

Healing and the Hereafter

Matthew 12:38-42 NIVUK

Then some of the Pharisees and teachers of the law said to him, "Teacher, we want to see a miraculous sign from you. He answered, 'A wicked and adulterous generation asks for a miraculous 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 one 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 one greater than Solomon is here.'"

Who knows what sign the Pharisees were demanding? Jesus' ministry was chock full of sensational miracles. And they continued after Jesus' ascension too, through the formative years of the fledging church. But most of the miracles seem to have been healings, and in the later apostolic letters we start to hear more about on-going sicknesses, **1 Timothy 5:23**, and **2 Timothy 4:20**.

We don't see those spectacular signs today either. God is not in the business of making his presence known to the world through attention-catching changes in our lives. We know God still heals but so often nothing changes when we pray for people who are sick, though we may be praying day after day.

But hidden in Jesus' response to the Pharisees may be one reason why we don't have our prayers answered in the way we would choose. After giving them the enigmatic sign of Jonah, Jesus also gave the crowd a preview of the future when Gentiles would condemn them for their refusal to respond when God in the flesh stood amongst them.

We may have imagined that at the judgment there would be awestruck silence, but Jesus tells us that there's going to be some vocal finger-pointing expressed. Now just suppose God acquiesced to our prayers and healed everyone when we asked, then there might be some more strong opinions. For example, the militant atheists who steadfastly rejected any idea of God throughout their lives might crow: "Well, if you'd done that for me, I would have believed." Those that suffered crippling sicknesses all through their lives might complain: "Look at the life I led. You didn't lift a finger for me, but you helped your favourites."

Perhaps, then, this is one reason why God doesn't take away our difficulties: that no one is going to be able to make those accusations against him, or use their lack of healing to justify their rejection of him.

At that time what everyone will clearly see is the power of God who transformed the lives of ordinary people no different from any others, people who looked for no special favours but were enabled to bear all that life threw at them, in faith accounting the suffering of the world not worthy to be compared with the glory that would be revealed in them, **Matthew 16:24**, and **Romans 8:18**. There'll be no argument about that.