

## **When Proof Is Not Enough**

**Mark 8:10-13**

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When I was in college, I read a great book on Christian apologetics that I would encourage you to read if you haven't read it; it's by Josh McDowell entitled, *Evidence That Demands a Verdict*. In that book McDowell presents various pieces of evidence in support of our faith; such as why the Bible must be true; the evidence for the resurrection, and so forth. When he named his book, McDowell was making the point that the evidence for the Christian faith exists, and that evidence demands that you respond. And that's true, there is evidence for the Christian faith, and it does demand a response when a person is confronted with that evidence; that evidence demands that you come to some verdict one way or the other. But what it doesn't mean is that that strong evidence that does exist demands that you reach the right verdict.

Human history is filled with examples of people who were confronted with a huge preponderance of evidence for a particular position and then simply chose not to believe it. If you doubt that, then go back and read a little of the history when they believed there was a flat earth; or when they believed that the sun revolved around the earth; or read about even today those people who reject the reality of the Holocaust that so many millions of Jewish people died in World War II; Or frankly open your Bible and look at Romans 1 where we're told that God has displayed on all of creation His handiwork, so that every man is without excuse and understands His eternal nature, His divinity, His power. And then open a textbook, turn on the news, open a magazine and hear them talk about how all of this happened by chance.

Evidence doesn't always demand the right verdict because we live in a fallen world where people's eyes are blinded and their hearts are purposefully, intentionally hardened toward the truth. You see this as well in how the religious leaders of Israel responded to the clear and incontrovertible proof of Jesus' identity. That's the very issue that Mark addresses in the passage that we come to tonight. It's when proof is simply not enough.

Look at Mark 8, and let me read for you, beginning in verse 10. The story that immediately precedes it of course is the feeding of the 4,000, and then it says, verse 10,

And immediately He entered the boat with His disciples and came to the district of Dalmanutha.

The Pharisees came out and began to argue with Him, seeking from Him a sign from heaven, to test Him. Sighing deeply in His spirit, He said, “Why does this generation seek for a sign? Truly I say to you, no sign will be given to this generation.” Leaving them, He again embarked and went away to the other side.

The clear message of these brief verses is that no amount of proof or evidence can overcome unbelief. Mark here paints a portrait of unbelief, and then he shows us how Jesus responds to that unbelief. So, let’s first of all look at the portrait of unbelief that he paints in this text. Look again at verse 10, “And immediately He entered the boat with His disciples and came to the district of Dalmanutha.”

Now, let me remind you of the background; in 7:24, Jesus left Israel, you remember, and He went to Phoenicia, up on the coast of the Mediterranean, and He was there in Tyre. And for the next several months out of that 3-and-a-half-year ministry that our Lord has, He ministers directly to Gentiles, in Gentile cities and in Gentile countries. The last two accounts that we read about, the end of chapter 7, the first part of chapter 8, both took place in primarily Gentile territory on the east side of the lake of Galilee, in an area called Decapolis.

Now after the feeding of the 4,000, you’ll remember we looked at that recently in the miracle that Jesus did that duplicated the feeding of the 5,000, but there were definite distinctions, one in the Jewish area, one in Gentile area. And after the feeding of the 4,000 and all of the people were satisfied, and He sends them home with the leftovers, immediately after that He entered the boat with His disciples. Now notice this time Jesus didn’t send them ahead, but He actually joins them.

And it says they, “... came to the district of Dalmanutha.” This is the only place in the New Testament and in all of the secular Greek sources where this place name occurs. It has to be on the western edge of the lake because they’ve been on east side and Decapolis, look at verse 31 of chapter 7, you’ll see that they were in the Decapolis which is on the east side of the Jordan, and then they get into a boat and go somewhere, 8:10 says, and then when that’s finished, verse 13

says they get back in the boat, and they go to the other side of the lake, and they land in the city called Bethsaida.

