

## Three Days

John 2:18-25

Three days that would change the world. Three days, from the crucifixion to the resurrection. Three days, and death would be conquered, the power of death brought to an end. Three days from death until life. Three days and the suffering of the cross would become a triumph. Jesus would rise from the dead on the third day.

That declaration was a central message which Jesus repeated frequently to his disciples, such as the words we read in,

Mark 9:31 “For He taught His disciples and said to them, “The Son of Man is being betrayed into the hands of men, and they will kill Him. And after He is killed, He will rise the third day.” 32 But they did not understand this saying, and were afraid to ask Him.”

And again,

Mark 10:33 “Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and to the scribes; and they will condemn Him to death and deliver Him to the Gentiles; 34 and they will mock Him, and scourge Him, and spit on Him, and kill Him. And the third day He will rise again.”

The same words were repeated to his disciples at least three times, but presumably the first time he spoke of his resurrection on the third day was here in John 2, shortly after the first miracle of turning water into wine, immediately after putting the moneychangers out of the temple at the time of the Passover feast.

The Jews responded to the cleansing of the temple by asking for a sign, and in one sense, that was appropriate. Jesus’ actions in cleansing the temple demonstrated much authority, even the

claim of God. Remember what he had said, “Take these things away! Do not make My Father's house a house of merchandise!”

Jesus claims God for his Father, and so the Jews ask for a sign so he could prove who he was.

v.18

Again, in one sense, that was appropriate. In fact, that is...

### I. THE PURPOSE OF MIRACULOUS SIGNS.

A sign is a miracle. And a miracle refers to a demonstration of supernatural power, the power that only God possesses. A sign is,

#### A. A demonstration of divine power.

In that context, perhaps you remember the words of King Nebuchadnezzar:

Dan. 4:1 “Nebuchadnezzar the king, To all peoples, nations, and languages that dwell in all the earth: Peace be multiplied to you. 2 I thought it good to declare the signs and wonders that the Most High God has worked for me. 3 How great are His signs, And how mighty His wonders! His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, And His dominion is from generation to generation.”

When Peter preached the gospel on the day of Pentecost, his conclusion was plain and simple,

Acts 2:21 “And it shall come to pass That whoever calls on the name of the Lord Shall be saved.”

Peter continued,

Acts 2:22 “Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a Man attested by God to you by miracles, wonders, and signs which God did through Him in your midst, as you yourselves also know— 23 Him, being delivered by the determined purpose and

foreknowledge of God, you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death; 24 whom God raised up, having loosed the pains of death, because it was not possible that He should be held by it.”

God raised him up! That was the the proof, the demonstration of God’s power at work in Jesus. That was the attestation, the validation. That’s what signs are for. And the climactic focal point of all the miraculous signs was the resurrection from the dead. Peter goes all the way back to Psalm 16 to speak of the first prophecy of the resurrection,

Acts 2:26 “Therefore my heart rejoiced, and my tongue was glad; Moreover my flesh also will rest in hope. 27 For You will not leave my soul in Hades, Nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption.”

And so as I preach the gospel to you today, I declare these signs to you as well. The signs of divine power are inseparable from the gospel itself. In a sense, the signs are the gospel. They are the power of God which is at work in the gospel. For this is the gospel preached by the Apostle Paul,

1 Cor. 15:3 “For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, 4 and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures.”

Thus this miraculous sign is also,

### **B. A call to faith in the truth of God’s word.**

That’s always the call, to believe! Believe God’s word to be true! Believe God’s supernatural power to be real. Believe God’s divine authority to be legitimate. Or as Paul puts it in,

Rom. 10:9 “...that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the

dead, you will be saved.”

The disciples heard Jesus and they believed!  
v.21-22

It took them awhile, as you discover reading through the gospels. They were pretty slow to believe, and they were very surprised and bewildered when the tomb was empty on the third day after the crucifixion, but in the end, they got it. “They believed the Scripture and the word which Jesus had said.”

The question is, do you? Do you believe in the supernatural power of God, the power to raise a man from the dead? Do you believe that God raised Jesus from the dead, according to the Scriptures, and that he was raised for our justification? If you believe that, and confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord, then you will be saved! That is the gospel invitation which I proclaim to you even this morning!

There was a problem, though, in our text. A problem with the Jews who were asking for a sign, and it was a problem of unbelief. Sometimes, when Jesus confronted that problem, he was rather blunt and direct,

Mat.12:38 Then some of the scribes and Pharisees answered, saying, "Teacher, we want to see a sign from You." 39 But He answered and said to them, "An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah.”

