

Matthew Chapter 12

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Date: 06 March 2016

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- [0 : 0 0] Chapter 42, a selection of verses from Isaiah, chapter 42. Here is my servant whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight.
- I'll put my spirit on him, and he will bring justice to the nations. A bruised reed he'll not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out.
- In faithfulness he'll bring forth justice. He will not falter or be discouraged till he establishes justice on earth.
- In his teaching, the islands will put their hope. I, the Lord, have called you in righteousness. I'll take hold of your hand. I will keep you and make you to be a covenant for the people and a light for the Gentiles, to open eyes as a blind, to free captives from prison, and to release from the dungeon those who sit in darkness.
- From Matthew's Gospel, chapter 12. In chapter 12, Matthew reminds us of those verses that I read from Isaiah, chapter 42.
- [1 : 2 5] But in verse 22, Matthew went on like this. Then they brought him, a demon-possessed man who was blind and mute, and Jesus healed him, so that he could both talk and see.
- All the people were astonished and said, Could this be the son of David? But when the Pharisees heard this, they said, It's only by Beelzebub, the prince of demons, that this fellow drives out demons.
- Jesus knew their thoughts and said to them, Every kingdom divided against itself will be ruined, and every city or household divided against itself will not stand.
- If Satan drives out Satan, he's divided against himself. How then can his kingdom stand? And if I drive out demons by Beelzebub, by whom do your people drive them out?
- So they will be your judges. But if it's by the Spirit of God that I drive out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you.
- [2 : 3 5] Or again, how can anyone enter a strongman's house and carry off his possessions, unless he first ties up the strongman? Then he can plunder his house.
- Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters. And so I tell you, every kind of sin and slander can be forgiven, but blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven.
- Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but anyone who speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come.
- Make a tree good, and its fruit will be good. Or make a tree bad, and its fruit will be bad. For a tree is recognized by its fruit.
- You brood of vipers, how can you who are evil say anything good? For the mouth speaks what the heart is full of.
- [3 : 4 3] A good man brings good things out of the good stored up in him, and an evil man brings out evil things out of the evil stored up in him.

But I tell you that everyone will have to give an account on the day of judgment for every empty word they've spoken. For by your words you'll be acquitted, and by your words you'll be condemned.

Then some of the Pharisees and teachers of the law said to him, Teacher, we want to see a sign from you. He answered, A wicked and adulterous generation asks for a sign, but none will be given it except the sign of the prophet Jonah.

For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. The men of Nineveh will stand up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for they repented at the preaching of Jonah.

And now something greater than Jonah is here. The Queen of the South will rise at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for she came from the ends of the earth to listen to Solomon's wisdom, and now something greater than Solomon is here.

[5 : 27] There's an interesting court case a few weeks ago. Two men, if I recall correctly, were found guilty of some crime and given a suspended sentence by the lady judge.

They were very relieved that they weren't sent to prison, but then they went home and used the social media to abuse the judge. They failed to recognize the authority of the judge and her court and were called back to face the judge.

And the result was that they were sent to prison for two years. Yes, they'd done something seriously wrong before, but now they were punished more severely as they failed to recognize the authority of the judge and had actually verbally abused her.

Matthew chapter 12, the Pharisees had done something similar with Jesus. They failed to recognize him for who he was and abused him verbally, publicly to his face, and in the hardness of their heart and unbelief, they accused him of using the power of Satan to perform his works of kindness.

And then if we move down to verse 38, we read this. Some of the Pharisees and teachers of the law said to him, Teacher, we want to see a sign from you.

[7 : 06] Now, that comes over as a very strange request to our ears because the context of this was that Jesus had performed lots and lots of signs.

In the earlier part of Matthew 12, for example, Jesus healed a man with a shriveled hand. And then in Matthew 12, verse 15, we read that a large crowd followed him and he healed all who were ill.

A few verses later, as we read, 22 to 23, he healed a person who was both blind and mute.

And yet, the Pharisees wanted to see a sign. Perhaps a modern parallel would be someone who's been faced with the statistics that show that their lifestyle is dangerously wrong, and yet they decide to refuse those statistics, refuse to look at the films on the TV or whatever, and continue to ask for proof and say, it's not proved.

Well, it's very hard to convince someone of something if their will, their desire, their lusts are being crossed. I'm sure you all are aware of that.

[8 : 36] You've experienced people just like that. The Pharisees here had a mindset or a heart set that would not accept the Lord Jesus Christ.