Now you put all of that together and that means they went to a place that was on the Mediterranean side of the Sea of Galilee, the western edge of the Sea of Galilee. Matthew puts it like this, Matthew 15:39, “And sending away the crowds, Jesus got into the boat and came to the region of Magadan.” Magadan, now Magadan is simply another name for Magdala, a city in the plain of Gennesaret. Let me just kind of show you where this is, and there’s a reason for this, okay? This isn’t just extraneous history, this goes to the point of why Mark included this, so stay with me.

On the western shore of the Sea of Galilee where that little red arrow is pointing, that’s where the Cliffs of Arbel are. There you see where that arrow’s pointing, right there are the Cliffs of Arbel and there’s the Sea of Galilee behind it. Right beneath that cliff, if you took that arrow and went straight down to the Sea of Galilee, that’s where Magdala is. Here’s another view from up there on that area. Now, here is from the Cliffs of Arbel, and you’ll notice right down here in this corner, that’s where Jesus and His disciples came – Magdala; Capernaum is up here, that’s His hometown, they’ve been over here on this side of the Sea of Galilee, and now they come back across to this place.

Now there are a couple of options: one is that Magadan and Dalmanutha are simply different names for the same place, and that’s possible. And by the way the Greek name simply means “salted” or “pickled fish,” because it was a seaport; this is what they did, they were fishermen there. It’s also possible that these two places that Matthew and Mark use, are distinct places, but are close to each other; and there’ve been a couple of suggestions, one is they found a cave just south of the ancient site of Magdala with the name Talmanutha instead of Dalmanutha engraved, and they found a small harbor on the north side between Magdala and Capernaum that might be the place. But almost certainly it’s where I just showed you on that area of the map.

Now why do I belabor this point? Before this boat trip Jesus had been in Gentile territory on the other side of the lake ministering primarily to Gentiles for several weeks, possibly even a couple of months. The feeding of the 4,000 in Mark 8:1-9 was in the Decapolis. The next time we see Jesus back on land, He’s back again primarily in Gentile territory, back on the other side of the

lake. He and His disciples will then remain in Gentile territory for several more weeks. The question is this: Why this short trip back to Israel? What is this about? Why would Jesus, after spending several months in Gentile territory make this short trip across the lake, all that we know about it is right here, then He gets back in the boat, and they go back across the lake into Gentile territory? Why? What's the point?

There are two possibilities. One is that Jesus intended to minister in Israel again for some period of time, but He was forced to change His plans after He ran into the antagonism again of these Jewish leaders that we find in this passage. Now that doesn't fully hold water because Jesus already knew about the antagonism, that was part of the reason you remember, they left for Gentile territory a few weeks before and went to Tyre and Sidon and then to Decapolis. So, that reason doesn't really stand up.

A second option (and the one that I really think is the reason), is that Jesus intended this to be a very short trip, knowing ahead of time the response that He and His disciples would get; it was intended to be a teaching moment (a stark contrast to teach His disciples several important lessons.) This seems the most reasonable explanation; because once they leave Dalmanutha, while they're still in the boat, Jesus will begin to teach His disciples about the negative influences that are present in Israel.

It's really shocking when you think about it. Jesus goes to Gentile territory. He ministers and serves there, and then He brings His disciples back to Jewish territory for a very short time to teach them some object lessons about the negative influence of religion in Israel. The reason that's shocking is because most Christians think that the worst influences come into their lives and the lives of their families from unbelievers, from pagans, and those influences can be very bad, but the influences of false religion are even more deadly, and we'll see that message unfold in the next section, starting in verse 14.

But let's come back then to verse 11. So, Jesus and His disciples have made this very brief, short trip, out of Gentile territory, and He's got something He wants them to see and to learn. Verse 11, when they get there, "The Pharisees came out and began to argue with Him, seeking from Him a sign from heaven, to test Him."

