

Matthew 12:38-50 “Are You My Mother?”  
Jonah 1:17-3:10  
Psalm 42

May 10, 2015 (Peter)

“Salvation belongs to the LORD.”

The Word of the Lord had come to Jonah the *first time* saying,  
Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it,  
for their evil has come up before me.” (1:2)

And Jonah fled from before the LORD,  
knowing (as he says in 4:2) that the LORD is gracious and merciful,  
slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and relenting from disaster.

As soon as Jonah hears the Word of the Lord commanding him to go to Nineveh,  
he knows that God’s purpose is to bring salvation to Nineveh.

If it was too late for Nineveh, then God would not have sent a prophet.  
God only sends prophets when there is hope for repentance!

Sometimes there is only hope for a remnant (think of the days of Elijah – or Jeremiah),  
but when a prophet declares the coming wrath of God,  
you should hear that warning as the voice of God’s *mercy*.  
“Who knows? God may turn and relent and turn away from his fierce anger,  
so that we may not perish.”

Salvation belongs to the Lord.

That theme is echoed in Psalm 42 – another song that has a lot of water –  
the waterfalls and breakers of the LORD that pour over me –  
the waters of judgment!

The Psalmist – like Jonah – had to pass through the waters of judgment  
trusting that salvation belongs to the Lord.

This is why baptism will become the sacrament of salvation.

The Sign of Jonah is that Jonah spent three days in the belly of the great fish.  
Even so, the Son of Man will spend three days in the heart of the earth.  
And Paul will say that we are *buried with Christ* by baptism into his death.

Jesus passed through the waters of judgment.

Jesus will speak of his *death* as a baptism.

He will pass through death.

Think of the hymns that talk about “Crossing the Jordan”  
as a picture of death and resurrection.

The Sign of Jonah is that through his death, Jesus has passed through the waters.

Therefore, all who are found in him have passed through the waters with Jesus.

Psalm 42 reminds us that the LORD is “my salvation and my God” –  
but Psalm 42 also reminds us that the waves and breakers that are drowning me  
are “*your breakers and your waves.*”

In the same way that the *LORD* sent the storm after Jonah –  
and the *LORD* sent the fish to swallow him –  
even so, God sends trouble – and he sends salvation – to you!

He sends trouble after Jonah because Jonah was running away from him.  
If you are running away from God, you have nowhere to hide.  
He made you – and everything else!  
All you can do is make matters worse.

But the good news is that in the same way that God only sends a prophet when there is hope,  
likewise, he sends trouble in order to call you to repentance!

Psalm 42 helps us reflect on that.

Sing Psalm 42  
Read Matthew 12:38-50

Jesus points to his disciples and says, “Here are my mother and my brothers.”

If God is your Father, then who is your mother?  
I grew up believing that there was no mother in the Christian life.  
God is Father. That’s it.

But Jesus says that he has a mother – besides Mary!  
And notice, that Jesus does not say, “here are my *mothers*” –  
unlike the postmodern world,  
Jesus recognizes that the category of “mother” is a singular term!

Jesus says that his disciples are his *mother* as well as his brothers.

Jesus is drawing on the teaching of the prophets that Zion – the church –  
is our Mother.

You find a lot of older writers – and a lot of older hymns – that talk this way –  
John Calvin once said that “there is no other way to enter into life unless this mother  
conceive us in her womb, give us birth, [and] nourish us at her breast....  
[A]way from her bosom one cannot hope for any forgiveness of sins  
or any salvation.”

But in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries people stopped talking about the church as mother.  
Is it any wonder that motherhood became devalued?  
If salvation has a Father, but no mother,  
then motherhood can’t be all that important!

But God is our Father, and the Church is our Mother.

Today we are looking at the end of Matthew 12.

Matthew 11-12 follows the same basic pattern as the Apostles' Creed.

God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit – and the church.

There is a reason why the Apostles' Creed is called *apostolic*.

Over and over again, throughout the apostles' teaching,  
you see the same pattern:

God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit – and the church.

Ephesians is loaded with this.

Peter's sermon at Pentecost in Acts 2 has this structure.

1 John has a couple examples.

But the apostles learned this pattern from Jesus.

