

Hebrews 12:1-2 proclaims that we are literally “surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses.” If that is not enough to boost our confidence, we notice that our Savior *proves* the importance of the witnesses behind the Scriptures by *relying on them Himself!* Jesus does not ask us to trust in the Scriptures as the foundation of our faith without first *testing them Himself!* Not surprisingly, then, on every page of the Gospels we see our Lord finding strength from the great cloud of witnesses who went before Him. This is especially true of Jesus’ reliance on the prophets. Let us never forget, therefore, that the Church of all Ages is built not only on the foundation of the Apostles, but also on the foundation of the prophets.

Monday: Read Matthew 12:38-41 and 21:32**Heeding the Prophets**

Jesus defends His mighty deed of cleansing the temple at the beginning of Passion Week by declaring that the prophet John bore witness to His authority (Mt. 21:32). In the same way, He defends His resurrection by pointing to Jonah’s three days in the belly of the fish as a sign of His rising from the dead. Jesus describes His rising as “the sign of Jonah” (Mt. 12:39-40), and declares that the great pagan city of Nineveh, which repented at the preaching of Jonah (Jonah 3:5-10), will be the judge of His own generation, which wickedly refused to repent at the preaching of Christ (Mt. 12:41). If Jesus heeded and warned from the lesser prophets who came before Him, there will be no excuse for those who refuse to heed the prophet Jesus who was “so much greater” than Jonah.

Meditate and Pray: Lord Jesus, please sensitize us to your Word as our Prophet who reveals the will of God for our salvation. Instead of those who lusted after ever greater wonders to thrill their eyes while their hearts remained hard, make us to be your sisters and brothers, joined to you by a faith which will sit at your feet to feed upon the truth from your lips. Help us not to hunger after the bread of toil in this world, but rather after the manna which endures unto eternal life. Amen.

Tuesday: Read Matthew 12:38-41 and Exodus 17:7**Do Not Test the Lord, your God**

Jesus’ words about Jonah were prompted by the insulting request of his foes for a sign (Matt. 12:38). All the mighty and merciful miracles which Jesus had performed were not enough! They demanded more. In this way, they tested Jesus as the Son of God.

But what exactly does it mean to test God? It means to question His ability to provide according to His promises. For example, remember Israel's question in Exodus 17:7, “Is the LORD among us or not?” What they were really asking was: “Is God truly with us with to save and preserve?” To put it another way, to test God means to “*require unnecessary proof of what should be believed without it*” (Archibald Alexander). We see how heinous this sin of “testing” is when we are reminded of all the miracles which God did for His unbelieving people in the Old Testament. How could they so quickly disbelieve when they had seen all the plagues in Egypt and walked through the Red Sea? Well, this is the same unbelief behind the question of Mt. 12:38, “Show us a sign.” The Pharisees demand that God prove Himself to them, at a time and manner of their choosing.

Meditate and Pray: Lord, when you speak to us with the promises of your Word, help us to take what you say and submit to it without murmuring or doubting. Grant us the assurance and peace which come from accepting, rather than testing, your words. Amen.

Wednesday: Read Matthew 12:42 and 1 Kings 10:1-13**Recognizing the Presence of God**

Gasping with wonder before the wealth and wisdom of King Solomon, the Queen of Sheba praises God for all that He had done for Solomon and His people Israel (1 Kings 10:9). Note the reason why this Queen admires Solomon -- because she recognized God's grace and presence in him, something the Pharisees and teachers of the law refused to see in Jesus. Therefore, this Queen's ability to see *Solomon's* Divine authority will condemn those who refuse to see *Jesus'* greater royal authority. "One greater than Solomon" has come, but the Pharisees, and other unbelievers like them, refuse to see it.

Meditate and Pray: May the Lord grant us eyes to see Jesus, the Son's, exalted place. May we eagerly bow and serve Jesus as our Lord, with words of praise for Him such as the Queen of Sheba spoke to Solomon: "Blessed be the LORD your God, who delighted in you, setting you on the throne of Israel! Because the LORD has loved Israel forever, therefore He made you king, to do justice and righteousness."

Thursday: Read Matthew 12:6-8 & 12:39-45**Our Great Prophet, Priest and King**

Jesus is carefully building a persuasive argument that He is the great Priest of God, "greater than the temple" (Mt. 12:6); that He is the great Prophet of God, "greater than Jonah" (Mt. 12:41); and that He is the great King sent from God "greater than Solomon" (Mt. 12:42).