As soon as they land the boat, and it becomes known that Jesus and His disciples have arrived, the Pharisees come looking for Him. This time they are on the attack; they take the initiative. They're probably still stinging from their last encounter. You'll remember, back in chapter 7, where Jesus told them that their hearts were far from God; that they had replaced divine revelation with their own human tradition, and so they come out to meet Him. Matthew adds that for the very first time, the Pharisees have company. Matthew 16:1 says, "The Pharisees and Sadducees came up, and testing Jesus, they asked Him to show them a sign from heaven."

So, now the Pharisees have some allies; who are these Sadducees? We haven't really met them before; the Sadducees were a group that arose during the intertestamental period, that 400 silent years between the Old Testament and the New Testament. They were primarily priests. They were from wealthy aristocratic families who basically controlled life in Israel, and especially controlled the office of high priest, led by men like Annas, and his son-in-law Caiaphas, and the Sadducees were connected with that group. Most of the political leaders in Israel tended to be Sadducees.

Now theologically the Sadducees were liberal. They embraced the Pentateuch literally, but they rejected the rest of the Old Testament, and they rejected, rightly, all of that oral tradition that the Pharisees accepted. They were also anti-supernaturalist; that is, they were essentially ancient deists. They believed that God made the world, but then He just didn't interfere in the world He made. So, because of that, there's no spirit world; there are no angels and there's no resurrection. Because of that you can imagine they were essentially pragmatists, and they were also more than willing to compromise with the Greeks, and so they were Hellenists. They were open to the Greek influences into their culture. That's who they were.

Now why, if you now know about the Sadducees (and you'll remember what we learned about the Pharisees), you know that they're like oil and water. One's theologically liberal, the other's theologically conservative. One's politically uninvolved, the other's all about politics. One is wealthy, and the other group are not wealthy. One is concerned about theology, and frankly the Sadducees have no real concern about theology at all. So, what brings them together? It's their common hatred of Jesus Christ. The enemy of my enemy is my friend. Their common hostility for Jesus makes these strange bedfellows.

Now notice that these two groups come find Jesus because they have an agenda. Look at verse 11 again. “The Pharisees ...” and (as Matthew adds), the Sadducees, “... came out and began to argue with Him, seeking from Him a sign from heaven, to test Him.” Now why would they do this? It’s not all together illegitimate (that they came out to meet Jesus and to seek something from Him), because there was a test established by Moses for a true prophet. Do you remember Moses. Nobody doubted that God spoke to and through Moses; I mean two million people at the foot of Mt. Sinai watched as God put on that amazing display at the top of the mountain, and Moses went up. They heard the voice of God speak the Ten Commandments; they saw the tablets written with the finger of God; everybody knew God spoke to Moses, face-to-face, as a man speaks with his friend. Nobody doubted what Moses said.

Well Moses, then, comes with a set of criteria for evaluating every future prophet. God isn’t going to do the same thing for every prophet, so how do you know if a guy’s a true prophet or a false prophet? Well, there were standards Moses established, several requirements to accept a prophet as legitimate. One of them, in Deuteronomy 18, was that the true prophet’s predictions will always come true. Look back there, turn to Deuteronomy with me; Deuteronomy 18, and notice verse 21, “You shall say in your heart, ‘How will we know the word which the LORD has not spoken?’” Moses has just warned them not to accept what the Lord hasn’t said through a prophet, “How do we know?” Verse 22, “When a prophet speaks in the name of the LORD, if the thing does not come about or come true, that is the thing which the LORD has not spoken. The prophet has spoken it presumptuously; you shall not be afraid of him.” And, in fact, prior to that, they’re told to kill him. He’s a false prophet.

So, the first criteria is: if the prophet says, “This is what God has predicted will come,” and it doesn’t happen, he’s a false prophet, kill him. If it happens one time. There are a lot of prophets through human history, a lot of prophets on religious television today, who by biblical standards should be dead. That was the standard.

