

Matthew 12E

- Today we reach the end of the first half of Matthew...it only took us 18 months
 - That division isn't reflected by the chapter count of the book
 - There are 28 chapters in Matthew but we're only at Chapter 12
 - Nevertheless, thematically the book divides distinctly between Chapters 12 & 13
 - And we'll look at that divide more next week
 - Meanwhile, let's finish the first half where today we find a fascinating exchange between Jesus and the Pharisees
 - Jesus has just condemned the nation for their failure to recognize and accept the signs Jesus performed
 - We've studied that crucial moment for the past 2 weeks, when Jesus gave the nation incontrovertible proof He was the Messiah
 - Then, the Pharisees dismissed Jesus' miracle as the work of Satan, and in doing so, they crossed a line
 - Jesus said they committed the unpardonable sin, a national transgression that results in Israel losing the Kingdom for a time
 - So Jesus withdrew the offer of the Kingdom from His people, and initiates the Kingdom Program
 - This program begins with Jesus training His disciples to carry on the mission of the Church in Jesus' absence
 - Specifically, His disciples will recruit men and women to be Jesus' disciples; citizens of the future Kingdom when it arrives
 - And as we learned last week that Kingdom will also include Israel, as the Lord promised
 - But Jesus will not return to set up His Kingdom until Israel cries out for Him
 - Or as Jesus said last week, you will not see me until you say Blessed is He Who comes in the name of the Lord

- So since Jesus was rejected by the nation at His first appearing, He demands that the entire nation receive Him before He returns
- That incredible series of events has happened simply because the nation wouldn't acknowledge the Spirit's irrefutable signs
 - Which is particularly ironic when you look at what happens next
 - The Pharisees demand Jesus grant them yet another sign

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

Matt. 12:39 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;

Matt. 12:40 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.

Matt. 12:41 "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.

- Back in v.37, Jesus told the religious leaders they would be accountable for the careless words they spoke in denying Jesus' miracle
 - And I imagine that rebuke caught those men off guard, and perhaps they became a bit defensive
 - Perhaps they worried they may have appeared hasty in their judgments, so they try to recover with a question trying to look objective
 - They ask Jesus for a sign that they could know He was telling the truth
 - On its face, such a question would be reasonable and even wise (since false Messiahs were common in Israel)
 - But coming as it did on the heels of Jesus' Messianic miracle just a moment earlier, their question was a joke
 - They're implying that Jesus hadn't done enough to prove Himself so they lacked sufficient proof to reach a conclusion

- Yet Jesus' earlier sign was so conclusive that even the uneducated Jewish crowds were able to recognize Jesus as the Son of David
- So certainly, Israel's learned religious leaders had seen enough to know the truth
 - No, their issue wasn't a "skill" problem...it was a "will" problem
 - And Jesus knew it, so He responds to their request more harshly than before
 - He says that an evil and adulterous generation craves for a sign
- The first thing we need to notice about that response is that Jesus speaks against that entire generation of Israel, not just these leaders or this crowd
 - This confirms what we learned last week that the unforgivable sin was a national sin, not an individual sin
 - The entire nation fell under judgment for failing to receive Jesus as their Messiah
 - How can Jesus condemn an entire nation for the actions of a few?
 - First, the religious leaders were the representatives of the people, in the same way that our nation's leaders represent each of us
 - Just as our nation is bound by the decisions that our representatives make on our behalf
 - So as the religious leaders declared Jesus to be Satan, they were acting on behalf of the nation
 - Secondly, as we've seen, the nation willingly followed these leaders' judgments
 - When they said Jesus had a demon, the people agreed with that assessment
 - There's no evidence in the Gospels that the crowds objected to their leaders' conclusions
 - Thirdly, this scene may have involved only a very small percentage of the nation but their actions were indicative of the nation's heart