His words were like water off a duck's back. Now, it's in the context of this incident and its setting in Matthew 12 that we learn three things.

There are lots of things to learn about Jesus, but there are three things in particular I would like to draw your attention to. Firstly, he's a patient saviour.

Then secondly, he's a great and gracious prophet. And thirdly, he's a glorious king.

So a patient saviour. Notice that despite the persistent hardness of their heart, he was still prepared to give them a sign.

[9 : 42] Look at verse 39. A wicked and adulterous generation asks for a sign, but none will be given it. Accept.

And then we've got a most important word. Accept the sign of the prophet Jonah. That word accept is so very, very important because it shows us just how patient the Lord Jesus Christ is.

He was to give them a sign that the Pharisees could not cover up. They could not ignore it. So what was this sign?

Well, Jesus tells us it was a sign of the prophet Jonah. In his patience with them, he was still prepared to give them that sign, a sign. It's a sign that demands your attention.

When you go through times of doubt, times that trouble you, times when your faith is assaulted, your saviour continues to deal patiently with you.

[10 : 56] And he reminds you of this sign. When you're troubled by the unbelief of the world around you, it's skeptics, it's intellectuals and so on, remember the sign that Jesus has for you.

And it was a sign of the prophet Jonah. Verse 40, For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.

Now we don't know all the details. We certainly don't know how it was that Jonah survived. But one thing is sure, he would not have escaped unmarked by the physical and chemical battering that he received there in the belly of that great fish.

And when eventually he was spewed out on the shore, there would be unmistakable marks left on his body of that unique suffering and the deliverance that he had from the deep as he appeared to the people of Nineveh.

Think of him appearing before the people of Nineveh. They knew, or at least Jonah probably told them about the judgment that had befallen him when he was thrown into the ocean and swallowed by the fish.

[12 : 18] And there before them would be a man who would be bleached by the juices in the stomach of that great fish.

He wouldn't look normal. He might well be very badly bruised. And there he was standing before the people of Nineveh. How interesting. No wonder they responded to what Jonah had to say.

And then if we go on from that, you remember how it was that Jesus appeared to the disciples after his resurrection. He said to Thomas, for example, Thomas, put your finger here.

See my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe. Well, Jonah appeared to the infamous, hard, cruel, wicked men and women of Nineveh and proclaimed that God would bring judgment upon them.

And in Jonah chapter 3 verse 4, we read that the Ninevites believed God. A fast was proclaimed and all of them, from the greatest to the least, put on sackcloth as a mark of their repentance.

[13 : 40] Their king called them, let everyone call urgently on God. Let them give up their evil ways and their violence.

Now the sign that was given to the hard-hearted Pharisees was the resurrection of Jesus and the repentance that followed. Not only in Jerusalem, but in the Gentile cities of the ancient world, as they heard about the resurrection of the Savior.

Matthew 12, Jesus promised that the Pharisees would be given a sign. But for now, he was patient with them.

He was patient with their ill-thought-out, careless, hard words that came out of their hard hearts. They accused him of doing those works by demonic, devilish power.

They could think of nothing better. He patiently explained to them where their hard words came from. Verse 34, Now I wonder if there's a time when you spoke foolish, angry things about the Savior that you're now ashamed of.

[15 : 19] And the Lord gave you time to change. He was patient with you. Perhaps over many months or years, your Christian neighbor or father, mother, wife, friend, warned you to turn to the Lord.

But you persisted in your useless, empty arguments and persisted in responding angrily to their pleas with you to turn to the Lord Jesus Christ.

And you caused them much grief. Jesus warned the Pharisees, I tell you that everyone will have to give an account on the day of judgment for every empty word they have spoken.

So was there a time when you angrily blurted out arguments to those who tried to help you? You might have thought that you were being clever or witty at the time.

But the Lord, the patient Savior, gave the Pharisees time to change and he's given you time to change.

[16 : 33] He gave you time to change. And now you're a new person. As we sang in that hymn right at the beginning, you were blind, but now you see.

You were deaf, but now you hear. You didn't have any life in you, but now you live. And that's because the Lord Jesus was patient with you.

What about the nation Israel? Why was that brought into being? Why did God choose those children of Israel?

Why was it that he brought them out of Egypt, brought them through the wilderness and into the promised land? Back in Deuteronomy 4, verse 5, we read that Moses said they should follow the laws that the Lord gave them.