Now why is that? Why is the demand for a sign a characteristic of an evil and adulterous generation? Why? Because the signs had already been given, and rejected, disbelieved!

Mat.12:40 “For 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 in the judgment with this generation and condemn it, because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and indeed a greater than Jonah is here. 42 "The queen of the South will rise up in the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and indeed a greater than Solomon is here."

Thus, the demand for additional signs is a demonstration of unbelief!

Mat.16:1 Then the Pharisees and Sadducees came, and testing Him asked that He would show them a sign from heaven. 2 He answered and said to 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 foul weather today, for the sky is red and threatening.' Hypocrites! You know how to discern the face of the sky, but you cannot discern the signs of the times. 4 "A wicked and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and no sign shall be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah." And He left them and departed."

As we will see in John 2, there is evidence of spiritual blindness, and so we read something of an interesting response from Jesus in the context of spiritual blindness.

## **II. MIRACULOUS SIGNS AND SPIRITUAL BLINDNESS.**

Jesus veils the truth. He hides it, or makes it obscure.

### **A. The truth is veiled to unbelieving hearts.**

They ask directly for a sign, and,  
v.19

Their response was limited to the realm of physical life, natural

life. Their understanding was limited to a literal, surface level. In this case, they could only think about that earthly temple, that structure build by human hands that had taken 46 years to build.

v.20

They are mocking Jesus, in their wicked unbelief. They must think him to be out of his mind, speaking so foolishly as this. And they would later use his own words against him,

Mat.26:59 "Now the chief priests, the elders, and all the council sought false testimony against Jesus to put Him to death, 60 but found none. Even though many false witnesses came forward, they found none. But at last two false witnesses came forward 61 and said, "This fellow said, 'I am able to destroy the temple of God and to build it in three days.'" 62 And the high priest arose and said to Him, "Do You answer nothing? What is it these men testify against You?"

Likewise,

Mat.27:38 "Then two robbers were crucified with Him, one on the right and another on the left. 39 And those who passed by blasphemed Him, wagging their heads 40 and saying, "You who destroy the temple and build it in three days, save Yourself! If You are the Son of God, come down from the cross."

Jesus' own words were used against him, words that were a direct claim to his divine identity and authority where understood as words of blasphemy for which he would be condemned. Then accused him of claiming to destroy the temple, of changing the customs and laws of Moses.

And the problem? In their sinful wickedness, they missed the whole point. They missed the truth.

Amazingly, that is precisely what Jesus intended, for veiled

declarations of truth are a form of judgment upon the wicked, revealing and exposing their wickedness and making them more accountable for their sins. So Jesus intentionally gives the wicked unbelievers a sign that he knew they wouldn't understand, though it was a sign that his disciples would come to understand correctly.

That is the same thing Jesus does when he teaches in parables. The truth is veiled to unbelieving hearts. And so even this miracle is veiled, or hidden. Because,

**B. Miracles are insufficient to change unbelieving hearts.**

They saw the miracles of Jesus, and while many believed, these Jews did not. They were blind, unbelieving. And Jesus was well aware of that.

v.23-24

In other words, miracles do not work faith. Those whose hearts are hardened will be unchanged, unmoved, even by the presence of the power of God so obvious in the working of miracles.

Do you remember the rich man, in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus. The rich man died, in unbelief, and was being tormented by the flames of hell. In the parable, we're told that the rich man cried out to Abraham, wanting him to go to his family still alive on earth,

Luke 16:28 "...that he may testify to them, lest they also come to this place of torment.' 29 Abraham said to him, 'They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them.' 30 And he said, 'No, father Abraham; but if one goes to them from the dead, they will repent.' 31 But he said to him, 'If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rise from the dead.'"

In other words, if your heart is hard to begin with, you won't believe even if you see a miracle! Such demonstrations of God's power do not change the unbelieving heart of a fallen, sinful man. Not even a resurrection from the dead.

That explains Jesus' response to the Jews which we read about in,

v.23-25

On the surface, that seems strange. Perhaps even contradictory. "Many believed when they saw the signs which He did. But Jesus did not commit himself to them." And then the reference to his omniscience. "Because he knew all men." What is the relationship between,

**III. MIRACULOUS SIGNS AND GOD'S OMNISCIENCE.**

Let me explain these words as clearly as I can. I do not believe that the reference in verse 23 is genuine saving faith. They believed, yes, that's what the words say, but it was only an outward form of belief, and outward manifestation of faith. Not a true faith. Just a pretense of faith, an appearance of faith. In other words, hypocrites. Nominal believers, that is, in name only. Not in reality. Just in appearance. And that mere external and outward appearance,

**A. A pretense of faith will not bring salvation.**

v.24a "But Jesus did not commit Himself to them."

