

unoccupied. So the demon will get 7 demons worse than himself and all 8 will come and live in that life and the condition of that man will be worse than it was before they first came to Jesus. (See Hebrews 6: 1-6 and Matthew 7: 21-25 and 2 Peter 2: 13-22)

What these verses teach is that it is possible to have incredible spiritual experiences and not be a Christian. Jesus does not assure of his love primarily by giving out miracles and other supernatural signs. He does not give assurance of salvation based on how much you know. You can have your life cleaned up by Jesus and set in order and yet not be a Christian because you have never repented of your sins and trusted in him like the Ninevites and like the queen of Sheba. Neither having a demon cast out of you nor casting it out (Matt. 7:21) means you are a Christian. To whom does Jesus give assurance of his love? That's the next point.

Jesus assures people of his identity, power and love therefore to reject his love leads to disaster.

Matthew 12 ends with this odd little report that Jesus' mom and brothers have come to talk with him but are unable to do so because of the crowds. When Jesus is informed that they are there and want to talk with him he asks the person who informed in the strangest question. He asks, "Who is my mother, my brothers?" How does Jesus answer his own question?

He points to his 12 disciples and says that they are his family. Then he says the reason they are his family is because "whoever does the will of his Father" is a member of his family.

Why does Matthew end this section of his biography of Jesus with this story? He didn't have to report this incident but he did for some reason. What is that reason? (CLUE: Review Matthew 11: 25-30)

The entire ministry of Jesus and his controversy with Pharisees revolves around the question: who belongs to God's family? The Pharisees and the Jewish nation have one answer: those who are Jewish by birth or become Jewish by conversion and keep the traditions as taught by the Pharisees and teachers of the law. Jesus has another answer: God's family is made up of all those to whom the Son chooses to reveal the Father and Father chooses to reveal the Son. All these chosen ones bear a family resemblance, they do the will of the Father who is in heaven. Jesus wants all the members of his family to be sure of his love. The way we demonstrate we belong to his family is by doing what every loving child loves to do, the will of their Father.

The million dollar question is, what is the will of Jesus' Father that all his family members do? (Review the gospel of Matthew up to this point to find the answer.)

Following are a few examples:

- ◆ *In the immediate context it is to repent like the Ninevites and worship Jesus like the queen of Sheba worshipped Solomon. Don't demand signs like the Pharisees.*
- ◆ *12: 30-32 Don't ascribe the work of Jesus to Satan. Do be wholeheartedly for Jesus and join with him in gathering others to worship him.*
- ◆ *11: 28-30 Come to Jesus and submit to him as his slave. Throw off the slavery of sin and of trying to please God by obeying the law.*
- ◆ *10:37-39 Love Jesus more than your own family. Stop demanding that life go your way on earth and give your life away in love to others*
- ◆ *10:32 Openly acknowledge Jesus by your life and words.*
- ◆ *Matthew 5-7 (This section is called "the sermon on the mount") is probably the best summary of the Father's will in the gospel of Matthew.*

Do you want Jesus to point at you and say, "this is my brother/sister because they are doing the will of my Father in heaven"? How do you know he will do that?

God wants all his children to know they are his children. Don't you want to know that Christ is the visible expression of the invisible God and then know that he loves you? Don't you want Jesus to point at you and say, this is my brother, my mother, my sister? There is a way for you to have this certainty, this assurance. Seek to do the will of Jesus' Father. You cannot have true assurance of salvation by seeking assurance of salvation. You will not find the peace and joy of knowing God by seeking the peace and joy of knowing God. You will only find that joy and that peace if you seek to be holy, if you seek to obey God. Jesus rejects the Pharisees request for a sign because they are not interested in obedience, they are interested in their own joy and happiness. They want a Jesus that likes what they like. The disciples are given the joy of knowing they belong to God's family because they are like the Ninevites and like the Queen of Sheba. They know they are sinners. They know they deserve judgement for their sin. So they repent of their sins. They are impressed with Jesus and so love and trust him and give themselves to obeying all that he commands. This is their passion. Is this your passion?

