

Introduction

When Karen and I lived in Atlanta we were asked to go to a Nigerian church service. So, we attended that service. The man leading the service kept making pleas for money. He said that God would not bless us unless we gave to him. There was constant pressure put on people to give that day. It was unrelenting and it was very difficult for me to sit there and watch all of this. What this man was doing from the pulpit goes against everything that I believe. We are encouraged by God in 2 Corinthians 9:7 to give as we have purposed in our heart. We are exhorted not to give under compulsion. We are taught to give cheerfully. The Greek word is *hilaros* (Strong's G2431), which is where we get our English word *hilarious*. What I was witnessing that day was constant pressure to make people give under compulsion, and not as they had purposed in their hearts. There was no way that I was going to give this man a dime. Karen and I love to give. We give cheerfully. We give as we purpose in our hearts to give. We sow generously into God's work, but we chose not to give that night.

(2 Cor 9:7) "Each one *must do* just as he has purposed in his heart, not grudgingly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver."

In our passage today, Jesus is pressed by the Pharisees to perform an attesting miracle. Jesus chose not to give a sign to them. Why did Jesus choose not to give the Pharisees a sign? The early church prayed for signs and wonders and God granted them. John wrote that Jesus did many signs so that we would believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. Isn't it God's desire that none should perish? Why would He refuse to do any signs for these Pharisees that were seeking a sign?

(John 20:30-31) "Therefore many other signs Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; {31} but these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name."

First, Jesus chose not to give them a sign because of their mission. They came there with a mission to accomplish, and their mission was not aligned with God's mission. Second, Jesus did not give them a sign because of their Method. They came there arguing with Jesus. Third, Jesus did not give them a sign because of their motive. Our text says that they came to seek a sign from Him in order to test Him. This morning I want to give you a better understanding of the passage. Second, I believe God wants us to be a generation that asks God for a sign, but with a different motive and different outcome.

Why Did Jesus Choose Not To Give The Pharisees A Sign?

1. Because They Came With The Wrong Mission.
2. Because They Came With A Wrong Method. (They came arguing.)
3. Because They Came With A Wrong Motive. (They Wanted To Test Him.)

(Mark 8:11-13) "The Pharisees came out and began to argue with Him, seeking from Him a sign from heaven, to test Him. {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." {13} Leaving them, He again embarked and went away to the other side."

1. Because They Came With A The Wrong Mission.

In order to properly understand the passage, it is important to put this encounter with the Pharisees in context. This is not His first encounter with these religious leaders. In Mark 2, we saw that Jesus healed and forgave a paralytic. The scribes were there and were reasoning in their heart that Jesus was blaspheming, since only God could forgive sins. Jesus confronted them and asked them which was easier, to forgive or to heal the paralytic. This sign should have been enough for them to believe. Other people went out amazed and were glorifying God, but not the religious leaders. (See Mark 2:1-12.)

Then, He called Levi, the tax collector, and went to his house. There were also some sinners there, in addition to the tax collectors. The Pharisees grumbled about Him eating and drinking with tax collectors and sinners. (See Mark 2:14-17.)

Then, the Pharisees found fault with Jesus' disciples for not fasting like them. (See Mark 2:18-22.) Then, they accused His disciples of doing things that were not lawful on the Sabbath. Jesus told them that the Son of Man was Lord of the Sabbath. (See Mark 2:23-28.)

In Mark 3:1-6, Jesus had another encounter with the Pharisees. There was a man with a withered hand, and He asked them if it was lawful to do good or to do harm on the Sabbath. Jesus saw the hardness of their hearts and told the man to stretch out his hand, and when he did, his hand was restored. The Pharisees immediately went out and conspired as to how they might destroy Him.

(Mark 3:6) "The Pharisees went out and immediately *began* conspiring with the Herodians against Him, *as to* how they might destroy Him."