Jesus did not entrust himself to them. Jesus did not consider them to be genuine disciples. And that is a warning that we must always consider. It is a warning against an external form of religion that is lacking substance. An outward form of religion that lacks inward conviction, inward reality. It is a warning against simply appearing to be a Christian, when your heart is actually

unchanged. Pretending to believe, claiming to believe, but only in pretense.

At times, Jesus actually made it rather difficult to claim to be his disciple. He would warn those who had only a pretense of faith with words like this,

Luke 14:26 “If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters —yes, even his own life—he cannot be my disciple. 27 And anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.”

And then there are these words,

Mat. 7:21 “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. 22 Many will say to Me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?’ 23 And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!’”

It is a helpful warning to read those words, and a pointed warning against the hypocrisy of those who continue to want only the pretense of faith, not those who have true, believing faith. And it is not hard to define that distinction, for it comes down to whether or not you believe the Bible is really true.

Do you remember Jesus’ words to Mary and Martha, on the occasion of the death of their brother Lazarus,

John 11:23 Jesus said to her, “Your brother will rise again.” 24 Martha said to Him, “I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day.” 25 Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. 26 And whoever lives and believes in Me shall

never die. Do you believe this?”

That’s always the question. “Do you believe this?” That’s the question I will always press upon you as well, when I proclaim the Bible to you. “Do you believe this?”

Martha, had a great answer, and it must be our answer as well.

John 11:27 She said to Him, “Yes, Lord, I believe that You are the Christ, the Son of God, who is to come into the world.”

Rom. 10:9 “...if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.”

If you believe! And if you don’t, no matter how religious you might be outwardly, such a pretense of faith will not bring salvation. And Jesus knows it!

### **B. A pretense of faith is known perfectly by Jesus.**

Because everything is known to Jesus.

v.24

Even further,

v.25

Now, in one sense, that ought to be terrifying. For he knows our hypocrisies. He knows where each one of us fails to live up to our own convictions. He knows where each one of us gives in to sin and temptation, even those things that we keep well hidden in our own hearts. The sins of our hearts. The secret sins that we keep all to ourself.

He knows everyone of them. And that should cause you to

pause. It should cause you to stop and search your own heart, because God knows it better than you do. And wherever you find sin lurking, you had better come to terms with it, for God knows everything about it.

Now, for those of you who are in Christ, for those in whom the Holy Spirit bears witness with your spirit that you are the children of God, that shouldn't shake your confidence in your salvation. It shouldn't make you doubt that God has saved you from your sin, for not one of us is yet without sin.

But it should stir you to genuine self-examination.

But for any who might simply be playing games, indulging in religion for whatever outward advantages they might enjoy, for any who would claim an allegiance to Christ but who do not give him their whole life as a living sacrifice, there is a great warning. Jesus knows your hypocrisy.

The harshest words spoken by our Lord Jesus were spoken to the religious leaders of his day, the Scribes and Pharisees. And he speaks those words of severe condemnation upon them, for they are what he calls "white washed tombs."

Matt. 23:25 "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. 26 Blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and dish, and then the outside also will be clean."

Matt. 23:27 "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of dead men's bones and everything unclean. 28 In the same way, on the outside you appear to people as righteous but on the inside you

are full of hypocrisy and wickedness."

Jesus knows the heart of a man, and he knows your own heart. Every crevice and corner of your heart lies fully exposed and totally naked before the gazing eye of our Lord. He needs no introduction to you, either for you yourself or from anyone else. He knows everything about you.

And he knows if your religion is simply a search for spectacular signs, or whether it is a matter of life and death, the commitment of your whole soul in loving service to the king. And as you are reminded that God knows you, that he knows every thought in your mind and every desire in your heart, as you think about that, respond with the appropriate humility so well described in,

Psalm 139:23 "Search me, O God, and know my heart; Try me, and know my anxieties; 24 And see if there is any wicked way in me, And lead me in the way everlasting."

That is how you ought to pray. "Search me, O God, and know my heart." And with that honest self-examination, then look at the signs we have received. And believe in your heart that God raised Jesus from the dead!

1 Cor. 15:3 "For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, 4 and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures."