

“The Sign You Must Believe”

March 17, 2013

Text: John 2:18-22

“Signs” in Scripture refer to extraordinary phenomena done by God for the purpose of teaching people a truth, warning them of danger, or encouraging their faith.

In today’s text, Israel’s religious leaders will demand that Jesus perform a miraculous sign, & He will promise to do so.

Then John will explain the nature of that sign, and point out that Jesus performed it by rising from the dead.

As we’ll see, those same religious leaders will be neither taught/warned by this sign, due to their unbelief.

The sign Jesus will promise is found in verse 19 of our text=>

“Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.”

In verse 21, John will explain that the Temple Jesus was talking about was His own body.

Rom 10 teaches that Jesus’ resurrection from the dead after

3 days in the grave is a sign that every man/woman must believe, if he/she is to become born again=> *“If you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and **believe** in your heart that **God raised Him from the dead**, you shall be saved”*
(Rom 10:9).

So this is a sign that you must believe in order to be saved.

Signs encourage the faith of those whom the H.S. has enabled to believe, but no sign is so convincing/compelling that it can force someone to believe against his own will.

Even the miraculous sign of X's rising from the dead didn't cause the religious leaders to believe in Jesus, and they knew w/o a doubt that He had been resurrected.

Our Lord Himself said=> *"If they do not listen to Moses & the Prophets, neither will they be persuaded if someone rises from the dead"* (Lk 16:31).

He rose from the dead, & they still didn't believe.

Not only did the leaders themselves refuse to believe in Jesus, they prevented other Jews from believing in Him by concocting a lie, telling the guards who were at X's tomb when He was resurrected=> *"You are to say, 'His disciples came by night and stole Him away while we were asleep.' / And if this should come to the governor's ears, we will win him over and keep you out of trouble"* (Mt 28:13-14).

This illustrates the amazing resilience of unbelief in the face of a sign that represents irrefutable proof.

But praise God, our text will end by reminding us that the faith of believers is strengthened all the more by sign-miracles=> Verse 22 will say of Jesus' disciples=> *"They believed the Scripture, and the word which Jesus had spoken."*

In this text, we find: The Sign Demanded, the Sign Promised, the Sign Explained, & the Sign Performed ...

*** The Sign Demanded**

[John 2:18]=> *"The Jews therefore answered and said to Him, 'What sign do You show to us, seeing that You do these things?'"*

"Therefore" takes us back to our text 2 weeks ago.

As you'll recall, Jesus had just cleansed the Temple by driving out all the oxen/sheep/doves being sold there.

Those who held authority over the Temple had allowed salesmen of these animals to erect their stalls right there in the Temple itself—the Court of the Gentiles.

They had also allowed moneychangers to set up shop there.

Jesus made a cord, drove out the animals, & turned over the moneychangers' tables, shouting, *“Take these things away; stop making My Father's house a house of merchandise.”*

X's disciples interpreted His action in light of Psa 69:9=>

“ZEAL FOR THY HOUSE WILL CONSUME ME.”

The Temple authorities had allowed God's house to be profaned in this irreverent manner, because they were getting a cut of all the profits these vendors earned.

Jesus was jealous for the sanctity of the Temple.

Irreverence like this dishonored God Himself, and that was intolerably offensive to anyone who truly loved God.

Because of what Jesus had done, the Temple authorities demanded of Him a sign to prove His authority from God to take such radical action.

He wasn't a priest, being from the tribe of Judah (not Levi).

So in their view, unless He could prove He was a prophet sent by God Himself, He had no authority to do the kinds of things He had just done in the Temple.

In 1 sense, these leaders had a right to challenge X's authority.

Even though they were abusing their own authority for personal profit, & had made a sham of worship in the Temple, it was their duty to maintain order there.

If everyone who wanted to disrupt its operations were allowed to do so, chaos would have resulted, & that certainly would not have honored God in His house.

But the reality that Jesus had been able to clear out the animals and no one was able to stop Him, clearly demonstrated that He wielded divine power w/i His own Person.

In addition, His words, as He cleansed the Temple, were vindicated/supported by the truth=> *“Stop making My Father’s house a house of merchandise.”*

That’s exactly what the temple leaders were doing, they were doing it for personal profit, and at some level their consciences must have convicted them for doing what they had to know was terribly wrong.

Their feelings of guilt, and their apprehension that Jesus might indeed be a prophet sent by God to censure their abuses, may explain why they didn’t have Him arrested on the spot. Instead, they found it more expedient to merely demand a sign of Him, to prove His authority was from God.

They were saying in essence, “Do a trick & we’ll believe You.”

