

Luke 40 – Opposition: Part 2

In the biography of British missionary David Livingstone, we read about how while he was trying to get into the interior of Africa, he had several trials. The first of these were fever and disease, which ravaged his body several times. He was forced to carry a box of medicines for himself and those around him as he went through the jungles. The second trial was an attack from a lion. While walking through the jungle a lion jumped at him and demolished his shoulder. There was also the attack from other men. The Africans he had been sent to help would constantly steal his things, even his medicine box once. He was also opposed by the slave trade, who either exploited his inroads into the Dark Continent or tried to stop him in his tracks. One might think that a man who did so much for the continent of Africa would have been helped, not hindered, but this is what we see not only in his life, but in the lives of many who want to do the Will of God.

Before His death, Jesus told His disciples: “In the world ye shall have tribulation.” He said to them: “They shall put you out of the synagogues: yea, the time cometh, that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service.” It is no wonder that Jesus said this, because He Himself went through the worst of persecutions, eventually being put to death on a Roman cross for crimes He did not commit. Throughout His life, those who should have been welcoming and helping constantly questioned and opposed Him. Such as the case we will see this morning, which is a continuation of what we started last week.

You remember that Jesus was casting out a demon in the story found in Luke 11, which is where I invite you to turn. Luke 11:14-16 says “And he was casting out a devil, and it was dumb. And it came to pass, when the devil was gone out, the dumb spake; and the people wondered. But some of them said, He casteth out devils through Beelzebub the chief of the devils. And others, tempting him, sought of him a sign from heaven.” Some religious leaders came to Jesus and though He was doing miracles, doubted that His claims were true. The reason Jesus did the miracles He did was to authenticate His message: the message of the Kingdom of God coming to Earth and the promise of the forgiveness of sins.

You will also remember that one group of people doubted Jesus by saying that He was casting out demons in the power of Satan. Jesus wisely answered their charge with six different defenses, outlined and explained in the last broadcast, which may be obtained on our website, www.fbcpr.org. Jesus completely explained why it was impossible to assume he was casting out demons with the Devil’s power, and the implications of His casting out these unclean spirits. He was taking back territory and people that had once belonged to Satan. His kingdom was expanding, and this was clear to the person whose eyes were not blinded by sin.

But you will notice that there were two lines of opposition. Jesus had demonstrated incredible power, and the religious leaders had to try to do damage control as to why Jesus was able to do them. The first argument was that Jesus wasn’t really using God’s power, but Satan’s. The second is that Jesus was not showing a sign. This may seem incredible to us, since casting out a demon would surely be a sign that someone was approved and empowered by God. But we need to understand the significance of a sign to a Jewish person.

We in the West are able to think very abstractly. We can use adjectives to describe things, since we understand the way things ought to be. We can see happiness, although happiness isn’t visible. Those in the East, however, especially those in 1st century Israel, did not think this way. They tended to think much more concretely. This is why in the Psalms, you won’t find David saying to God, “You are strong,” as much as He says things like, “Thou art my rock.” A rock pictures how you think of God, and a rock is something much more tangible. This is not a wrong way of thinking, only a different way of thinking, and one that, when grasped, will help you more fully understand the Bible, since it was written by Easterners, not Westerners.

So, what was a sign? A sign was a proof that something in the future would happen. We know this firsthand because of road signs. We see a sign saying, “Menahga, 9 miles,” and we can anticipate arriving in Menahga in the near future. We see a billboard for a restaurant and know that we will pass one a few miles up the road. The

same is true for a sign in the Bible. The word “sign” appears ninety-nine times in the Bible, 46 in the Old Testament and 53 in the New Testament. The word in Hebrew means literally “something that appears.” It is a signal or monument, but is often used as another word for a miracle.

The first instance of the word “sign” in the Bible is in Exodus 4. In Exodus 3, God appeared to Moses in a burning bush and told him to go back to Egypt. God was going to use Moses to lead His people out of their slavery in Egypt and into a land He had prepared for them. Moses, though he wanted this, was not sure about whether he really should or not, and offered God excuses. One of these excuses is found in the first verse of Exodus 4: “And Moses answered and said, But, behold, they will not believe me, nor hearken unto my voice: for they will say, The LORD hath not appeared unto thee.” Moses says that any shepherd can appear in Egypt and say that God spoke to them. He was afraid they would not believe them. Moses perhaps thought that this excuse would throw God and make Him look for someone else, but God simply asks Moses a question: “What is that in thine hand.”

