

## **Matthew 16:1-4** **The Truth About Signs and Wonders**

We are in Matthew 16:1-4. As we get ready to start a new year with our new life, we are starting a new chapter, Matthew chapter 16.

We are still in this section of Matthew chapters 5-25, The Public Ministry of Christ. In these chapters 5-25, there are five messages with supporting chapters for each of the messages.

Chapters 5-7 was the first message, and chapters 8 and 9 were the supportive, or supplemental, Scriptures for that message.

In Matthew chapter 10 was the second message, entitled The People of the Kingdom. It is a sermon on discipleship, with Matthew chapters 11 and 12, The Ministry of the Rebuke by Christ concerning the rejection of Him to become His disciple.

In Matthew chapter 13 is the third message, but in chapters 14-17 we have the supportive chapters, the supplemental chapters. Chapter 13 was The Parables of the Kingdom, but in chapters 14-17, The Ministry of the Principles of the Parables. The parables were all about either receiving the Word of God or rejecting the Word of God. In chapters 14-17 we have examples of both, people who received the Word of God, and people who rejected the Word of God, just as Jesus spoke in His parables.

In Matthew chapter 16 for today, here the religious leaders continue their attack on Jesus. That is the religious leaders of the Jews. In Matthew chapter 16:1-4, The Proof from Heaven. Very important, for today.

In Matthew 16:1 we have The Confrontation set up for us. **And when the Pharisees and Sadducees came tempting *Him*, they asked Him to show to them a sign from out of heaven.** That was their temptation to Jesus.

Now, the two groups that are confronting Jesus are the two main religious groups that make up the Jewish religion: the Pharisees and the Sadducees.

The word *Pharisee* means *to separate*. These were the separatists. They were also the legalists. Not only did they follow the law, but they made up rules and regulations on how to follow the law. We saw that in the last chapter. They believe in the resurrection of the dead. They believed in future judgment. And they believed in the existence of spirits and the spirit realm, namely angels and other spirits.

Then there were the Sadducees. In actual function within Judaism the Pharisees and the Sadducees were enemies, they opposed each other, had different beliefs. The Sadducees were mainly made up of priests who were in charge of the operation of the temple. They did not believe in the resurrection of the dead, nor did they believe in the afterlife, opposite of the Pharisees. They did not believe in angels or spirit beings.

And so, the Pharisees and the Sadducees were opposite in their interpretation of the law. So, they opposed each other in just about everything. But it is interesting that both the Pharisees and the Sadducees, were now coming to Jesus as a united front. The reason why I say that is because in our text, here is where the technicalities help in the text. It says, "And when the Pharisees and Sadducees came." The word *the*, the definite article *the* in the Greek text goes with both groups, Pharisees and Sadducees, uniting them as one group in the presentation. So, the definite article establishes that both the Pharisees and the Sadducees were coming as a united front to attack Jesus, yet they were enemies with each other. But they found a common cause to come up against Jesus and attack Him on a united front.

But we also see, thirdly, in this verse, a key phrase that we are going to focus on this morning. **When they came to Him, they were tempting Him, and they asked Him to show to them** (notice this) **a sign from out of heaven.** That is a key phrase, "to show to them a sign from out of heaven."

The Bible teaches that there are different kinds of signs and I want to establish that for you today from the Scriptures. There are *confirmation* signs and there are *authorization* signs, *confirmation* signs and *authorization* signs.

Confirmation signs are horizontal - where a spirit will use one person to another person or to another group of people. Confirmation signs, performing signs.

The authorization sign is a sign that comes directly from out of heaven from God.

So, you have signs and wonders that are ministered among people, those are confirmation signs. Then there is the authorization sign coming directly from God from heaven without any human vessel or intermediary.

Out of these two kinds of signs, there are two types of confirmation signs. This is something I want to drive home to you this morning. The reason why we are focusing on this is because there is a tremendous signs and wonders movement in and amongst the church and the body of Christ that are really leading a lot of believers astray. I want to go over this with you this morning in order to establish what the Bible teaches about the performing of signs and wonders.

Confirmation signs. There are two types of confirmation signs, one is worked by God's Spirit as a sign and wonder, and one is worked by demons. Did you know the Bible teaches that Satan and demons can perform signs and wonders and even look like the real thing just to get people to follow them?

Well, the first type is done by God's Spirit. We saw back in Matthew 11:4-6, you remember when John the Baptist sent a couple of his disciples over to ask Jesus, "Are You the one who is to come, or do we look for another?" And Jesus basically told them, tell John that the blind receive their sight, the lame are walking, the lepers are being cleansed, and the deaf are hearing, and the dead are being raised, and the poor have the gospel preached to them. He didn't say, "Yes," or, "No." He quoted from Isaiah's prophecies, Isaiah 35:5-6 and Isaiah 61:1. So He

says, "Go tell him that I am performing the signs which Isaiah prophesied about, that the Messiah would do. I am confirming that I am the Messiah by doing these healings and doing these miracles."

