

Show Us A Sign

Our last study was about a sin that cannot be forgiven. It is a sin that some of the religious leaders of Jesus' day committed. It is called the unforgivable sin, and it is a sin that some can commit today if they credit the work of the Holy Spirit in Jesus' ministry to the demonic. That is, if they believe that the wonders, powers, and miracles performed by Jesus were performed by demonic power, then they have committed the unpardonable sin. The Pharisees came to this conclusion after watching Jesus perform many miracles and wonders. Since they were unwilling to accept the possibility that Jesus was God, they concluded that He was demon-possessed. What a tragic conclusion! Today some refuse to accept the possibility that Jesus is God too. As a result Jesus is called a wise man, a fictitious historical character, or a prophet. Those who hold such views have not committed the unpardonable sin, but they are headed in the wrong direction nevertheless.

WORDS AND CHARACTER. When we come to this study (Matt. 12:33-50), we find Jesus sharing an illustration. This one explains why people commit the unpardonable sin.

Either make the tree good and its fruit good, or make the tree bad and its fruit bad; for the tree is known by its fruit. (NASB) Matt. 12:33

The illustration is simple. It reveals that every man and woman is like a good or a bad tree. The Greek word that Jesus uses for "bad" is SAPRON. The word does not just refer to "bad," such as evil versus good. The word refers to something that is rotten: in this case, a rotten tree. It is an ugly word. Rotten trees do not produce good fruit or any fruit at all. If such trees do produce fruit, it is bland, tasteless, sour, or unappealing. But good trees produce beautiful, delicious fruit.

When Jesus said, "Either make the tree good . . . or make the tree bad . . ." He was indicating that everyone,

including the Pharisees, has a choice. Every moment of each day we choose to be good or rotten. Our words and actions will reveal our hearts and show others that we are good or rotten trees. Our words and actions are either bland, tasteless, unappealing and evil or they are beautiful, delicious and holy. A bad tree can pretend to be a good tree, but its fruit will eventually reveal that it is a rotten one.

God has told us throughout the scriptures that who we truly are is not our outward appearance and behavior but what we are on the inside.

For as he thinks within himself, so he is. . . (NASB) Prov. 23:7



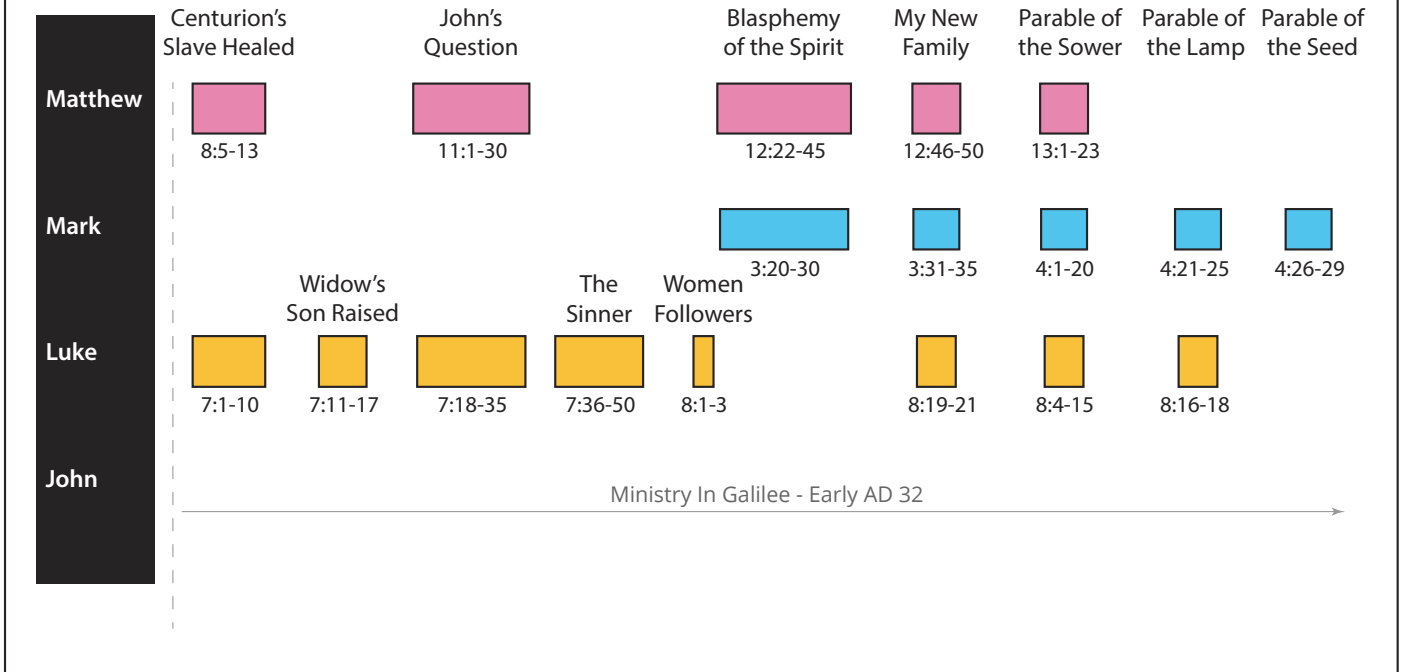
But the things that proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and those defile the man. (NASB) Matt. 15:18

