

A Sign From Heaven

Mark 8:1-13

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¹In those days, when again a great crowd had gathered, and they had nothing to eat, he called his disciples to him and said to them, ²*“I have compassion on the crowd, because they have been with me now three days and have nothing to eat. ³And if I send them away hungry to their homes, they will faint on the way. And some of them have come from far away.”* ⁴And his disciples answered him, “How can one feed these people with bread here in this desolate place?” ⁵And he asked them, *“How many loaves do you have?”* They said, “Seven.” ⁶And he directed the crowd to sit down on the ground. And he took the seven loaves, and having given thanks, he broke them and gave them to his disciples to set before the people; and they set them before the crowd. ⁷And they had a few small fish. And having blessed them, he said that these also should be set before them. ⁸And they ate and were satisfied. And they took up the broken pieces left over, seven baskets full. ⁹And there were about four thousand people. And he sent them away. ¹⁰And immediately he got into the boat with his disciples and went to the district of Dalmanutha.

¹¹The Pharisees came and began to argue with him, seeking from him a sign from heaven to test him. ¹²And he sighed deeply in his spirit and said, *“Why does this generation seek a sign? Truly, I say to you, no sign will be given to this generation.”* ¹³And he left them, got into the boat again, and went to the other side.

For this morning, I would like to focus on verses 11 through 13 only.

In verse 11, we see the Pharisees coming to question or argue with Jesus. They want to test Jesus. They demand a sign from heaven. And Jesus tells them that no sign will be given to them.

When we began the Gospel of Mark, we have been seeing the Pharisees and scribes opposing Jesus for what he said, what he did and for who he said he was. The Pharisees were lay religious leaders in the first century temple system. The Pharisees were deeply religious but self-righteous.

Jesus said about them - *“So you also outwardly appear righteous to others, but within you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness”* Matthew 23:28.

You don't have to be religious to be self-righteous. You just have to have a standard that you think is right to you and then impose it on others without you yourself following it. The Pharisees preached but did not practice what they preached. And they imposed on

others stricter laws than they themselves would not follow.

To navigate this passage, I would like to draw your attention to four major points:

The *heart* of the self-righteous.

The *motive* of the self-righteous.

The *demand* of the self-righteous.

Jesus' response to the self-righteous.

1. In Mark chapter 2, before Jesus healed a paralyzed man, Jesus told him that his sins were forgiven. And the scribes accused him of *blasphemy*. (Mark 2:6-7)
2. Then, after Jesus called Levi to be his disciple, Jesus has a meal at his house. And there were many tax collectors and sinners at Levi's house. There the Pharisees say, "why does he man eat with tax collectors and sinners?" Jesus tells them that he came to call sinners to repent not for self-righteous people. (Mark 2:16-17)
3. Later, in the same chapter, the Pharisees accuse disciples of breaking the Law by when they saw them pluck grain on a Sabbath. Jesus tells them that He is the Lord of the Sabbath. (Mark 2:24)
4. In Mark chapter 3, when Jesus healed the disabled man on a Sabbath day, the Pharisees were so angry and conspired to destroy Jesus. (Mark 3:6). Later, they accuse Jesus of driving demons out by the prince of demons himself – Beelzebul. And Jesus tells them that blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is an unforgivable sin. (Mark 3:29).
5. One more, in Mark, the Pharisees accuse Jesus's disciples of not following their tradition. And you heard what Jesus called them – Hypocrites!

So, the Pharisees, strict and religious as they may seem, are really enemies of the Gospel. They are antagonists. They are adversaries of the Lord Jesus Christ. And adversaries of Jesus are enemies of God.

The *heart* of the self-righteous: Hypocrisy and Unbelief!

Why do they want to question or argue with Jesus?

To test him.

The *motive* of the self-righteous: Test God!

"If anyone is inclined to be contentious, we have no such practice." 1 Corinthians 11:16

When the devil tempted Jesus, he said this three times –

- *If you are the Son of God, then turn these stones to bread. If you worship me, I will*

give all the kingdoms of the world. If you are the Son of God, jump off the cliff. Luke 4. Jesus is already the Son of God. Jesus does not need to prove anything to Satan.

One of the biggest lies we tell ourselves sometimes is that you are not a child of God.

- If have repented and trusted in Jesus Christ alone, then you are justified or have been declared righteous. You have the righteousness of Christ by faith in Christ and therefore you are a child of God. Sure, there are times, when we doubt. And with doubt we can get cynical of God. But God does not need prove anything to us. The real issue is if you are living and conducting yourself as children of God.
- John writes in his first epistle *“By this it is evident who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil: whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother.* 1 John 3:10

The *demand* of the self-righteous: Prove God by doing a miracle!

