

Matthew 21-04-11a

Good morning, welcome to the Sunday morning services at Grace and Truth Bible Church. I'd like to bring you a moment of silence every now and again for reflection, to confess your sins, get back in fellowship before the Bible class starts. So hopefully you availed yourself of that opportunity.

We're going to resume this morning our study in the Gospel of Matthew. You where we left off before the special that we did on the teaching of the Lord Jesus just before his arrest and trial, crucifixion, burial, resurrection, that wonderful week of communication on his part, the emphasis that he gave to his disciples and to us. But we are back in the slightly earlier chapters of Matthew at chapter 16, and we're going to see some unusual things this morning, things that I had not ever connected together before.

But once we take a look at them, the connection is one of those where you say, why didn't I see that before? So let's take a moment to ask God's blessing on our fellowship and on our study, and we'll begin. Father, what a wonderful privilege to be alive at this time in history, to be securely held in your hands by your grace, positioned to observe the unfolding of these closing times of this dispensation, to seek to redeem the time, to use our situational awareness to make the most of the opportunities and the resources that you have given us. We thank you for the Lord Jesus Christ and his example.

His words are so full of meaning and pertinence for us. We pray that as we look at them this morning, that your Holy Spirit will guide us, be our teacher, impress them on our hearts, help us to remember them in the hours and days ahead and to make application in a way that makes them meaningful and justifies the Lord communicating to us. We pray that in all things, the Lord Jesus will be glorified and you will be pleased with our fellowship and our worship this morning.

We ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen. It is always a good idea to read the passage.

Sometimes I just want to dive right in and I think, you know, I've been looking at it for days and maybe I ought to read it first and then we can discuss it afterward. You'll look up in the end of chapter 15 and remember that Jesus has just fed the 4,000 and he has sent the multitude away in verse 39, got into the boat. Matthew didn't tell us that they came here in a boat, but it's the boat.

So obviously they did. So came to the region of Magadan. If yours says Magdala, cross it out.

This is not where Mary the Magdalene came from. This is Magadan. If you look at the parallel in Mark, I think it's Mark, either Mark or Luke, it says it's the regions of Dalmanutha.

And the best guess is that this now unknown location, nobody knows where Dalmanutha or Magadan were exactly, but the speculation is that it was on the Western shore of the Sea of Galilee. So Jesus has been crossing the sea in various directions. He's been in the northern edge at Nazareth and Capernaum, then crossed down south and east when he found the demon-possessed man and back again.

So this now takes a southwesterly course, it would appear. So because this is a little bit closer than going all the way up to the north edge, the Pharisees and Sadducees came testing him, asked that he would show them a sign from heaven. He answered and said to them, this is chapter 16, verse two, when it is evening, you will say it will be fair weather for the sky is red.

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. 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. Just for comparison, turn with me to Luke chapter 12, verse 54. Luke chapter 12, toward the end of that chapter, Jesus is speaking to the multitudes here.

He has just said that he will bring division to households. Verse 51, do you suppose that I came to give peace on earth? I tell you not at all, but rather division. For from now on, five in one house will be divided, three against two and two against three.

Father will be divided against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. And Jesus is the cause. Verse 51, do you suppose that I came to give peace, unity, harmony? I tell you not at all, but rather division.

The presence of Jesus Christ, the issue of Jesus Christ divides households. You remember the Lord saying that if someone loves family members more than he, more than him, they are not worthy to be a disciple. It's a hard truth.

Right after that, in verse 54, he also said to the multitudes, whenever you see a cloud rising out of the west, immediately you say a shower is coming, and so it is. And when you see the south wind blow, you say there will be hot weather, and there is. Hypocrites, you can discern the face of the sky and of the earth.

How is it you do not discern this time? How is it that you do not discern what time? It is the time of exposure. It is the time of division. It is the time where the issue of Jesus Christ either unites us or divides us based on whether we respond or react to him.

How can you not understand the sign of the times? He doesn't say it's political. He doesn't say it's geological. He doesn't say that it's astronomical.

What is the time that he is speaking of? It is the time where the issue of Jesus Christ forces people to choose. This is where the material in our passage comes from. When it is evening, you say it will be fair weather.

In the morning, it will be foul weather. This comes from Luke. You can also look at the parallel in Mark 8, verse 11.

And there is a purpose in us looking at these now. So turn to Mark 8, verse 11. If you look just above that, we have our same context, the feeding of the 4,000.

In verse 11, the Pharisees came out and began to dispute with him, seeking from him a sign from heaven, testing him. Virtually identical language to Matthew 16. Notice his reply in verse 12.