Why? Well, verse 5, observe them carefully, for this will show your wisdom and understanding to the nations, who will hear about these decrees and say, surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.

[17 : 48] What other nation is so great as to have their gods near them in the way the Lord our God is near us? They were meant to be a light to the nations, that those around them would look upon them and say, what an amazing God they have.

And that was true throughout the history of Israel. That was why they were called. They were called to be a light to the peoples around them, a light to the Philistines, a light to the Medes, a light to the Midianites, a light to the Babylonians, and so on and so forth, and eventually a light to the Greeks and to the Romans.

And then, eventually, the Pharisees emerged. They started off very well, but they degenerated, and they wandered far from the Lord. Instead of teaching the laws of God, they taught their own ideas, their own laws, their own petty laws.

Sometimes laws, as we were reminded of last time, which actually allow them to excuse their lack of love, their lack of response to their aging father or mother.

They were covetous. They wanted lots of money, lots of things, and they were self-righteous. They were judgmental, as you all know.

[19 : 22] And they certainly did not draw the wondering eyes of the nations around them. So what effect did their legal, self-righteous religion have?

What effect did their obvious greed have, their judgmental spirit? what effect did it have on the people around, on the Romans, on those who passed through their land, those who looked on?

I wonder if you've ever been close to a bonfire. And sometimes people don't build their bonfires very well. They put a lot of damp grass and stuff on the bonfire, and you get a lot of acrid smoke coming off.

when the smoke blows towards you, your eyes sting, and so you move around to another part of the bonfire to look at that bonfire. It's a painful experience.

Well, Israel was a bit like that. Back in the days of the New Testament, the people didn't have electric lights like we do.

[20 : 37] They used a kind of candle and taper to give them light. Now, if those candles, if those lamps were lacking in oil, if they were damp, if they were broken, they were useless.

And the religious system of the Pharisees was just like that. It put people off. It was offensive to men and to God as well. Now, listen to the patience of the Lord Jesus Christ.

He's a patient saviour. He says this, a bruised reed he will not break, a smouldering wick he will not snuff out. Now, before you came to know the Lord Jesus Christ as a great saviour, he was patient with you.

It might be that you were a religious person. You went regularly to church, in a sense a bit like the Pharisees. you went to church, you pretended or thought that you were a Christian, but your Christianity could hardly be described as a light to those around you.

And if you're honest, you might even admit that your self-righteous, legal, judgmental Christianity was offensive to those around you, and it turned people away from the gospel.

[22 : 09] Are you still a smoky Christian? Are you still like the smoking flax that was so offensive to the Gentile nations in biblical times?

Remember that Jesus is a patient saviour. He continues to give you time to change. Are you using that time well?

Now, he's a patient saviour, but he's a great saviour. He's great in every way. When you think about him, do you try to remind yourself just how great he is?

How do you go about reminding yourself just how great he is? Well, Jesus gives us a technique here. Let me put it like this. If you have a little child and you want to explain to that little child how great, how vast the city of London is, what you might do is to say to the little child who might have been to a city like York or Leeds or Newcastle or someone like that, you could say to them, now, that city of York, it was big, wasn't it?

So much traffic, so much noise, so many people milling around. Ah, but London, well, it's another matter altogether. It's much faster, much bigger, much busier, so much more going on there than York.

[23 : 52] And you could use that sort of technique to show how big London is. But if you want to understand better how great Jesus is, note what he said in verses 40 to 42.

He compared himself to two men, to Jonah and Solomon. Jonah was an example of a great prophet, and Solomon a great and wise king, and both of them had a positive effect upon the Gentile nations of their day.

We've already seen how the Lord used a ministry of Jonah in bringing the powerful, wicked, violent city of Nineveh to repentance. I can't think of any preacher who wouldn't long to see that sort of thing in his ministry, or in his church, in his town, his country.

It's something that should inspire our prayers. If the Lord did that to the city of Nineveh, what about decadent Britain? What about needy Whitby?

How great the Lord is. However, Jonah, the minister at that time, was not a gracious man.

[25 : 20] He didn't want the people of Nineveh to repent. I can't believe that, can you, in one sense, that a man preaches and the last thing he wants is to see people converted. But Jonah was like that, and that's why he ran away from the Lord right at the beginning of the history given us in the book of Jonah.

And he reflects on this in Jonah chapter 3 verse 10. When God saw what they did, how the Ninevites turned from their evil ways, he relented and did not bring upon them the destruction he threatened, but to Jonah, this seemed very wrong, and he became angry.