A second requirement or standard of a true prophet is found back in chapter 13; and that is that: a true prophet’s message will always be in complete doctrinal agreement with previous revelation. Look back at Deuteronomy 13:1, “If a prophet or a dreamer of dreams arises among you...” [and notice this], “... gives you a sign or ... wonder,” In other words, he does something, maybe a legitimate sign or wonder, or maybe something that looks like a sign or

wonder, and you're going to be swayed by it, because it's impressive. "and the sign or ... wonder comes true, concerning which he spoke to you...." [But his message, while he's doing the sign or wonder is, I represent the true God, but] "Let us go after other gods (whom you have not known), and let us serve them."

In other words, God's changed His mind, it's okay to bring some others alongside Him, it's okay to include some other worship,

"you shall not listen to the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams; for the LORD your God is testing you to find out if you love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul. You shall follow the LORD your God and fear Him ... you shall keep His commandments, listen to His voice, serve Him, and cling to Him. But that prophet or that dreamer of dreams shall be put to death, because he has counseled rebellion against the LORD your God...."

In other words, any prophet who comes along, even if he does something impressive, this is something for you to understand. If somebody walked into this auditorium tonight and said, "I am a true prophet of God, and I'm going to show you a miraculous sign," and then he tells you to do something contrary to what God has already revealed, he is a false prophet, however impressive it might look. God doesn't change His Word. He's a false prophet, that's the point.

In addition to those two criteria, God would often authenticate the true prophet by empowering him to work miracles; you can see that with Moses, you see that with other prophets throughout the flow of Old Testament history. Their authenticity is proven by their working of miracles.

So, what I want you to see is, this is the Old Testament background. It wasn't completely inappropriate for these religious leaders to ask a prophet for a sign. But that's not what these guys are doing. Go back to Mark.

Remember now, there's been history. The religious establishment has already heard about many of Jesus' miracles. In fact, not only have they heard about it, but they have personally witnessed a number of His miracles with their own eyes. These guys that come out to the boat here don't seem to be from Jerusalem. This isn't another one of those delegations coming up from down at the temple. These are home grown religious leaders. These are local Pharisees and local

Sadducees. When Jesus shows up, they show up; they come out apparently from their homes and from their towns. Well guess what? Jesus has done most of His miracles right under their noses, and in fact, they themselves have witnessed them.

Let me just remind you, and I'm not going to take you back to these passages, but let me just remind you, that in chapter 1 you remember, Jesus cast out a demon in the synagogue, in Capernaum, on the Sabbath. All these Jewish leaders would have been there. They saw it.

Then He went and ministered in the synagogues throughout Galilee. Again, that would have been on the Sabbath days. He would have taught and ministered and done miracles, as the text tells us. So, the religious leaders scattered across all of Galilee would have seen miracles from Jesus. In chapter 1:44, a leper's healing is made known to the priest, you remember, when Jesus says, "Go tell the priest so that they may know what's happened to you." This would have been the Sadducees.

In chapter 2, Jesus heals the paralytic and forgives his sins, and He does that with scribes (those would be Pharisees), present, and they wonder, "Why did Jesus say He can forgive this man's sins?" So, they saw it, they witnessed it.

Chapter 3, Jesus heals a man with a withered hand on the Sabbath, in the synagogue, again probably in Capernaum. So, they've had all of this evidence. they've seen all of these signs with their own eyes. That's what I want you to get. Don't miss this. They saw Jesus do what you wish you could see Jesus do. They saw Jesus actually heal people. They saw a man's withered arm come to full life and operation and full strength, in a moment's time at the touch and command of Jesus Christ. They saw all of this, but they had come to their own verdict about what it all meant.

You remember in 3:22, "The scribes who came down from Jerusalem were saying, 'He is possessed by Beelzebul,' and 'He casts out ... demons by the rule of the demons.'"

