

The Disillusionment of Christmas Matthew 12:38-42 sermonaudio.com

3-Year Bible Reading Plan

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You and I, we just had the privilege of singing one of the great songs of the season, "O Holy Night," but you know, there is this one statement in there that really gets me every time I hear it or I participate in singing it where it says fall on your knees. You know, most of us look back at the Christmas story 2,000 years ago and say, "Oh yeah, fall on your knees. We should fall on our knees." Can we be real transparent this morning? Most people missed Christmas 2,000 years ago. They were so busy with their jobs, their families, traditions and such. Most people did not fall on their knees and so this Christmas season, can we learn from the mistakes of those that have gone before us? Let's not allow the economics of life and even the task of life to keep us from falling on our knees.

Let's pray.

Lord, as we continue our time of worship, what a challenge to fall on our knees. Lord, though there is not a physical manger before us this day and though there is not the scene of the nativity that we're so accustomed and familiar with, Lord, help us today to fall on our knees before your word. Lord, as we read your word, as we study your word, as we're challenged by your word, help us, O God, today to fall on our knees before you. It is in the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.

This morning, I'm going to ask you to turn to Matthew 12 and we're going to see if you can find it first or if I can get on stage first. Go. It's going to take me a while as I roll around here. Now for those of you who may be here wondering, "Why on earth is the stage so big?" Last night as tonight, over 150 voices and musicians presenting what we know as Handel's Messiah, an incredible music event of the Christmas season. I hope that you can and will be a part of it this evening.

As you're turning to Matthew 12 this morning, today I want to deal with one of those issues that's one of the proverbial elephants in the room. You see, this is the season of, "Joy to the world." This is the season of, "Hark, the herald angels sing." This is the season, "O come let us adore him." And yet study after study after study says that this is the season where we feel more stress, more frustrated and more depressed than any other and so the songs we sing and the cards we send oftentimes are conflicting with the

emotions we're experiencing and so today I want to deal with the subject matter of the disillusionment of Christmas. You see, this season comes and goes every year and many of us who have lived through these seasons hope that this year we will have things meet our expectations, or maybe with a certain event or maybe with certain people being in the room or maybe if this happens or that happens, or if this is acquired or if that is given, and yet time after time, year after year, all of our expectations, all of our hopes for this time of the year end up in disillusionment.

Today as we turn to Matthew 12, I want you to see a group of individuals who were disillusioned as well; that there were things they were seeking, things they were desiring in life, things they were hoping to experience that from their perspective they had not yet experienced and yet there's a conversation, there's a discussion they have with Jesus Christ and he is not only going to deal and answer their disillusionment but he's going to address how it can be reversed or how it can be flipped.

Matthew 12, beginning in verse 38 it says,

38 Then certain of the scribes and of the Pharisees answered, saying, Master, we would see a sign from thee. 39 But he answered and said unto them, An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given to it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas: 40 For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. 41 The men of Nineveh shall rise in judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: because they repented at the preaching of Jonas; and, behold, a greater than Jonas is here. 42 The queen of the south shall rise up in the judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: for she came from the uttermost parts of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and, behold, a greater than Solomon is here.

Now what I want to do in this passage today is utilize it as an example to us, a parallel in our lives, that here are these individuals, they're disillusioned with what's happening around them. We're going to see in just a moment they're disappointed with what they hoped to experience or hoped to see that they felt they are not.

Those of you that are seasoned in the church world, you may look at that very first statement in verse 38 where it says the scribes and the Pharisees and say, "How can that parallel my life? How can I be counted among them?" And for some of you, you may struggle with that because oftentimes in sermons and in Bible studies, it is these Pharisees and scribes that are on the other end of some of Jesus' most harsh remarks for it was the Pharisees who said, "Let his blood be upon us and our children." It was the Pharisees who refused to believe. It was the Pharisees and the scribes who Jesus called whitewashed tombs, beautiful on the outside but full of dead bones on the inside.

You say, "Well, how does that parallel my life? That's not who I am." Yet when you look at them sociologically, we very much emulate the Pharisees and the scribes of Jesus' day.