He sighed deeply in his spirit and said, Why does this generation seek a sign? Assuredly, I say to you, no sign shall be given to this generation. What we have in Matthew is a textual addition. If you have a red letter addition, this is a lot easier.

But in verse 2, it says, He answered and said to them, comma. Everything after that comma to the end of verse is not original to Matthew. All of the stuff about the weather in the evening and the morning is not there.

So you can cross out when it is evening, you say it will be fair weather. The sky is red 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. This has come from Luke. It was not in Matthew.

The best great manuscripts of Matthew and early do not contain this section. It has been added from Luke. So what Jesus said on this occasion jumps from the first clause in verse 2. He answered and said to them, verse 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. Now, not only is there the textual evidence that this does not belong, but remember where we are in the career of the Lord Jesus. Jesus is no longer trying to teach these people.

This would be a teaching point. But at this point in his ministry, he's no longer wasting his words on those who are deaf and blind to them. Now, this should sound a little bit familiar.

What he does say in verse 4, no sign shall be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. And even the words, the prophet, seem to be a later addition. I don't have any problem leaving them there, but the same text that leaves out verse 3 in the last half of verse 2 also doesn't have the prophet.

No sign will be given to it except the sign of Jonah. Very terse, very succinct, very much to the point. So short that Mark doesn't even include the sign of Jonah.

But Jesus did say this and he had said it once before. Do you remember the previous occasion where he said much the same thing? We've already seen it in this gospel and it's really important. Turn back a few pages to Matthew chapter 12.

Notice in verse 38, this is Matthew 12, 38. Some of the scribes and Pharisees answered him. This is after he said either make the tree good and it's fruit good or else make the tree bad and it's fruit bad.

And then in verse 34, he says brood of vipers. How can you being evil speak good things? What comes out of your mouth comes out of the heart, right? So their answer, this is some scribes and some Pharisees. By the time we get to chapter 16, this is a much larger group.

These are the first ones to really start opposing the Lord Jesus. And in verse 34, he called them brood of vipers. More about that shortly.

Some of the scribes and Pharisees answered him saying, teacher, we want to see a sign from you. He answered and said to them, an evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign. No sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah.

You can see why the words, the prophet would drift into our passage in chapter 16, verse four, because he does say it but he explains what this sign is. 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.

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 something greater than Jonah is here. The queen of the South will rise up in judgment with this generation and condemn it for she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon.

And indeed something greater than Solomon is here. He has already told the scribes and Pharisees in detail what the sign of the prophet Jonah is. And he just says, already told you that's the only sign you're going to get brood of vipers.

Turn back to Matthew chapter three, Matthew chapter three, John the Baptist is preaching verse five, Jerusalem, all Judea, all the region around the Jordan went out to him and were baptized by him in the Jordan confessing their sins. But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, what did he say? Brood of vipers who warned you to flee from the wrath to come, bear fruits worthy of repentance. Don't rely on your ethnicity.

Don't rely on your heritage. Don't rely on your culture. It's the axes being laid through

the trees.

John was the first one to call these guys a brood of vipers. Jesus does it again in verse 12 and he is not, I'm sorry, chapter 12 and he's going to do it again very soon. So in looking at this, he is going to go on down in chapter 16 to say, beware the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees.

They are a brood of vipers. John called him that Jesus called him that. Where does this come from? It's a bit of an odd phrase.

He doesn't say you snakes. He doesn't say you sons of serpents. He calls them a particular thing.

The viper here is a particular small, deadly snake. It's the same snake that bites Paul later on in the book of Acts when he's gathering firewood after the shipwreck, hanging off his arm and he does not die from the bite. They are very deadly, extremely venomous, not just any old serpent.

We've got lots of rat snakes and grass snakes and various harmless snakes. This is a poisonous, deadly to human snakes, hence the translation viper. Where does this come from? The gospel of Matthew in our regular study about the Pharisees and the Sadducees and the huge differences between them.

The Pharisees were the self-righteous religious conservatives who made up all of the extra rules to try to put a hedge around the law to be sure that no one broke it, to be sure that you didn't work on the Sabbath. They made up dozens and dozens and dozens of specific rules about what you could and could not do. This was the Pharisaical approach.

They were the conservatives and they were very prideful about their righteousness. The Sadducees were the opposite. They were the liberals.

They didn't believe that you had to keep all of these rules and regulations. Therefore, their morality was much more lax. They didn't believe in an afterlife.

They didn't believe in a judgment. They didn't believe in angels. They didn't believe in spirits, didn't believe in the resurrection.

