

An Evil and Adulterous Generation

Matt 12:38-50

Increasingly, Jesus presented a contrast between the fates of those who rejected His ministry and the compassion and blessing that He held out to those who sought His help. In chapter 11 He argued that the religious leaders had rejected both Himself and John the Baptist for opposite reasons so that if you took their words at face value then they would have favored one of the two but they "changed their colors" in order to reject them both. Jesus then compared the fates of the cities of Galilee, Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum that were blessed by His ministry to the immoral and idolatrous cities, Tyre, Sidon and Sodom, cities infamous for their experience of judgment. Each of the evil cities had been destroyed and had never been rebuilt but Jesus said that if the mighty works done in Galilee had been done in those cities then they would have repented. "It will be more tolerable for Tyre, Sidon (and Sodom) in the Day of judgment than for you." But Jesus looked beyond the religious elite to the common people and continued to offer hope and help. "Come to Me all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."

Matt 12 records 2 miracles that sparked very intense controversy. In the first, Jesus healed a man with a withered hand in the synagogue on the Sabbath. It was a trap laid by Jesus' opponents who wanted to publicize what they regarded as Jesus' disregard for the Sabbath. Jesus recognized the trap and unveiled their hypocrisy. Then He healed the man anyway. In the second, Jesus freed a man from demon possession and in the process gave him sight and the ability to speak. The propaganda from the authorities claimed that Jesus had cast out the demon by the power of the Devil but Jesus defeated this accusation and indicted its authors as guilty of the unpardonable sin. He raised the issue of our words being a window to our soul and so demonstrated the spiritual consistency of an unpardonable sin that was a sin of words.

A pause occurs, Jesus is questioned by the Pharisees at another time and place. They ask, "Teacher, we want to see a sign from You." Jesus' answer was consistent with His sayings that Matthew had just recorded. Again, Jesus responded to opposition with words that warned of a judgment to come. Jesus lived closer to the judgment that we do. He had come from God and He was returning to God. Peter says that a thousand years are like a day to God and a day like a thousand years. God created the means by which we measure time. He created time. But He is not limited by time. He operates inside and outside of time. From outside of time, it would seem that all of the events of time could be seen simultaneously. From this perspective judgment looms large. It is imminent. It is decisive. It dwarfs any other concern.

Judgment does not seem to be much of a concern to most people. It seems far away. It does not seem fair but harsh and cruel. If God is good then how could there be a judgment? Aren't our present sufferings enough? Sermons about judgment are negative. They might have worked a couple generations ago but people do not want to hear that stuff today.

Are these objections to judgment serious? Obviously, these objections are meaningful to those who raise them but do they have a point? Should the objectors to judgment shake your faith?

Problem # 1 The arguments against God's goodness begin at the wrong place. The first question must be, "Is there a God?" Next, "Do we have a way of knowing what He is like?" For the Christian, the answer to question #1 is "Yes." And the answer to question #2 is that He has revealed Himself to us through His creation, through the Bible and through His Son, Jesus Christ. When you accept these two answers then they define the nature of our spiritual quest. Our quest must be a journey of discovery as we dig deeply into God's revelation of Himself in order to know and understand our creator and redeemer. My opinion or any other human view of what God should be like has no relevance to the reality of God's existence and personhood.

The book, Yellow and Pink.

Jesus came to speak on God's behalf. His confession was that He spoke the words that the Father gave to Him. Jesus spoke often of the judgment. It was obviously very real to Him. He was deeply concerned for us in regard to the judgment and He constantly appealed to His audience to be ready and prepared for the judgment was certainly coming. To argue against the judgment is to argue against reality. No matter how eloquently you articulate your views, nothing will change.

Let's say that our radios and phones went off in order to declare a national emergency. A tsunami had been detected and it was due to come ashore in 3 hours. Ground 0 was Huntington Beach. Now if I hurried to the beach and declared that I could not see the tsunami and that therefore it must not exist, would this change the arrival time or the location of ground 0? If I claimed that it was clearly discriminatory for the tsunami to hit Huntington Beach when there were so many babies and children who lived there, would this change the location of ground 0? If I claimed that 20% of the population of Huntington Beach was not plugged in to media either by TV, radio, or phone and that therefore it was unfair for the tsunami to hit so suddenly when so many had no chance to respond, would this change anything?

An argument against reality is hopeless. It is meaningless. It is a waste of life. It prevents any adaptation to what is real. It deceives. It holds you back. It is intellectual

foolishness. Brilliant logic that rests on a false premise is worthless. It accomplishes nothing.

When the Jews asked Jesus for a sign, they ignored the reality they had already witnessed. They injected their opinion - Jesus had not yet sufficiently proved His claims for if He were the Messiah He would surely feel as they did about the Sabbath, He would be part of the establishment and surely He would be a Pharisee. Therefore, He could not be the Messiah and so His healings were farcical, His teaching was blasphemous, and His lifestyle was licentious. And the Pharisee who was caught up in these thoughts was likely to run into a blind man who could now see and to stand next to a man whose withered hand had been healed or to worship with a man whose daughter was raised from the dead.

Jesus answered, "No sign but the sign of the prophet, Jonah." This was the sign of the resurrection. Jonah was thrown out of the boat swallowed by the great fish and vomited on shore three days later. From the beach he went directly to Nineveh where he preached the coming judgment. His story was his message. The sailors authenticated his story. He had been on the ship. They had been in a terrible storm. They had thrown him overboard. They had been certain of his death. He smelled to them like a fish had eaten him. They believed him. The reality of Jonah's experience convinced the city that the judgment was real. They repented and they were spared.

The people of Nineveh accepted the reality of God's revelation instead of projecting their own notions of what God should be like upon Him. They came to an understanding of God that was completely foreign to anything that they had ever considered. They let go of their former thoughts and embraced the reality of God's power, His authority as their creator, His prerogative to establish a moral and spiritual code and His right to hold them accountable for breaking it. By accepting reality they changed their destiny. Nineveh is a story of God's mercy rather than an example of His wrath.

The sign was the sign of the resurrection. The sign has been given, where do you stand?