In Matthew 11-12, the basic question is *who is Jesus?*

That's the question that John asked – “Are you the one who is to come,  
or shall we look for another?” (11:3)

This question will keep driving Matthew's gospel  
until Peter finally confesses that Jesus is the Christ (Matthew 16:16)

And Matthew 11-12 focuses first on the Father and the Son (especially 11:25-27),  
then turns to the relationship between the Son and the Spirit (cf. 12:28),  
before concluding with the relationship between the Son and the church (12:50).

We saw two weeks ago that Jesus is the unique Son of God.

“All things have been handed over to me by my Father...”

Jesus claims that God is “my Father” in a unique way.

God has not “handed over” all things to *anyone else!*

Indeed, Jesus says, “no one knows the Son except the Father,  
and no one knows the Father except the Son

and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.” (11:27-28)

If you want to know the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob,  
then you need to come to Jesus!

We saw last week how the Spirit is essential to the work of the Son.

Jesus is not only the Beloved Son –

he is also the Servant of the LORD.

And Matthew quoted Isaiah 42 “I will put my Spirit upon him,  
and he will proclaim justice to the Gentiles.”

Jesus is the Spirit-anointed Servant of the LORD

who is all that Israel was called to be.

And the way you know this – the way you know that the Kingdom of God has come –  
is because Jesus is casting out demons by the Spirit of God.

In other words, to the question “Are you the one?”

Matthew shows us, first, that Jesus is the unique Son of God –  
and second, that Jesus is the Spirit-anointed Servant of the LORD –

So at the center of Matthew 11-12

is the relationship between the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit,  
and what the Triune God is doing for the salvation of his people.

Here at the end of Matthew 12,

Jesus applies this to the church.

He starts with the negative.

The first two points address “this evil generation.”

The word “generation” is used four times in our passage.

In v39, “an evil and adulterous generation”

v41, “The men of Nineveh will rise up at the judgment with this generation”

v42, “The queen of the South will rise up at the judgment with this generation”

v45, “So also it will be with this evil generation”

So what does Jesus mean by “an evil and adulterous generation”?

The word translated “generation” has several meanings.

In this context, it could either mean a “generational cohort” –

like “the baby boomers” or “generation X” –

or it could mean something more like “race” –

an ethnic group with cultural similarities.

What does *Jesus* mean?

Notice first that Jesus addresses the scribes and Pharisees.

In Matthew’s gospel, the scribes and Pharisees are the leaders of the opposition.

Jesus has just hinted that they may have blasphemed the Holy Spirit.

So when Jesus says “an evil and adulterous generation” –

he’s not saying that *everyone* in this generation is evil and adulterous.

Jesus is referring to a particular sort of people.

In one sense, “this generation” plainly applied to those who heard him –

but as soon as Matthew writes it down,

the message becomes directed to the next generation –

and indeed, all generations!

“This generation” does not refer to a cohort born between certain dates.

Anyone who identifies with the Pharisaic way of responding to Jesus

becomes a part of “this evil generation.”

Verses 38-42 start by saying that an evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign.

## 1. An Evil Generation Seeks for a Sign – Something Greater than Jonah and Solomon Is Here (v38-42)

<sup>38</sup> Then some of the scribes and Pharisees answered him, saying, “Teacher, we wish to see a sign from you.” <sup>39</sup> But he answered them, “An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign,

This may seem odd.

Jesus has been healing the sick, casting out demons – even raising the dead!  
And the scribes and Pharisees say, “Teacher, we wish to see a sign from you.”  
Plainly, the signs that Jesus has been doing are not enough for them!

What sign do they seek?

What sign would satisfy them?

If you saw the heavens open, and a figure came down and declared with a loud voice,  
“Jesus is the Son of God!”  
Would that do it?

Maybe.

For a little while.

But how long would that last?

After a few months – a few years –  
you start wondering,

“Was that real? Or was that just a dream?”

And then, what about your children?

Would they believe you?

Or would God have to do it again and again?

How often would God have to do that?

Every morning there’s a public service announcement from heaven:

“God here – don’t forget to believe in Jesus today!”

God actually did that once:

for 40 years in the wilderness he provided manna from heaven six days a week.  
The glory-cloud (the presence of the Holy Spirit) led Israel through the desert.