Undoubtedly, these guys had influenced their local counterparts. They all bought in to the same idea. Jesus is in league with the devil, and in fact, He's even indwelt by the devil.

Again, notice they don't question the fact here that Jesus had actually cast out demons. They acknowledge it. So, if they had already seen all those miracles, then what's going on here when



they come out to Jesus and ask for a sign? Notice the nuances and how Mark describes what's happening. Look back at verse 11 again. They, "... came out ... began to argue with Him, seeking from Him a sign from heaven, to test Him." They didn't deny that He had performed signs, but they wanted Him, not to meet the Old Testament biblical standard, but to jump through their own manmade hoops. You see the rabbis taught that when Messiah came, He would perform signs in the sky, in the heavens, astronomical signs. All of Jesus' miracles had been where? Right here on terra firma, right here on earth. That didn't meet their criteria, even though it wasn't a biblical one.

So, they're not questioning the reality of Jesus' miracles, but the source of His miracles. What they are implying here is that Jesus' earth-bound miracles might very well be the work of Satan. They wanted a sign from heaven that proved the source of His power was from God. For example, they wanted (like Moses provided) bread from heaven. They wanted Him to do something like that; or like Joshua, who made the sun stand still; or Samuel, who brought thunder and rain at the harvest time, which never happened in Israel; or Elijah, calling down fire from heaven; or Isaiah, calling the shadow of the sundial to reverse. They wanted something in the sky, something dramatic, some sign to prove the source of Jesus' power, and if it came from the skies, their theological understanding was, it came from God. They wanted a public definite proof that His power came from God.

As D. Edmond Hiebert writes in his commentary, "They wanted some startling celestial phenomenon, some audible or visual sign in the sky, that would incontrovertibly establish His claims." But folks, understand this: even that wasn't a legitimate request. It's not like these guys were open to the evidence. They already had their minds made up. Look at the last two words in verse 11, "testing Him." Mark uses the Greek word for "test" four times. Three times he uses it of the Pharisees doing it to Christ, as here. The other time it's Satan doing it to Christ. These guys were putting Jesus on the spot by calling for Him to do some sign in the heavens, to substantiate His authority, and it's their belief, and their desire, that He will not be able to do it, and He'll be publicly discredited. That's what they're after.

R. T. France writes, "The request denotes it's not a readiness to be convinced, but an excuse for refusing to respond to the clear evidence already available in Jesus' teaching and ministry."

What else did Jesus need to do to prove who He was? They weren't going to believe whatever it

was; besides that, you know what they're asking for here? They say, "We want a sign from heaven," something from the skies that show who Jesus really is. Think about it for a moment, they already had it. You remember when it happened? At Jesus' baptism. What happened when Jesus came up out of the water? The Holy Spirit descended upon Him like a dove, and then there was what? A voice, God the Father, spoke from heaven and said, "This is My Son," like this giant arrow pointing down, can't miss it, this is the One, you don't need to adjust your glasses. They had it. This is how unbelief always works. No amount of proof or evidence is ever enough.

You know this week I read, as you may have, another group announced that they had found Noah's ark on Mt. Ararat; did you read about that? Well, who knows? I mean this may be another in a long line of mistaken identities or even ruses, I don't know. It may turn out to be the real thing. But understand this, it doesn't really matter; please understand this. You know Christians are always looking for, "Boy if we could just, if they could find the ark. If they could find the ark on Ararat, then unbelievers would line up to believe in Jesus Christ and to embrace the Bible." It won't convince anyone to believe.

I saw that clearly this week because when there was even the possibility that this was a boat approaching the size and description of Noah's ark, it was interesting to me the various internet comments. They were not, "You know if it's Noah's ark, and they can prove it is, then I'll believe the Bible." Anybody see any comments like that? No. Instead, the comments were like this: "Even if it is the boat or like the one described in Genesis, it couldn't have been a worldwide flood because there's no evidence of a worldwide flood." I'm not making that up. In other words, and this is what you have to see, proof is never enough to overcome unbelief.