Moses responds that he is holding a rod in his hand, and God tells him to throw it on the ground. When Moses obeys, the rod becomes a serpent. When Moses picks his serpent back up, it again become a rod. God then tells Moses to put his hand inside his robe. When Moses draws his hand out, he finds that it is leprous. When he puts his hand back inside his coat and withdraws it, it is restored. God then says to Moses: “And it shall come to pass, if they will not believe thee, neither hearken to the voice of the first sign, that they will believe the voice of the latter sign. And it shall come to pass, if they will not believe also these two signs, neither hearken unto thy voice, that thou shalt take of the water of the river, and pour it upon the dry land: and the water which thou takest out of the river shall become blood upon the dry land.” God intended these two miracles to be used as a sign to point to the fact that God was serious and that He was going to do something in the future.

This is what a sign is. It is something meant to point unequivocally to a future event. When you looked at something or someone, you knew that it was true or false because there was a sign pointing to it. We see these in the Bible all the time. In 1 Kings 13, a prophet comes to wicked king Jeroboam and tells him that in the future, a king named Josiah would pollute the altar on which Jeroboam was offering incense. In order to prove that this would happen, the prophet offered a sign: the altar would be torn to pieces and the ashes would fall to the ground. 1 Kings 13:5 says “The altar also was rent, and the ashes poured out from the altar, according to the sign which the man of God had given by the word of the LORD.” This prophecy came true much later, and God did raise up a man named Josiah to be king, who then polluted that very altar.

In 2 Kings 20, King Hezekiah is very sick. He prays to God to heal him, and Isaiah the prophet tells him that He will. Hezekiah asks for a sign that he may know that it will come to pass. 2 Kings 20:8-11 gives us the conversation: “And Hezekiah said unto Isaiah, What shall be the sign that the LORD will heal me, and that I shall go up into the house of the LORD the third day? And Isaiah said, This sign shalt thou have of the LORD, that the LORD will do the thing that he hath spoken: shall the shadow go forward ten degrees, or go back ten degrees? And Hezekiah answered, It is a light thing for the shadow to go down ten degrees: nay, but let the shadow return backward ten degrees. And Isaiah the prophet cried unto the LORD: and he brought the shadow ten degrees backward, by which it had gone down in the dial of Ahaz.” When Hezekiah saw the sun dial record that the shadow miraculously went back ten degrees, he knew that he would be healed.

There were signs that would point to the arrival of God’s Promised One, the Messiah. We have talked about this in the past and do not have time to go into this now, but God had said that the Messiah would be born of a virgin in Bethlehem. He would be from the tribe of Judah and his arrival would be accompanied by a genocide. All of these things came to pass, so that those there at the time of Jesus could have seen them, if they had been looking. There were even more signs that Jesus would be crucified, that He would die among thieves, and that He would be buried in a rich man’s tomb. The Old Testament gave signs that the Messiah would be meek, that He would come into Jerusalem riding on a donkey, and that He would heal diseases such as blindness and deafness. All these things were signs to Jews who were looking for them.

However, if you were not looking for them, you would miss them. This happened to me a few weeks ago. I was driving through an unfamiliar neighborhood and was stopped by a policeman. When he asked me if I knew why he stopped me, I said I didn't know. He told me that I had driven through a stop sign. I do not remember doing that or seeing it, and still could not tell you how I missed it. The policeman let me go, but it is a good illustration of how people miss signs. The sign was there, but I was not paying attention to it or looking for it. The same was true for these Pharisees. They were not looking at the signs found in the Bible, but for new ones. They were opposing Jesus, and so once again Jesus defends Himself in our text, which is Luke 11:29-32. It says:

“And when the people were gathered thick together, he began to say, This is an evil generation: they seek a sign; and there shall no sign be given it, but the sign of Jonas the prophet. For as Jonas was a sign unto the Ninevites, so shall also the Son of man be to this generation. The queen of the south shall rise up in the judgment with the men of this generation, and condemn them: for she came from the utmost parts of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and, behold, a greater than Solomon is here. The men of Nineve shall rise up in the judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: for they repented at the preaching of Jonas; and, behold, a greater than Jonas is here.” This story is also given in Matthew 12:38-42.