These were people who were into their families, celebrations, festivities much like this season of the year. They loved to gather their loved ones around. They loved to gather their friends, their coworkers, their network of influence, they loved to celebrate. Also, you may not feel this way in your specific culture but at least globally speaking these were at least middle class and above. They had financial resources for the food at these celebrations and they had the networks but they also were very religious people. They never missed a chance to go to the synagogue to celebrate their faith and yet on a day like today that is so dreary, so wet and so cold, you could be in bed right now, maybe you're wishing you were still in bed right now but you're here and so our lives really do look a whole lot like these guys and they did and professed and said a lot on the outside but they were struggling on the inside and I want you to see what happens in their life when they encounter Jesus and hopefully you'll draw the parallel in your life this day.

I want to begin with their disappointment. It's obvious these guys are disappointed with Jesus because they said, "We would seek from you a sign. We want something more. What we've experienced with you, Jesus, what we hoped you to be, what we've heard you would be somehow, some way, it's not meeting our expectations." And the reason they were disappointed was threefold. The first reason is this: somehow, some way, they were willing to dodge the facts. Now just for the sake of brevity of time today, just look in Matthew 12. We're not going to look at the whole life and ministry of Jesus but there are two stories that take place in this one chapter alone that they were willing to completely dodge that which was in front of them, they were completely being willing to just avert it. The first is this, that Jesus is feeding and healing on the Sabbath day. Now to you and I in our culture, that may not seem that significant, however, in the Jewish culture, in the Jewish tradition, the Sabbath day was not a day of worship, it was not a day of celebration, it was not a day of work, it was a day where for 24 hours you did nothing. And you look at the story of the Israelites coming out with what we know as the exodus and the fact the Lord said, "If you will gather twice as much manna on the day before the Sabbath, that which normally will spoil and go bad, I will preserve if you will not work." Yet what did Jesus say in this passage? "For one greater than Jonah is here. One greater than Solomon is here." And one of the things they were dodging is that the Sabbath day wasn't just about 24 hours of nothing, the Sabbath day wasn't just about seeing the manna and its provision, the Sabbath day actually was pointing to the Messiah, the fact that they could not save themselves, they could not redeem themselves, they needed God to supernaturally divinely interject himself in their lives. You see, they're upset that Jesus is feeding and healing on the Sabbath and they don't realize that the Sabbath day that they're so upset about is staring them right in the face. He is the embodiment of the Sabbath. That which they had celebrated their whole life was staring at them, was a few feet away.

But there's also another story in this chapter where you see an individual who is perplexed, is possessed by a devil and Jesus comes and heals this individual, delivers this individual. They are no longer in the bondage of that spiritual oppression and chains. What did these men say? "Obviously, Jesus, you're doing this by Beelzebub for you have to be of the enemy. There is no way you can really be the real deal. You must be casting out by the prince of darkness." One of the things that Jesus replies to them has even been repeated by great men and women and, shall we say, leaders through the ages where he

says, "Can a house stand that is divided? How can the devil cast himself out?" And he challenges them and says, "Do you not realize that there is no way the devil would cast himself out because he wants control. I'm setting people free." These individuals, they were dissatisfied, they were struggling because what they wanted Jesus to be, what they wanted the Messiah to be was exactly what he was but it looked a little different. He was doing something on the Sabbath day, he was delivering people from their spiritual oppression, they're actually dodging the facts. They're dodging that he who they claimed they would believe in is right in front of them but then they dismiss the results.

I want you to look at verse 15 of Matthew 12. I want you to see what it says. It says that the multitudes, they came out. The multitudes came out from the city to be healed by him. Now I want you to think about this for just a moment. Everywhere Jesus went, every town he went into, all throughout the Gospels it said that the crowds, the multitudes came out and he healed those that were sick and he delivered those that were oppressed. You cannot find one single person in the Bible who sought healing from Jesus that didn't get it. You can't find one person who was in spiritual oppression and bondage to when they touched either the hem of his garment or he prayed for them that they did not receive freedom. The only people who did not receive did not believe. They were willing to dismiss the results. It didn't matter what the diagnosis was, it didn't matter what the history was, the story was, it didn't matter what had led up to that moment, they were willing to say, hear this, "Everybody else is wrong."

