

Episode #821 Matthew 16 Part 1-Signs of the Times

I. The purpose of the gospel of Matthew is to present Jesus as the Christ, the King of Israel. It is another grand treatise like John to prove to Israel Who Jesus really is. It is the book of being “in Israel,” in contrast to believers today who are “in Christ.”

II. The Lord had just fed four thousand with five biscuits and a few fish. Now, having crossed the sea, He continues His ministry in Matthew 16.

III. A Sign from Heaven. Matthew 16:1-4.

A. Verse 1. The Pharisees and Sadducees.

1. The Pharisees were a company in Israel, with both good and bad men among them. Like a political party in our country. Joseph was one of them along with Nicodemus, and these were very good men.
2. The Sadducees were commonly enemies of the Pharisees, but they found common ground in their hatred of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Sadducee way was common among the priests. They rejected the idea of resurrection and of angels and spirits. Probably this is because they only recognized the books of the law, Genesis to Deuteronomy, and claimed to not see these things there.
3. Again they approached Him, *proserchomai*, as to a King.
4. A sign from the heaven, singular (it is usually plural), probably meaning in the sky, like among the stars. Foolish, when He has been giving so many already!

B. Verse 2. This is the way it was in the land of Israel. Not necessarily true of other locations. The sky is again “the heaven.” He tells them they can see the signs of the sky but not the signs that were taking place on the earth right before them!

C. Verse 3. The Signs of the Times.

1. This has become a very familiar phrase Christ spoke. These words had nothing whatsoever to do with His second coming.
2. Regardless, many generations of the prophets of doom have laid hold of these words and used them to bolster their own wild predictions concerning the future of mankind and the second coming of Jesus Christ. 1001 sensational events are declared to be the most positive signs of the imminent return of Christ. When this text is restored to its context, the honest mind will readily admit that these words had no such meaning when the Lord first spoke them.
3. He spoke of these Pharisees and Sadducees not reading the signs of the times in their day. This shows He was not referring to signs that pointed to His second coming. How absurd for anyone at that time to have looked at any strange events then as signs of His second coming, when His first coming was not yet complete! Anyone who thought they saw such signs would have been greatly mistaken, for two thousand years have passed since then.
4. Our only possible conclusion is that this phrase has no connection with Christ’s second coming at all. Many preachers in the past centuries have greatly deceived their hearers by taking current events and proclaiming them as positive signs of the second coming. Every one of these has been wrong. The only people who have been as consistently wrong are the date-setters.
5. If these Pharisees had discerned the signs of the times, they would have learned they were living in the days of the Son of Man on earth. Certain signs gave testimony to the reality of His presence. Nicodemus recognized this,

John 3:2. His works were the signs of those times. Yet the Pharisees failed to discern them. They did not point to a future event, but the current reality.

6. We are not living in the days of the Son of Man on the earth. The signs we are to deal with are the signs of the current day in which we live.
7. Has God dealt with us according to our sins? Has God been restraining wickedness or rewarding righteousness? No! God does not deal with us according to our sins, but in grace, in love and favor shown to the undeserving, Ephesians 4:32. The signs of the times show that we are living in the dispensation of grace. Every day of your life gives witness to this. These are the signs of our times, and it is tragic that so many fail to discern them.
8. A sign does not have to be a great miracle. We need to learn that God may not be in the great things, but in the still small voice, along with Elijah, I Kings 19:11-13. He may also be in the silence, and God is silent today, Ephesians 3:8, and administering His grace to the world in secret, Ephesians 3:9. Justice must always be carried out in the open, but grace is best done in secret.
9. Everything He is doing is in secret now, which is why some think that “God is dead” or is not active in the world (Deism). Yet the student of Scripture should know that God is currently acting in grace and in secret. The signs of these times are all around us, and we would do well to discern them. Nothing but error and confusion result when many fail to do so.

10. THE SIGNS OF THE TIMES ARE THE SIGNS OF THE TIMES IN WHICH ONE LIVES. They are not signs of coming times.

- D. Verse 4. By “adulterous,” He means unfaithful to their God. By “generation” He means not all the people of a certain age living at that time, but rather this “generation” of religious leaders, produced by the culture and teachings brought into existence by their predecessors. The Lord speaks here almost ironically. The sign of the prophet Jonah is one they would create for themselves! The Lord already said this once before in Matthew 12:39.

IV. Conclusion: The Pharisees and Sadducees failed to discern the signs of the times. These had nothing to do with Christ’s second coming, but were signs of the times in which they then lived: the times of the Son of Man on earth. The “signs of the times” in our day can also be discerned, and they do not point to Christ’s second coming, but to the fact that we live in the dispensation of the grace of God. Let us look at the signs that prevail today and know the truth about God’s current work. If we do know, then we will be as in the dark as these hypocritical religious leaders were.