The Pharisees had asked Jesus for a sign that He was the Messiah. This meant that they wanted Him to do more miracles. Remember that this had been one of Satan's tactics in the wilderness. He had said: “If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down from hence: For it is written, He shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee: And in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone.” Satan's temptation was to forgo the message of God and simply get the adoration and obedience of an incredulous crowd of people who would see Jesus jump from the temple and land unharmed, aided by the angels of God. This would have been a sign, but Jesus rejected it. He was not trying to use His message to authenticate His miracle working, but was using His miracles to authenticate His message, which came first. Jesus had said in John 18:37: “To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth.”

Jesus first calls out those asking for a sign. He says, “This is an evil generation: they seek a sign.” Matthew records that Jesus says: “An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign.” They are not willing to do what God asks, only desirous to see new, miraculous things. They do not want the Messiah, only the Messiah's miracles. Jesus refuses to give them this sign. He says: “and there shall no sign be given it.” However, Jesus will give them a clue to a sign that has already been put up. Centuries earlier, God put a sign of Jesus in the Bible, and Jesus refers them to this sign and the implications. What is this sign? Jesus says, “the sign of Jonas the prophet.” About what is this talking?

Jesus uses the word “Jonas,” but this is the New Testament form of the Old Testament name “Jonah,” whose story is found in the book of Jonah. God had told him to go to a city called Nineveh, which was full of people who were wicked and hated the Jewish people. Instead of going to Nineveh, Jonah got on a boat and decided to go in the opposite direction, away from Nineveh. God sent a storm to stop the prophet from running away, and the sailors were forced to throw Jonah overboard and into the sea. Instead of drowning, God sent a great fish to swallow Jonah whole. Jonah 1:17 says: “And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.” This is to what Jesus is referring and it indicates that Jesus believed the story of Jonah to be authentic and not allegory, as some believe.

Some throughout the years have had trouble believing that Jonah could really be swallowed by a fish, especially those who do not believe in miracles. They say it is impossible for a whale to swallow a man. Yet various types of sperm whales are able to swallow and regurgitate objects much larger than a man. Some say that it would have been impossible for Jonah to have survived in the belly of the whale, but there is scientific evidence that suggests the contrary. A whale has more than one stomach, much like a cow does. Jonah would have been able to stay in the first chamber, where he would not have been subject to stomach acids, and where it is possible he

could have breathed. We do not believe the story of Jonah because of science; we believe it because it is in the Bible. But on the other hand, science does not provide any reason to not believe what the Bible has declared. We are fully justified in believing that Jonah was real, that he really spent three days and three nights in the belly of the whale, and that Jesus was not believing in fairy tales in referring to Jonah.

But how was Jonah a sign to the nation during Jesus' time? What was it about Jonah that pointed ahead to the Messiah? There is nothing in the story that directly points to Jesus Christ, but Jonah is a picture. Jonah's and Jesus' lives parallel one another. Jonah was sent by God to an unbelieving city; Jesus was sent to an unbelieving world. But it is not that to which Jesus refers. He says in Matthew: "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." The sign, says Jesus, is not in Jonah's ministry, but in being in the whale for three days and three nights. This, of course, is a reference to the burial and resurrection of Jesus later on. As Jonah was enclosed in the flesh of the whale underwater, so Jesus would be enclosed in the rock of the tomb. This is a parallel, but it is also a sign.

In fact, Jesus' resurrection is the ultimate sign of His authority and connection with God. Why is this? Of all the things in this world that scientists can do, raising the dead has not been one of them. Doctors have been able to restore hearing and sight, but never life. Some may die for a short time on an operating table and come back to life, but they have never been dead for three days and come back to life. The resurrection of Jesus to new life and a new body was a sign that Jesus was who He said He was. That would be the ultimate sign that the people needed to see. Let me say three things about this:

First, the resurrection is the single most important event in the history of mankind. If Jesus really rose from the dead, that that means that there is a God, since only God can raise the dead. It was the fulfillment of the prophecy that God would dwell with mankind. It was the only event that cannot be explained naturally, especially given the disciple's response and eventual martyrdom. One may try to explain away Jonah, the Red Sea, or Daniel in the lion's den to a degree that may satisfy himself, but the resurrection cannot be explained away. It cannot be dismissed, because it actually occurred, and has profound implications.

