

Matthew 16:1-12

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[0:00] If you're here for the first time, then if you're not here for the first time, you've heard me say this about a million times, but if you're here for the first time, I'd like you to feel just sort of welcome among us and kind of feel that your presence here is no accident.

God has a message for you. He wants to speak to your heart this morning. We've been working our way through Matthew's gospel and we've got to chapter 16. But before we dive into that, let me just pray.

God, our Father, your word tells us that the heavens declare your glory. Day after day, they pour forth speech as we look outside and see the blue sky and the autumn colors. They just proclaim glory to you.

But Lord, as we look at your word, what our longing is that we would behold the glory of our Lord Jesus. And something of that glory would descend in this place as we become very conscious of your Holy Spirit here.

working amongst us, ministering to us in the ways that we need to be ministered to us this morning. Lord, we bless you and praise you and long for more of you. In Jesus' name. Amen.

[1:14] So what we've been saying is that the way that Matthew is writing is that he is, in terms of who he's trying to speak to, he is very much wanting to speak with a Jewish audience. Not exclusively, but primarily in mind. A Jewish audience who've been asking the question that comes out of the lips of John the Baptist.

Are you the one that we were expecting, that we should be expecting to come? The promised one of God that the whole of the Old Testament is kind of pointing towards. And we've seen how, as we've worked through Matthew's gospel, how Matthew has constructed things in every page to say, yes! Yes, he is! He is the one promised.

See how he fulfills all that God has promised. Almost like a checkbox of things. The predictions that he would be from the royal line in chapter 1 of the royal line of David, 2 Samuel chapter 7.

Tick born of a virgin in Isaiah. Tick born in Bethlehem as Micah predicted in chapter 5. Tick, and then Matthew goes on to quote Hosea and Jeremiah in chapter 2.

And also Isaiah again in chapter 3. The Psalms in chapter 4. Every one of these verses that were pointing forward to the coming of the Messiah are fulfilled, yes and amen, in Jesus Christ.

[2:26] But interestingly, what Matthew doesn't quote directly, which others make reference to, like Peter, for example, in Acts 3, Stephen in Acts 7, was what Moses said and predicted in Deuteronomy chapter 18, verse 15.

Moses said, But indirectly, Matthew is sort of pointing and frames his gospel in such a way as to say, yes, he is the one, the greater Moses that Moses was pointing towards.

You need to listen to him. We could go to Tide on all the parallels in Matthew's gospel with the first five books of the Bible. But just sort of think back over Matthew's gospel and think just how Jesus' life tracks with Moses' life.

Moses born in Egypt. Jesus, the greater Moses, was in Egypt. Moses went up to the mountain to meet with God and bring God's word. Jesus, the greater Moses, was God and went up the mountain to preach his own word.

In Moses' day, God provided manna in the wilderness. The greater Moses is the manna from God, the bread of heaven provided for hungry souls. But also to exemplify and illustrate that, we saw how he feeds 5,000, 4,000 in the wilderness in the Jewish and Gentile districts.

[3:59] God, in Exodus, parted the seas for Moses. The greater Moses walked right over them. Moses spoke with authority and saw great miracles performed by God. The greater Moses is given all authority in heaven and earth and is God, the God who is performing the miracles.

See, in every page, Moses is saying, read the signs. See, here, here amongst you is the greater Moses that Moses himself was pointing to, longing for that day.

Come to lead his people in the newer and greater global exodus that will include every nation, tribe, and tongue, Jew, and Gentile, as we've been seeing in the last weeks.

A spiritual exodus out of slavery to sin, to Satan, to death, through this powerful work of God by his spirit in our hearts, such that it feels like they have been born anew, changed from stone to flesh, and we feel born again.

A fresh start with God and in life. Resurrection life taking hold, new creation awaiting us in that everlasting promised land to which we are called. And, you know, as we think on these things, as we grasp these things a little bit like Jesus explained it to the guys on the road to Emmaus, is this God who revealed himself in the scriptures.