Sadly, Jesus' own generation would not have Him as their prophet, priest and king. They reject Him completely, thereby bringing upon themselves a far worse spiritual condition of unbelief than all their preceding sin produced! In Mt. 12:43-45, Jesus likens them to a well-swept house of outward morality and hypocritical religion, but with no spiritual heart in which the Lord Jesus dwells by His Spirit. Because of their hardness, they are *not* a household of faith, but a household of Satanic hypocrisy, indwelt by seven demons of the worst kind -- full of contempt for Jesus. God save us from such a terrible end!

Meditate and Pray: Use this hymn of confession in which we plead to be saved from the deadly effects of sin upon our souls as well as our lives:

*No, not despairingly come I to Thee;
No, not distrustingly bend I the knee:
Sin hath gone over me, yet is this still my plea,
Jesus hath died.*

*Lord, I confess to Thee sadly my sin;
All I am tell with Thee, all I have been:
Purge Thou my sin away, wash Thou my soul this day;
Lord, make me clean.*

*Faithful and just art Thou, forgiving all;
Loving and kind art Thou when poor ones call:
Lord, let the cleansing blood, blood of the Lamb of God,*

*Pass o'er my soul. Ah! mine iniquity crimson hath been,
Infinite, infinite—sin upon sin:
Sin of not loving Thee, sin of not trusting Thee—
Infinite sin Then all is peace and light this soul within;*

*Thus shall I walk with Thee, the loved Unseen;
Leaning on Thee, my God, guided along the road,
Nothing between*

Trinity Hymnal 495

Fri/Sat/Sun: Read Matthew 12:46-50 and John 4:27-33

Matthew 12:46-50 speaks great comfort after dire warnings. Here Jesus reassures the broken sinners who have gathered around Him to hear His teaching that they are His adopted brothers and sisters. Those who claim allegiance to Him based on mere blood relationship, such as His mother and brothers (Mt. 12:47), are left outside. This does not mean that Jesus has no care for His blood relations. Indeed, as He died He entrusted the care of His mother to His disciple John, and we find Jesus' family among those who gather in prayer on the day of Pentecost.

But His family does not as of yet understand what He is doing. They assume that their blood ties give them the right to interrupt His ministry. They were upset to hear reports of some who believed Him to be mentally unbalanced (Mark 3:21). Jesus' mother and brothers did not join Christ's enemies in thinking He was demon-possessed, nor did they necessarily agree with those (Mark 3:21) who thought He was suffering mental distress. But they had fears and concerns that Jesus had gone too far. Jesus makes clear that He is about the great work of salvation and cannot stop. He will build His church, gathering into His family those who hear and heed His will (Mt. 12:50), and not even flesh and blood will stand in the way of His great work.

Meditate and Pray: What a Savior we have, willing to be accused of mental imbalance and worse in order to be our Savior. Even His own disciples were surprised at His zeal in pursuing the salvation of a lowly Samaritan woman (John 4:27) and were concerned that Jesus did not seem to eat enough of the bread of this world (John 4:31). But let us thank Jesus that His food was to do the Father's will, and His hunger and thirst could only be satisfied by feasting with sinners at the Wedding Supper of the Lamb. Would any lesser level of zeal and commitment have worked to find us in our sin? What a Savior, to refuse to pick the flowers of this world; to refuse to live a "normal life" of self-gratification! Nothing less could have purchased our salvation. Sing about Jesus' tireless commitment to pursue the salvation of sinners like us:

*There were ninety and nine that safely lay
In the shelter of the fold.
But one was out on the hills away,
Far off from the gates of gold.
Away on the mountains wild and bare.
Away from the tender Shepherd's care.
Away from the tender Shepherd's care.*

*“Lord, Thou hast here Thy ninety and nine;
 Are they not enough for Thee?”
 But the Shepherd made answer: “This of Mine
 Has wandered away from Me;
 And although the road be rough and steep,
 I go to the desert to find My sheep,
 I go to the desert to find My sheep.”*

*But none of the ransomed ever knew
 How deep were the waters crossed;
 Nor how dark was the night the Lord passed
 through
 Ere He found His sheep that was lost.
 Out in the desert He heard its cry,
 Sick and helpless and ready to die;
 Sick and helpless and ready to die.*

*“Lord, whence are those blood drops all the way
 That mark out the mountain’s track?”
 “They were shed for one who had gone astray
 Ere the Shepherd could bring him back.”
 “Lord, whence are Thy hands so rent and torn?”
 “They are pierced tonight by many a thorn;
 They are pierced tonight by many a thorn.”*

*And all through the mountains, thunder riven
 And up from the rocky steep,
 There arose a glad cry to the gate of Heaven,
 “Rejoice! I have found My sheep!”
 And the angels echoed around the throne,
 “Rejoice, for the Lord brings back His own!
 Rejoice, for the Lord brings back His own!”*

Trinity Hymnal #187