This is my second point. The resurrection is a sign because it is essential to Christianity. There are many things that make up the various denominations. Some believe in foot-washing, others do not. Some share a cup at communion, others have individual cups. But these are not essential to being a Christian. The resurrection, however is crucial to Christianity. The apostle Paul says this in 1 Corinthians 15:14-19: "And if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain. Yea, and we are found false witnesses of God; because we have testified of God that he raised up Christ: whom he raised not up, if so be that the dead rise not. For if the dead rise not, then is not Christ raised: and if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins. Then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished. If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable." The resurrection is not a piece of the puzzle, it is the foundation of Christianity.

Third, the resurrection being a sign meant that it would be too late for them. In other words, if the resurrection was a sign, it meant that Jesus was already crucified and buried. It meant that Jesus had already been rejected and condemned to die. It meant that they had missed the initial signs for the one that came after. In this way, we can say that Jesus' life was not about teaching primarily, but about His death and resurrection. It was about the fact that He came to die and rise so that we could have life. Friend, the Bible says that Jesus Christ died on the cross for your sins. He died, being innocent, so that you could be found innocent, being guilty. He took our punishment upon Himself, and now He asks you to respond in faith to Him. If you will this morning believe that Jesus died and raised for you, you can be saved.

But the people of Jesus' day did not understand this. They would ultimately reject Him and have Him murdered. It is for this reason that Jesus says in the next verses: "The queen of the south shall rise up in the judgment with the men of this generation, and condemn them: for she came from the utmost parts of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and, behold, a greater than Solomon is here." What is this saying? Jesus is again referring

to the Old Testament, specifically 1 Kings 10. This is the famous story of a queen coming to see King Solomon, who was the wisest man who ever lived. Sheba was located in the southern part of what is now Saudi Arabia. She traveled with a caravan all the way to Israel because she had heard of the wisdom of Solomon. She says in 1 Kings 10:6-7: "It was a true report that I heard in mine own land of thy acts and of thy wisdom. Howbeit I believed not the words, until I came, and mine eyes had seen it: and, behold, the half was not told me: thy wisdom and prosperity exceedeth the fame which I heard." She also says, "Blessed be the LORD thy God, which delighted in thee, to set thee on the throne of Israel: because the LORD loved Israel for ever, therefore made he thee king, to do judgment and justice."

Why does Jesus refer to this story? This is a story of a woman who did not know God and had no access to the laws of God. Yet she was able to recognize that the wisdom and gifts of Solomon were given by an all-powerful, all-loving God. She was someone who saw God in a wise Solomon. Contrast that with the people of Jesus' day. There are three comparisons. The queen of Sheba traveled from far away to hear Solomon and listened. The people of Jesus' day didn't have to travel at all (Jesus came to them), but they did not listen. The queen of Sheba wondered at the wisdom of Solomon. The people of Jesus day were hearing One who was wiser than Solomon, but were not listening. The queen of Sheba came interested to learn, but the people of Jesus' day were only interested in what they could get.

It was for these reasons, Jesus says, that the queen of Sheba will someday judge the hearers of Jesus. This, I do not think, means that she herself will judge them, but that in a way she will part of their judgment. Someday, every person and nation will be judged by God. Revelation talks about God's throne and books being opened to judge all mankind. Hebrews 9:27 says "And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment." When it is the turn of the people who heard Jesus, the queen of Sheba will in a way take the stand against them, since they had more light than she did, and she acted appropriately. They were able to hear the Son of God speak the wisdom of God, and they did not accept it. He says the same thing in the next phrase, which is "The men of Nineveh shall rise up in the judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: for they repented at the preaching of Jonas; and, behold, a greater than Jonas is here."

