

Resistance to the Kingdom

1. Intro

- Our theme this morning is belief and unbelief ... in particular, belief and unbelief in Jesus and the consequences of both
- So before we start let me ask you a question
 - Where is your belief at with Jesus?
 - Where on the spectrum between belief and unbelief do you stand?
- Because depending on where you stand ... the outcome is very different

- We've been working our way through Mathew's gospel last year and this year
- And recently, as we've been looking at Ch 11-12 we've been considering how we respond to Jesus
- And as in Jesus day, people in our culture have a very mixed response to Jesus
 - Some hate Jesus and reject him
 - Others who are skeptical
 - Some sit on the fence
 - Those who profess faith Jesus, yet their faith is so half-hearted it makes no difference in their life what-so-ever
 - People who have been struck by the truth of Jesus and whole-heartedly believe

- Therefore, no matter where you sit on that spectrum, Jesus has something to say to you
- And in particular, in the verses we are looking at this morning we see Jesus is warning us ... telling us we need to get our belief in him right
- Because if
 - If you want to put conditions on your belief and demand that God gives you a sign before you believe; or
 - If you are sitting on the fence and procrastinating in your belief ...
 - Then the consequences are dire

- But these verses also highlight ... that when our belief is real ... then it comes with great privilege

- This morning, I want to look at the passage under three headings:
 - The consequence of conditional belief (38-42)
 - The peril of procrastinating belief (43-45)

- The test of true belief (46-50)

2. The Consequence of Conditional Belief (v38-42)

- Jesus is still up in the north of Israel in Galilee and some Pharisees and Teachers of the Law come and ask Jesus
 - "Teacher, we want to see a miraculous sign from you."
- But Jesus replies
 - v39 - *"A wicked and adulterous generation asks for a miraculous sign!"*
- Now what's going on there?
 - It seems a little extreme doesn't it to call them wicked and adulterous just for asking for a sign?
- You need to remember the context
 - Jesus has been hanging around Galilee for almost his entire ministry
 - Ch 8-10 Matthew recorded countless miracles Jesus did in that region
 - Healing leper, mute, demon possessed man, calms the storm, brings dead back to life and many others
 - In 11:20 pronounced 'woe' on the towns of Galilee because they failed to recognise and accept Jesus as the Messiah despite
 - all the miracles he'd done in their midst
 - the fact the OT (Isaiah) pointed to the fact that God's Messiah would do all these things
- So this generation has
 - had all the signs they could wish for
 - had Jesus in their midst ...
 - one who's greater than the Temple
 - greater than King David
 - the Son of Man
 - the Lord of the Sabbath
- And yet they still won't accept Jesus as the Messiah and believe in him
- Instead ... they have the audacity to ask for yet another sign
- Jesus just calls it as he sees it
 - He **knows** more miracles and signs weren't going to change the hearts and minds of these Pharisees or the wicked and adulterous generation they represent

- They've already rejected Jesus ... and their request for another sign is really just confirms their skepticism and unbelief
- And so Jesus refuses to bow to their demands
 - He refuses to act like a circus performer keeping the crowd happy who were not serious about Jesus or what he had to say
- While he won't give them a sign there and then ... he does go on to say ... they **will** have a sign in the future ... and it's the sign of Jonah
- Now what's this about?
 - Jonah was an OT prophet God called to go and preach to the Ninevites in Assyria
 - Ninevites were arch-enemies of God's people
 - And because Jonah (an Israelite) hated the Assyrians ... he didn't want to go and preach there because he knew God would cause them to repent and be saved ... and he didn't want them to be saved ... he wanted them to go to hell!
 - So he ran away ... got on a boat and sailed to Tarshish in the opposite direction
 - God had other plans and raised up a wicked storm and Jonah was thrown overboard, only to be swallowed by a huge fish ... where he stayed for three days and three nights before being spewed out onto dry land
 - Having had the life scared out of him, Jonah thought he better obey God this time, went to Nineveh, preached God's message and the whole city of 120,000 responded in repentance
- Now how's that a sign for the wicked and adulterous generation of Jesus day?
 - v40 – *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.*
- Jesus is saying ... the sign for you will be my death and resurrection
 - He's pointing to the fact, that just as
 - Jonah and his message from God was vindicated by coming to life after three days in the fish
 - So Jesus and his message will be vindicated by him coming back to life after three days in the tomb
- So Jesus says ...