And yet it was to that generation that the LORD said,  
“they are a crooked and twisted generation.” (Dt 32:5)  
Daily signs from heaven *don’t work*.

And so Jesus says, “an evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign.”

The Devil had challenged Jesus to perform a sign –  
turn stones into bread –  
cast yourself from the pinnacle of the temple.  
Do something spectacular to prove who you are!

Jesus replies in a way that is opaque to the Pharisees –  
but reveals life for those who have eyes to see:

*but no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah.* <sup>40</sup> *For just 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.*

WE want a sign that is great and glorious!  
Show us your power!  
Show us your glory!  
If you are the Messiah, then restore the Kingdom of David!

How do I know that the Pharisees wanted something like that?  
Because Jesus says that something greater than Solomon is here.  
Jesus *says* that something greater than Israel's most glorious king is here!

For those who have eyes to see,  
Jesus will give them a sign that *does* show his power and glory!  
a sign that does signal the restoration of the Kingdom of David!

You want a sign – fine, I'll give you a sign.  
The Sign of Jonah.  
The sign of the failed prophet who ran away from God.  
The sign of the prophet who rebelled and refused to do what God commanded.

Why does Jesus say that he will give them the sign of the prophet Jonah?  
To understand this, you need to understand what the book of Jonah is doing.  
The book of Jonah was not written to Nineveh.  
The book of Jonah was written to *Israel*.  
Israel was called to be a light to the nations.  
But Israel fled – Israel refused to be a light to the nations.

If Jonah represents Israel,  
then the prophetic message to Israel  
is that Israel must die so that the nations can live.  
So the Sign of Jonah points forward to the Son of Man.  
The Son of Man will lay down his life,  
he will descend into hell,  
and be swallowed up by the grave,  
so that those who trust in him might live.

If you understood the scriptures,  
then you would know that the only road to glory is the way of the cross!

The Sign of Jonah is that Israel must die so that the nations may live.  
Think back to Mathew 12:18, 21 – quoting from Isaiah 42:

“Behold, my servant whom I have chosen,  
my beloved with whom my soul is well pleased.  
I will put my Spirit upon him, and he will proclaim justice to the Gentiles.  
...and in his name the Gentiles will hope.”

Indeed, as Jesus says in verses 41-42:

<sup>41</sup> *The men of Nineveh will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and behold, something greater than Jonah is here.* <sup>42</sup> *The queen of the South will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon, and behold, something greater than Solomon is here.*

Notice how Jesus links together Jonah and Solomon.

In one sense the link *is* the Gentiles –

Nineveh and the queen of the South were both Gentiles –

and yet these Gentiles will condemn “this generation” –  
this *Jewish* generation.

But even more important is the way that Jesus is connecting *all of scripture*.

What does *Jonah* have to do with *Solomon*?

How does the Sign of Jonah signal the coming of the Kingdom of God?!

As Jesus had said in the sermon on the Mount:

“I have come *not* to abolish the Law and the Prophets, but to fulfill them.”

All the Law and the Prophets are fulfilled in Jesus.

The men of Nineveh heard the preaching of Jonah –

one line: “Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!”

and they repented.

The queen of the South came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon,

and she believed the good news.

Now the Son of God has come in the flesh –

the fulfillment of all the Law and the Prophets –

and those who are most skilled in the scriptures –

the scribes and the Pharisees –

are plotting to destroy him.

What about you?

Are you waiting for a sign?

Are you saying in your heart,

“If God does X, *then* I will follow him?”

“If God shows me Y, *then* I will repent and turn away from my sin?”

God has given you a sign –

the sign of Jonah –

in the death and resurrection of Jesus!  
And every Sunday, the heavens open, and the glory of the Lord shines forth –  
and the messenger of heaven proclaims to you that Jesus is Lord!

Verses 43-45 then explain what happens to “this evil generation”:

## **2. An Evil Generation Gets More Demons (v43-45)**

<sup>43</sup> “When the unclean spirit has gone out of a person, it passes through waterless places seeking rest, but finds none. <sup>44</sup> Then it says, ‘I will return to my house from which I came.’ And when it comes, it finds the house empty, swept, and put in order. <sup>45</sup> Then it goes and brings with it seven other spirits more evil than itself, and they enter and dwell there, and the last state of that person is worse than the first. So also will it be with this evil generation.”