Jesus assures all those who do the will of his Father that they are members of his family.

Describe, based upon the Ninevites and the queen of Sheba, the kind of response Jesus expects from us to him and his work.

Jesus expects us to turn from our sins and our worship of other things to trust in him alone. He expects us to be so impressed with him that we will do anything to know him better and to show our love for him. He expects us to praise and worship his Father for the grace he shows us through him.

When you compare your response to Christ to the Ninevites and the queen, will they rise and condemn you at the judgement or will they affirm you because you responded as they did?

Jesus assures people of his identity, power and love by the glory of his being.

In verses 43-45 Jesus is describing what happens to a demon after he casts it out from a person. Some of his language is figurative (“it goes through arid places”, “the house I left”, “he finds it swept clean and put in order”) so we should be aware of drawing too many firm conclusions about exorcism and demon behavior. However, there are several things that are clear. Let’s try to identify what is certain.

- ◆ According to the last sentence of v. 45, why does Jesus use this illustration?

What happens to the individual from whom Jesus casts out a demon is a symbol of what is happening to the entire Jewish nation.

- ◆ According to the illustration, where is it that demons prefer to live?

Demons prefer to live in human beings, not out of them.

- ◆ When Jesus casts a demon out of a person what is the condition of that person’s life?

That person’s life is cleaned up and set in order. Evil influences are removed and the life is made ready for God to live in it.

- ◆ Why is the demon able to return to the “house” from which it was driven? What does this mean?

It is able to return because it is unoccupied. In other words, even though the person was freed from demonic oppression, he or she did not invite Christ to come live in his or her life. While the person is happy to be free from demonic influence she is not interested in submitting to, trusting in Christ. Therefore, when the demon returns, there is no one there to defend the person from the onslaught of Satan and so the demon is free to live there and recruit even more wicked demons to join him in possessing this person.

What is Jesus telling the Jewish nation is happening to them? Is there any evidence you can see that would show that the final condition of the Jewish nation is worse than before Jesus came?

He is present to “clean house” among the Jewish people. He is casting out demons and setting things straight by his works of power and by his teaching ministry. However, even though he is cleaning up the Jewish house, the nation as a whole is rejecting him and refusing to invite him to live among them as their king. So, they can expect that Satan is going to come back with a vengeance. Their condition is worse now because they are so hardened to Christ and so unwilling to admit their sin and turn to God as he requires. The nation is generally opposed to God as he actually exists and unable and unwilling to turn to God with a whole heart. The evidence of Satan’s return to make their condition worse is how they treated Jesus during the last week of his life. On Sunday of that week they welcomed him into Jerusalem and proclaimed that he was their Messiah. On Friday of the same week, the same people were screaming to have him crucified. On the human level what happened is that the people were happy to acclaim Jesus as their king as long as he was healing them and giving them food. But when it became clear that his main concern was not in giving them an easy life on planet earth but on getting them to reform their way of life by repenting of their sins and submitting to his rule in their life, they turned on him. Satan was only too willing to assist this process in a variety of ways.

Do these verses only apply to the Jewish people living in Jesus’ day? Can the same thing happen today?

The same thing not only can happen but does happen. Many people are attracted to Jesus to find stability in their lives. Many associate with him so they can improve their marriage, escape their addiction, become better parents, find friends, get healed, get rich, etc. Jesus in his compassion will help people solve significant problems in their lives. However, if a person does not come to Jesus to get their biggest problem solved, their sin and God’s anger against them because of it, they will experience the clean and well-ordered life for a time but then the demon will return and find their house

Does the death, burial and resurrection of Christ seem to be adequate “proof” to you?

Jesus assures his people of his identity, power and love by his death, burial and resurrection.