You see miracles were intended to convince, that was one of the purposes of miracles, Jesus in John 10:37 says,

"If I do not do the works of My Father, do not believe Me; but if I do them, though you do not believe Me, believe the works, so that you may know and understand that the Father is in Me, and I in the Father."

So, miracles were intended to point to the reality of who Christ was, and He calls for faith in response to those miracles. But understand this, miracles in and of themselves are not enough to produce a true faith.

What about Jesus' brothers? They grew up with Jesus; they knew and heard of who He was; they saw the perfection of His person; but even His brothers, "... were not believing in Him." John 12:37, John writes, even "... though He had performed so many signs before them, yet they were not believing in Him."

And you remember in the story that Jesus told of the rich man and Lazarus, the poor beggar, you remember, the rich man dies, and opens up his eyes in hell, and Lazarus dies and opens up his eyes in heaven, he was throwing the whole system the Pharisees had constructed about retribution theology on its head. They taught that if you were blessed in this life, it meant God was pleased with you, and you were righteous, and if you weren't blessed in this life, it meant God wasn't pleased with you, and you weren't righteous. And Jesus tells a story that throws all that on its head.

But in that story, the rich man, you remember from hell, says this, "If I can't be relieved of my torment, then I want you, please Abraham, to send someone to my brothers; send Lazarus to my brothers, that he may warn them about this place." You remember what Jesus said, as He puts these words in the mouth of Abraham? "If they do not listen to Moses and the prophets, they will not be persuaded even if someone rises from the dead." Let that sink into your mind for a moment. If there were a genuine resurrection in Southlake (provable, verifiable, it was a work of God, no question about it), it wouldn't make a difference. If they will not listen to Moses and the prophets; if they will not receive the Scripture, then they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead. They weren't convinced with everything Jesus did.

Now what is the implication of this for us? No amount of proof or evidence will overcome unbelief. Your apologetics, your arguing for the Christian faith and against error, may knock the props out from somebody's faulty world view, and there's a place for that, but you are never going to argue someone into Christianity by amassing any amount of evidence. Read Josh McDowell's book, *Evidence That Demands a Verdict*. It's great stuff, and there's great

evidence. Our faith will stand the test of weighing the evidence. But understand the proof is never enough for unbelief. You aren't going to convince them by amassing proof.

Look over at John 8. John 8:45. Jesus says to the Jewish people,

“... because I speak the truth, you do not believe Me. Which one of you convicts Me of sin? If I speak the truth, why do you not believe Me?” If I'm speaking the truth, why ... [don't] you believe ...? [Verse 47 here it is] “He who is of God hears the words of God; for this reason you do not hear *them*, because you are not of God.”

There's the bottom line (or as Paul puts it in 1 Corinthians 2), the natural man cannot understand or receive the things of the Spirit of God. the Word of God, the revelation of God, the truth about God, they're spiritually discerned, he's absolutely blind to them, and no amount of evidence is going to overcome his spiritual blindness or his deafness or his unbelief.

Now, this is important because in today's world there are two basic approaches to proving the truth, and I don't want to spend a lot of time here, but I just want to remind you of them. There's the evidentialist approach, which says there's this common pool of facts which we can approach the unbeliever with and argue from this common pool of facts and evidence, and if that unbeliever will carefully use his reason to assess these facts, it's going to lead to agreement that Christianity is in fact true, and maybe even lead him possibly to accept the gospel. If I can just give him enough evidence.

And then there's the position that we're really urged to in this text and that I hold, the elders of this church hold, it's called the presuppositionalist view. Doesn't mean you can't present evidence, just don't think your evidence is going to convince them. The presuppositionalist view embraces these realities: God has revealed Himself in creation, in providence, in conscience; every man knows that revelation to be true and is without excuse. Man willfully, sinfully chooses to deny and disregard that revelation (or as Romans 1 says, to suppress it or hold it down), and in fact, man is dead to God, and unable to choose the good even when he's confronted with it; therefore, unbelievers cannot be rationally argued into saving faith, instead God has to turn on the light. God has to say, “Let there be light.”