Does that sound familiar in our society and culture today? You see, there are disappointments, their disillusionment with Jesus is they were willing to dodge the obvious, the facts, they were willing to dismiss the impact. So what did they do? In their disappointment according to verse 38, here's what they say, "We would see a sign from thee." Now I want you to hear clearly what their asking of Jesus. They're not asking for a miracle, they've already seen one in their midst on the Sabbath day. They're not asking for an intrusion of the divine, they've seen that over and over. They're not asking for a special word for he has preached to the masses. In your Bible what we know as a sign is a very rare yet indisputable supernatural act of God.

Allow me to illustrate. In the story of Noah and the flood when Noah gets off the boat after 15 months, he's finally off the boat. When he gets off the boat, the Lord puts a rainbow in the sky and said, "This is a sign between humanity and myself. I will never flood the entire earth again." That's a pretty supernatural significant thing. There's a man by the name of Gideon. Gideon has an army of thousands but the Lord comes to him and says, "No, I want you to win the battle with just 300." Now I don't know about you but I would have struggled with that and Gideon said, "Boy, I need a sign here," and the Lord says, "Okay, I'll give you a sign. I want you to put a fleece or a piece of carpet out in the backyard. Tomorrow morning when you wake up, the dew is going to be all around the ground but the fleece is going to be dry." He wakes up the next morning just as God said. He said, "Do you know what? I'm struggling here. I want you to reverse that." So the next morning the fleece is wet and the ground is dry.

There are very few places in your Bible where a sign is mentioned. Oh sure, there's the miraculous, sure there is the divine, but what these guys are asking when they say, "We would see a sign," their disillusionment, their disappointment, their frustration in life, they're saying, "Okay, if you really claim to be who you say you are, you're going to have to do something nobody else has done. So what did Jesus say? "I'm coming back from the dead. That's what I'm going to do." That's what he did, right? He said as Jonah was in the belly of the whale three days and three nights, so the Son of Man will be in the heart of the earth three days and three nights. You see, there are lots of folks who can do the miraculous, there are lots of people who can play the sleight of hand, but can we all just agree today when you come back up from the dead, that trumps it all. That is a sign from God.

Do you find it interesting that those who were struggling, those who were disillusioned, those that were dissatisfied with what was going on, that Jesus' answer to them was the resurrection because it is the resurrection that forms this umbrella in our lives that all of our other struggles and issues can be housed underneath because if Jesus be risen from the dead then all the other things can be taken care of because everything else pales in comparison to that issue and that struggle. So they're disappointed, they're struggling and Jesus says, "Fine. You want a sign. I'll give you one. I'm going to come back from the dead once I go on the cross a few days from now."

I mentioned that it starts with disappointment but it really is initiated with doubt and here's what I want to communicate this morning, the disappointment that these guys, the disappointment, the disillusionment that we have not just at this season but in life, at the core of that, the seed of that is always doubt, a willingness not to believe. If you allow me to say it, a willingness to not transfer from that which we know cerebral in our mind and our head into our heart. How did that take place in their lives? How does it take place in our lives? Well, do you know what? It always begins because we dodge the facts.

Now here's what I find interesting about this passage. What did they ask Jesus for? A sign, right? "We want you to do something supernatural." Yet they're dodging the fact that he is a living, walking sign in front of them. You see, purposefully a while ago I left out one of the most well-known "signs" in your Old Testament. Rainbow in the sky. Fleeces that are dry versus ground that is wet. Did you know in Isaiah 7 the Lord says, "I will give you a sign. A woman not married, young, with no opportunity in the natural course of life will have a child and this child will be born a supernatural birth." Did you know all throughout Jesus' life and ministry one of the greatest ways they tried to pigeon-hole him was saying that he was born wrong, that he did not have the proper pedigree, he did not have the proper maternal influence in his life and Jesus never argued. Jesus never argued with them. He always agreed and said, "You're absolutely correct."

