah, is our validation that Jesus is God, He is who He says He is, and he is trustworthy to place our full faith in.
- v. **This is why faith is required for salvation and not works.**
- Because if works were our pathway to salvation, then the object of our faith would be ourselves.
 1. But God is glorified when he is the object of our faith.
 2. This is Ephesians 2:8-9 - *"For you are saved by grace through faith, and this is not from yourselves; it is God's gift—⁹ not from works, so that no one can boast."*
 - So, when we say that one has to have faith in Jesus for the forgiveness of their sins, what we're saying is that one must in their heart believe:



1. That they have sinned before God and need his grace and his mercy to be forgiven.
 2. That Jesus Christ, the Son of God, came to make a way for us to be saved and to be the object of our faith.
 3. He lives a life without sin but dies a sinners death because God's wrath upon our sin was placed on him.
 4. He then goes into the grave, dead because he is under the wrath of God.
 5. But because he is the perfect Son of God, the perfect sacrifice for our sin, he defeats death. He satisfies the wrath of God. He passes through death, emerges from the grave, now able to apply redemption and forgiveness to those who have faith in him.
 6. And the fact that he walked out of the grave and all of history has not been able to disprove it, is our sign, that he is the one who is worthy to be the object of our faith.
- And to have faith in Jesus is to trust in his life, death, and resurrection for our salvation, not to trust in ourselves.
 1. Not to trust in our works.
 2. Not to trust in our understanding.
 - But to fully trust in Jesus.
- vi. **Why are you worthy of heaven?**
- The answer is, Jesus is, and that's all I have.
 1. 2 Cor 5:7 - *"...we walk by faith and not by sight."*



f. Do you have faith in Jesus or do you live by sight?

- i. This gets to our last question on why Jesus calls the Scribes and Pharisees an evil and adulterous generation.
 - And the reason is because this generation of Scribes and Pharisees was the most privileged.
 1. They had the Scriptures.
 2. They were born into the covenant community of God.
 3. They were alive when Jesus Christ was present in the flesh and witnessed his miracles and heard his teaching.
 4. Yet, they still demanded to live by sight.
 5. They were adulterous because they were unfaithful to God and more faithful to themselves.
- ii. The reality is that the demand to live by sight, and to have a sign from God other than Jesus Christ Himself, is the sin of the garden in Genesis 3.
 - In his commentary, James Edwards says this:
 1. *"The longing for a more spiritual revelation [than Jesus] is the mother of all heresies, the original temptation of the serpent no longer simply to know God, but to be god."*

¹ Edwards, James R. *The Gospel according to Luke*. Edited by D. A. Carson. The Pillar New Testament Commentary. Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.; Nottingham, England: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company; Apollos, 2015.



- It is to believe in your heart that you are more trustworthy, your instincts more pure, your intellect more godly, than God Himself, His Son Jesus, and His Word given to us in the Bible.
- iii. **And so the question for this morning is this...who do you trust more.**
- Jesus Christ who was raised from the dead.
 - Or yourself?
- iv. **See, some people accuse those who live by faith as being anti-intellectual.**
- That's not the case. God gave us minds and the ability to reason so we could use them, explore his creation, innovate, study the world, grow in knowledge...
 - No, living by faith is not anti-intellectual.
 - If I can be so blunt, living by faith is anti-narcissistic.
 - It's to say that my mind is not the pinnacle of all creation and I can live my life with faith in the creator.

g. Do you trust in Jesus?

- i. **Do you believe that the only way to be forgiven of your sin and to have a relationship with God is through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus?**
- Do you believe that Jesus paid for your sin?
 - Do you believe that because of Jesus, when God looks at you, he sees a beloved son and daughter, not a sinner.
 - Do you believe that as Jesus was resurrected, you will be resurrected into eternal life?
 - This is what it means to have faith in Jesus.



- ii. And your joy is found in living by faith in the one who walked out of the grave.
- Not by living by sight...trusting in yourself. But trusting in Jesus. He is worthy of your faith.
 - Knowing there will come a day when He will return, or we will be brought home...and at that moment, (1 Cor. 13:12) we'll see face to face...our faith will become sight.

IV. PRAY