He prayed to the Lord, isn't this what I said, Lord, when I was at home? This is why I tried to forestall by fleeing to Tarshish. He didn't want to be successful as an evangelist to them.

He preferred God to judge the Assyrians. in a sense that was the mindset of so many of the Jews both in the Old Testament and the New Testament.

Now just compare him to Jesus. Jonah ran away, Jesus had his face steadfastly to go to Jerusalem, not only to fearlessly confront and rebuke sin, but to suffer at the hands of the scribes and the Pharisees and the priests.

[26 : 50] He must go to Jerusalem in order to pay the price of our sins. See how the writer to the Hebrews speaks in Hebrews 10.5, when Christ came into the world he said, sacrifice an offering you did not desire but a body you prepared for me with burnt offerings and sin offerings you are not pleased.

Then I said, here am I, it is written about me in the scroll, I have come to do your will, my God.

See how different he was from Jonah. Now Jesus was more than a prophet, he was a priest, he came to offer sacrifice for sin, he offered himself.

He was a much greater priest than the Old Testament priests. They had to keep on offering animal sacrifices year by year to atone for the sins of the people of Israel.

And these sacrifices could never take away sin. Hebrews 10 goes on to tell us, when Jesus said, when the Son said, here I am, I've come to do your will, by that will we've been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

[28 : 09] it wasn't a case of repeating that sacrifice. How could it be? In the previous chapter we read, Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many.

He's an infinitely greater prophet than any human messenger or angelic messenger. he's a priest too. Listen how the book of Hebrews introduces the Lord Jesus Christ.

In the past, God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days, he's spoken to us by his Son, whom we appointed heir of all things and through whom he made the universe.

Someone here emerged much greater, infinitely greater than Jonah. The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word.

And he's more than a prophet, he's more than a priest. After he provided purifications for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the majesty in heaven.

[29 : 32] He's a king. He's God's king. Now, Jonah's ministry did have an effect on one city.

It had a huge effect on that one city of Nineveh after he was swallowed by the fish and spewed upon the shore. But what followed the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ was and is universal in its scope.

Jesus confronted the Pharisees and said, the men of Nineveh will stand up with the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for they repented of the preaching of Jonah and now something greater than Jonah is here.

Earlier, we spoke of the patience of God, the patience of the Lord Jesus Christ. Listen to this. The apostle Paul addressed the Athenians, those learned, clever, able men, but idolatrous men, and he said to them this, in the past God overlooked such ignorance.

There we got the patience of God. In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now in the light of the resurrection of Christ, he commands all people everywhere to repent.

[30 : 55] There's not one of us excused there. You and I and every person in the world in all places everywhere are commanded to repent for he, God, has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed.

He has given proof of this to everyone by raising him from the dead. Jesus faced the proud and and bending Pharisees and said that on the day of judgment the people of Nineveh would testify against the Pharisees and those that followed them.

The implication was this, that they were harder, more wicked, more unbelieving than the people of Nineveh. But wait a moment. Before we condemn the Pharisees, remembering that they had more light than the people of Nineveh.

Remember this, that you and I have more light than those Pharisees. Those Pharisees who lived before the death and the resurrection of Jesus.

Remember that. Five chapters later in Matthew's Gospel, we read of three of the disciples who recognized who Jesus was and they went up with him onto a mountaintop and there they were transfigured before him, before them.

[32 : 31] And his face shone like the sun. His clothes became as white as light. They heard a voice. This is what the voice said. This is my son whom I love.

With him I am well pleased. Listen to him. You and I should listen to him. His disciples then were told to listen to him.

Are you different? The people of Nineveh listen to Jonah. There's something much greater here than Jonah. So how do you listen to him? Do you daydream through sermons?

Do you plan your week through sermons? Do you despise the efforts of preachers as they seek to bring you to Christ and to be obedient to him? Do you pick and choose what you want to listen to?

That voice from heaven said, listen to him. This is my son in whom I'm well pleased. Are you quick to criticise sermons rather than to learn from them?

[33 : 40] How do you listen to the son of God as he comes to you through the preaching of his word? Jesus is greater than the Old Testament prophets.

He's greater for that matter than the Old Testament priests. But he's greater too than the Old Testament kings. Solomon, the son of David, was renowned for his wisdom and the prosperity of his kingdom.