There were other encounters with the scribes and Pharisees. They had made up their mind to destroy Jesus. They were jealous that people were following Him. (See Mark 15:10.) They made it their mission to destroy Jesus. In John 10:10, we find the mission of the devil and it is contrasted with the mission of Jesus. The thief has come to kill, steal, and destroy. The Pharisees were looking for a way to put Jesus to death and to destroy Him. Jesus' mission was different. He came to give us life. There is a contrast between trying to kill and destroy, and someone trying to give life. Jesus knew their mission. He knew why they had come.

(John 10:10) "The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I came that they may have life, and have *it* abundantly."

So, when we get to our text today, the Pharisees had not come there to seek God; they had come there to destroy Jesus. Jesus knew their mission, and He was not going to participate in their plan. When they came seeking a sign from Jesus, He simply sighed deeply in His spirit and asked, "Why does this generation seek for a sign? Truly, I say to you, no sign will be given." I believe that deep sigh was a cumulative sigh. It was a sigh of thinking of all the past encounters with them and how He had already done so many miracles in their sight. They were spiritually blind and their hearts were so hardened that none of the attesting miracles that He had done had affected them.

2. Because They Came With A Wrong Method (Mark 8:11)

The Pharisees came to this fishing village to seek out Jesus. They wanted to destroy Him, and their method of approaching Jesus reflected their mission. Mark records that the Pharisees came out and began arguing with Jesus. They did not come in peace or to make peace. They came to argue and bring strife.

(Mark 8:11) “The Pharisees came out and began to argue with Him, seeking from Him a sign from heaven, to test Him.”

How many of you enjoy being around someone who argues all the time? In the book of Proverbs, Solomon addresses those who are contentious and argue. He said in Proverbs 21:9 that “it is better to be in a corner of a roof than in a house shared with a contentious woman.” In Proverbs 21:19, he said, “It is better to live in a desert land than with a contentious and vexing woman.” Then, in Proverbs 25:24, he repeated what he said in Proverbs 21:9. The fact that he repeats the same verse implies that this is emphatic. It is very clear that people do not want to be around contentious people. The Pharisees, who came arguing with Him, did not come in a way that would endear them to Jesus. If we want someone to do something for us, this is not the right approach. You have to use the right methods to accomplish your goals.

(Pr 21:9) “It is better to live in a corner of a roof than in a house shared with a contentious woman.”

(Pr 21:19) “It is better to live in a desert land than with a contentious and vexing woman.”

(Pr 25:24) “It is better to live in a corner of the roof than in a house shared with a contentious woman.”

Solomon did not just speak about contentious women, he spoke of men also. I have seen lots of contentious men in my life, so it is not a gender issue; it is a heart issue. A proud and arrogant heart argues and contends with everyone. They are always right in their own eyes, and they argue with people. Solomon said that contentious men are like charcoal to hot embers and wood to fire. They kindle and stir up strife. These Pharisees were going to kindle strife, and the best thing to do is to get away from them, which is exactly what Jesus did. Our text ends today by saying that Jesus left them, and went away to the other side. It is better to get away from contentious people before more strife is kindled.

(Pr 26:21) “*Like* charcoal to hot embers and wood to fire, So is a contentious man to kindle strife.”

(Mark 8:13) “Leaving them, He again embarked and went away to the other side.”

My father used to tell me that honey attracts more flies than vinegar. I guess that is the Tennessee way of saying that your methods of approaching people make a difference. If you come sweetly, you are more inclined to attract people. These Pharisees were like vinegar and their method and approach did not endear Jesus or anyone else to do anything for them.

Before we go on, let’s talk about our methods with people. When Paul gave the requirements for elders, he said that they should not be pugnacious. The Greek word is plektes (Strong’s G4131),

which means a striker. They can't be contentious or argumentative. The elders set an example for the flock to follow. In fact, Peter tells pastors not to lord over people but to lead by example. The example for the flock is that we need to be gentle, peaceable, and not contentious. Apparently, these religious leaders, did not get Paul's memo on our methods with people.

(1 Tim 3:2-3) "An overseer, then, must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, prudent, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, {3} not addicted to wine or pugnacious, but gentle, peaceable, free from the love of money."

(1 Pet 5:3) "nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock."