I should say something about demons.

Scripture never gives us a full “demonology.”

For that matter, nowhere in scripture are *we* commanded to cast out demons.

You see Jesus and the apostles casting out demons

(and healing the sick, and raising the dead),

but the apostles never tell us to do the same.

In the gospels, we often hear that a particular illness was caused by a demon –

but we are not given the information on how to diagnose that.

Instead, in James we are told that if someone is sick,

they should call for the elders, who should anoint them with oil,

and the prayer of faith will raise them up.

There is nothing about casting out demons – simply anointing with oil and praying.

(Incidentally, I should mention that our elders *have done this* and *will do it* if you ask!)

What do demons do in scripture?

We often focus on temptation –

you'll hear people talk about the demon of “lust” or “fear” or “anger.”

But outside of Satan’s tempting of Jesus,

it's hard to find much about demons *tempting us to sin*.

Scripture talks about lust, fear, and anger in terms of *our flesh*.

What do demons do in scripture?

Demons *torment* (both physical and mental illness is demonic).

Demons cause suffering – they make life miserable for you.

That’s why Jesus never calls on the demon-possessed to “repent”!

If you have a demon, that means that you are *suffering* – you are *afflicted* –

and you need *relief*!

But, after Jesus has cast out your demon –

after Jesus has brought relief from your afflictions –

then what?



Notice that Jesus speaks of “a person” – and then applies it to the whole of “this evil generation.”

So let’s start with “a person.”

I’ve seen this happen so many times – it makes my heart break!

Jesus casts a demon out of a person.

In other words, Jesus has mercy on a person who was afflicted in various ways  
and brings them out of their trouble.

They may repent and believe outwardly –

but in their heart, they are still a Pharisee.

In other words (look back at verse 38),

they are still longing for signs –

and *most importantly*, they are *refusing* to love God and neighbor

*because* God isn’t giving them what they want.

Jesus cannot say this more clearly to you:

*The demons are coming back.*

And there are more of them – and they are worse than the ones you had before!

I think of a man who found relief from his afflictions at MCPC.

As long as he was in fellowship with God’s people,

he felt good – he had hope – he could see a better future –

“the unclean spirit” had gone out of him.

He no longer was tormented.

Jesus says,

“Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart,  
and you will find rest for your souls.”

But other things mattered more than following Jesus.

He did not want to *learn* from Jesus.

He just wanted to feel good.

He wanted the emotional high of being free from demons –

but he did not want to be “tied down” by the yoke of Jesus.

Today, the demons are back.

And it’s worse than ever!

So, Jesus says in verses 38-42 that at the judgment,

the men of Nineveh and the queen of the South will rise up

and condemn this evil generation,

because they did not repent and believe the gospel.

And, in verses 43-45, Jesus adds that this evil generation *also* includes some

who have been temporarily relieved by Jesus from their demonic afflictions.

Does that scare you?  
It should!

Faith *trembles* at the threatenings of scripture.  
When we hear that the demons are coming back,  
we ought to tremble!  
I don't want those demons back!

But precisely at this moment, Jesus' mother and his brothers arrive!

### **3. "Whoever Does the Will of My Father in Heaven Is My Brother and Sister and Mother" (v46-50)**

<sup>46</sup> *While he was still speaking to the people, behold, his mother and his brothers stood outside, asking to speak to him.* <sup>48</sup> *But he replied to the man who told him, "Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?"* <sup>49</sup> *And stretching out his hand toward his disciples, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers!"* <sup>50</sup> *For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother."*

Matthew wants us to see Jesus' words in verses 48-50 as the *antidote* to "this generation."  
And it is here in verses 48-50 that we realize that "this generation"  
is not *just* referring to a "generational cohort."  
"This evil generation" refers to a certain family –  
a family that is opposed to Jesus and refuses to believe in him  
or do what he says.

Here, Jesus shows us the alternative to "this generation."  
"Whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother."

As many have said before, "God has no grandchildren."  
Jesus is the *unique* Son –  
notice how he says, "the will of *my* Father in heaven."  
You can only have God for your Father if you come to Jesus!