The people of Nineveh were wicked, but they repented when a lone, disobedient prophet came to their city offering a simple sermon: "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown." Yet these people had been listening to Jesus speak many words and do many miracles, yet had not repented. Therefore, says Jesus, the men of Nineveh will one day take the stand against the people of Galilee, since they did not repent when a greater than Jonah came. They will be held more responsible for their response than the inhabitants of Nineveh would have been. They will come under more condemnation because of their unbelief. This is what Jesus says "For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more." Little revelation means little accountability, while much revelation means much accountability.

When you are presented with God's Word, as you are here, you have a responsibility to react to it. You have a responsibility to act on the light God has given you. It is not by accident that God gives us revelation; we are expected to do something about it. This is what Jesus is talking about in the next parable. He says in Luke 11:33-36: "No man, when he hath lighted a candle, putteth it in a secret place, neither under a bushel, but on a candlestick, that they which come in may see the light. The light of the body is the eye: therefore when thine eye is single, thy whole body also is full of light; but when thine eye is evil, thy body also is full of darkness. Take heed therefore that the light which is in thee be not darkness. If thy whole body therefore be full of light, having no part dark, the whole shall be full of light, as when the bright shining of a candle doth give thee light."

Jesus uses a picture that everyone listening to Him would have understood. He talks about using a candle in a house. A candle, of course, gives off light. In the Bible, light is a picture of God revealing Himself to mankind. Jesus says that when someone lights a candle, they do so with intention. They do not take that candle and put it under a basket. They do not put it on the floor, but they put it on a candlestick to lift it up and let all those in the

house see. In the same way, God's Word, or revelation, is intentional. God has given His Word so that we might know more about Him and that we might order our lives in such a way as to live according to God's laws. This is what 2 Timothy 3:16-17 means when it says "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works."

Similarly, we observe light through our eyes. If our eyes are wide open, we are able to see many things. If they are healthy and working, we enjoy good sight. However, if our eyes do not work or are partially shut, they cannot let in much light and we are unable to see. The people listening to Jesus were displaying the fact that they could not see well with their spiritual eyes. They were not perceiving what Jesus wanted them to be able to see. Jesus in one place called the spiritual leaders, "blind leaders of the blind." The result of such a relationship would be that both of them would fall into a ditch.

The thing that these people were blind about was all the signs that Jesus was giving. He had cast out the demons of a man, yet they still looked for a sign. In John 6, Jesus fed an entire multitude of people with just a few loaves of bread and fish. The people thereafter started to follow Him, and when Jesus declared Himself to be from God, they asked Him: "What sign shewest thou then, that we may see, and believe thee? what dost thou work?" Despite the fact that Jesus performed a miracle that should have cast no doubt on who Jesus was, the people still asked for a sign. They still wanted a sign. They still wanted proof.

It is true that we as humans are by nature faithless and untrusting. In some ways, there is no amount of proof that will ever be good enough to convince. Atheists who are writing today say that they are looking for some kind of proof of God and are not able to see it, so they cannot believe. Psalm 19:1 says "The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork," yet this is not sufficient for some. I maintain that for some, nothing will ever be proof enough. Consider this: Peter went onto the mount of transfiguration with Jesus and saw His glory. He saw Jesus as Jesus appears in heaven. This is the kind of proof for which some people nowadays are looking, yet it was not enough even for Peter. Remember that at the trial of Jesus Peter still denied that he even knew Jesus. One would think that seeing Jesus in His glory would evoke a different response, but it shows the wickedness of the human heart.

Jesus has been challenged, and once again He meets the challenge. These are ways that Jesus addressed the opposition aimed at him. He defended Himself against these two charges, but as we have seen, a million reasons are not enough to satisfy some skeptics. This same crowd would one day cry out, "Crucify Him!" They would call for the murder of the Son of God, despite hearing His wisdom and seeing His miracles.

Friend, what about you? You have heard this morning all the wonders of who Jesus was. How will you respond? Perhaps you this morning have never put your trust in Jesus Christ alone. Won't you do so this morning? Stop depending on yourself to save you. There is nothing you yourself can do in order to get to heaven. Ephesians 2:8-9 says: "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast." Only by placing your faith in Jesus can you be saved. If you have any questions about what I have said this morning, please don't hesitate to contact us. You can do so in the following ways:

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