Verses 41-43 tell us why Jesus is so angry with “this generation”. He compares them to the Ninevites and the Queen of Sheba and himself to Jonah and Solomon. Discuss these comparisons. You will need to read Jonah 2 & 3 and 1 Kings 10: 1-13 & 23-25. How do these comparisons show the great guilt of “this generation”? (NOTE: Pay careful attention to how the Ninevites repented and how the queen responded to Solomon.)

JONAH AND THE NINEVITES:

Ninevah is the capital of the Assyrian nation. For a description of the Assyrians see Isaiah 10: 5-11 & 36: 1-20. Ninevites were pagan, idol-worshipping, arrogant, violent, immoral people. They were non-Jewish. They did not know the OT at all. God had never spoken to them as he had to the nation Israel at Mt. Sinai and through the prophets. In short these people were the very antithesis of what good Jewish people esteemed. The Ninevites flagrantly broke all the commandments of God and never said they were sorry until Jonah showed up.

Jonah was a stubborn, disobedient, angry, racist prophet. He wanted Ninevah to be destroyed. He only spent three days in the city. He performed no signs of any sort. His message was one of judgement only, “40 days and Ninevah will be destroyed.” Consider how much greater Jesus was than he. He healed hundreds of people in very public ways. He taught for hundreds of hours. His teaching was first person. He never said, “thus says the Lord.” John the Baptist prepared the way for his arrival. In short, Jesus fulfilled all the OT prophecies about the Messiah and powerfully demonstrated his divinity by his life, his miracles and his teaching.

The question he is forcing upon these men is this, “How can it be that the men of Ninevah who had so much less information repented at the preaching of Jonah and you, who know so much more and have one who is infinitely greater than Jonah living among you do not repent but demand more proof?” Should I not be angry with this people?

QUEEN OF THE SOUTH:

The queen of Sheba lived hundreds of miles away from Jerusalem, the capital of Solomon’s kingdom. She did not have the OT Scriptures, the temple, the

priesthood. She was an idol-worshipping pagan. She heard second hand reports of his greatness. She was especially drawn to his relationship with Yahweh (1 Kings 10:1). As a result of these reports she expended huge effort to go to see Solomon. When she observed the greatness of his kingdom and of his wisdom she was overwhelmed. She praised him and openly acknowledged that he was great because God had chosen him and blessed him. She knew that he was the greatest person she had ever met and so blessed him and gave him gifts. She, as the queen of another country, acknowledged that he and his kingdom were greater than she and her kingdom. She submitted to his authority by giving gifts and bowing before him.

Consider how much greater Jesus is than Solomon. Solomon never healed anyone. His greatness was entirely in earthly categories (# of horses and chariots, size of army, amount of gold and silver, size of his territory, etc.). Jesus’ sovereignty is universal and he owns everything and everyone. Solomon’s wisdom was a derived wisdom, it came from God. Again, Jesus never said, “Thus says the Lord”, he always spoke in the first person, as if he were God.

If the Queen of Sheba was so amazed at Solomon’s greatness and saw so clearly God’s presence and blessing in his life, how much more ought the Jewish nation, who knew so much more and had so much more exposure to Jesus have been impressed with Jesus and acknowledged God’s presence and blessing in his life? Instead, they say he operates by Satan’s power and demand he prove himself. What would have happened to the Queen of the South if she would have persisted in questioning and doubting the greatness of Solomon after she saw all his greatness?

What does Jesus mean when he says that the Ninevites and the queen of the south will arise at the judgement and condemn “this generation”? Use your imagination in envisioning that scene.

On the day of judgement Jesus will be seated on his throne and all people will stand before him to receive the verdict of his judgement (Matthew 25: 31-33 & Rev. 20:11-15). As the Jewish nation protests their innocence and attempt to argue that they do not deserve hell but rather ought to be rewarded with heaven Jesus will call forward the Ninevites and the queen of Sheba. They will tell of hearing the preaching of Jonah and of seeing the glory of Solomon and of how they repented of their sins and submitted to the rule of God through Solomon, respectively. Then Jesus will say to them, “If these, who had so much less revelation from God than you, repented and believed, what excuse do you have since you received so much information and kindness from God in me?”

