

**The Compass:
Encounter-Examine-Explore-Embrace God's Word
on
Your Discipleship Path**

Sermon Series: "The Gospel of Matthew" (Epiphany 2019)

This Week's Theme and Scriptural Focus: "The Sign of Jonah." Matthew 12.38-42, 46-50.

This Week's Mark(s) of Discipleship: **Joy** (Trusting in God's grace and promises, I have inner contentment and purpose in spite of my circumstances).

□ Day #1--Monday, February 11th. Read: Matthew 12.38-39. Encounter: God's Word and your life—
What do you Hear and/or See?

In Matthew chapters 11-13, one of the themes throughout this section is the *authority* of Jesus; who He is and what He has come to do in this world. In our text for this week, Jesus is once again challenged by the religious establishment to demonstrate His authority—to give to them a "sign," a miracle. The irony is that Jesus has been performing "signs," in fact, He has just exorcized a demon! However, the Scribes and Pharisees do not have the "eyes of faith" to recognize them! The religious leaders even attribute the power of Satan as the source of Jesus' "signs." However...

Jesus refuses to play their game. He does not work wonders on demand and especially not for skeptics. Their request reveals their evil intent and lack of faith (as in vv. 34–35). "Adulterous" applies the common Old Testament metaphor for idolatry...Again Jesus rebukes "this generation" (see...11:16–19). In this context he is looking ahead to increasing rejection by his contemporaries (see the future tense "will be" with the same expression in v. 45). The only sign Jesus will provide, therefore, is the "sign" that is Jonah.¹

The "sign of Jonah" is a reference to Jesus' death and resurrection. "Jesus cites what happened to Jonah as a preview of His own death, burial, and resurrection. Jonah was the only OT prophet to whom Jesus directly compared Himself."² Jesus' statement here affirms that the Book of Jonah is historical (not legend or fable) and as such, is a prefiguring of his own death in His salvific mission for the world. Unlike Jonah, however, Jesus is not running away from His God-given mission to save the people, but rather dies as part of this divine mission. I.D. Campbell adds:

Jesus' purpose in alluding to Jonah, however, is not so much to make this comparison as to demonstrate the different responses between the people of Nineveh, who heard Jonah preach and repented of their sins, and the people of Jesus' generation, who have heard a 'greater than Jonah' and have not repented. Again, the seriousness of the rejection is seen in the light of the greatness of the privilege.³

Consider/Reflect: What is the "spiritual condition" of your heart? Is there an area/particular doubt or question(s) that you are struggling with? As you study and pray this week, reflect on this section of Matthew and how it may relate to your spiritual "heart condition."

□ Day #2--Tuesday, February 12th. Read: Matthew 9.40-42. Examine: The Text and its Relationship to other Passages.

¹ C. Blomberg. *Matthew* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992).

² *Lutheran Study Bible* (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2009).

³ I.D. Campbell. *Opening up Matthew* (Leominster: Day One Publications, 2008).

Jesus' reference to "three days and three nights" is a Semitic idiom for any portion of three calendar days. Jesus sternly rebukes the lack of faith expressed by the unbelieving people. Jesus contrasts those rejecting him now with those who in the past, accepted the message of God through His prophets—and they were Gentiles! The Ninevites (Jonah 3) and the Queen of Sheba (1 Kings 10:1–10) will "join with believers of every time and place on Judgment Day, as a witness against those who rejected Jesus. The irony is even greater because those Gentiles in Jonah's and Solomon's day, repented and turned to God after hearing God's "lesser" spokesmen, while "this generation" refused to believe even after hearing "one greater" (vv. 41–42)."⁴

Two parallel sayings are now appended that indicate the repentance and receptivity found in those who had much less evidence to depend on than did the contemporaries of Jesus. The Ninevites, on the one hand, who repented at the preaching of Jonah (Jonah 3:5), and the Queen of Sheba (i.e., "the south"), who traveled so far to hear the wisdom of Solomon (1 Kgs 10:1–10; cf. 2 Chr 9:1–9), will "rise up" (ἀναστήσονται) in the resurrection at the final judgment and condemn the present generation... That the Pharisees did not respond positively to such conspicuous evidence as Jesus had given them makes them all the more culpable. Jesus and his kingdom far exceeded all else that Israel had witnessed in her history. Ironically, the Gentiles will be able to see what the Pharisees cannot.⁵

The search of a "sign" absent an honest desire to know and obey God, is just a wish for "magic" and will never change the human heart. Again, even the miracles Jesus did perform were not enough to convince those whose minds were closed. Even in the Old Testament, God would exhibit power and glory for His people, delivering them from their enemies, but it wouldn't be long before they would engage in idolatry, looking for more "signs" from lesser gods!

Jesus' message, His words and signs, were meant to bear witness that God has come to open His Kingdom to all! The great day of cosmic salvation had arrived! Jesus "stands as God's sign, saying that *"a greater than Jonah is here,"* and again, *"a greater than Solomon is here,"* as He had said that He is Lord of the Sabbath and again that *"a greater than the temple is here."*⁶ The people then, and people now, are called to hear and respond to God's ultimate and final Word in Jesus Christ.