His rule marked the high point of the history of ancient Israel. You can read about it in Kings 4 and also in Chronicles.

And we're told that he ruled over the kingdoms west of the river Euphrates, as far west as the sea as the Mediterranean. It embraced parts of modern Iraq, if you want to get a sort of geographical picture of it, Jordan and parts of Syria.

And the people, the people of Israel, the people of God, dwelt in safety and security. During his lifetime, Judah and Israel, from Dan in the north to Beersheba in the south, lived in safety.

[34 : 58] Everyone under their own vine and under their own fig tree. Think about the piece of it. If you've been to the Middle East, you can think about the fig tree there and the vines over at the front of the house, and you can picture the people just sitting there peacefully.

Well, that's the sort of peace that Solomon gave. But what sort of man was he? You can read in the Bible about his knowledge, his vast knowledge, knowledge of architecture, botany, gardening, literature, the animal world.

He had a huge collection of wise sayings. He was immensely rich. He had an enormous number of servants who provided for him and built his palace and the magnificent temple.

He was clever, wise in his alliances. He'd been given great wisdom in administering justice. You can read about it there in the Old Testament.

And the surrounding nations held him in great esteem. Of course they did. For example, the Queen of the South, 1 Kings 10, 1 Chronicles 9, when the Queen of the South, the Queen of Sheba, heard of the fame of Solomon, she came to Jerusalem.

[36 : 11] I don't know exactly where she came from, perhaps Abyssinia, Ethiopia, somewhere like that. She came to Jerusalem with a large retinue of followers herself, with camels bearing spices, very much gold and precious stones.

She had discussions with Solomon and he answered all her questions. She was amazed at the buildings in Jerusalem, his food, his servants and the way they were dressed, and the burnt offerings in the temple.

her breath was taken quite out of her. She was a rich, powerful, able lady, but Solomon took even her breath away.

She could no longer boast of her possessions and her power. She was a Gentile that was impressed, awed by this wise, powerful king, and in particular, the worship at the temple.

temple. Now, Jesus used her to further rebuke the Pharisees of their hard hearts and loud mouths.

[37 : 23] The queen of the south will rise at the judgment with this generation and condemn it. For she came from the ends of the earth to listen to Solomon's wisdom, and now something greater than Solomon is here.

Solomon studied creation. He knew an awful lot about botany and animal life and so on, but the son of God built creation.

He sustains creation. For example, Paul reminds it in Colossians, for in him all things were created, things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities, all things have been created through him and for him.

Solomon exercised his sovereignty or rule over a vast tract of land. At the end of Matthew's gospel, where it reads the words of the Lord Jesus Christ, all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.

The Queen of the South's breath was taken away by Solomon's kingdom and his wisdom and his power, but does it take your breath away to contemplate the Lord Jesus Christ, King Jesus?

[38 : 50] Do you go out of your way to contemplate just how great he is? Do you meditate about him? If you do, how can you contemplate his greatness and boast about yourself and the works that you do at the same time?

You can't do it, can you? He should take your breath away. Solomon was a great king, but he was a flawed king.

This morning we were reminded about people who were flawed, were all flawed. Solomon was flawed, and it might be said he was too clever for his own good. In attempting powerful alliances, he married a pagan and this led to idolatry entering the land.

But Jesus was without flaw. No one could find any fault in him. He's unlike any other ruler in history.

And one greater than Solomon stood there before the Pharisees. If you read Solomon's history, and you think to yourself, how was it that he was able to rule so many people, you've probably come to the conclusion that he often ruled by fear.

[40 : 16] Jesus is entirely different. If you read Paul's second letter to the Corinthians, you read this, the love of Christ constrains us.

Why did Paul act in the way he did? Well, he was overcome with a sense of the love of Christ. It affected him, it drove him, it was the motivator behind his life.

So are you driven to sacrificial obedience at all by the love that Christ has for you? He's that sort of king.

That's the way he rules. Are you thankful that Jesus is a patient saviour, a gracious prophet, a wise and powerful king?

Do you realise that he exceeds all others in that he's a prophet and a king? But yes, he's a priest too. He's a priest who offered his own perfect life upon a cross as a sacrifice to pay for our hard, foolish, judgmental words that sometimes come out of our hearts.

[41 : 37] He died there to pay for our unbelief, our inattention to his commands. He's a great saviour.

Are you thrilled by him? Let's sing about him. Let's sing hymn number 165. All the glorious names of wisdom, love, and power.

Amen.