HE ASSURES HIS PEOPLE OF HIS LOVE

Matthew 12: 38-50

INTRODUCTION

“Prove it!” “Put up or shut up.” These are common challenges on the playgrounds and in the gym. This is what we say to people who boast of their prowess in any field of endeavor. This is what we say to our politicians when they are elected after 3 months of promise making during the campaign. While we may not say it, this is what we often think about our friends and family members who say they love us. If we are honest, this is how most of us talk to God, at least on occasion.

The religious leaders of Israel say this to Jesus in Matt. 12:38. Who can blame them? Jesus has told them they are worse than the vile and idol worshipping people who lived in Tyre, Sidon, Sodom and Gomorrah. He has claimed that no one knows the Father except he and those to whom he chooses to reveal the Father. He claims to be the Lord of the Sabbath who alone gives rest and at whose command Sabbath keeping is ended. Finally, he has just told them that by attributing his works of healing and exorcism to Satan, they have crossed the line and will never be forgiven by God. So they say to him, “Prove it! Put up or shut up!”

In answering this challenge Jesus shows us how it is that he assures people of his identity, power and love. He does it through his condemnation of the Pharisees and through his commendation of his disciples. If we will pay careful attention we can discover how he assures his people of his love.

STUDY

How does Jesus respond to the request of the Pharisees and teachers of the law when they ask for a sign?

He is very stern and calls them a wicked and adulterous generation.

Define what Jesus means by “wicked”, “adulterous” and “generation”. Look up these OT passages to help: Psalm 1, Psalm 10: 2-11, Ezekial 16: 8-26.

- ◆ *WICKED: This is the most often used term in the OT for the enemies of God. They are characterized by pride, self-reliance, hatred, violence, oppression of the weak, despising of God, no fear of his judgement.*
- ◆ *ADULTEROUS: This is a very common description of the people of Israel who were unfaithful to the Lord by making idols and engaging in the*

worship of false gods. Their adultery reached its climax in the sacrificing of their children to the idols of Molech and Chemosh.

- ◆ *GENERATION: Jesus’ use of this word shows that it isn’t only the religious leaders of Israel who are demanding a sign, but the whole nation. This demand for Jesus to prove himself is evidence that the entire nation of Israel has abandoned God in wickedness and in idolatry.*

In light of Jesus’ harsh condemnation of these people, what is surprising about the end of v. 39 and then v. 40?

He says they will get no sign but then he says he is going to give them a sign. He condemns them for their unbelieving, skeptical demand but then he graciously says that he is going to give a sign that proves that he is who he claims to be.

Read Jonah 1 & 2:10. What is the sign that Jesus is going to give?

The sign that will be given is his death, burial and resurrection from the dead. Jonah was as good as dead when they threw him overboard and was buried in the belly of the fish three days and nights and then was “resurrected” on the third day when the fish vomited him up on dry land. (NOTE: You may get asked how it can be that Jesus says here that he will be buried for three days and three nights when from the accounts of his death and resurrection it appears that he was put in the tomb on Friday evening and was resurrected early (before 7am) Sunday morning. Thus he was in the grave for a portion of 3 daylight periods but only two nights. The answer is this. Nowhere are we told that Jonah was in the whale for 72 hours. Rather, 3 days/3 nights means that he was in the fish for a portion of 3, 24 hour periods. Just like when someone might ask me after I spent the weekend at my sister’s cottage, “how long were you at you sister’s?” I would respond “Three days.” Literally I arrived at her cottage Friday evening at 8pm and left Sunday at noon and so I was only there 40 hours, far short of three days. It is simply a shorthand way of speaking. So it was with Jonah and so with Jesus.)

Have you ever asked God to prove himself to you? Has God answered that request?

Jesus declares that God has convincingly proven himself in his death, burial and resurrection. Asking for more “proof” than this places us in the position of these Pharisees and exposes us to the same charge that Jesus made against them.