The words of the Pharisees revealed that they were rotten trees on the inside. Jesus' statement was not aimed exclusively at the Pharisees. It applies today as well.

After the illustration, Jesus

Life and Heart of Jesus

Ministry In Galilee



described the heart of the Pharisees.

You brood of vipers, how can you, being evil, speak what is good?

For the mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart. (NASB)

Matt. 12:34

They were like a brood of snakes ready for the kill. They were rotten trees. They were evil, and the words of their mouths were like the bite of a snake and their poisonous example and false teaching motivated the people to become insensitive to God.

Then Jesus added another illustration. It was about a good man who distributes good things from his precious, priceless treasure.

The good man brings out of his good treasure what is good; and

the evil man brings out of his evil treasure what is evil. (NASB)

Matt. 12:35

An evil man distributes evil from his worthless treasure too! Both types of people distribute treasure. The evil treasure is

not stolen or tarnished valuables, but sinful, evil, or wicked deeds and words. We should not be surprised that some day our lives will be evaluated, every careless word will be reviewed. God will use these events from the lives of Christ-rejecting sinners to show them why they deserve eternal punishment.

But I tell you that every careless word that people speak, they shall give an accounting for it in the day of judgment. For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.” (NASB) Matt. 12:36-37.

Why will God use our words and actions to judge us? Our words objectively reveal our hearts - our true selves. Our actions are further proof.

WE WANT A SIGN? When the Pharisees heard this, they challenged Him. They attempted to embarrass Him by asking for something that they believed He could not do.

Then some of the scribes and Pharisees said to Him, “Teacher, we want to see a sign from You.” (NASB) Matt. 12:38

At first the first question might seem to be insignificant. But a quick review of the gospel accounts reveal that they were asking for something very special.

The first time that the Pharisees asked for a sign was in John 2:18,

The Jews then said to Him, “What sign do You show us as your authority for doing these things?” Jesus answered them, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.” (NASB) John 2:18-19

On that occasion, Jesus refused their request and offered them the future sign of His return to life after His death on the cross. The next time the word “sign” appears in the gospels occurs when Nicodemus comes to Jesus. Here is Nicodemus’ statement.

Now there was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews; this man came to Jesus by night and said to Him, “Rabbi, we know that You have come from God as a teacher; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him.” (NASB) John 3:1-2

When Nicodemus says that Jesus has been performing signs, he was referring to the miracles that Jesus had already performed. After Jesus healed the royal officer’s son, John 4:54 refers to that event as a sign,

This is again a second sign that Jesus performed when He had come out of Judea into Galilee. (NASB) John 4:54

In John 6:2 we are explicitly told that the miracles that Jesus was performing were signs.

A large crowd followed Him, because they saw the signs which He was performing on those who were sick. (NASB) John 6:2

Then in John 7:31 we read that many people believed in Jesus because of all the miracles that He was performing such as healing the blind, deaf, and mute. He had raised the dead, turned water into wine, fed 5,000 men, and cast out

demons. All of these were called signs in John 7:31,

But many of the crowd believed in Him; and they were saying, “When the Christ comes, He will not perform more signs than those which this man has, will He?” (NASB) John 7:31

Even the Pharisees agreed that Jesus was performing signs.

Therefore some of the Pharisees were saying, “This man is not from God, because He does not keep the Sabbath.” But others were saying, “How can a man who is a sinner perform such signs?” And there was a division among them. (NASB) John 9:16

After Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, the religious leaders admitted once again that Jesus was performing signs,

Therefore the chief priests and the Pharisees convened a council, and were saying, “What are we doing? For this man is performing many signs. (NASB) John 11:47

Our last passage is John 12:37. Here we read a disappointing fact,

But though He had performed so many signs before them, yet they were not believing in Him. (NASB) John 12:37

This quick survey reveals that the religious leaders had already seen signs. We discover even later in Jesus’ ministry that the Pharisees asked for a sign once again (Matt. 16:1-4) after they had seen many more miracles. So what were they asking for when they asked for a sign? The answer is that they were looking for a very significant sign such as the sky opening up, fire coming down from heaven, or the appearance of angels in the sky. They wanted an extraordinarily unbelievable sign and not just healings, raising the dead to life, or the multiplying of bread and fish.