Consider/Reflect: "The people of Nineveh heard Jonah, and the queen of Sheba saw Solomon. But greater than either that prophet or that king is our Lord Jesus Christ. We are privileged to hear and receive Him in His Word. Sometimes, like the unbelieving leaders, we seek signs of God's goodness in success, wealth, and health. One sign is sufficient for faith, the sign of Jonah. In this sign we find peace, joy, and hope. [Pray]: O Jesus, my Prophet, Priest, and King, accept the praise I bring because You revealed to me the sign of salvation. Amen."⁷

□ **Day #3--Wednesday, February 13th. Read: Matthew 9.43-45. Explore:** The background to this text(s).

The incident that began the questioning of Jesus by the Scribes and Pharisees in this text, was likely the exorcism of verse 22; the freedom that God offers through Christ. As Craig Blomberg notes, Jesus:

...wants the man who was liberated, along with everyone else present, to realize that freedom from demon possession is not enough. Ownership by the devil must be replaced with ownership by Christ (cf. Rom 6:15–18). Otherwise one's release is only temporary. Moral reform without Christian commitment always remains inadequate. Jesus likens the situation to a house made ready for new occupants which still stands vacant. Squatters will soon move in. No person can live long without serving someone. Satan will always return to attack that which is left defenseless, and each success leads him to increasingly worse designs, whether, as here, to literal repossession by an even greater

⁴ Blomberg. *Matthew*.

⁵ D.A. Hagner. *Matthew* (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998).

⁶ M.S. Augsburger and L.J. Ogilvie. *Matthew* (Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson Inc, 1982).

⁷ *Lutheran Study Bible*.

number of demons (the number seven may indicate completeness of possession) or with the more widespread degeneracy of repeated sin, which characteristically renders humans more insensitive to their guilt (cf. Rom 1:18–32).⁸

As Jesus indicates here, the reality of spiritual warfare in the Christian life is real. For the Christian, the work of discipleship is the ongoing process of Spirit empowered transformation into Christ-likeness; to use Jesus' analogy here, it is similar to making ready our home (our heart) for Jesus, ensuring that only Jesus is welcome and NOT other powers or influences. The people who questioned Jesus' authority, particularly His authority to cast-out the demonic, will render them helpless against the powers of spiritual darkness.

[T]hose who are refusing to embrace what Jesus brings... may have appreciated its immediate benefits but have kept themselves safely distant from its deeper challenges and larger significance. Their houses may have been tidied, but they remain empty; so an awful fate awaits them. Outside the story world it is not clear what the awful fate is that Matthew has in mind. It may be the judgment threatened in vv. 41–42, it may be judgment in history as anticipated in Mt. 24, or it may be something that is expected to operate more locally at the communal and personal level. Precision is not intended; warning is.⁹

Consider/Reflect: “Jesus describes how a person delivered from a demon becomes worse when there is failure to fill the emptiness with goodness. We can also relapse into old and habitual sins when we fail to nourish our spiritual lives through Word and Sacrament. Only the Holy Spirit can replace the evil spirits that are constantly ‘seeking someone to devour’ (1Pt 5:8). With words from Luther’s baptismal service, we cry out: ‘Depart thou unclean spirit and make room for the Holy Spirit’ (AE 53:107). [Pray]: Come, Holy Spirit, and make my heart Your dwelling place. Amen.”¹⁰

□ **Day #4—Thursday, February 14th. Read: Matthew 9.46-50. Explore:** The Background to this Text.

Chapter 12 ends with a rather provocative challenge by Jesus. In a culture where duty to family was primary, Jesus insists that His *true family* are those who do the Father’s will. While it is clear that Jesus loved and respected His family, it is also clear that all human allegiances and relationships are under the authority of God and are always in service to the Kingdom of God.

Jesus does not directly address his family but does implicitly rebuke them. They deserve no preferential treatment. Human kinship does not take priority over spiritual kinship, and Jesus is busy ministering to crowds that include his spiritual family... The “will of God,” as throughout Matthew, means obedience to God’s commands by following Jesus.¹¹

Interestingly, in Mark 3:21, Mark says that after calling His disciples, Jesus’ family wanted to “seize” Him because they thought He was “out of His mind!” In John 7.1-5, Jesus’ brothers are likewise doubtful of Jesus’ behavior. Again, the cultural value of familial loyalty makes these incidents very intriguing. Again, I cite Blomberg:

Given the strong family ties in ancient Palestine, Jesus’ attitude here would have proved as shocking as in 8:22 and 10:37... More positively he points to believers as people who should care for each other as if they were family members. Jesus does not call any of his disciples “father,” however, not just because Joseph is not present (many think he is by now dead), but, as in 23:9, because Christians have only one “Father ... in heaven.” Paul will later contemplate the extraordinary evangelistic potential of displaying to the world a family-like unity in the church (Eph 3:5–10). The all too common contemporary

⁸ Blomberg, *Matthew*.