That’s a game God never plays, because (as one commentator put it), He won’t be domesticated.

God also knows that signs don’t cause anyone to believe.

Jn 12 says of X's ministry to the multitudes=> "*Though He had performed so many **signs** before them, yet they were **not believing** in Him*" (12:37).

When faith comes first, a sign may strengthen it.

But signs alone don't cause people to believe.

X went on to say of those in Mt 12=> "*An **evil** and adulterous generation **craves** for a **sign**.*"

Their pride wanted God to prove Himself to them w/ signs.

Instead of causing people to believe, signs just cause them to crave more signs.

After X fed the 5000, they actually had the gall to ask Him,

*"What then do You do for a **sign**, that we may see, & believe You? What work do You perform?"* (Jn 6:30).

***The Sign Promised**

Jesus promised the Temple authorities a sign, but it couldn't have been the sort of sign they'd hoped for, & it was the most significant sign God has ever given to mankind.

He understood that signs don't convince nonbelievers, but they do affirm the faith of believers.

So He promised a sign intended to do just that, when His disciples would need it most=> after His death.

[Verse 19]=> "*Jesus answered and said to them, 'Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.'*"

This was a masterstroke, and Jesus had the leaders cornered.

They wanted a sign that would prove He was authorized by God to do what He had done=> cleanse the Temple.

So He responded, “You tear down the Temple, and I will raise it up again w/i 3 days—that’s your sign.”

If He had the power to rebuild that Temple in 3 days, then He certainly had the authority to cleanse it.

How likely was it that they would take Him up on His offer and destroy their own Temple? => 0 likelihood.

Looking at this in retrospect 60 years later, John knew that Jesus was referring to His own resurrection 3 days after His body had been “*destroyed*” by crucifixion.

He was claiming to have the power to raise Himself from death.

In other NT texts, the Father is said to resurrect Him.

E.g. Gal 1 refers to “*God the Father, who raised Him [the Son] from the dead.*”

But this shouldn’t confuse us, because the Father/Son are 1.

What the Son does, the Father does, and vice versa.

Jesus said=> “*Whatever the Father does, these things the Son also does in like manner*” (Jn 5:19).

**This statement by Jesus was what the Jews called a *mashal*—
which means a “veiled saying.”**

Jewish literature was filled with such *marshals*.

E.g. Samson’s riddle for the Philistines => “*Out of the eater came something to eat, And out of the strong came something sweet*” (Judg 14:14).

He was describing the carcass of a lion he had seen, which the bees had turned into a hive w/ honeycomb.

Jesus' message here was a statement that revealed the truth to those who believed, but hid it from those who didn't.

When X rose from the dead, the Jewish leaders simply ignored the fact that He had fulfilled the sign He had promised. Once again, a miraculous sign (in this case, the greatest sign ever performed) failed to convince the skeptics.

It wasn't that they had forgotten what Jesus had said.

It stuck in their craw, so they brought it up at His trial before the H.P. in a perverted form, claiming Jesus had boasted He was going to destroy the Temple Himself (Mk 14:58).

They also taunted X on the cross, saying=> *"You who are going to **destroy the temple & rebuild it in three days, save Yourself!**"* (Mt 27:40).

Jesus' body was far superior to the Temple, as man's meeting place with God.

Jesus Himself made that clear in Mt 12:6.

1) In the OT, Israel's identity as a people centered on the Temple, reminding them of their unity under God.

But X is now the center of our identity, unifying us as His Body, He Being the Head of that Body (Eph 4:15f).

2) Originally in OT Israel, God was the King of its theocracy, and He ruled from His throne over the Ark in the Holy Place. For us as believers, Jesus is our Lord/King, who rules on the throne of our hearts.

Again, Rom 10=> *“If you confess with your mouth **Jesus as Lord**, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved”* (10:9).

3) In OT the temple reminded Israel they were holy unto God.

God is a holy God, & they were called out from among the nations to be His holy people.

To that end, the entire sacrificial system provided atonement for sin, making unholy people holy.

The Tabernacle/Temple were the places where God manifested His holy presence and His glory.

But the Temple was just a prophetic type, which has now been completely fulfilled by X.

He is the holy/sinless One, whose people have been set apart/sealed by the H.S., as holy unto God.

And X calls them to become conformed to His image, living increasingly holy lives.

1 Pet 2:5 says we are *“a **holy** priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.”*

The OT sacrificial system also prefigured Jesus, in that He has become our propitiation, a sacrifice that forever atones for our sin.

In the OT, the glory of God was seen only in the Holy of Holies, but Jesus has become for us the very radiance of God’s glory.