God accomplishes that regeneration, that new life by means of the Spirit using what? The Word of God. That's why all of our arguments will never convince them. Doesn't mean we can't answer their objections; doesn't mean we can't present them with evidences, but understand ultimately the tool the Spirit of God will use is the Word of God, spiritually illumined for that sinner's understanding. That's why we come back to simply presenting the truth of the gospel. That's why we do that. That's why Paul says in 1 Corinthians 1, the Jews seek for a sign, but what did he do? They want a sign; they still wanted a sign in his day; but what did he do? He said we preach Christ and Him crucified. We just preach the message of Christ and the gospel, Christ and the Cross, because that will be the power of God to their salvation.

Now that brings us to the second part of this passage, and that's Jesus' reaction to unbelief. Look at verse 12. "Sighing deeply in His spirit, He said, 'Why does this generation seek for a sign? Truly I say to you, no sign will be given to this generation.'" That expression "sighing deeply in His spirit," or "sighing deeply," only occurs one time in the New Testament right here. It describes an intense, sort of emotional upheaval, that is expressed outwardly in a deep sort of groan or sigh, it's probably a combination (we're not told), but it's probably a combination of sort of righteous anger and grief over their hard-hearted unbelief.

When He says, "this generation," Jesus meant most of His contemporaries; by the way, that means the problem wasn't just with the Pharisees and Sadducees, it was most of the people who lived around Him in the first century. Matthew adds that Jesus called them an evil and spiritually adulterous generation.

In response to the demand for a sign, notice how Jesus responds, "Truly I say to you ...". Literally in the Greek text it's, "Amen, I say to you." In other words, "Let this be true. Listen to what I'm about to say, if this generation shall be given a sign." That's literally what it says in the Greek text. "Amen, I say to you, if this generation shall be given a sign." Period. You say that isn't a sentence; no, it's not a sentence. It's a Hebrew idiom. It's a conditional statement that leaves the second half of it unstated. It's a conditional statement like 2 Kings 6:31, where we read, "... May God do so to me and more also, if the head of Elisha the son of Shaphat remains on him today." So, this is like a strong oath. Jesus was simply saying this: "If this generation gets a sign; may God take My life; or may God punish Me." That's what Jesus was saying.

Jesus is very serious about this. He's saying, "They will never get a sign." It's like our saying, "That'll be over my dead body."

Jesus doesn't mean that He hadn't already given them a sign, because Matthew records this: "... a sign will not be given it, except ..." There is one sign, and I've already given it to you, "... the sign of Jonah." What does that mean? Well, Jesus explains it in another place, because He used the same statement in another time in Matthew 12. He said to them, "An evil and adulterous generation craves for ... [this] sign [you keep asking for]; and yet no sign will be given ... it but the sign of Jonah the prophet." And here it is, "... just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the sea monster, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth."

In Luke 11, several weeks after what happens in Mark 8, He repeats it again. You see Jesus' sign was always the same, the resurrection was always the ultimate sign that He was the Messiah; and if they won't accept the sign He's given them, He's not going to give them another one.

And look at how He responds in verse 13, "Leaving them, He again embarked and went away to the other side." William Hendrickson writes, "They are abandoned to the destiny which they, by their hardness of heart, have chosen for themselves." There's more here than Jesus getting in the boat; Jesus left them.

Really a profound message in this text. There are people in the church, there are people sitting here tonight, who have all their lives dabbled with Jesus; little bit of religion, little bit of Scripture memory involved in, maybe grew up in the church, went through Awana and everything else, maybe you grew up in a church other than this one, who are on the fringes, never really embracing Christ, never really following Him; the day will come when God will leave you alone to walk in your own way. That's the message of this text; you demonstrate a hard enough heart and soon, as William Hendrickson says, you will be abandoned by God to the destiny which you yourself have chosen.