- "You want a sign to confirm I am who I am ... well my resurrection from the dead is the final sign I will give you ... because my resurrection is the **one sign** that truly vindicates me and my mission"
- Then in v41-42 Jesus goes on to make a separate point ... where he compares the response of the Ninevites and the Queen of the South to his hearers
- The Queen of the South ... otherwise known as the Queen of Sheba came from the Arabian Peninsula to hear the great wisdom of the OT king Solomon
- Both the Ninevites and the Queen of Sheba listened and responded to the word of Jonah and Solomon
- And Jesus says ... 'someone greater' than Jonah and Solomon is here
 - I'm greater than Jonah ... for I am the true messenger of God
 - I'm greater than King Solomon ... for I am the true wise king
- And **yet**... the Jews failed to listen to and respond to Jesus
- Therefore, the response, by contrast, of the Ninevites and the QoS, will condemn this unbelieving generation

Application

- There's a couple of things to apply here
- First is that if ever you find yourself placing conditions on God as to whether you believer of not ... you are treading on very dangerous soil
- Because as we've seen here in the case of the Pharisees and TOL ... conditional belief is often a mask for unbelief
 - The religious leaders didn't believe in Jesus ... they were trying to trap and kill him
 - Their request for a sign was a mask of their unbelief
- Lots of people who are confronted with the truth about Jesus ... will do the same as the Pharisees ... because deep down they are unwilling to acknowledge the divinity and Lordship of Jesus and turn to him
- And so in order to justify themselves ... they will demand a sign
 - "If only God would reveal himself to me ... then I would believe"
 - "If God spoke to me ... then I would know for sure"
 - "Why doesn't God just give us a sign he is there?"
- And the implication of these statements is ...
 - "I'm not going to believe ... until God fits in with my demands"

- Need to say ...
 - It's okay to doubt and question the truth of Christianity
 - Being a Christian doesn't mean checking your brain out at the door when you come to church
 - Any religion ought to be critiqued and assessed
 - It's good to look at the evidence for Jesus and Christianity
 - I'm convinced the evidence does stack up in your heart and in your head ... and there are many, many people around the world who are 50x smarter than me ... who are convinced that Jesus and Christian faith stand up under the weight of scrutiny

- However, it's one thing to question, doubt and scrutinize the evidence for Jesus and Christianity ... but it's quite another to dictate to God what evidence we want ...
 - After all, God is the potter and we are the clay
 - We fail to understand this if we're making demands of God and dictating to him the basis on which we will or won't believe
 - To do so is really quite arrogant

- Much better is to look at the evidence he's **already** given us
 - And there is no better evidence to look at than the person and work of Jesus himself
 - For he is God the son, God in the flesh, entering our world and revealing to us the existence, character and mission of God
 - No other religion can claim that!
 - No other religion can give you the assurance that it is true ... like Jesus does with Christianity
 - Because no other religion claims to say that God revealed himself to us in person
 - But that's what Jesus did

- And as you look at the life and ministry of Jesus
 - You will see
 - his teaching
 - his example
 - his miracles
 - his impact

- Begin to stack up ... and the cumulative weight of all those things ... give us the all evidence we need to believe that Jesus Christ is indeed the Messiah ... the Christ ... God's chosen king
- However, the **key thing we must consider** is Christ's death and resurrection
 - It's **the** sign that validates everything
 - As the Apostle Paul said ... *'if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith.'*¹
 - Why?
 - Because if Christ wasn't raised from the dead, then our sins have not been paid for and we are therefore still dead in our sins and cut off from God
 - The resurrection is **the** proof that
 - Christ is who he says he is;
 - And that his message of forgiveness and salvation is true
 - This is why the Apostle's focused so much on the resurrection in their preaching
- It's the sign that we look to that validates Christ and all that he did
- Therefore, if you're not a Christian, or you're sitting in the fence, or you're considering the claims of Jesus and Christianity
 - Don't go demanding more signs from God or saying "If only God would give me a sign then I would believe"
 - He's given you all the evidence you need
 - He's given you the greatest sign in his Son and his death and resurrection
- So don't harden your heart and ignore the signs he's already given you
 - There is no greater sign to help you believe
 - You just need to consider it and weigh it up
 - If you want to do that ... can I recommend
 - Case for Christ / Case for Easter by Lee Strobel
 - Life of Jesus or Christianity Explored courses
- And if you find you are a person who wants to see a sign from God before you believe ... then can I urge you to consider what's behind that?
 - Is it your unbelief that you are masking?

¹ 1 Corinthians 15:14

- Because if is ... then the response of the Ninevites and the Queen of the Sheba will condemn you on the Day of Judgment
- But if it's an enquiring mind and searching heart that truly wants to know God ...
 - Then ask God to help you know Jesus
 - Because when you do ... Jesus says
 - *Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you*

3. The Peril of Procrastinating Belief (v43-45)

- In v43-45 Jesus goes on to tell a short parable about an evil spirit coming out of a man, then returning later with seven more to take residence in him once again
- The reference there at the end of v45 where Jesus says – *“That is how it will be with this wicked generation”* – shows it's meant to be an illustration of those Jesus has been speaking to and about in v38-42
- Basically, Jesus is saying ...
 - “You lot are like a man from whom a spirit is cast out
 - I've come to you ... and in my teaching, preaching and miracles ... I've been cleaning up this generation
 - I'm binding up the strong man Satan
 - I'm robbing his house ... freeing people from his oppression
 - Me being here is like you have a house nicely swept and put in order
- BUT
 - if you do not respond to me ... then your house is still empty
 - if you continue procrastinating and umming and ahing about whether or not to take me seriously ...
 - then one day ... it will be too late ... and your last state will be worse than the first
- You have a chance now to accept me as the Messiah while I am here with you
 - But if you continue to reject me or sit on the fence ... then it will be seven times worse
- Now is the time to respond ... not to procrastinate