But I want you to understand what these guys are dodging because they want a sign and yet the Messiah would be born in the fashion of a sign just as Isaiah 7 said so. So I want us to walk it back for just a moment. I want us to take what we know as the Christmas story and I want us to walk it backwards so you can see how they were dodging it and how we oftentimes do as well. Jesus was raised just as the prophet said in a place called

Nazareth. He was in Nazareth because his family came out of Egypt just like the prophets foretold. He went to Egypt when the stars and what we know as the wise men came just as the prophets foretold, and before that, he was born in Bethlehem just as the prophets foretold. In fact, those who were having a conversation with Jesus agreed with him on all of these matters. In fact, they said, "How can something good come out of Galilee?" That's where Nazareth is, and yet the prophet said he would be a Nazarene. And yet they didn't dispute the fact out of Nazareth, lived in Egypt for a while, was born in Bethlehem and yet they weren't willing to connect the dots that the only one who would follow that lineage or would follow that line of events would be the Messiah.

As you look at the life and the ministry of Jesus Christ not only as foretold in the Old Testament but just from a practical perspective, there is nobody who decides how they're conceived. There is nobody who decides what town they're going to be born in. There is nobody who at age 2 says, "Hey, guys, we're going to move to a different country." So all of those prophecies that were fulfilled in the life of Jesus, there is no way he could have somehow orchestrated his life to fit the equation. They didn't argue with Nazareth. They didn't argue with Bethlehem. They didn't argue with Egypt. And yet they dodged the fact that the only one whose life would look that way would be the one that was born of a sign, the Messiah.

Then what they did was this, they dismissed the results. You see, not only did Jesus Christ, not only was he conceived, not only was he born, not only was he raised as the prophets foretold but he also lived his life, his entire ministry could be summarized in Isaiah 61 and what he spoke of in Luke 4 at his very first sermon. He said, "The captives are going to be set free. The Gospel is going to be preached to the poor." Find anything that Jesus did or said that does not match up with the prophesy of Isaiah. Find anything that Jesus said or did that did not match up with that first sermon in Luke 4 in the synagogue where he said, "Today this is fulfilled in your eyes." You see, not only did they doubt the facts of his supernatural conception and birth, they were willing to dismiss that every word he said, every action he took, every deed he did completely perfectly matched up with how the prophets said the Messiah would act, the words he would say, the deeds he would do. You see, the issue of doubt really has nothing to do with the facts, it has really nothing to do with the evidence, it's the fact that we're not willing to transfer from head knowledge to heart knowledge.

Last but not least, Jesus addresses this sign they want in verse 40. He says, "For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the whale's belly, so shall the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth." Now maybe it's just me but I find this intriguing. There are 39 books in the Old Testament, there are dozens of prophets, there are thousands of people that Jesus could have said, "Hey, if you really want to know who I am, look at this guy or read this story." But he picks this one? Why would he pick this story of all the stories in the Old Testament?

Some years ago, in fact, almost 30 years ago, I found myself in a place in life where there was a small church right in the middle of the Texas landscape, they were doing an interview, they were perspectively looking for a new youth pastor. Somehow my name

had been given to them and I was going through the process of being their youth pastor in those days and I made it to the point where we actually had a sit-down interview, a conversation. I remember showing up that night and it looked much like what I expected. There were four or five individuals that were in the room and myself, and it began as most interviews had and do, they began to ask questions about my upbringing, my testimony, my experience and such, but I noticed two very distinct things about this interview. The first one was this, that everybody was talking but one person and that person was sitting in the corner and he was at least 40 years older than anybody else in the room. He was an elderly, stately, had that appearance of just that wise countenance of a man. I didn't know why he was there, I didn't know what the format was, all I knew was this, he was not doing any of the talking, he was not doing any of the interacting, he was just sitting in the corner to himself. I thought it odd but okay. Well, over the course of time, the questions began to die down and one of the individuals in the room turned to this elderly stately man and said, "Sir, it's your turn now." Now can I just be honest? That struck fear in my heart. Here's a man who is probably at the time 50+ years older than me who hasn't said a word in over an hour and they tell him, "It's your turn now." I have no idea what's coming my way. I found out later that he was the, shall we say, the theological gauntlet of the group. It was his job to make sure that I was theologically sound. It was his job to make sure that my beliefs and my convictions of Scripture lined up with their church family.