[5:16] Do our hearts not burn within us and say, oh, glory, glory of all these things that God has brought to pass. So here, in this chapter, chapter 16, here in this passage, right here, in front of the Pharisees and the Sadducees, verse 1, is the one that the whole of the scriptures promise.

But they've come to do what? Well, they've come to test him. They've come before the one that the whole of Israel, the whole of the nations have been waiting for.

And these great, these leaders of the people of God at the time, what is in their hearts? Are they glad? Are they rejoicing? Are they yielding? Are they open? No, they're coming with hard and hardening and skeptical hearts before him.

Why is that? Why can't they see what is right before? Why can't they behold the glory? Well, let's dip into the passage and see what's going on. Let's see how the Lord, you know, will speak to our hearts as we do that this morning.

Well, verse 1, the Pharisees and the Sadducees came to Jesus and tested him by asking him to show him a sign from heaven. In a sense, what's happening here is it's a troubling sign because of this unlikely pairing.

[6:36] Two weeks ago, we talked a little bit, I went on a historical diversion, if you liked, on the formation of the Pharisees. If you're new and haven't been before, then you can go back on the live stream and get the background there.

But this week, we're introduced to this group, the Sadducees. What about them? Who were they?

Well, the root of the Sadducees, linguistically, is something like the Zadokites.

Because they were a grouping amongst the, if you imagine the whole of the priesthood, there was a grouping within the priesthood who referred to themselves as the Sadducees.

They took their sort of lineage, if you like, from Zadok, the high priest mentioned in 1 Kings 2, who helped King David and oversaw the transition to his son, King Solomon.

Zadok means righteous, and his lineage, the sons of Zadok, are commanded by Ezekiel in chapter 44 for remaining faithful to God while Israel went astray.

[7:37] And were given then the sole rights to minister before the Lord in the temple. And in a sense, they had been doing that for the sort of thousand years between then and there. The Greek word for this group is going to come up on the screen.

Sadduceoi. The Greek's a bit rusty. The Anglicized for him, I don't know, it is Sadducees. The Anglicized version of it. And that's where we get the name. But this particular group of Sadducees and their teaching and their understanding, because what we're seeing is that they've gone astray. They're no longer the faithful ones spoken of and commended by God in Ezekiel 44. But they've become the unfaithful shepherds condemned by Ezekiel in chapter 34 over this period of time. And they've taken their sort of theological lineage from a guy called Antigonus, who came to the conviction that there is no resurrection. No, from the dead, no angels, nor demons, no real supernatural.

And so the popular maxim, and you're all going to groan if you've heard this before, because you heard it in Sunday school. But for some of you, it's new and you're going like, ah. That's why they were called the Sadducees, because they were Sadducees that didn't leave in the resurrection.

[8:52] Groan, yeah? Yes, there we go. So what did they do? Instead, they focused on the opportunities of this one life that they were given. They had their place and position in the temple.

They had all the privileges associated with that that gave them a place at the seat of power in Jerusalem. They looked down on the Pharisees, saw their piety as a bit of a waste of time, but rather focused on the opportunities that there were to be involved in state policy, the army, relations

with the Roman Empire.

And of course, those opportunities brought with them the trappings of the luxuries of life. But the thing is that here's the thing that you could miss about these two groups that have formed over the years and are standing there before Jesus.

And it is this, that the Pharisees, which we learn means separated ones, and the Sadducees, which you could say means sort of Zedekites or righteous ones, can't stand each other.

One sees the other, the Pharisees see the Sadducees as a corrupt priestly line, whose lineage may well have gone all the way back to Aaron, the first high priest in Israel, 15, 1600 years before.

[10:03] But they had lost their way, loving pomp and power and position and all the proceeds that came from that. And rather than keeping the people of God faithful, they were leading them into unfaithfulness.