When Paul wrote his second letter to Timothy, he reiterated this principle. He said that the "Lord's bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all...with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition." Our methods have to be gentle and peaceable, not argumentative.

(2 Tim 2:24-25) "The Lord's bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged, {25} with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth,"

Our method of approach before God is important. When we go to approach the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords, we must come in respectfully. We need to enter His gates with thanksgiving and His courts with praise. (Psalm 100:4) We need to say, "Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name." (Luke 11:2) We need to bless the name of Jesus. We should not come barging into the throne room of God in an irreverent manner. God already knows what you need before you bring it up to Him. Spend time praising and adoring Him. Spend time thanking Him. I think that too often the church is like these Pharisees, we argue with one another on the way to church and then expect God to bless us with our requests. Jesus told us to put our offerings down and go get reconciled with our brother, and then come present our offerings. You see, God does not want a contentious, argumentative people, coming before Him with their requests. We need to come humbly, contritely, peaceably, and reverently. Then, we can present our requests, whether it is for signs and miracles, for provision, or for the salvation of a loved one. These Pharisees may not have believed or accepted it, but they had just come into the presence of the Lamb of God, the Name above all names, the Creator of the heavens and the earth, the Son of God, the Messiah, the Wonderful Counselor, the Almighty God, and they came before Him arguing and bringing strife. That is not the method to use when we are asking Jesus to do something for us.

(Matt 5:23-24) "Therefore if you are presenting your offering at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, {24} leave your offering there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and present your offering."

3. Because They Came With A Wrong Motive (They Wanted To Test Him.)

The Pharisees came to destroy Jesus. Their mission was not right. The Pharisees came arguing and contending with Jesus. They did not come peaceably and with the right method. Next, they came with the wrong motive. Notice that Mark says they came to test Him. They wanted Him to perform an attesting miracle to test Him. Their motive was not to see their son or daughter

healed. They did not bring a deaf and dumb family member to Jesus to heal. They did not bring a man with a withered hand or a paralytic to be healed. No, they only wanted a sign to be done in order to test Jesus. They had the wrong motive.

(Mark 8:11-13) “The Pharisees came out and began to argue with Him, seeking from Him a sign from heaven, to test Him. {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."

I want to take a few minutes to look at some key words with you. The first word that I want to look at is the word sign. The Greek word is “*semeion*” (Strong’s G4592). It is used seventy-seven times in the New Testament. It is translated as sign fifty times and miracle twenty-three times. Scholars are pretty unanimous in saying that this is an attesting miracle of Jesus’ Messiahship. In John 6:13-14, Jesus had just fed the multitudes with the five loaves and two fish, and when the people saw the sign (*semeion*) which he had performed, they said, ‘This is truly the Prophet who is to come into the world.’” The feeding of the five thousand was an attesting miracle to show that He is the Messiah.

(John 6:14) “Therefore when the people saw the sign which He had performed, they said, "This is truly the Prophet who is to come into the world."

In John 7:31-32, many of the crowd believed in Jesus and were saying, “when the Christ comes, he will not perform more signs than those which this man has, will He?” These signs or miracles attested of His being the Messiah. Notice the response of the Pharisees, who had seen the same signs. They heard the crowd saying these things and they sent officers to seize Him.

(John 7:31-32) “But many of the crowd believed in Him; and they were saying, "When the Christ comes, He will not perform more signs than those which this man has, will He?" {32} The Pharisees heard the crowd muttering these things about Him, and the chief priests and the Pharisees sent officers to seize Him.”

In John 11:47-48 the chief priests and Pharisees convened a council to discuss the signs that Jesus was doing. They said, “What are we doing? For this man is performing many signs. If we let Him go on like this, all men will believe in Him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation.” Jesus had already performed signs for the Pharisees and they had not believed them. When they came to Jesus in our text today, they were not really after signs. They were trying to destroy Jesus in any way that they could. They wanted power and control, and Jesus was a threat to their power and control. They had not really come to Jesus seeking a sign.