- We know that the crowds turned against Jesus at the end of His life
- And we still see the Jewish people today set against Jesus and Christianity
- So while this scene involved a small number of people, Jesus knew the hearts of all people and they were against Him
- Finally, if you're still concerned that Jesus was unfair to Israel by condemning the entire nation because of these Pharisees, remember this is a national judgment
 - Jesus condemned the nation for rejecting Him, but that didn't prevent individual Jews of that generation from placing faith in Jesus
 - Jews could and did receive forgiveness and eternal life when they placed faith in Jesus
 - That opportunity has always been available for Israel and still is today
 - The sin of rejecting Jesus was a national sin and the consequence of that unforgivable sin were also a national consequence...
 - Israel suffered the loss of the Kingdom in that day
 - And Jesus declared they would lose their temple ("house")
 - And ultimately, Israel lost access to their land for a time
 - That's why Jesus is speaking here in terms of a generation, because He's pronouncing judgment on the entire nation, not individuals
- And in response to the Pharisees' request for a sign, Jesus says that only an evil and adulterous generation craves or seeks for a sign
 - Now why is seeking for a sign evil? Didn't Gideon seek for a sign? Hasn't God provided men with signs from time to time?
 - Yes, and here's the difference...it's not wrong to seek signs when your intent is to understand how to obey
 - But it is a sin to seek for signs as an excuse for not obeying
 - In the first case, a person (like Gideon) asks God for a sign because he or she is unsure of what action pleases God

- In the second case, the person (like the Pharisees) knows exactly what God wants, but they act as if they are unsure so they don't have to obey
- It's like pretending you didn't hear your spouse or your boss
- Jesus says the real reason they ask Him for another sign was because they were evil and adulterous
 - Evil refers to the Pharisees' general ungodliness...they were unbelieving men who pretended to know God yet were far from Him
 - And they have adulterous hearts because they seek for other gods of their own making rather than submitting to the true God
 - They made pursuit of God through the Law an idol of sorts
 - And when your heart is set on another, you will not love the one you have
- Therefore, Jesus says the only sign He will offer this generation from this point onward is the sign of Jonah
 - Up to this point in Jesus' earthly ministry, the Lord has been performing sign after sign after sign to prove Himself to Israel
 - In addition to casting out the mute demon, Jesus healed lepers; which is another Messianic miracle
 - Furthermore, He's taught with authority, healed multitudes, multiplied fish and loaves, walked on water, etc., etc.
 - Truly, the signs have been everywhere, and the size of Jesus' crowds testifies to their impact
 - But now Jesus says there will be no more signs to the people
 - From this point in Matthew's narrative, Jesus no longer performs miracles strictly for the purpose of proving Himself to crowds
 - From this point forward in the Gospel, Jesus only performs miracles for those who demonstrate faith in Him first
 - And afterward, Jesus ends each encounter by commanding the person not to tell people Who He is
 - And this shift makes sense...

- Why perform signs to convince Israel He is the Messiah when Israel has committed the unpardonable sin
- The nation was no longer eligible to receive the Kingdom...the offer had been withdrawn, so giving signs would be pointless
- In v.40 Jesus says there will be only one exception to His “no sign” policy...He will give them the sign of Jonah
 - Jonah was a Jewish prophet sent by God to preach a message of repentance to a city of the Assyrians called Nineveh
 - Jonah opposed God’s plan because he despised the Assyrians
 - So rather than obey God’s call, Jonah flees from God by hiring a ship to take him far from Israel
 - Eventually, Jonah finds himself swallowed alive by a large fish
 - The Lord leaves Jonah there for a time to convince Jonah to fulfill his appointed mission
 - But Jonah’s stubborn...he’s so stubborn that it requires three days and three nights inside that fish before he changes his mind
 - Jesus says Jonah’s experience in the fish will serve as a picture or a sign of something Jesus would do in His ministry
 - Specifically at the end of v.40, Jesus says He will spend three days and three nights in the heart of the earth
 - In other words, the sign of Jonah refers to the death and resurrection of the Messiah
 - Jonah was left for dead yet after three days he walked the earth again, and so it will be for Jesus
 - Though in Jesus’ case, he will actually die and be raised again
 - The resurrection is the one and only remaining sign that Jesus will offer Israel to prove He is their Messiah
 - Some will believe it, and those who do will be saved
 - In fact, believing in the sign of Jonah has become the means of personal salvation for everyone
 - Remember Paul’s teaching in Romans