So they were kind of the eat, drink and be merry crowd and let's have social justice and let's try to make a better world in the present because this is all there is. If you don't believe in a resurrection and yet you are religious, what kind of religion are you going to have? If you want to be perceived as righteous and you're not worried about a future judgment, then it's all about the accolades and the benefits that you can get in this life. And you vindicate yourself and justify yourself by whatever standard you choose, but it isn't the Pharisaical standard of strict and pecunious adherence to the law.

It's a self-invented standard. So depending on what analogy you want to use, you could say conservatives and liberals. You could say the Pharisees were kind of the Republicans of their religion and the Sadducees were the Democrats, progressive, free thinking, not worried about any afterlife or future consequences.

So what would unite these diametrically opposite groups? Well, both of them were after the esteem of people. And when the crowds begin to follow Jesus, he is a threat to the system. This would be like a third party candidate starting to take the votes away from both parties.

And both parties would unite to pile on to this individual and try to ruin him by whatever means. And when trying to embarrass him publicly or shame him or criticize him doesn't work, they have to resort to actual violence, which is what they will eventually do. But you can see that at this point in his ministry, Jesus is so popular among the people and so notorious for the mighty works that he has done.

And he has just fed 4,000 people. And this word has spread quickly. It came right across the lake with him to the region of Magadan.

And so these Pharisees and Sadducees have to find a way to neutralize this threat to the status quo. There's even a benefit. People say there's a benefit in the two-party system because it's sort of checks and balances.

And the Pharisees and the Sadducees had kind of a love-hate relationship. There were benefits as they would play off each other and each would use the other as a foil. You sort of need a contrast.

You need an adversary of sorts to be able to emphasize what you feel are the benefits of your side. And you can make some representative of the other side a boogeyman. You see this with presidents down through the last many decades.

If you've been alive and watching the party in power, this is a great opportunity for the party that's out of power to try to climb back in and make themselves attractive by contrast. So they see this as a threat to the entire status quo. So when they come and testing him, perazzo, this is the very same word that was used back in Matthew 4, verse 1, when the Holy Spirit led the Lord Jesus into the wilderness to be perazzoed by Satan, to be tested.

So these individuals are doing to the Lord Jesus the very same thing that Satan did. What was the nature of Satan's test? I need a tissue please. I'm making myself so emotional I'm going to have to dab my face.

Say again. Exactly. The answer to my question, supplied by the furthest along student in the room, is to offer the crown without the cross and to step outside that program of God, which requires suffering before glorification and requires humility and self-sacrifice

before there is elevation and a seat at the right hand of the Father.

Or as we saw Thursday night, seat at the right hand of the Lord Jesus, which is what James and John were after and their mother was implicated in it. But what was the first thing that Satan tried on Jesus when he was perazzoing him, testing him in the wilderness? What's the first recorded? And it's the same, the other two come in different orders, but the first one is always the same. It's been 40 days without food.

So what's he supposed to do? If you are the son of God, turn these stones into bread. Jesus has the ability to create food. He has just demonstrated it twice in our preceding few chapters, right? So why would it be wrong for him to create? He creates food for others.

Why did he not create food for himself? Well, God gave me this power. That's 40 days. Why not turn a few stones into bread? What is the nature of that test? What is Satan seeking to get Jesus to do? To use his power outside the plan and purpose of God.

There is a reason for Jesus to be hungry. It's not something we often think about. Why was he 40 days with no food? What's the purpose of starving? What's the purpose of this almost superhuman fast? God has a purpose in it.

God has a purpose in bringing challenge at a point of weakness. Why? What should we do when we are challenged and we're weak? We haven't got the normal tools, the normal resources, the normal defenses at our disposal. We're worn down.

We're exhausted. We're piled on. It's too many things at once.

We haven't had time to reflect and nourish our souls in the word of God. We're stressed. We're stretched.

We're at the end of our rope. What happens at that point when we are tested? Well, if we rely on our own strength, we fail. Uniformly, without exception, if in a time of weakness, we turn to our resources and they're lacking, then we are absolutely going to fail.

How do we succeed in a time of weakness? What does Jesus reply to Satan in his hour of weakness? After 40 days of no food and being offered the opportunity to have a nice meal by using power that his father gave him, what does Jesus reply? It's not physical bread that counts. It's the word of God that counts. We don't live just for physical provision and physical sustenance.

We are here and alive to follow every word that proceeds from the mouth of God. It is a spiritual issue and we have to go to God, not to ourselves. Satan didn't say, well, if you're the son of God, ask your father to send you some bread.

Did he? That would be a completely different thing. Guess who does eventually minister

to Jesus after his testing is complete? Angels from the father, on the father's orders, come down, refresh, renew, and restore the son of man. But that refreshment and restoration comes at God's time, not by way of proving something or copping out.