But this remains true in every generation.  
Your parents cannot believe "for you."  
*You* must repent and believe the gospel.

The evil generation is always waiting for a sign –  
insisting that God do things their way before they will obey him.

The family of Jesus does the will of Jesus' Father –  
because he has become *our* Father.

Jesus had said in Matthew 11:27,  
"no one knows the Father except the Son  
and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him."

When Jesus reveals the Father to you,  
and you become a child of God,  
then you do the will of Jesus' Father,  
and thus you become the brother or sister of Jesus.

Now, if that was all that Jesus had said, we'd be happy.  
We are brothers and sisters of Jesus!  
Yay!

But Jesus says something else.

Jesus says, "whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister  
and *mother*."

What does Jesus mean?

Plainly Mary is the only person who gave birth to Jesus.  
But Jesus points toward the disciples and says,  
"Here are my *mother* (singular) and *brothers* (plural)."

Isaiah often speaks of Jerusalem as the *mother* of the people of God.

In Isaiah 66:7-12, the prophet said  
*"Before she was in labor she gave birth;  
before her pain came upon her she delivered a son.  
<sup>8</sup> Who has heard such a thing?  
Who has seen such things?  
Shall a land be born in one day?  
Shall a nation be brought forth in one moment?  
For as soon as Zion was in labor she brought forth her children.*

Notice how Isaiah speaks of Zion giving birth *first* to a son –  
and *then* to a whole nation in one moment.  
*Jesus* is the firstborn son of Zion –  
and *we* are the nation born in one moment.

As God continues to say in Isaiah 66:9-12 –

<sup>9</sup> *Shall I bring to the point of birth and not cause to bring forth?" says the LORD;  
"shall I, who cause to bring forth, shut the womb?" says your God.*

<sup>10</sup> *"Rejoice with Jerusalem, and be glad for her, all you who love her;  
rejoice with her in joy, all you who mourn over her;*

<sup>11</sup> *that you may nurse and be satisfied from her consoling breast;  
that you may drink deeply with delight from her glorious abundance.*"<sup>[a]</sup>

<sup>12</sup> *For thus says the LORD:*

*"Behold, I will extend peace to her like a river,  
and the glory of the nations like an overflowing stream;  
and you shall nurse, you shall be carried upon her hip,  
and bounced upon her knees.*

We are used to calling the church the “bride of Christ,”  
but in fact, throughout the scriptures, the church is *more often* called  
the *mother* of God’s people.

As Paul says in Galatians 4:26,

“the Jerusalem above is free, and she is our mother.”

Or as in Revelation 12:5, where the woman gives birth to the male child,  
and then in 12:17, the dragon makes war on “the rest of her offspring” –  
and notice how John describes her “offspring” –

“those who keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus.”

According to Revelation 12,  
we share the same mother as Jesus.

And Jesus told us,

“Whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother.”

So the church is the mother of Jesus – and therefore she is our mother as well.

The Church is the womb in which the unbeliever encounters the gospel,  
is impregnated by the Holy Spirit through the preaching of the Word.  
It is she who nurtures us, feeding us at her breasts with the pure milk of the gospel,  
then giving us the solid food of sound doctrine and discipleship.  
She guides us with her long wisdom,  
taught to her by the Holy Spirit from the Word of God,  
over long ages of her history—  
the very wisdom of God in Christ, to whom she submits.

Look back at verse 44.

This evil generation is like a house, empty, swept and put in order.

The Pharisees have everything in their place.

But they will not follow Jesus.

On the other hand, the family of Jesus is not empty, swept, and put in order.

The family of Jesus is busy doing the will of my Father in heaven.

I’m not talking about how clean your house is!

Jesus’ point is that *this generation* is obsessed with doing everything *just the right way*.

But they “need a sign” in order to do what Jesus says!

Jesus says that the only sign that you are getting is the Sign of Jonah –  
the sign of weakness – the sign of the cross.

But Jesus has come in order to establish a new family – a new generation –  
characterized by *doing* the will of his Father.

And Jesus says that whoever does the will of my Father is my brother, my sister, my mother.  
Are you my mother?