The Sadducees saw the Pharisees as nothing but self-appointed, over-the-top lay religious zealots. So what are they doing here standing together before Jesus? Well, they found a common enemy, haven't they?

The very God that they both claim to worship. And they come before him with a common problem, as we'll see, that they both have a kind of self-righteousness. They understand that because of either their position or their piety, that that has made them right with God, and they are in the right position to be able to lead people of God in the truth of God.

But actually what we'll see is that their self-righteousness, not Christ-righteousness, self-righteousness is actually hardening their hearts over this period, and making them blind to the signs, the true living God who is standing before them, whose wonderful work gives a much better position and power for a new piety, if you like, than the wooden and warped and worthless form that the Pharisees or the Sadducees taught.

They have joined forces to force God out of their religious life. Nothing like the true and living God to get in the way of all our made-up attempts to be following him.

[11:36] If it wasn't so serious, it would be comical. So we have this troubling sign or unlikely pairing, this troubling as they've come together. But then they come testing for a sign.

They've joined forces, verse 1. They're testing the Lord, asking him to, well, go on then, Jesus, show us a sign from heaven. And there's a whole background there that we could explore about how the stubborn and hard hearts of the people of God in the past put God to test in Exodus 17, for example, in Massa and Meribah.

And again, it was looked back on in the Psalms, it's do not harden your hearts as you did at Meribah. But that was a sort of place that was looked at as an example of where just hearts became hard to the Lord. And these hardening hearts of these skeptics are asking for proof from Jesus.

But here's the thing. We've seen exactly the same kind of situation happen, actually, earlier on in chapter 12. Except that time it was the Pharisees and the teachers of the law.

So what's going on? Of course, the hearts are hardening. It's blinding them. But actually, what we need to see is Matthew is imagining that we have been tracking all that has been happening.

[12:51] And sort of the thing about going through the Bible like this is that we can kind of forget some of the stuff that happened before because it takes us a while to get through the chapters. And so sometimes we need to just sort of step back in order to save the wood from the trees.

All that Jesus, we need to look back and see what all that Jesus has been doing, that the Pharisees and the Sadducees are doing their very best to stamp out that they would not approve of.

As kingdom life is beginning to be proclaimed and worked out. So for example, in chapter 8, a Gentile Roman centurion comes to Jesus asking for healing for his servant.

He said to Luke, Jesus, I'm a man also under authority and command. I know that you have authority to do. You just need to speak the word and it'll happen. You don't need to come to my house. Of course, Jesus works a wonder there.

In chapter 9, a Jewish temple ruler comes asking for healing for his daughter, claiming, you know, Lord, I believe, help thou my unbelief, going all AV as you do if you've been brought up with that.

[13:57] And God is able to, and Christ is working a wonder amongst the Gentiles and amongst the Jewish people, amongst, you know, those who are far off and those who are near, amongst the surprising and the unsurprising.

As we saw last week, also, you know, a Canaanite Gentile woman asking for deliverance for her daughter. And Jesus worked this far as him as savage. He said, would he be going apopleptic if they

knew that these things were happening?

They want to stamp out the work of God. But the work of God is beautifully unfolding. He's been working these wonders in their lives as signs that God truly has come amongst them.

The one that Moses longed for is here. They should listen to him. Now, I don't know how your mind is interacting with the idea of signs and so on.

You may be thinking, well, is it wrong that the Pharisees are asking for a sign? Is it wrong that I would ask for a sign? Well, actually, you look in the Scriptures, and David, you know, asks for one in Psalm 86, verse 7.

[14 : 58] Show me signs of your goodness, Lord. It's Gideon, chapter 6, famous incident where he asks for several signs as he's called by the pick by God, a very unlikely character, to do an impossible task, and he's looking for reassurance.

So I think as a general principle, it's not the sort of thing, Lord, you know, give me a sign every day of what I should be doing or whatever. But occasionally, maybe in difficult circumstances, in desperation, as we call out to the Lord, say, Lord, I need, you know, you've done this.