Application

- Here Jesus underlines the impossibility of being neutral on Jesus

- It's impossible to hear the gospel ... of your need for forgiveness and Jesus' death and resurrection to reconcile you to God ... and sit on the fence
- There are two ways to live
 - And as Jesus said back in 12:30 - *He who is not with me is against me*
 - As Mike said last week ... you cannot sit on the fence and think you are okay ... because Satan owns the fence
- JC Ryle says in his commentary
 - *'Here is a picture of the history of many individual souls. Despite strong religious feelings and some outward changes, there was nothing deeper and they eventually gave up religion [...] and it appears to be impossible to help them to repent. Let us never be content with a partial reformation of life without true conversion to God, and the death of the whole body of sin. It is a good thing to cast sin out of our hearts, but let us take care that we also receive the grace of God in its place.'*
- You see what he's saying
 - There's a real danger when we procrastinate or are apathetic towards Jesus because according to Jesus ... it will be worse than if we'd never known
 - You can listen to Jesus, come to church, even clean up your life somewhat and become a better person
 - But unless you fill your life with Christ ... then your soul is still empty and it will be worse for you than before
- A nominal belief
- A wishy-washy commitment to Jesus
- A half-hearted repentance ... is useless
- In fact it's more than useless ... for those who know of Christ and sit on the fence ... it will be worse for you than if you'd never known
- Friends ...
 - if you're sitting on the fence
 - if you've been procrastinating for a while ...
 - Don't wait any longer
 - Jesus is urging you here ... to take action
 - Make a decision for him today
 - Give your life to Christ

- Come to him in repentance and put your trust in him for the forgiveness of your sin and the salvation of your soul for eternal life
- Because if by the end of your life (and that could be tomorrow) ... if you're not with him ... you're against him

4. The Test of True Belief (v46-50)

- Now it's somewhat of a relief to get to the end of the chapter and find a group of people who haven't rejected Jesus
 - *While Jesus was still talking to the crowd, his mother and brothers stood outside, wanting to speak to him. ⁴⁷ Someone told him, "Your mother and brothers are standing outside, wanting to speak to you." ... ⁴⁹ Pointing to his disciples, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers. ⁵⁰ For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother."*
- This is not Jesus showing a lack of respect for his family ...
 - Later in Ch 15 Jesus reiterates the OT command to honour your father and mother
- What Jesus is teaching here is the what true belief looks like and what it means to be a disciple of Jesus
- In contrast to those who reject Jesus and look for endless signs, sit on the fence and remain neutral to Jesus ...
 - The disciples have come to Jesus
 - They've gathered around him
 - And most significantly ... they do the will of the Father

Application

- So while the consequence of conditional belief and procrastinating belief ... will result in judgment
 - True belief will be tested and proven by those who are willing to respond to Jesus
 - Gather around him; and
 - Do the will of the Father
- How do we know the will of the Father?
- We need to listen to Jesus
- As Jesus said back in Matthew 11:27

- *"All things have been committed to me by my Father. No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.*
- The will of the Father is revealed to us by the Son to whom God has committed all things

- So are you doing that?
 - Have you responded to Jesus
 - Do you gather around him to listen to him?
 - Are you doing the will of the Father?
 - That is ... not just being a **hearer** of the word, but a **do-er** of the word
- For that is the test of true belief
 - This is what true discipleship looks like
 - Are you doing that?

- Here are C@P we want to live to be and make disciples of Jesus
 - Want see people 'Established as Christians, maturing in their faith, growing stronger in their belief
 - Which is why we want to see each and every member of C@P committed to being
 - regular attenders at church
 - committed members of a GG
 - regularly reading the Bible
 - You cannot **do** the will of God ... unless you **know** the will of God
 - And you cannot know unless you have responded to Jesus and are gathering around him and his word

- Of course, the great privilege for those who
 - respond to Jesus
 - gather around him; and
 - do the will of the Father
- Is he considers you family!
 - You see that there in v50 – *"For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother."*
- What does it mean to be part of God's family?
- You are
 - Loved more than you can ever imagine
 - Forgiven of every mistake, sin and failing you've ever committed
 - Share in an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade

- Creator of universe is your Father in heaven

5. Conclusion

- So
 - Where is your belief at with Jesus?
 - Where on the spectrum between belief and unbelief do you stand?
 - If you want to put conditions on your belief and demand that God gives you a sign before you believe; or
 - If you are sitting on the fence and procrastinating in your belief ...
 - Then the consequences are dire
- But when your belief is real ... then it comes with great privilege of being part of God's eternal family ...
 - Love, forgiven, blessed
- How do you know your faith is real
 - You respond to Jesus
 - You gather around him
 - You listen to his word and do the will of the Father

PRAY