[Rom. 10:9](#) that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved;

- Saving faith requires believing in the sign of Jonah, Paul says
- But other than that sign, Jesus would no longer preach the Kingdom to Israel...that time had come and gone
- Which is why in v.41 Jesus says that at the judgment the men of Nineveh, the ones who heard Jonah's preaching, will judge this generation of Israel
 - In the story of Jonah, here's what happens once Jonah finally obeys God and goes to Nineveh

[Jonah 3:1](#) Now the word of the LORD came to Jonah the second time, saying,

[Jonah 3:2](#) "Arise, go to Nineveh the great city and proclaim to it the proclamation which I am going to tell you."

[Jonah 3:3](#) So Jonah arose and went to Nineveh according to the word of the LORD. Now Nineveh was an exceedingly great city, a three days' walk.

[Jonah 3:4](#) Then Jonah began to go through the city one day's walk; and he cried out and said, "Yet forty days and Nineveh will be overthrown."

[Jonah 3:5](#) Then the people of Nineveh believed in God; and they called a fast and put on sackcloth from the greatest to the least of them.

[Jonah 3:6](#) When the word reached the king of Nineveh, he arose from his throne, laid aside his robe from him, covered himself with sackcloth and sat on the ashes.

[Jonah 3:7](#) He issued a proclamation and it said, "In Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles: Do not let man, beast, herd, or flock taste a thing. Do not let them eat or drink water.

[Jonah 3:8](#) "But both man and beast must be covered with sackcloth; and let men call on God earnestly that each may turn from his wicked way and from the violence which is in his hands.

[Jonah 3:9](#) "Who knows, God may turn and relent and withdraw His burning anger so that we will not perish."

[Jonah 3:10](#) When God saw their deeds, that they turned from their wicked way, then God relented concerning the calamity which He had declared He would bring upon them. And He did not do it.

- Jonah arrives at a great city, a city so large it would take you three days to walk through it all

- A man could walk about 20 miles in a day, so we're talking about a city about the same size as our city
- Imagine walking through San Antonio preaching the Gospel... what impact would you expect to make? Maybe convert a handful?
- In Jonah's case, he gets barely a third of the way through the city with his message of repentance and it catches fire among the people
 - Jonah's preaching triggers a city-wide revival...the idol worshippers of that city all turned to God
 - Even the king of the city is converted
- Therefore, Jesus says that city of idol worshipping Gentiles will stand with Jesus at the judgment condemning the generation of Israel that rejected Christ
 - And why does Jesus say they should judge Israel? Because they were willing to receive the message from far less a messenger
 - Consider the ministry of Jonah vs. the ministry of Jesus
 - Certainly, we know Jesus' ministry was impressive...He was Messiah!
 - Jesus performed unfathomable miracles, taught with awe-inspiring authority
 - Jonah, on the other hand, was an ordinary man of no significance to the Assyrians
 - Moreover Jesus deeply desired to convince His people Israel that He was the Messiah
 - We studied last week how Jesus declared "Oh Jerusalem, Jerusalem...how I wanted to gather you..."
 - On the other hand Jonah didn't even want to go to Nineveh much less to preach to them
 - In fact, after the account of Jonah's preaching in Chapter 3, we read this in the first verse of Jonah 4

Jonah 4:1 But it greatly displeased Jonah and he became angry.