(John 11:47-48) “Therefore the chief priests and the Pharisees convened a council, and were saying, "What are we doing? For this man is performing many signs. {48} If we let Him *go on* like this, all men will believe in Him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation.”

The second word that I want to talk about is “test.” The Greek word that is used is *peirazo* (Strong’s G3985). It is used about 40 times in the New Testament (39x in KJV, 40x in NASB). The most common translation is tempt. In the KJV, 31 out of the 39 times that it is used, it is translated as tempt. The Pharisees did not just come to test; they came to tempt Jesus. They wanted Him to sin or stumble and have a case against Him. They were not the first to try this.

Let's take a look at some other passages. In Luke 4:1-2, Jesus was led around by the Spirit in the wilderness for forty days, being tempted by the devil. That is the same word, *peirazo*, that is in our text. The devil tempted Jesus for forty days. The devil tempted Jesus to eat bread. There is nothing wrong with eating bread. Jesus was rightfully hungry, fasting for forty days, but it was one of the temptations.

(Luke 4:1-2) "Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led around by the Spirit in the wilderness {2} for forty days, being tempted (*peirazo*) by the devil."

The devil showed Jesus all the kingdoms of the world and said that if Jesus would worship him, he would give them to Jesus. They all belonged to Jesus, but it was just another ways that the devil tried to tempt Jesus. He led Jesus to Jerusalem and had Him stand on a pinnacle and then asked Jesus to throw Himself down. Notice how Jesus answers the devil. "It is said, 'You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.'" Jesus was quoting from Deuteronomy 6:16, where it says, "You shall not put the Lord your God to the test." We are not to test or tempt God. And this is exactly what the Pharisees were doing. Guess what that word test is? It is the same *peirazo* that is in our text. The Pharisees came to tempt or *peirazo* Jesus, and we are not to put the Lord our God to the test.

(Luke 4:12-13) "And Jesus answered and said to him, "It is said, 'YOU SHALL NOT PUT THE LORD YOUR GOD TO THE TEST (*ekpeirazo*).'" {13} When the devil had finished every temptation (*peirasmos*, Strong's G3986), he left Him until an opportune time."

(Deut 6:16) "You shall not put the LORD your God to the test, as you tested *Him* at Massah."

In James 1:13, God said, "Let no one say when he is tempted (*peirazo*), 'I am being tempted (*peirazo*) by God', for God cannot be tempted (*peirazo* by evil and He Himself does not tempt anyone." God does not tempt you and I to sin. And, He cannot be tempted by anyone to sin. He is a perfect God. Jesus was tempted in all things and without sin. As a man, He was not going to be tempted by the Pharisees and sin. Jesus only did the things that He saw the Father doing. He did not do signs or miracles out of pride. He did signs and wonders that He saw the Father doing. He did nothing on His own initiative. He only did what the Father told Him to do, and the Father was not leading Him to do anything for these Pharisees. Jesus was not going to be tempted by them.

(James 1:13) "Let no one say when he is tempted (*peirazo*, Strong's G3985), "I am being tempted (*peirazo*) by God"; for God cannot be tempted (*peirazo*) by evil (*kakos*, Strong's G2560), and He Himself does not tempt (*peirazo*) anyone."

The Pharisees did not have the right motive. Notice what James said about asking with the wrong motives. He said, "You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives..." The word for wrong motives is *kakos*, which is generally translated as evil. That is the same word that is used in James 1:13, where it says that "God cannot be tempted by evil (*kakos*). The Pharisees' request for a sign seemed innocent on the surface, but it was evil. They had wrong or evil motives and it was evil. God is not tempted by evil.

(James 4:3) "You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives (*kakos*), so that you may spend *it* on your pleasures."

There is one place in Scripture where we are encouraged to test God. It is a proving of God, not a tempting of God, and there is a difference. In Malachi, God encourages us to bring our tithes and offerings to Him. He promises to open up a window of blessing and to rebuke the devourer when we bring our tithes to Him. He tells us to test Him in this and see if He doesn't do exactly what He said. Again, this is a test, not a temptation. God is always going to be faithful to His promises. I think the real test in this verse is on our part. Are we willing to trust God with finances? If we give Him our tithes, that is ten percent of our earnings, and our offerings, do we trust God to meet all of our needs? Do we trust Him to rebuke the devourer and to pour out a blessing for us? I think it is a test of our faith, but God encourages us to test Him in our giving.

