

LD 16 (QA 41); Jonah 1:17-2:10; Matthew 12:38-42; The Sign of Jonah I. The Unlikely Sign Given II. The Point of this Sign III. The Rejection of this Sign

Cemeteries are not places that children normally like to visit. Most kids are hesitant to go to a place where they know that the bodies of those who have passed away have been buried. Even adults tend to have mixed feelings about visiting a graveyard. Perhaps during the day- but it is a little creepy at night. Well, the question before us this morning is this- why did Jesus go to the grave? Why did Jesus need to visit the tombs- to be placed among the dead? Understanding why Jesus needed to die- and even be buried- is important for us all. If you have not yet, you will all likely have to go to the graveside of a loved one at some point in your life. I remember the first time I went to the graveside- when my great grandfather died. I was in grade school- and that memory is still very vivid. I traveled to the cemetery with my cousins and we joking and having a good time. But the somber setting- the tears that we shed as the casket was buried- has a way of sobering young boys. So today we ask ourselves- why was it necessary for Jesus to be buried. Not just to die- but to be placed in a tomb in the earth? We will consider this theme: Jesus Christ was buried to sanctify the grave and comfort those who face death.

### **I. The Unlikely Sign Given**

In our first point we consider that the death and burial of Jesus was given as a fulfillment of a sign. Jesus needed to be buried because He said that He would be buried. Jesus speaks of this sign of burial as the sign of Jonah. In our text from Mt. 12 Jesus has been hounded by the scribes and Pharisees. They asking for signs- they are looking for more miracles. Now this is not an innocent request. Remember that these Pharisees have already witnessed many signs and wonders- they had seen Jesus heal the man with the withered hand- Jesus casting out demons and healing those who are blind and mute. It was not that they had not seen any sign- rather they were looking for more- greater signs. They wanted to see more- but this was not a request made by someone with a weak faith. It was the request of someone who was hard hearted and rebellious. They did not want to believe- and there was no sign that Jesus

could do that would convince them! Rather, they were looking for another opportunity to condemn Jesus! As our context in Mt. 12 makes clear- the Pharisees were grumbling because Jesus had done these miracles on the Sabbath. They wanted to see if Jesus would do it again so they could have more fodder for their cannon- more reasons to condemn Jesus. Whatever Jesus did, they found a reason to critique and criticize- even to condemn. Note that they said back in 12:24- after Jesus cast out a demon- they accused Jesus of being a servant of Satan. He casts out demons by the prince of demons! So instead of believing in Jesus because of the signs, they were using the signs as an opportunity to condemn and slander Jesus. So Jesus says to them in v. 39- you are a wicked and adulterous generation. You will get no sign except the sign of the prophet Jonah. Now children, you all remember the story of Jonah- right? Jonah was the prophet who ran away from God- was thrown into the sea, swallowed by a great fish and then spit out on the dry land after 3 days. This will be the sign given to this generation- Jesus will be like Jonah. Here Jesus is speaking of His death, burial and resurrection. Just as Jonah was in the heart of the sea- buried under the water for 3 days- so Jesus will be buried under the dirt as his body lay in the grave for 3 days. And just as Jonah was resurrected and came out alive after 3 days- so Jesus will be resurrected after 3 days as v. 40 states. Now here is where we have to dig in a little to note differences in how v. 40 is understood. Most scholars will say that Jesus died on Friday at 3 pm- and since the Hebrews counted their days by counting partial days as whole days- this death on Friday and resurrection on Sunday covers part of 3 days. Since Jesus really did remain in the grave for portions of 3 days, this sign of Jonah was fulfilled. The challenge is our understanding of John 19:31 where Jesus is said to die on the cross on the day before the Sabbath which is the day of preparation. So if the Sabbath in reference in John 19 is the regular, weekly Sabbath celebrated on Saturday- the day of preparation before the Saturday Sabbath would be Friday- thus Jesus died on Friday. But another Sabbath day could be in view. Without getting into too much detail- it is also possible that the "high Sabbath" reference in John 19 was a special sabbath feast day celebrated on the Friday of Passover. Remember that we are in

the midst of the Passover celebration which was determined by the phases of the moon. So if the High Sabbath of John 19 was the feast day of Friday during Passover- then the preparation day before high Sabbath would actually fall on Thursday. So it is possible that Jesus died on Thursday afternoon instead of Friday. Both days fit with the Biblical account. But what is beyond any doubt is that Jesus died and was buried- and that He rose again on the 3<sup>rd</sup> day- and that day of resurrection is the first day of the week which is our Sunday. It is not the actual day of his death that matters- much like we do not know the actual day of His birth. But the Day of His Resurrection is clear! Resurrection Day is Sunday- and that point is beyond any debate. So Jesus was in the tomb for 3 days- and like Jonah He came out on 3<sup>rd</sup> day alive!

## **II. The Point of this Sign**

Now that we understand the sign of Jonah as Jesus applied it to Himself and fulfilled, in our next point we consider what the point of this sign is. In other words, why did Jesus need to be buried? And here we note that we are not asking about the death of Jesus- we have already seen that Jesus needed to die because death is the consequence of sin. Our particular focus is on the burial- on the placing of Jesus' body in the tomb and His burial under the soil. Our QA 41 puts it like this- Jesus needed to die and be buried to prove that He had really died. Now this might seem self evident, but His burial was necessary to silence the critics that might suggest- Jesus only fainted. He passed out for a few hours and when He was taken off the cross, He revived and came to. No, this is an impossibility because He was buried. His burial is capstone- or the exclamations point of His death. He really did die! So the whole process of the soldiers taking the body of Jesus off the cross- his body being given to Joseph and Nicodemus to be anointed and wrapped in a linen shroud- and carried to the new tomb to be placed on the burial bed with a rock stone rolled over the mouth- all of this is to prove beyond a doubt that He was really dead! Multiple witnesses- beyond the shadow of a doubt! So that when Jesus rises again after 3 days- it will not be a simple refreshment- not the coming to of someone in a comma or someone who passed out

recovering. No- it will be a dead man come back to life! Now we can press on to find even more benefit from the death and burial of Jesus as well. Being crucified, died and buried- now alive and well- proves that He has power over the grave! Not just a spiritual resurrection- but a real physical resurrection- will prove that Jesus has the power to lay down His life and take it up again! A real, dead body in the tomb can be raised up- and made alive and well again! So this burial emphasises and highlights His power over the grave! And this, my friends, is good news that we are all going to need! We have peace and comfort when we are the ones standing beside the grave. When our loved ones are being lowed into the ground as some have witnessed recently- we know that Jesus was also placed in the ground! His body was in the same place as your loved bodies now rest. And unless Jesus returns soon, your body also will be placed in the grave- lowed into the ground. The burial of Jesus before His resurrection proves His power over the grave- the bars of Shaol have been burst open! Jesus went to the grave before us to sanctify the grave for us- to remove the fear and sting of it all. Not that we no longer have sorrow when loved ones die- but that sorrow is not without hope! In fact, I Cor. 15 compares the burial of our bodies to that of planting a seed! The bodies that are placed in the ground will one day be brought up again- revived and perfected- made like Jesus' body! So we have comfort in that Jesus not only went to the grave to visit his friend Lazarus- He went into the grave to sanctify that grave and take away our fear of it! If Jesus can die, be buried and rise again on the third day, He can do the same for you! So the full sign of Jonah that Jesus fulfilled was His death, burial and resurrection after 3 days. But our passage has more to say about Jonah's ministry. After Jonah's resurrection, he went and preached to the Ninevites and they repented! Will the Pharisees do the same at the sign and preaching of Jesus?

### **III. The Rejection of this Sign**

This question brings us to the last point. As Jesus says in v. 41- something greater than Jonah is here. The sign of Jonah was fulfilled in Jesus- perfected as an antitype. Jesus underwent a greater- a fuller death, burial and resurrection. Added to that, Jesus is a greater prophet than Jonah! He is the one

greater than Moses, David, Solomon and even Jonah! But the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus will not be the sign that convinces the Pharisees to believe. Remember how the Pharisees respond when they hear that Jesus had been raised from the dead? Well, in Mt. 28 the Jewish leaders take council and come up with this story about Jesus' disciples stealing the body! Even now- after His resurrection- they still refuse to believe! After the sign of Jonah is fulfilled! Remember also that the sermon of Jonah was really short- his sermon was- "In 40 days, Nineveh will be overthrown." That's it! And how the Ninevites responded with repentance as they sat in sackcloth and ashes. Compare that to Jesus- who is the word of God and the perfect prophet! His preaching was so full- it was perfect- full of power- and yet how did the Pharisees respond? Well, they remained unmoved! That is why Jesus says in v. 41- the Ninevites will condemn this generation for they repented- and you refuse! Even though my preaching and my signs are greater than Jonah's – you harden your hearts! The rebellion of this people will be passed on for generations as a warning! Woe to those who ask for signs and refuse to heed the Word! So in the end, the Ninevites become an example of humility as they repent from their sins and turn from their wicked ways and it is these who are spared; while the Pharisees reject Jesus and remain condemned in their sins. Let us rather listen to the Words of the One who is greater than Jonah- as we hope in Him who died, was buried and rose again. Coming now to the Lord's Table, we celebrate this death and resurrection. As we eat and drink in remembrance of Him, we give thanks that He died, was buried and rose again for our salvation.

As we close, we remember that the grave is a place of mixed emotion. We have sorrow over our loss- but also joy in what was gained by our loved one who is now in glory. As we heard in the introduction, we will all be standing by the grave one day- and if the LORD terrifies- it will be our bodies that are in that grave. Jesus Christ was buried to sanctify the grave and comfort those who face death. Praise God that someone greater than Solomon and Jonah has come- and that He has conquered the grave!