Lord, I need to hear from you. And the word comes. Lord, I need to hear from you. And you're reading the Scriptures this morning, and a verse just jumps out like it's been highlighted by the Holy Spirit. Spirit, of course, God can speak into our lives, just administer to you in that way.

But sometimes as we ask, it's not demanding a sign. We're sort of leaving it over to God and saying, Lord, here's the long, you know my situation. You know what I need here. And actually, it's lovely to think over the years of just the way that we've been able to give testimony to one another of just how God has graciously brought a sort of some, just a token of reassurance in one way or another that has just helped us through a difficult period.

What's the difference here, though? Well, a couple of weeks ago, we saw that actually the thing that Jesus is really concerned about is what's going on in our hearts, not the external stuff that the Pharisees or the Sadducees are all kind of concerned about.

[16 : 22] That the problem at the heart of the problem is the problem of the human heart. And we know that Jesus knows what is in our hearts. You see that elsewhere in the Scriptures. See, all these other characters who came to Jesus, whether it was the temple ruler or the Canaanite woman or the Roman centurion, they all came, in a sense, with hearts open, with a modicum of trust and faith, even the size of a mustard seed.

Varying degrees of trusting. But when these guys come to Jesus, it's not trusting, it's testing, isn't it? Because their hearts are hardening in their growing opposition to Jesus.

It's one of the hardest things to see when hearts have gone hard to the Lord, hard to the gospel.

Maybe you've known that kind of hardness of heart in your own life.

In the past, you just were totally opposed to Christian faith. Hard because, you know, maybe what my pals think. If I became a Christian, no way am I going to do that.

Or maybe fellow academics, if you're in the world of academia. It might be, what are my fellow atheists? I mean, I'm drawn to this, but what would my fellow atheists think? What would my sports team members think?

[17 : 39] What would my family, you know, I feel drawn to this. It seemed to make a lot of sense to me. Better sense than kind of life at the moment. But I just can't. Hard because something really tough has been happening.

You blame God, the God that you didn't even believe in, but still, he was the problem. It might be because of what it would mean for our plans for our lives and the way that we want to live it.

I've told you this story before, but N.T. Wright, when he was presenting his PhD on the resurrection, N.T. Wright's work on the resurrection is like gold standard in terms of just showing the veracity of the truth of the resurrection as proclaimed in the Gospels.

But as he presented his work to his supervisor, the supervisor said, this is fantastic work, Tom. But to be honest, I'm just not going to believe it.

And he said, why? And he said, the truth is, it would mean I would have to change my life too much. And I'm just not prepared to do that. You know, hearts can be hardened to the Gospel for all sorts of reasons.

[18 : 52] But praise God. Praise God. For God can reach through and melt even the hardest hearts, as some of us will be able to testify this morning. You know, sometimes folks, when they're, you know, saying, oh, is God out there?

Or they've got a Christian friend and saying, you know, I just don't believe it. Say, well, why doesn't God just give me a sign? If only I do this or do that, then I would believe. If something happens and they put it down to coincidence.

And I say, well, then I was just a coincidence. I need something else to happen. Or sometimes just none are seemingly given. But then there's other instances where folks are not looking for a sign, and God just seems to give them an absolute ton of them.

Many of you, you know, actually, some of you will have heard this story before. Many of you are new and will not have heard this story. So I'm just going to tell anyone because it's a corker. But when I was studying to become a pastor, doing my degree, I worked up in a church in the Isle of Skye, near where I was brought up, for three months.

And Ivor, the pastor there, said, I'd love you to meet with Graham. He just moved into the area. Seems quite interested in the Christian faith. Maybe you could study the Gospels with him. Sure, let's do that.

[20:10] So met up with Graham. He was up for studying the Gospels. We were reading through them. And one day he said, he said, Cal, I've not told you my story. I said, no, Graham, you haven't. And he said, to be honest, I have no Christian background at all.