Ken Hughes writes, “What a terrible thing it is to have Christ turn His back on you and sail away, but that is ultimately what He does to those who continually refuse His revelation. There comes a time when He gives no more signs and no more help in understanding.”

This is not just the message of this text; this is a message that comes throughout the Scripture. This is how God ultimately responds. He’s patient, He’s long-suffering, but where there is continuing unbelief, enough is enough. Psalm 81, “... I gave them over,” [God says,] “to the stubbornness of their heart, To walk in their own devices.”

Jeremiah 23:33, “Now when this people or the prophet or a priest says to you saying, ‘What is the oracle of the LORD?’” What’s God saying? “... then you shall say to them, ‘What oracle?’” The LORD declares, ‘... [I’ve abandoned] you.’” God’s not speaking anymore.

Jesus put it this way in Matthew 7, “Do not give what is holy to dogs, and do not throw your pearls before swine, or they will trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you to pieces.” Jesus is practicing in Mark 8 what He preached in Matthew 7.

Matthew 15, He says of the Pharisees, “Let them alone; they are blind guides of the blind. And if a blind man guides a blind man, [they will] both ... fall into a pit.” Just leave them alone. It’s the worst thing that can happen to an individual.

John 8:21, “Then He said ... to them [again], ‘I go away, and you will seek Me ...’” [Once I’m gone,] “... you will seek Me, [but you] ... will die in your sin.” [Because the opportunity will be gone.]

John 12:36, “While you have the Light, believe in the Light, so that you may become sons of Light.” These things Jesus spoke, and He went away, and [He] hid Himself from them.”

Same thing happens in the ministry of the apostles. In Acts 13 on the first missionary journey

“... when the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy and *began* contradicting the things spoken by Paul and were blaspheming. Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly and said, ‘It was necessary that the word of God be

spoken to you first; since you repudiate it and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life...,” [... we’re going to leave you alone,] “... [we’re] turning to the Gentiles.”

In Romans 11 Paul says of the Jews,

“... [they] were broken off for their unbelief, but you stand by your faith. Do not be conceited, but fear...” [You see the problem with unbelief does not lie in the mind; the problem with unbelief lies in the will.]

Let me finish with one final text. I’ll put it up here, but it’s a text I want you to let burn into your mind, mark it in your notes, read it, meditate on it; it is one of the most foundational texts in all of the New Testament. John 7:17, Jesus says, “If anyone is willing to do ... [God’s] will, he will know of the teaching, whether it is of God or *whether* I speak from Myself.”

The bottom line is this: Where there is unbelief, it’s not because there’s a lack of evidence, it’s because there’s a lack of willingness to respond to the truth. My hope and prayer is there’s no one here like that tonight. May God give us all tender hearts to the truth, tender hearts to the gospel. I plead with you, don’t pass the line of God’s patience.

Let’s pray together.

Father, thank You for Your Word, thank You for even this sober warning.

I pray, O God, for the person here tonight who has played fast and loose with the truth, who’s never bowed the knee to Christ, who’s resisted His will, who has turned a hard cold heart in unbelief. Father, I pray that in Your mercy and grace You would break that hard heart to pieces, You would bring whatever it takes into that person’s life to bring them to the end of themselves, to where they can only look up. But O God, be gracious, be patient, don’t turn Your back on those under the sound of my voice tonight who are manifesting a hard heart of unbelief.

Father, for those who know and love You, remind us that no amount of proof will ever win our loved ones to Christ; it will be the Word of God used by the Spirit of God to bring life to a dead heart.



Keep us faithful to share that news, and may You be pleased to bring those people we love and have prayed for to a genuine knowledge of Christ, in whose Name we pray, Amen.