II Cor 4=> *“God, who said, ‘Light shall shine out of darkness,’ is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ” (4:6)*

When we enter the New Jerusalem, X will be the Temple.

He will so completely fulfill the Temple’s function that there will be no need for any other Temple.

John says (Rev 21:22)=> *“I saw **no temple** in it, for the Lord God, the Almighty, and the **Lamb**, are its **temple**.”*

Jesus promised a sign=> destroy this Temple and I will raise it up in 3 days.

He fulfilled that sign when He was resurrected for our justification, & all these blessings began to flow down on us, as He became our Temple.

***The Sign Explained**

The main connection between the Temple and Christ’s body is that both represent the seat of God’s presence among His people.

As we have seen, Jesus is superior to the Temple.

So His resurrection was the complete restoration of God’s manifest presence with man.

But the Jewish leaders were blind to that fact.

[Verse 20]=> *“The Jews therefore said, ‘It took forty-six years to build this temple, and will You raise it up in three days?’”*

The Jews completely misunderstood what Jesus was saying about His own future resurrection.

They were so focused on the literal Temple, they couldn't see X.

We can't blame them too harshly, since even X's disciples didn't understand it until after He was raised.

But we certainly can fault them for the disdainful attitude of sneering unbelief that lay behind their answer.

As rabbis, they were very familiar with such veiled sayings.

But they applied none of that familiarity/knowledge to what Jesus said, because their minds were closed to Him.

The Jews would repeatedly misunderstand Jesus throughout His ministry, taking His words literally when He was communicating a spiritual truth.

E.g. in Jn 6, Jesus said=> *“I am the living bread that came down out of heaven; if anyone eats of this bread, he shall live forever; and the bread also which I shall give for the life of the world is My flesh.” / The Jews therefore began to argue with one another, saying, ‘How can this man give us His flesh to eat?’ (51-52).*

In verse 64, X exokaubed why they misunderstood, saying,

“But there are some of you who do not believe.”

In our own text, the Jews pointed out that the Temple had been under construction for 46 years.

Josephus records that Herod the Great had started rebuilding it in 20-19 B.C., using 18,000 workers.

It still wasn't completed in Jesus' time, & it wouldn't be until A.D. 63.

7 years later, the Romans would demolish the Temple
during what they called the “Jewish Wars.”

**Now John adds an editorial note, that explains what Jesus
meant by “*Destroy this Temple.*”**

[Verse 21]=> “*But He was speaking of the temple of His body.*”

X made a connection between His own body & the Temple.

The Temple was an object lesson in which man could learn what
was needed for him (in his sinful condition) to interact w/
God (in His perfect holiness).

The barrier of sin had to be removed between God/man
before man could hear from God or be heard by God.

But the Temple was only an object lesson, teaching these
principles which would ultimately be fulfilled by God’s
only begotten Son, when He came to earth, as a man.

In the living Temple of X’s body, the ultimate sacrifice for
sin would be offered, through Jesus’ death.

Then He would miraculously raise Himself from the dead
3 days later.

Meanwhile, both before Jesus’ death, and after His resurrection,
His body was/is the focal point, & the living abode of God
on earth (i.e., a Temple).

Therefore, He is the center of all true worship, & the
fulfillment of all the Temple meant to the Jews.

E.g. Psa 84 says=> “*My soul longed and even yearned for*

the courts of the Lord [in the Temple]. My heart and my flesh sing for joy to the living God. // How blessed are those who dwell in Thy house!” (84:2, 4).

We can say the same of Jesus—our Temple.

He is the point of our communion w/ God.

But better than the Jews’ Temple worship, we can come to Him at any time, day or night.

And we can fellowship w/ Him any place on earth, not just in Jerusalem.

He is our H.P. w/i the Temple, who mediates between us & God, even pleading our case before God as He does.

He is for us, what they Temple was for Israel—& far more.

*** The Sign Performed**

[Verse 22]=> *“When therefore He was raised from the dead, His disciples remembered that He had said this [better=> that He had been saying this repeatedly]; and they **believed** the Scripture, and the word which Jesus had spoken.”*

At the time when Jesus was confronted by the Temple leaders

His disciples didn’t understand His words about the destruction/raising of the Temple any more than the Jews did.

But after His resurrection they recalled what He had said, & it all became clear to them.

X had told them the H.S. would bring to their remembrance everything He’d said to them (14:26) & that He would disclose its meaning to them (16:14).

That’s exactly what happened in this situation.

The Jews had all the same information the disciples had, but instead of believing in X, they hardened their hearts.

Refusing to believe the truth, the truth was taken from them.