Might have been to a christening and a wedding. Other than that, nothing. Nada. And he said, but I used to work in the car industry and delivering cars from one garage to the other.

And in order to kind of pocket the expenses, I would just hitchhike with the trade plate so that folks would know I wasn't a nutcase. And they would free field to pick me up.

And so I did that. I was all over the country with it. They said one day I was hitchhiking and had the trade plate up. Actually, it was at the corner, a dangerous corner of the road. I was familiar with it. There was a hedge between the path and the road. So I went on the path. And as I was doing that to get back on the road, the guy stopped on the corner, shouted over the hedge, Hey, are you looking for a lift?

[21:09] And she was like, yes. Great. Jump in. So jumped into the car. I said, remember the guy? You know, he was an executive for a company. He gave me his card.

And we're driving along. And he says, I'm glad I found you. And Graham's like, get the number plate ready just to pin him with any nonsense. And he said, yeah, it's going to sound really weird.

He said, but I really feel that God wants to tell you something. Graham kind of relaxes. Like nuts, but nice. That's okay. That's fine. We can relax. And he said, well, okay.

What is it? He said, God just really wants to tell you that he loves you. That's nice. Thank you very much. He said, Callum, that would have been weird in itself. He said, by the fifth time that it happened, five different people, five different locations.

He said, the last one was a joiner. I jumped in, you know, right thing along, jumped into the van, driving along. The guy's sort of head hung low. He said, this is going to sound really weird.

[22:13] And he said, I feel I really need to. And he said, stop. You can stop right there. He said, I know what you're going to say. And he said, what is it? He said, you're going to tell me that you really feel that God needs to tell me something. And that is lovely.

He said, do you know that? He said, you're the first person that's told me. And the guy said, well, you need to do something about that. He said, I did. I moved myself and my family 700 miles north to the Isle of Skye from the south of England to start a new life.

Who's the first person at my door? Ivor MacDonald, the local minister, to invite me to church. So we went along. And here I am, you know, looking into all of this. And, you know, we met and eventually he said, oh, Callum, I've been reading this little book that Ivor gave me.

And at the end of it, it's got a prayer. He said, I prayed. I said, well, let me see it, knowing what it was. And I said, Graham, if you've prayed this, you've become a Christian. He said, I can't. I can't. I feel too good. I said, that's when Jesus came.

And so Graham, you know, gave his life to the Lord. He got baptized that summer. His wife became a Christian. His son became a Christian at his baptism. And he's still going on with the Lord. You know, God, you know, some people are not looking for signs, but God just gives them a wonderful, gracious, beautiful amount of signage.

[23:23] But ultimately, all of those, they point to the one sign that ultimately is needed that we will discover. The once for all time sign that Jesus goes on to talk about here.

Now he goes on, verse two. We're only in verse two. Flip. The earliest recorded use of the adage that we're familiar with is here in verse two.

It's the earliest recorded one in scripture. You know, we all know it. Red sky at night, shepherd's delight or sailor's delight, depending on your previous occupations. Red sky in the morning, sailor or shepherd's warning.

It says, you know all that. We know all that. You're great at reading the weather, the sun and the rain, but you cannot tell about the things of God about his son and his rain.

I'll nick that off somebody else. Okay, I thought it sounded good, but I didn't make it up myself. He knows their hearts. And he knows that they're hardening.

[24 : 23] And he speaks into them quite directly, doesn't he? It's a wicked and an adulterous generation that are looking for a sign. He's referring to hearts that are given over historically in the Old Testament to false religious idols and false worship.

And in the Bible, in the Old Testament, those idols can either be the physical idols that people worship or the idols of the heart. Where we replace the creator's place in our lives with created things that make, you know, they're perfectly good in themselves, good servants, but poor masters, always demanding more and more.

Ultimately, do not lead us to the living God, but demand our attention, our time, our worship. They shape our lives and our moralities, leading us into wickedness, adulteries.

They harden our hearts. And ultimately, what Jesus is saying, I'm not not giving you a sign.