Jesus responded by denying the explicit request that they were seeking.

But He answered and said to them, “An evil and adulterous generation craves for a sign; and yet no sign will be given to it but

the sign of Jonah the prophet; for just as JONAH WAS THREE DAYS AND THREE NIGHTS IN THE BELLY OF THE SEA MONSTER, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. (NASB) Matt. 12:39-40

The men of Nineveh will stand up with this generation at the judgment, and will condemn it because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and behold, something greater than Jonah is here. (NASB) Matt. 12:41

He called them an evil and adulterous generation because they had already witnessed enough signs to motivate them to believe. But because of the evil treasure in their hearts, they refused to believe. They were evil. Yet Jesus did promise them a sign. It would be a future sign. It would be the sign of His own return to life. His body would die, be buried for “three days and three nights” and then return to life.

It is important to note that the phrase “three days and three nights” as a Jewish idiom was a general term. Any part of a day was regarded as a day or night. In 2007, it is common for someone to say that they might be on travel for two days, but they do not mean that they will be on travel for exactly 48 hours. If they travel by an airline, they may leave in the early morning hours and then return in the late afternoon on the next day. Neither day would be a full 24 hour period. The same was true with Jesus. He left this world Friday afternoon and returned Sunday morning. The Jewish idiom agrees with our cultural usage even today. It is a mistake to force “three days and three nights” to fit some arbitrary mold of an exact 72 hours period. But a bad tree or an evil heart will want to ignore this reality in order to discredit Jesus.

NINEVEH BELIEVED. Jesus already knew what would happen to Him. He knew that the vast majority of the crowds as well as the religious leaders would ultimately reject Him. They would not believe the many signs that He had already performed and would perform. So Jesus pronounced judgment.

Have you ever wondered if signs would motivate someone to believe in God? Many today seek a sign as proof that Jesus was God. Yet, many saw Jesus perform signs who did not believe. Signs do not guarantee that people will believe.

Why did Jesus introduce Jonah and Nineveh? Jonah was the prophet who did not want to obey God and preach in the city of Nineveh. He was the prophet who was thrown out

of a boat and into the Mediterranean Sea and was then swallowed by a huge fish. Jonah eventually yielded to God, was spit out onto a beach, and later preached to the people in the city of Nineveh. He did not do any signs. He just simply preached a call to repentance and the people repented. Yet, Jesus performed signs and preached and only a few in comparison were repenting. Therefore in the future judgment, the men of Nineveh will condemn the unbelieving generation of Jesus’ day.

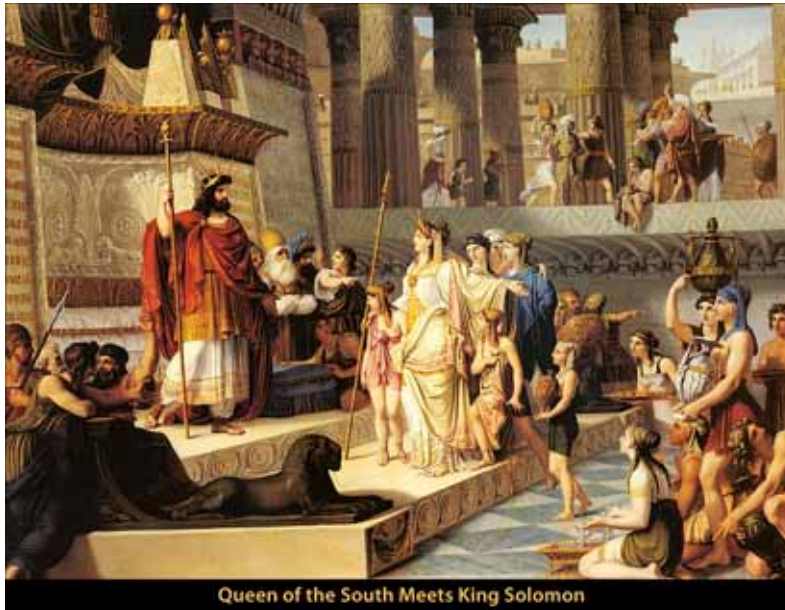
QUEEN OF THE SOUTH. The same will be true of the Queen of the South. She had travelled from southern Arabia to hear the wisdom of King Solomon.