The time of weakness is on purpose. A time of hardship and shortfall is on purpose. It's a part of the plan of God.

It is according to the word of God. It is not the time for Jesus to eat. When Satan says, make yourself some bread, it's not the time.

The test comes in an hour of weakness. So what is the test really? To use his power at a time and in a way that does not comport with the plan of the father. It's the word of the father that defines when, where, and how resources are employed.

And in a time of testing, it's not a matter of how do I solve this physical problem? How do I get out of this pressure circumstance? How do I meet and overcome this challenge of life, whether it's civil, social, physical, relational, financial? What is the issue? We are not here to simply live a physical life. We are here to live in the light and by the power of the word of God. And it is God's word that tells us when, where, and how.

And that time was not it. Jesus knew that there was a reason he had no food for nearly six weeks. It wasn't an accident.

It wasn't a happenstance. We're going to see here shortly, the disciples are going to be scratching their heads because they forget to bring bread. Did Jesus forget to take bread to the wilderness? Did he forget to get to the edge and stop by someplace that had bread? The weakness and the shortcoming and the vulnerability was on purpose and Jesus knows it.

And it is to meet and overcome by God's grace and God's power and God's word that test. So when the Pharisees and Sadducees come to test Jesus, testing him, ask that he would show them a sign from heaven. And the key there is the last two words.

What did they ask him to do back in chapter 12? Show us a sign. What has Jesus done in the intervening chapters? He has performed many miracles. He has healed people all day long.

He has fed a crowd of 5,000 men and their families, fed another crowd of 4,000 men and their families. Word of what he has done is everywhere. Has Jesus done sign after sign after sign after sign? So how do they get around that so that Jesus can't say, haven't you heard what I just did? Were any of you there when the bread and the fish got multiplied? How do they escape that? Show them a sign from heaven.

Not a sign on earth. They want a comet. They want an eclipse.

They want angels appearing in the heavens. A sign from heaven. We want to know that this is all from God.

They've already accused him of casting out demons by the prince of demons. So they're ready to believe that he's got power from hell. They're ready to believe that he's bamboozled the people or that he's a great sleight of hand magician and he actually had big stacks of bread hidden under the seat and he's pulling them out and handing them to the people.

They don't know. But they don't want an earthly sign. He's been doing earthly signs for three years.

A sign from heaven. Now what would a sign from heaven be? You can think about Elijah. How did the altar and everything on it and the water in the moat surrounding it disappear on Mount Carmel? Where did the fire come from? Heaven.

They want to see fire fall from heaven. They want to see something mosaic in terms of complete darkness. God has given them signs from heaven in the past.

Remember in the days when Elijah first began his ministry back in 1st Kings 17. God says, I'll give you a sign from heaven. I'm going to shut up the heavens and there will be no rain.

Peter points that out. You want a sign from heaven? How about the heavens don't give you the rain that you expect? This is a really evil request because they figure that Jesus has power of some kind to do things on earth, but he can't call down anything from heaven. They don't believe he is from heaven.

They don't believe there is power in heaven at his command. So when Jesus says a wicked and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, why is it wicked and adulterous to seek a sign? Didn't Moses at the burning bush say, how do I know it's really you Lord? And you have the hand going into the robe and coming out leprous. You have the signs that are given at the beginning of various stages of God's plan.

Uh, why is it wrong to seek a sign here? Signs have been given from the outset. Signs have been given ever since the day Jesus was baptized. A wicked and adulterous generation seeks a sign of their own making that suits their own standards.

And these standards can never be reached. If Jesus did command Haley's comet to go sailing overhead at low altitude, these guys would explain it away. What did they do when Lazarus was raised from the dead? Well, I don't know what kind of bamboozlement went on there, but we've got to kill that guy.

He's a walking sign. There are 9,000 men and their families walking around saying, I watched a guy take a handful of bread and a couple of fish and feed everybody. There

are abundant signs.

It's a wicked and adulterous generation that is still seeking a sign when all the sign that is needed has already been given because they are not seeking a sign out of faith. They're seeking it out of disbelief, out of hardness of heart. They want God to jump through a hoop of their own making.

And even if God did so, they still would not be convinced. This is not faith seeking confirmation. This is animosity seeking an excuse to reject.

They figure Jesus can't provide a sign from heaven, sign of Jonah. Well, we're going to pause here and take our break. And when we come back, we're going to see a little bit more about this sign of Jonah and about what it is to be wicked and adulterous.

You could just say a wicked generation, but it's wicked and adulterous. Why that particular adjective? We're going to be heading back to the source of these ideas after the break. But at this point, we're going to pause for some refreshment and some wonderful special music, and then we'll resume.