They're going to receive the sign that will stand at the center of human history for all time, all people, all generations, all tribes and nations and tongue can see and hear and believe and put their trust in.

[25 : 39] It is the sign of his death and his resurrection, as he refers to here, as the sign of Jonah. Now, Jonah, again, many of you are new to looking into the Bible, and so you may not be familiar with it, but actually some of you wonderfully were hearing, put your trust in the Lord Jesus as Savior and Lord over the last couple of weeks.

And we rejoice in that with you, along with angels in heaven who rejoice over those who give their lives to Christ. But Jonah was a prophet in the Bible from about 500 years before, sent by God, from God, to an unbelieving, rebellious, wicked people facing judgment for their notorious wickedness. He ended up in the belly of the fish for three days, and then as he was released out of the belly of the fish, goes and proclaims the truth of God. And a great number of people who were wicked and spiritually adulterous believed and were saved.

So Jesus comes as the greater Jonah. Every story whispers his name. Jesus comes as the greater Jonah, sent from God, the Son of God, sent to unbelieving generations for you and for me, who outside of Christ are facing hell's judgment.

But this great, this faithful prophet, rather than the unfaithful one, didn't run away from his calling, but rather run towards it. He went to the cross. He went to the grave for three days to take the judgment we deserve to give us the heaven that we don't.

[27 : 08] Dying the death of a wicked and adulterous generation, so that in the end, a great multitude who cannot be numbered will one day stand before the throne, proclaiming his name delivered, saved.

See, God, in this passage, has come to do a God-sized work, not just in one nation, but in all the nations, not just in one generation, but in every generation.

Verse 4 is solemn, isn't it? Jesus left them. Jesus basically just walked away. What a thing to have stood in the presence of the Savior of the world, the very Prince of heaven, the Son of God himself, and have hardened your hearts such that you're not receiving what he's saying.

In the end, he turns away from you. You know, friends, if you're sensing the presence of the Lord, if you sense him speaking to you this morning, don't harden your heart. Don't turn away from him or let him turn away from you, but receive him this morning as Savior and Lord.

The sign has been given, the sign for all the ages, the sign that is written in our history that declares his love for you. Jesus said, greater love has no man than this, and he lay down his life for his friends.

[28 : 24] Jesus Christ lay down his life so that you could not just be a follower, but a friend, dearly loved, of the living God. So we have this troubling sign that's unlikely appearing, this testing, this once-for-all time sign that is given, and then there's this last passage, which is kind of forgetting and remembering the sign.

Verse 5 is wonderfully real, isn't it? The disciples have forgotten the bread. I mean, we can all relate to stuff that we've forgotten. I, you know, hands up, I confess, on Thursday morning, as we were leaving the hotel in Mallorca that we're staying in, Moraghan had a bag of clothes that was there that I was, amongst other things, to collect so that we were ready for the bus to take us to the thing. And of course, halfway to the airport, where's the bag? It had my clothes in it, you know. Okay, we've all been there, all right?

Similar situation. We have all been there. Please, help me. So the disciples, they're stressed, they're discussing, you know, who, oh, forget to say, who forgot the snacks?

Who forgot the bread for dinner or whatever? And so they're having this discussion amongst themselves. Jesus, you know, is maybe reflecting on the encounter with the Pharisees and the Sadducees. So interjects, verse 6, be careful, be on your guards against the yeast of the Pharisees and the Sadducees.

[29:57] And in my mind, which is probably overactive, you've got the disciples kind of arguing with Jesus say something, they pause. They hear something about yeast. Verse 7, I think it's comedy gold.

Somebody pipes up, oh, you muppet. It's because you forgot the bread. He's talking about yeast. Thinking about their stomachs, not with their head and their hearts. Verse 8, Jesus kind of replied, have you forgotten already about the feeding of the 5,000, the 4,000?

How much was left over? Where's your faith? Keep focused. Think clearly. Apply what you've been learning to your situation.