I'll never forget what happened next. He looked at me and he said, "Jeff, I have one question for you." I said, "What is it, sir?" He said, "What do you think about Jonah?" I said, "Jonah, like Jonah and the whale Jonah?" He said, "Yeah, the prophet of God that was swallowed by the whale. What do you think about it?" I said, "Sir, I don't think I quite follow the questions here. What are you asking?" He said, "Okay, I'll make it simple. Was Jonah swallowed by a whale?" "Yes, sir." "Was he in the whale for three days?" "Yes, sir." "Was he spit out three days later on the beach?" "Yes, sir." He turned to the group and he goes, "He's good." They did what you're doing, they looked bewildered. "What do you mean he's good?" And I'll never forget what that stately man said, he said, "If he believes that, he believes it all."

Think about that for just a moment. Jesus could have picked any story, coming out of Egypt, crossing the Red Sea, manna in the wilderness, holes in the ground being swallowed 14,000 people, that's in the book of Numbers, we'll get there eventually, I promise. And he picks Jonah. You see, there wasn't a person in the audience who did not believe the story of Jonah. Everybody had heard it, everybody believed it, everybody knew it and what he's saying is, "You'll believe that story but you won't believe in me. You'll believe all of the details around his life but you won't believe what's standing right in front of you." It makes me wonder this Christmas season if maybe some of our disappointment, if maybe some of our disillusionment, maybe if some of the struggles that we have is that maybe we know all of the head knowledge of the Christmas story but we've never truly believed, we've never really grasped that Jesus was the Savior for our sins not just the subject of most of the songs we sing.

Let's pray with our heads bowed and our eyes closed. You know, maybe you're that individual today, maybe you're that person who said, "Do you know what, Jeff? You're right. I've sung all the songs, I've gone to all the parties, I've read all the stories but somehow in some way I just missed it." Man, I've got some great news for you. The Bible says whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved and maybe you're that person today, maybe you're that person, maybe you're that individual who would love that privilege, that opportunity. We've seen it displayed through baptism today. We saw those display on the outside what had already taken place on the inside. That's what we're talking about at this juncture. You say, "How do I do that? How does that take place?" Can I encourage you just to have a conversation with the Lord? You don't have to have this conversation out loud, in fact, you don't even have to say the same words that I might say, but maybe your conversation would go a little something like this. "God, today I've celebrated Christmas my whole life but I want to be honest, I've never met the Jesus Christ of Christmas so today I want you to know, God, I believe. I believe that Jesus Christ loved me so much that he was willing to be born on my behalf. I believe that Jesus Christ loved me so much he was willing to live a sinless life on my behalf. I believe that Jesus Christ loved me so much he was willing to pay the price for my sins on the cross and I believe just as we read today, I believe that three days later he rose from the dead so that I could be forgiven and I could be saved. God, today I don't have all the answers to all the problems that are surrounding me, but I do know that Jesus Christ is the only answer to my sin problem so in the best way I know how, I'm asking you to forgive me, I'm asking you to save me, I just want to turn my life over to you."

With our heads still bowed and our eyes still closed, maybe today is the day you had that conversation with the Lord. We'd love to have a conversation with you, we'd love to celebrate what the Lord is doing whether that's a first-time decision or maybe that's following in believer's baptism, becoming a part of this great church or any other decision, we just want to celebrate with you. We invite you for the privilege of a conversation.

Heavenly Father, as we continue our time of worship, we are grateful this day for your hand of grace, for your arm of mercy, for your willingness to forgive and your desire to save. Lord, I pray this day at this hour in this season that we would realize the Jesus Christ behind the songs, the trappings and the traditions and it wouldn't just be about what we know in our head but, God, what we would believe in our hearts. It is in the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.

I'm going to ask you to stand with me as our team leads us. Whatever decision, I'll be right here at the front.