⁹ J. Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids, Michigan; William B. Eerdmans, 2005).

¹⁰ *Lutheran Study Bible*.

¹¹ Blomberg, *Matthew*.

divisiveness and lack of warm interpersonal relationships in the Christian community seem scandalous in comparison.¹²

Consider/Reflect: “Jesus’ family comes to speak with Him, but He gently rebuffs them in order to make the point that all Christians are His sisters, brothers, and mother. None of us deserves to be included in this sacred relationship. But our Savior’s arms, once extended on the cross, now embrace us with His forgiving love and empowering grace. [Pray]: My Brother, Jesus, assure me of Your presence, and guide me as I seek to do my Father’s will. Amen.”¹³

□ **Day #5-Friday, February 15th. Read: Matthew 13.1-9, 18-23. Embrace:** God and His guiding you through His Word.

In chapter 13, Jesus tells one of His parables: “The Parable of the Sower.” What may have prompted this particular parable? According to L.A. Barbieri:

The previous chapter (12) is probably the major turning point in the book. The King had authenticated His power by various miracles. But growing opposition to the King climaxed when Israel’s leaders concluded that Jesus worked not by divine power but by satanic power (9:34; 12:22–37). While their full rejection of Him did not occur until later, the die was cast. Therefore Jesus turned to His disciples and began to instruct them along different lines. This is one of several major discourses in the Gospel of Matthew (others are in chaps. 5–7; 10; 23–25).¹⁴

The word “parable” is a compound word in Greek; *para* and *ballō*, which literally means, “To throw alongside.” Jesus would take every day events and experiences in the ancient near east, and “throw alongside” a spiritual truth and/or revelation. In this parable, Jesus explains how His Word, His message of the Kingdom, takes root in some hearts but not others. In verses 18-23, Jesus explains this parable. “Perhaps the story would be better described as the parable of the soils because, as the sower casts the seed out of his hand, it falls onto four different kinds of soil, each giving a different result. We can summarize the parable this way:

Type of soil	Result of contact with seed	Spiritual meaning
The path	Birds swooped down—seed taken away immediately	Hear word, but don’t understand it—devil steals it away
Rocky ground	No depth of earth—instant growth but no root, therefore scorched by the sun	Initial reception of gospel message, but persecution leads to falling away
Weeds	Seed grew among thorns that choked it	Reception of word compromised by riches and worldly concerns
Tilled ground	Seed took root and there was growth	Word heard, understood and received—spiritual fruit in human life ¹⁵

Consider/Reflect: “The parable provides a sober reminder that even the most enthusiastic outward response to the gospel offers no guarantee that one is a true disciple. Only the tests of time, perseverance under difficult

¹² Ibid.

¹³ *Lutheran Study Bible*.

¹⁴ J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.). *The Bible Knowledge Commentary* (Wheaton, Illinois: Victor Books, 1985).

¹⁵ Campbell, *Opening up Matthew*.

circumstances, the avoidance of the idolatries of wealth and anxiety over earthly concerns...and above all the presence of appropriate fruit (consistent obedience to God's will) can prove a profession genuine."¹⁶

□ Day #6--Saturday, February 16th. Read: Psalm 119.97-106. Embrace: God and His guiding you through His Word.

Using the Daily Order of Prayers from *Luther's Small Catechism*,¹⁷ read and mediate on Psalm 119.97-106 and:

"[M]ake the sign of the Holy Cross and say: In the name of the Father and of the Son + and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Then, kneeling or standing, repeat the Creed and the Lord's Prayer:

I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth. And in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord; who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary; suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried; He descended into hell; the third day He rose again from the dead; He ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead. I believe in the Holy Ghost; one holy Christian Church, the communion of saints; the forgiveness of sins; the resurrection of the body; and the life everlasting. Amen.

Our Father, which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy Name. Thy Kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, As it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, As we forgive them that trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, But deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory, forever and ever. Amen.

(Depending on the time of day, pray the prayers below):

(Morning) I thank you, my heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ, Your dear Son, that You have kept me this night from all harm and danger; and I pray that You would keep me this day also from sin and every evil, that all my doings and life may please You. For into Your hands I commend myself, my body and soul, and all things. Let Your holy angel be with me, that the evil foe may have no power over me. Amen.

(Afternoon/Evening) I thank you, my heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ, Your dear Son, that You have graciously kept me this day; and I pray that You would forgive me all my sins where I have done wrong, and graciously keep me this night. For into Your hands, I commend myself, my body and soul, and all things. Let Your holy angel be with me, that the evil foe may have no power over me. Amen.

Consider/Reflect: Pray about Worship tomorrow. Ask God to prepare your heart to receive His Word and Sacraments.

¹⁶ Blomberg, *Matthew*.

¹⁷ Martin Luther. "Luther's Small Catechism." Taken from, *The Lutheran Study Bible*. (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2009).