Tim Keller used to talk about the fact that the opposite of remembering is not forgetting. It's actually dismembering. Remembering is putting things back together, reattaching, if you like.

So faith is remembering, reattaching what we've been learning of the Lord, the promises of God, to the situation that we are encountering, remembering them together.

[31:06] For many of us, sometimes in the circumstances, I think, where is God in this situation? And one of the things that we're called, it is remember, reattach the promises of God, the truth of God, the things that we learned in the light, in the midst of the situation we're experiencing, where there might be darkness.

But why this warning about the yeast of the Pharisees and so on that they eventually get by the end of the passage? Well, verse 12, it's because the teaching, it spreads. It works its way through the whole batch, as it were.

It must be guarded against because it will spread and it will lead people away from the truth of the life of God and their souls that Christ has come to proclaim.

Paul described how it infected his life as a Pharisee when he wrote about it in Philippians chapter 3. If you want to flick over to it, page 1180, if you're using the church Bibles.

I'm not going to read it because of time. But see there how he describes what the condition of the heart of a Pharisee, that they have confidence in the flesh.

[32:15] In other words, confidence in the things that they do, their position and their privileges and their piety. Who I am and what I do.

And he says, because, you know, I felt I had it all. If that's your kind of understanding of how you get right with God, then I had it right. Verses 5 to 7, my piety, I had the ancient sign of the people of God's circumcision.

In terms of my position, his blood was ancient blood, pure blood. 100% Israelite of the tribe of Benjamin, who along with the tribe of Judah remained faithful to the line of David. He was a Hebrew of Hebrews.

In other words, untainted by Greek pollutants that were coming in at the time. In terms of his piety, in regard to the law, a Pharisee, a separated one as for zeal, putting it into practice, I persecuted, I hunted down, I presided over the death of the people of God.

I kept it all pretty much perfectly. I thought I had it licked, he is saying here, when it came to getting right with God and getting to heaven. I was not just born into it because of my position and privilege, but also I made sure that I added to it by my piety and my religious works.

[33:28] But, but, but when he encountered the one sign that has been given, Jesus' death, unmistakable sign of Jesus' death and resurrection, he saw that actually all that he needed was just one thing to start that true God thing that changes everything in our lives that we've been saying.

All that other stuff that he was leaning on and putting his trust in, well, verse eight, it was garbage. A polite word for an absolutely stinking pile of poo.

Dung. That's pretty much, that's even a polite word, apparently, of what he says. Why? Why?

Because when you realize what is going on, when you realize what Jesus has done, when you realize that you only need one thing, that's to put your faith and trust in him as Savior and Lord's, it begins to shatter, in a sense, all that other stuff that we were clinging to.

The Pharisees, the Sadducees, are standing there before Jesus at the beginning of the chapter thinking that they are clothed in splendor and they're righteous acts, but unfortunately not realizing it's like the emperor's new clothes.

[34 : 53] Jesus sees the reality that their robes are not righteous, but they're rags. Like Isaiah says, all our righteous acts are like filthy rags, especially in comparison with the one true, altogether truly righteous and good act of the cross of Calvary and resurrection.

The one sign, the one thing that is needed in which instead of rags, he bestows a true robe of righteousness with which we can stand humbly before God, not because of what we've done, but because we're trusting in what he has done.

You know the beautiful story that I think encapsulates something, the power and the beauty of the gospel in Victor Hugo's play, *Les Misérables*. Jean Valjean, remember he's shown kindness by a local bishop who takes him in and gives him a place to stay.

And in repaying that kindness, Jean Valjean decides to steal the silvery and make off with a good chunk of it. He's caught by the police and the police bring him to the door with, you know, there he's guilty.

The bishop knows he has the right to throw the book at him. And get his stolen goods back. And Jean Valjean knows that that's what he deserves. He deserves a judgment for his wickedness.