- Jonah had just participated in the greatest revival in the history of the world up to that point
- And his response to that miracle was to be angry and displeased with the outcome
- So knowing Jonah's heart, how enthusiastically do you think Jonah preached his message to that city?
 - Do you suppose he preached with gusto? Do you think he tried to be persuasive?
 - The text doesn't say, but I'm fairly certain it wasn't the most compelling presentation
- So that's the contrast Jesus is making here...
 - The community that received probably the least enthusiastic Gospel presentation in the history of Gospel presentations, responded with sackcloth and ashes
 - While the privileged nation of Israel received the most generous revelation of God in all history yet dismissed it with careless words
- Moving on, Jesus offers a second comparison

Matt. 12:42 "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.

- This comparison relies on another Old Testament story of a Gentile conversion, this time of a queen from Arabia
 - Her story is recorded in 1 Kings 10, and Jesus summarizes the story succinctly in v.42
 - The queen had heard that Solomon was gifted with extraordinary wisdom by God so she traveled a great distance to hear him
- And like Nineveh, this woman was working off little revelation
 - She had just heard rumors about Solomon – nevertheless that was enough for her to make a journey to know more

- So at the judgement the queen will be there, clothed in Christ's righteousness, condemning Israel for ignoring such great revelation
- Jesus' point is Israel has received more than enough data, because others have done far more with far less, so they didn't need more signs
 - But there's a lesson for Christians here too...because we too need to be careful about seeking signs and ignoring revelation
 - Christians often ask the question, "How do I know what the Lord wants me to do?" Or "How do I know His will?"
 - In my experience, the vast majority of the time the person asking that question has all the data they need to answer the question
 - They claim to need more signs, when in reality they have already received God's word, and so all that remains is to obey
 - I like to say there is a time to pray and seek the Lord's counsel, and then there's a time to get off your knees and do what you've been told
 - We're so good at this game that I think we often fool ourselves at times
 - We believe our own claims of ignorance...and to be fair, sometimes those claims are accurate
 - Sometimes we truly are ignorant of what God has said, because we aren't studying it, but that kind of ignorance is not an excuse
 - We need to be careful about playing such games, because the Lord says the more revelation we receive the greater the expectation for obedience
 - So I ask you, who has received greater revelation? The Israel of Jesus' day or us today?
 - Consider for a moment that we have received everything they did, recorded in the Gospels, and we have much more beyond that
 - So who has the higher expectation of obedience?
 - We can't afford to handle the word we've received lightly
 - We have to take what we learn and do the right thing with it

- And I think this is especially true for us, a group of Christians working to establish a Bible teaching community like ours
 - As Paul warns the church

[Eph. 5:15](#) Therefore be careful how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise,

[Eph. 5:16](#) making the most of your time, because the days are evil.

[Eph. 5:17](#) So then do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.

- Before we move on, there are two interesting footnotes to Jesus' words in v.40
 - First, notice that Jesus says He will spend three days and three nights in the grave
 - The Gospels report Jesus rose from the grave before dawn on a Sunday
 - So if we count backward three days and nights from that point, we find that Jesus didn't die on a Friday as tradition holds
 - Instead, we discover that Jesus died on a Thursday...which is a reminder that we need read our Bibles carefully rather than relying on tradition
 - Secondly, notice Jesus says He spent that time in the heart of the earth
 - Jesus' words confirm that Hell is a real, literal, physical place
 - And the location of Hell is in the center of the earth, below our feet
 - If we could dig deep enough into the earth, we would find the place of burning and torment that holds the souls of the lost
- We end our lesson tonight with Jesus making one final observation about that generation of Israel

[Matt. 12:43](#) "Now when the unclean spirit goes out of a man, it passes through waterless places seeking rest, and does not find it.

[Matt. 12:44](#) "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.

[Matt. 12:45](#) "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."