(Mal 3:8-10) "Will a man rob God? Yet you are robbing Me! But you say, 'How have we robbed You?' In tithes and offerings. {9} You are cursed with a curse, for you are robbing Me, the whole nation *of you!* {10} Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, so that there may be food in My house, and test Me now in this," says the LORD of hosts, "if I will not open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you a blessing until it overflows."

Conclusion and Applications

The first application for us is that we need to come before God with the right mission in mind. The thief came to steal, kill and destroy, but the Lord came to give us life and life abundantly. When we ask for a sign or miracle, it should be to restore life to someone, not make them stumble. The Pharisees did not have the right mission. Our mission needs to be aligned with God's mission.

Second, our methods need to be aligned with God. We need to come before Him humbly, gently, and peaceably, not by arguing and causing strife. In the area of prayer, I believe the church has much to learn about our method of coming before the King of Kings. I believe the church needs more reverence, awe, and fear of the Lord.

Third, our motives need to be right. The motives of the Pharisees was to tempt Jesus. They wanted to see Him stumble and fall. Our motives need to be pure, not selfish or evil, like the motives of the Pharisees were.

I want to also encourage everyone to ask God for signs. The early church did. In Acts 4:29-30, they prayed for God to extend His hand to heal, and for signs and wonders to take place through the name of Jesus. God heard their prayers and answered them. Many signs and wonders were taking place. But, notice their mission. They were seeking signs so that people would get saved. They also prayed for boldness in proclaiming the gospel. Their mission was right.

(Acts 4:29-30) "And now, Lord, take note of their threats, and grant that Your bond-servants may speak Your word with all confidence, {30} while You extend Your hand to heal, and signs and wonders take place through the name of Your holy servant Jesus."

Their method was also right. In verse twenty-four, notice how they began their prayer. They lifted their voice in one accord. There was no division, strife, arguing, or contention. They were in one accord. Notice their reverence. They began by saying, "Lord, it is You who made the heaven and the earth and the sea, and all that is in them." They did not barge in and make their requests. They came hallowing the name of God, the Creator of heaven and earth."

(Acts 4:24) “And when they heard *this*, they lifted their voices to God with one accord and said, "O Lord, it is You who MADE THE HEAVEN AND THE EARTH AND THE SEA, AND ALL THAT IS IN THEM,”

Church, it is not just okay to pray for signs and wonders; I believe God wants us to pray. We should seek signs and wonders. But, our hearts need to be pure. Our motives need to be pure. It can't be about us; it must be about glorifying God. Our methods and approach needs to be reverent. Finally, it must be about accomplishing the mission that God gave us.

One of the verses that has really stood out to me this year is in Luke 12:32. Jesus said to all of us, “Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has chosen gladly to give you the kingdom.” He may not have been willing to give it to the Pharisees that day, but He has chosen gladly to give us the kingdom.

(Luke 12:32) “Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has chosen gladly to give you the kingdom.”

Introduction (2 Cor 9:7, John 20:30-31, Mark 8:11-13)

1. **Because They Came With A The Wrong Mission.** (Mark 2:1-12, 2:14-17, 2:18-22, 2:23-28, 3:1-6, John 10:10)
2. **Because They Came With A Wrong Method** (Mark 8:11-13, Pr 21:9, 21:19, 25:24, 26:21, 1 Tim 3:2-3, 1 Pet 5:3, 2 Tim 2:24-25, Matt 5:23-24, Ps 100:4, Luke 11:2)
3. **Because They Came With A Wrong Motive** (Mark 8:11-13, John 6:13-14, 7:31-32, 11:47-48, Luke 4:1-2, 4:12-13, James 1:13, 4:3, Mal 3:8-10)

Conclusion and Applications (Acts 4:29-30, 4:24, Luke 12:32)