

Pray More Lenten Retreat - Transcript

God, Show Me A Sign

Ashley Stevens

Hi, my name is Ashley Stevens from Mountains Unmoved. And today we're gonna reflect on a verse that came up in one of the Lenten readings from Luke 11. And it says: ***This generation is an evil generation, it seeks a sign, but no sign will be given it except the sign of Jonah. Just as Jonah became a sign to the Ninevites so will the Son of Man be to this generation.*** And I don't know about you, but I've asked God for signs throughout my life. I've asked God: Show me which college you want me to go to. Show me if this is the man you want me to marry. Show me if our family should move. I've asked God to just make it blatantly clear, right, when you're debating between one or two or three options.

But in this verse they're talking about the story of Jonah being a sign. And in the story of Jonah, Jonah was angry at God. He was angry about the way that God was blessing enemies of his people, and he run away from God. He booked a ticket on a ship and got in the ship to run away from God. And along the way soon after God saw that and He punished it and He put a storm around the ship, to rock the ship, and they were going to go down. And the crew on the ship cast lots to figure out who is being punished? Who is God punishing with this storm right now and they cast lots and chose Jonah. And Jonah got thrown over the ship and the storm died down. But Jonah was left in the sea fighting for his life, trying to survive while swimming in the ocean, and soon after God brought a big fish, or a whale, to swallow Jonah whole. And for three days Jonah survived in the stomach, in the belly, of that fish. And over those three days Jonah began to see God's love. He began to see that God sometimes He uses supernatural means to rescue his people even when His people are angry with Him. And after three days that fish took Jonah to the shore, and spit him out, and he continued to live the rest of his life.

I don't know about you but I often ask God: Why can't there be signs like that today? Why can't there be like to Moses a burning bush that you speak through? Why can't there be a parted sea that people walk through? Why can't there be huge signs like a pillar of cloud walking before us that we see them and we look at them and we have absolutely no doubt that God is here? Why doesn't God still work in that kind of ways, and how much easier would it be to trust Him and to love Him and to spring other people to Him if He came before us so visibly in signs like that today?

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But I think throughout Scripture Christians have always had to live by faith. We've had to have faith in the unseen. We've had to believe that God made us that we don't see. That God redeems our brokenness. We've had to do that throughout the history of Scripture. By faith Noah built an ark when it wasn't raining. By faith Abraham left his home towards God's promise when he didn't know where that was. By faith Sarah at the age of 90 years old believed and trusted that God would grant her a child. Can you even imagine? Can you imagine if God somehow through a prayer told you, "When you're 90 you're going to have a baby that's gonna be one of the carriers of the Son of God"? Can you imagine? She laughed, and I would too. But throughout Scripture, throughout God's word there are countless examples of Christians, of Catholics, having faith in God when they can't see, before they see the sign. Nor countless other examples of people who conquered kingdoms or shot the mouths of lions, quenched a raging fire, brought down giants. And these people they didn't wait for a sign to follow God, they didn't wait to see Him visibly or hear Him audibly to trust Him before the signs came.

And I don't know where you're at in your story, I don't know if you're waiting for a sign or looking for a sign, I don't know if you're begging God to show up in a hard situation. For me one of the days and chapters that I begged God most for a sign is when I was in the hospital. And when I was in the hospital I didn't know how much of my life I would get back. And from the hospital bed I remember I looked at a crucifix hanging on the wall, and through my fears, through my anger at God, looking at that that crucifix hanging above my hospital bed reminded me that God is with me. It reminded me how He had been with me in the past. How He had when I was seven years old fought for my soul in baptism. How He had fought for my heart in high school when I accepted Him on stage into my life as my savior. How He had fought for my mind in college as I got into RCIA and was really convinced in the truth of the Eucharist and joined the Catholic church. And in that moment when I looked at Christ in the Eucharist and I remembered how He had fought for my salvation and redemption by giving me His life, I knew, I knew that He was still fighting for my life and for my recovery then.

Even if it wasn't a big miraculous sign when I was completely healed of my partial facial paralysis, when my handwriting was back to normal, when my hearing was back to normal, even if God didn't miraculously heal everything, He was working in His way and in His timing. And I think for me that's one of the best ways when I am just longing to see God, one of the best ways to trust that He's still there is remembering how He has fought for me in the past. And I don't know how He's fought for you, but I'm sure He has. Maybe for you it's you were raised in a godly family, maybe it's God put a key spiritual mentor, a friend, in your life at the perfect time. Maybe He answered a prayer that was miraculous, gave you a baby

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when you didn't think you could. I don't know how God has fought for your heart, and for your mind, and for soul, and for your life and recovery, I don't know but I am confident that He has. And for me when I'm getting to where I can't see Him, and I can't hear Him, and I'm frustrated that there's no big signs, remembering how He's been with me in the past gives me hope that He is and that He will.

There's a verse in Hebrews that says: ***Now faith is a confidence in what we hope for and the assurance of what we do not see.*** And brothers and sisters if you're not seeing God in a burning bush or a parting sea, or a vibrant community that you long for, or a family that you desperately have been trying to achieve, if you're not seeing God, I want to encourage you to have hope that you have. You have and you will even if there's no miraculous healing, even if there is no miraculous job offer, even if there is no big sign, He is still working because He has and because He will.

There's figures I mentioned in Scripture, the Noahs, the Sarahs, the Abrahams that trusted before they saw the sign. It's like the Ace of Base song right? Those people, they all trusted, they all had faith. Noah had faith before the flood came, Sarah had faith before the baby came, but in all those situations, because of their faith, when they didn't see the sign, they eventually did. Noah saw the flood and he saved God's people. Sarah had the baby that was one of the great, great, great, great grand parents of our savior. Their faith though, their faith in the unseen, paved the way for our ultimate sign in the savior of Christ.

There is a verse in Isaiah 7, it says: ***Therefore the Lord will give you this sign, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son and shall name him Immanuel.*** Brothers and sisters, the Son of God became a man for you. The Son of God hang on a cross and gave His life for you. The Son of God resurrected to beat our deaths and all of our many deaths even when we don't see a flashy sign. So I don't know where you're at today but I would beg you, don't forget all of the many signs and God's presence in your past. Don't forget all that He has done through us through the greatest sign of His son. And don't, when you're seeking and begging and longing to see Him and for Him to guide you and lead you, don't forget to see what He has done to trust what He is doing now.

Let's close in prayer. *In the name of the Father, Son, Holy Spirit. Amen. God I pray for anyone listening today. I pray for anyone that just is longing to see you clearly, anyone who's longing to hear you maybe for the first time ever in prayer. I pray for anyone who's longing for a baby, or a better marriage, or whatever the big sign it is that they're asking you for, I just pray for those people right now, and I just pray that they would know and trust that you have fought for them in the past, you are*

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now and you will even if it's not a flashy parting sea kind of sign way. I thank you for your Son's birth, I thank you for His death on the cross, I thank you for what His resurrection did for our redemption and I just pray that we would never forget the biggest sign of all in the birth of your Son. I ask this in the name. In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.