[36 : 27] But here's what the priest, Victor Hugo has the priest saying. He says, Ah, Jean Valjean, you're here! He exclaimed, looking at him. I'm glad to see you. Well, how is this?

I gave you the candlesticks too, which are of silver like the rest and for which you will certainly get 200 francs. Why did you not carry them away as well as the forks and the spoons that you've already taken?

Jean Valjean, he records here, opened his eyes wide, stared at the venerable bishop with an expression that no human tongue can render on any account of.

See, Jean Valjean is left speechless by the experience of the gospel in action in the words and the actions of the bishop. All sense of self or unworth are wonderfully shattered by an undeserved love, unmerited kindness, mercy and grace and goodness.

and his eyes are wide. All that he has attempted to do to kind of make his life work and so on, just lie in tatters round about him.

[37 : 37] The chains and shackles that bind him are now lying at his feet as he receives undeserved, unmerited love and forgiveness, which frees him into a new life and a new way.

Jesus Christ's death on the cross establishes for us grace and mercy undeserved, giving us a new position before God, much better than that that the Pharisees and the Sadducees thought they'd established.

Not one that we've made for ourselves, but one that Christ has made for us on the cross through which we, like Jean Valjean, are declared not guilty, justified, made right with God, given a positional righteousness as it's described.

Like the hymnal writer says, nothing in my hands I bring, simply to the cross I cling. So we're given a new position. We're also given a new power to live in a new and living way, a new piety, if you like.

People call that a progressive righteousness, sanctification. We're changed by this great act of love as we receive by faith this undeserved grace and mercy and kindness.

[38 : 59] And it leaves us speechless, not just simply on the day that we receive it, but on every day that we recollect it, overflowing with praise. And we've sung of that time and again already this morning.

And so as the band come up, let's begin to land the plane on this. The yeast of the Pharisees and the Sadducees. Any system that is, any system that tells you that you can earn your way to heaven, whether it's by privilege or by status or by good works, by being a good person or by extreme religious acts.

And Jesus wants to say, guys, that's all rags. The righteousness that we need that makes us able to stand before God with all confidence is not self-made.

It's borrowed. Jesus gives us it to us. It cannot be earned. It must simply be received, given as a gift to those who will receive Jesus as Savior and Lord.

He is the one who lovingly shatters all our self-made imaginings about getting right with God by this or by that, by giving us the one sign for all time, putting our faith in Him, the one thing that is needed that changes everything.

[40 : 22] So how does it look for us this week as we begin to apply this passage to our own lives? As we think about what we reckon makes us right with God, the things that we're tempted to put our trust in other than Jesus for our assurance that He loves us, that are not the one true sign that is given, that assures us day after day of His great love for us, but that we think that we need to earn it.

We lost sight of the wonder of what we have received and are receiving every day, pruning our trust in our own spiritual resume, which ultimately are rags that produce pride and boasting or insecurity or lack of assurance.

And we lost sight of what His great redeeming work in our lives has made us before Him and how He views us, this new position that He's given to us of dearly loved, His child, His children, and the new power that He's given to us by the Holy Spirit that changes us and is changing us, such that as the Pharisees are standing before Jesus, what they're holding ultimately, if you could see it in a different way, is rags.

And what Jesus is holding before them is a true robe of righteousness with which He wants to clothe us. We don't feel that we deserve it. We don't.

But He longs to give it to us. Have we lost sight of what we have received in Jesus Christ, the basis of our acceptance before Him, not our own spiritual resume, but His great redeeming work on the cross, and that He has given to us a new power by which we are changed and being changed, that we might live in Him and with Him in joy and delight, in humility.

[42 : 17] So come as we gather and begin to sing our final song and reflect on, remember, reconnect the things that you've been learning with your situation and the things that you're tempted to think and let the truth of the gospel, the light of the gospel, recondition your heart and your thinking and find your way to joy, His joy in you and a restored joy in Him and remind ourselves, Christ, He's enough and He's enough for me.

Let's sing that together.