Matthew’s gospel describes the request this way in two places:

1. Then some of the scribes and Pharisees answered him, saying, “Teacher, we wish to see a sign from you.” Matthew 12:28
2. And the Pharisees and Sadducees came, and to test him they asked him to show them a sign from heaven. Matthew 16:1

So, the Pharisees want to question Jesus in order to test him. They really want a sign from heaven. They want Jesus to prove irrefutably with a miracle or a sign from heaven that he is what he claimed to be.

The Israelites were given plenty of signs and wonders by the hand of God’s prophets.

1. When Moses was hesitant to go to Pharaoh, God allowed Moses to perform wonders through his staff. Exodus 4:1-2
2. God parted the Red Sea to bring them out of Egypt.
3. God provided manna for forty years in the desert.

Remember Gideon? Of the judges in ancient Israel. Gideon wanted to test God.

- *“Then Gideon said to God, “If you will save Israel by my hand, as you have said, behold, I am laying a fleece of wool on the threshing floor. If there is dew on the fleece alone, and it is dry on all the ground, then I shall know that you will save Israel by my hand, as you have said.”* Judges 6:36-40.

Gideon’s prayer sounds presumptuous. God had already determined to save Israel.

Jesus’ *response* to the self-righteous: Crucifixion and Resurrection!

Verse 12.

¹² And he sighed deeply in his spirit and said, “*Why does this generation seek a sign? Truly, I say to you, no sign will be given to this generation.*”

Jesus sighs at the demand of the Pharisees. Jesus sighs because of their unbelief! Matthew’s Gospel records for us a longer response from Jesus.

³⁹ But he answered them, “*An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. ⁴⁰ For just 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 at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and behold, something greater than Jonah is here.*” Matthew 12:39-41

² He answered them, “*When it is evening, you say, ‘It will be fair weather, for the sky is red.’ ³ And in the morning, ‘It will be stormy today, for the sky is red and threatening.’ You know how to interpret the appearance of the sky, but you cannot interpret the signs of the times. ⁴ An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of Jonah.*” Matthew 16:2-4

John’s Gospel records the following:

So the Jews said to him, “What sign do you show us for doing these things?” ¹⁹ Jesus answered them, “*Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.*” John 2:18-19

Mark says no sign will be given. Matthew says no sign will be given except the sign of Jonah. John says the sign Jesus will give is destruction of the temple his body.

What is the sign of Jonah?

1. Jonah was a prophet of God. God told him to go the gentile city of Nineveh to call them to repentance. However, Jonah disobeys God and takes ship journey in the opposite direction. God hurls a huge storm to warn Jonah. Jonah realizes his disobedience and asks to be thrown overboard.
2. God is gracious and appoints a whale to swallow him and keep his alive. For what? To complete his mission to Nineveh.
3. Later, the whale spits out Jonah. And he fulfills his mission.

Jonah being drowned, being swallowed and living again is allegorical to Jesus dying, being buried and rising from the dead. This is the sign of Jonah.

So, Jesus tells them. You want a sign from heaven, a miracle, a wonder? The only sign they will get is the sign of Jonah – Jesus’ death and resurrection!

- Jonah was disobedient to God. Jesus was never disobedient.
- Jonah was disciplined for his disobedience and he repented.
- Jesus never sinned but was punished, humiliated, beaten and crucified because I sinned and you sinned. Jesus took all the punishment that I deserved for my sin and your sin. Jesus was wounded for your sin to purchase your forgiveness.
- God appointed a whale to save Jonah. Jonah was rescued from the mouth of the whale by God’s power. Jesus rose from the dead by his own power.
“No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again.” John 10:18
- God appointed His Son Jesus Christ to be a substitute in my place. You and I were the transgressors but Jesus was numbered among the transgressors. If God were to hurl his wrath on us, we would deserve it for our sinful disobedience against God.

This is the only sign Jesus said he would give. You know what these Pharisees said at the trial of Jesus?

“And some stood up and bore false witness against him, saying, ‘We heard him say, ‘I will destroy this temple that is made with hands, and in three days I will build another, not made with hands.’” Mark 14: 57-58

For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles. 1 Corinthians 1:22-23

The Gospel sounds very foolish to the world. It is one of shame, suffering, dying and humiliation of Jesus. And yet in Jesus Christ, you have righteousness and redemption!

----- Discipleship Questions-----

MESSAGE SUMMARY: A Sign From Heaven. Mark 8:1-13

HEAD: These questions help you examine the truth of God's Word.

1. Why do the Pharisees demand a sign from Jesus? How would you describe their heart condition and motive? What do you observe from Jesus' response?

HEART: These questions help you wrestle with what you believe.

2. Do you believe *testing* God is presumptuous? Why? What do you see that the Pharisees weren't able to? Why is the Cross of Christ the remedy for all our ills?
3. What is God convicting you of and to believe in light of this message?

HANDS/HABITS: These questions help you bring the truth into your everyday life and develop behaviors that change your habits.

4. For personal reflection: Distinguish between your faith and the religion of the Pharisees? Why is self-righteousness an impediment to faith?