The Queen of the South will rise up with this generation at the judgment and will condemn it, because she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and behold, something greater than Solomon is here. (NASB) Matt. 12:42

She was not looking for signs and wonders. She simply wanted to hear King Solomon. Today we can read King Solomon’s wisdom in the book of Proverbs and the Song of



Solomon. Today we can relive Jonah’s adventure and thrill in his ministry. Today we can read about Jesus’ miracles and listen to Him preach as we read the gospels. Yes, Solomon was a king and Jonah was a prophet, but Jesus was God who took on human flesh. Why did the Ninevites respond? Why did the Queen of the South respond? Why didn’t the generation of Jesus’ day respond?



PROMISE OF JUDGMENT. Then Jesus concluded with the following illustration.

Now when the unclean spirit goes out of a man, it passes through waterless places seeking rest, and does not find it. Then it says, ‘I will return to my house from which I came’; and when it comes, it finds it unoccupied, swept, and put in order. Then it goes and takes along with it seven other spirits more wicked than itself, and they go in and live there; and the last state of that man becomes worse than the first. That is the way it will also be with this evil generation.” (NASB) Matt. 12:43-45

The encounter with the religious leaders started when Jesus cast out a demon from a man who was blind and mute. So it appears that Jesus picks-up on this miracle and then uses it to make a point. His illustration is simple. If an evil spirit is exorcised and cannot find a new home, he will return to his old home in order to determine if he can return. When the demon returns, he discovers that he can possess the man once again; therefore, he brings along seven new friends. The final spiritual condition of the man was worse than in the beginning.

Then Jesus added a shocking comment, “So it will be with this evil generation.” The generation had seen and would see Jesus perform many signs. They had heard and would

hear Jesus preach many messages. Some were already rejecting Jesus, including most of the religious leaders. Others would reject Him in the future. Jesus, who was the light of the world, came shining in the darkness, and the darkness rejected Him because it did not understand.

The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it. (NASB) John 1:5

The darkness refers to the spiritual condition of every man and woman who has not believed in Jesus Christ. Those who reject God are in a worse condition than those who seek Him and find Him.

MY TRUE FAMILY. The next two verses tell us that while Jesus has been speaking to the crowds in the inner patio of the house His mother and brothers had arrived.

While He was still speaking to the crowds, behold, His mother and brothers were standing outside, seeking to speak to Him. Someone said to Him, “Behold, Your mother and Your brothers are standing outside seeking to speak to You.” (NASB) Matt. 12:46-47

The Greek verb translated as “standing” is a pluperfect. This reveals that Jesus’ family had been standing outside for some time waiting to get inside to see Jesus. Finally someone, perhaps shouting over the crowds, told Jesus that His family had been standing outside.

Jesus’ response was unexpected.

But Jesus answered the one who was telling Him and said, “Who is My mother and who are My brothers?” And stretching out

His hand toward His disciples, He said, "Behold My mother and My brothers! For whoever does the will of My Father who is in heaven, he is My brother and sister and mother." (NASB) Matt. 12:48-50

We should not conclude from Jesus' statement that He did not love His family. When Jesus was dying on the cross, He asked the beloved disciple, John, to care for His mother (John 19:25-27). That was not a act of indifference. Instead, Jesus gave His mother to the beloved disciple, to someone He knew would care for her. So why did Jesus say, ". . . whoever does the will of My Father who is in heaven, he is My brother and sister and mother"? The answer is that Jesus' was speaking of a spiritual family. It is composed of those who believe in Him. That is the message of the following passages,

But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name . . . (NASB) John 1:12

The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him so that we may also be glorified with Him (NASB) Rom. 8:16-17

Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is. (NASB) 1 John 3:2

Ultimately, this is the only family that counts. The religious leaders were unwilling to obey God, unwilling to submit to Jesus, unwilling to believe and unwilling to humble themselves. But those who truly believe in Jesus want to do the will of God. The main mark of true faith in God is the desire to submit, yield, and obey Him. Those who do the will of God are those who have believed in Jesus - those who belong to God's spiritual family.

CONCLUSION. Those who reject Jesus Christ because they believe that His miracles were not real, were just magic

tricks, were performed with demonic powers or were imagined have committed a great error. Those who have concluded that Jesus' signs were performed by demonic powers have committed the unpardonable sin. They are in the deepest of troubles. The Jewish religious leaders committed this sin because they had concluded that Jesus was demon-possessed.

This is a sober warning to those who reject Jesus' miracles as some ancient Egyptian magic trick or the work of Satan himself. The following words are the words of Jesus, not the words of this author,

For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life. (NASB) John 3:16

For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him. He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. This is the judgment, that the Light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the Light, for their deeds were evil. (NASB) John 3:17-19

Jesus is our God. He calls us to believe Him. True belief will respond with repentance over sin and seek His forgiveness. True belief will also yield to Him. If you believe in Jesus, want your sins forgiven and are ready to follow Him, then please tell Him!