- In this example, Jesus compares Israel to the body of a demon-possessed man
 - In this scenario, the demon, which Jesus calls an unclean spirit, goes out of a man
 - You'll remember from past weeks we learned that demons can only leave a body either if the body dies or they are cast out
 - In this scenario the man doesn't die, so that means Jesus is talking about a demon being cast out by God
 - So Jesus says if a demon is cast out of a person, it passes through waterless places seeking rest
 - To understand what Jesus is describing, let's define a couple of terms
 - The word "waterless" is the Greek word for dry, so the demon passed through dry places
 - In that day, passing through a dry place meant finding no accommodation, no town, no village, just barren wilderness
 - And therefore, "rest" in this context refers to a new body to indwell
 - So in this scenario, Jesus describes a demon cast out of a body yet finding no new body to indwell
 - So eventually, that demon returns to the only home it had
 - That "home" (meaning the previous body) was swept clean, Jesus says, which refers to the Lord having cast out the demon
 - And in the process, the man was made whole and healthy again
 - The removal of the demon was accompanied by a restoration of normality and proper thinking and behavior
- But ironically, the man's body has become an even more appealing target for that demon
 - Now that the man is clean and his body is in order, it offers that demon a renewed opportunity to create destruction
 - The demon will return to that body, Jesus says, and with a vengeance he will set up occupation again

- And now the demon goes to work tearing down the good work that the Lord did in freeing the man the first time
- In fact, Jesus says the demon will bring friends with him the second time; seven more (which is the number for completeness)
 - In other words, this time the demonic destruction of the man will be complete and he will not recover
 - The second state of that man will have become worse than the first
 - For in the first case, he was demon possessed, but in the second case he was legion possessed
- Now it didn't have to be that way for the man...there was a way in which he could have avoided that worse fate
 - When that first demon was sent out by God and the man's body was swept clean, his vessel could have been occupied
 - A different Spirit, the Holy Spirit, could have set up residence in that man's body
 - If that man believed in Jesus as Savior, then the Holy Spirit would have indwelt him
- And as a result, the Lord would have hung a "No vacancies" sign on the man's body and the demon be barred from entry
 - Because once the Spirit has us, the enemy never can again
 - Paul teaches in 1 Corinthians 10 & 2 Corinthians 6 that the two worlds do not mix, and the Lord will not share His children with demons
- That's Jesus' point to Israel...He came to Israel offering Himself to them by performing signs – including casting out demons from people
 - So in that sense, Jesus swept Israel's house clean and prepared it to receive Him as their King and Messiah
 - Had Israel done so, then He would have dwelled with them as He promised in His word

Ezek. 37:27 "My dwelling place also will be with them; and I will be their God, and they will be My people.

[Ezek. 37:28](#) “And the nations will know that I am the LORD who sanctifies Israel, when My sanctuary is in their midst forever.””

- That dwelling would have preserved Israel and protected them forever
- But since Israel rejected Jesus, then like the man in His example, the sweeping was useless and temporary
 - Jesus’ ministry was of no value to Israel...it accomplished nothing
 - All the great teaching, the miracles, the healings, the exorcisms amounted to nothing
 - The people forgot the teaching and miracles, and the people Jesus healed eventually died or were repossessed
 - And eventually that person faced their judgment, which was made worse for having rejected Jesus
 - Only if a person came to faith in Jesus did he or she receive the benefit of Jesus’ ministry
- And that was also true for the nation as a whole
 - The arrival of Israel’s Messiah didn’t produce lasting spiritual change for the nation
 - In fact, their future state would be worse than the first
 - Where before Israel had a temple, in the future they will not
 - Where before they lived in their land, though under occupation, in the future they will be denied access to the land
 - Where before the nation anticipated a Messiah, in the future Israel stops caring about a Messiah
 - That’s the danger of emphasizing physical, earthly outcomes over heavenly, spiritual outcomes
 - We may feed and clothe and treat people as part of our Christian service, but those activities are not the mission of the Church
 - The mission of the Church is to recruit people to become citizens of the Kingdom by faith in Jesus Christ

- If we only treat the body and not the soul, we have failed them and we have failed at the mission Jesus gave
 - The final state of suffering for those people will be worse than their initial state of suffering on earth was
 - And as a result, their future state will be worse than their prior state