Jesus said as much in Mt 13:12=> *“Whoever has, to him shall more be given and he shall have an abundance; but whoever does not have, even what he has shall be taken away from him.”*

When a person closes his heart and refuses to believe the revealed truth he understands, God blinds his mind not only to that truth, but to all other truth as well.

That’s what happened to these Jewish leaders.

Their initial unbelief set their lives on a whole course of unbelief that ultimately led to their apostasy.

By contrast, the disciples interpreted Jesus’ saying in the Temple in light of His resurrection, & they connected both w/ OT Scripture that prophesied Messiah’s death/resurrection.

For them, it all came together, so that they believed it and believed in Jesus all the more firmly.

This faith formed a grid of understanding for them, on which that based their whole lives.

This section of John’s Gospel is all about belief/unbelief, and this text illustrates some of the sins that prevent people from believing in X.

As I mention 2 such sins, you might examine your heart for them.

* Self-righteousness kept the Jewish leaders from believing in X.

They believed in neither His Messiahship/resurrection.

Beneath their fine priestly garments, they saw themselves
as the religious equivalent of good guys.

You can't expect people like that to believe a gospel which
is for sinners whose sins condemn them before God.

There can be no salvation for such folks until they seek
God's grace, apart from their own merits, trusting
only in the merits of X's death/resurrection.

That is the sign they either must believe, or be lost.

Self-righteous sinners hate being treated like that, and
prefer to take their chances that God will take their
own goodness into account not bringing them so low.

I hope you will humble yourself before X, & reach out to
Him by faith, seeking His undeserved grace.

* A false view of religion also kept the Jews from believing in X.

Like them, many people today look at externals, ignoring
the real issues of sin/righteousness/judgment.

They want a fine musical program at their church, & a
sermon that makes them feel good about themselves.

The last thing they want is to be told that God wants them
to have a heart that is broken/contrite over sin so they
can draw near to Him, & worship Him in spirit/truth.

By contrast, Jesus' true disciples wanted Him to take away
their sin more than anything else in this world.

They believed His words, & they believed in X Himself.

He forgave their sin, & I pray He will forgive yours too.

“The Sign You Must Believe”

March 17, 2013

Text: John 2:18-22

1. “Signs” in Scripture refer to extraordinary phenomena done by God for the purpose of teaching people a truth, warning them of danger, or encouraging their [12 faith].

Rom 10:9

2. Signs encourage the faith of those whom the Holy Spirit has enabled to believe, but no sign is so convincing or compelling that it can force someone to believe [16 against] his own will.

Lk 16:31; Mt 28:13-14

In this text we find a sign demanded, a sign promised, a sign explained, and a sign performed...

*** The Sign Demanded**

[John 2:18]

3. Jesus had just cleansed the Temple by driving out all the oxen, [12 sheep], and doves being sold there.

Psa 69:9

4. Because of what Jesus had done, the Temple authorities demanded of Him a sign to prove His authority from [8 God] to take such drastic action.

Jn 12:37

5. Instead of causing people to believe, signs just cause them to crave [10 more] signs.

Jn 6:30

***The Sign Promised**

[Verse 19]

6. Looking at this in retrospect, John knew that Jesus was referring to His own resurrection three days after His [10 body] had been “destroyed” by crucifixion.

Gal 1:1; Jn 5:19; Judg 14:4; Mk 14:58; Mt 27:40

7. Jesus’ body was far superior to the Temple as man’s [16 meeting] place with God.

Mt 12:6; Eph 4:15-16; Rom 10:9

8. The Temple was just a prophetic type which has now been completely [20 fulfilled] by Christ.

I Pet 2:5; II Cor 4:6; Rev 21:22

***The Sign Explained**

9. The main connection between the Temple and Christ's body is that both represent the seat of God's [18 presence] among His people.

[Verse 20]

Jn 6:51-51, 64

[Verse 21]

10. The Temple was an object lesson in which man could learn what was needed for him (in his sinful condition) to [18 interact] with God (in His perfect holiness).

Psa 84: 2, 4

***The Sign Performed**

[Verse 22]

Jn 14:26; 16:14

11. The Jews had all the same information the disciples had, but instead of believing in Christ, they [18 hardened] their hearts.

Mt 13:12

This text illustrates some of the sins that prevent people from believing in Christ...

- *12. Self-righteousness kept Jewish leaders from [22 believing] in Christ.
 - *13. A false view of [18 religion] also kept the Jews from believing in Christ.
14. Jesus' true disciples wanted Him to take away their sin more than anything else; they believed His words, and they believed in Christ [16 Himself].