People ask me all the time, "Why don't we see the same miracles and the same signs as when Jesus was here?" And there are Christians that actually try to duplicate those miracles over and over again and look to perform them. Well Jesus came to perform miracles for the sole purpose of confirming that He is the promised coming Messiah. He doesn't need to prove that anymore, therefore we don't have the same activities going on today.

In John 6:2, when people saw Jesus healing and performing miracles on the sick and the diseased the multitude followed Him because they saw the signs which He was doing. *The signs*. His miracles are called signs.

In John 6:14, men arose and when they had seen the sign which Jesus did and said, "This is of a truth that prophet that should come into the world." He had just fed the five thousand and the text says, "And when they saw the sign" of the feeding of the five thousand, they confessed that He is the prophet that should come into the world.

In John 6:26, when the crowd turned away and walked no more with Him, Jesus answered and said, "Truly, truly I say to you, you seek Me not because you saw the signs, but because you did eat of the loaves and were filled." Free lunch. The miracle of the multiplying of the food. "That's why you're following Me, not because you saw it as a sign." Jesus wasn't going to do it again because He did it as a sign; not as a promise, but as a sign.

In John chapter 20 at the end of John's Gospel, John 20:30-31, John says, "And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book: but these are written, that you might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you might have life through His name." Many other signs Jesus did that John said we didn't include in our book, but he called them *signs*. Many other signs Jesus did that are not written in the book.

So, we have signs, *confirmation* signs, being done by Christ to confirm that He is the Messiah, but then we have the second type of confirmation sign and those are signs that are done by demonic spirits. They appear to be the same, they look the same, they feel the same; it's a difference of spirits.

You remember back in Matthew 12:23-24? You remember when the people came and were amazed at what Jesus had done and the Pharisees, when they heard of it, they said, "This fellow does not cast out demons except by the prince of demons, Beelzebub." They attributed Jesus to be casting out demons by demons. This is according to the Jewish belief that was established by the Old Testament, by the way. They believe that both God's Spirit and demons can perform miracles and they can look identical, but it is established by their scriptures.

In the book of Exodus 4:1 through chapter 11 - this is where Moses came and performed the signs and brought the plagues upon Egypt so that they would let the children of Israel go. Now, it is interesting, because I want to skip ahead to Exodus 10:1 where the Lord said unto Moses, "Go into Pharaoh and all of his servants so that I might do my signs before them." He said, "I will harden their hearts so that I will do my signs in front of them." Well, in chapter 4 verse 1 of Exodus, when God called Moses to go to Pharaoh and say, "Let My people go," Moses said, "Well, how will the Hebrew people know that you sent me to represent them and deliver them?" And God says, "Take your stick, your rod, and throw it on the ground." He threw it onto the ground, it became a snake. He says, "Now, if they don't believe you because of that, put your hand in your chest, your vest, and pull it out," and it was leprous. He had leprosy on the hand. He says, "Now, put it back in and pull it out," and it was healed. He says, "Now, go and give them those two signs," to the children of Israel, "so that they will know that I sent you." See, confirmation through Moses to them. Confirmation, that is what signs are for.

So, as they come to Pharaoh in 7:8-13 of Exodus, Pharaoh says, "Show me a sign that God has sent you to tell me to let the children of Israel go. Show me a sign." And so, Moses threw his stick down on the ground and it became a snake. But the magicians came in and they threw their sticks on the ground and they became snakes. See, Satan can duplicate most of the miracles and signs that God does. Anyway, Moses' snake wound up swallowing theirs - it is kind of the icing on the cake to prove that point.

Later on, in Exodus chapter 7, God told Moses because Pharaoh won't let the children of Israel go, go and strike the water with your stick that it would become blood. Well, the magicians came with their sticks and did the exact same thing, changed the water into blood. Satan can duplicate miracles. Satan can perform miracles.

In 8:1-7, God told Moses that Pharaoh will not let the children of Israel go, so bring frogs up from the land. Well, the magicians did the same thing, they multiplied frogs out too, miraculously.

Then God says, interesting in 8:16, "Strike the dust that lice will come out and cover the land," but the magicians were not able to do that; and they said, "This is the finger of God." They didn't want to mess with this one. And they went on, where Moses performed swarms of flies, the cattle died, boils broke out on all the people. And it is interesting, it says the magicians wouldn't even come and stand in front of Moses, because they had boils all over them. It was like a confession, or testimony of guilt that they have been struck by God. Moses performed signs of locust, and darkness, and the death of the firstborn in Exodus chapter 11. All these signs, but the first few signs the magicians were able to duplicate. They were matching Moses and the power of God. Satan can perform miracles. He can perform signs. He can perform wonders. He can perform healings.

I can remember when we used to have a Bible study down in Huntington Beach for the Maranatha music groups once a month, and all of us who traveled stayed in a motel, and when we had the free coffee and donuts. If it's free coffee and donuts, you'll find me there. So, the motel had free coffee and donuts and so we met a man there who was a Muslim. He said, "Are you all grouped together?" And we said, "Yes." And we said, "We do a Bible study here on

Saturday night." And he said, "Oh, I'm Muslim," and he shared a little bit about his religion with us. And He says, "Now, you say that Jesus rose from the dead and that's proof that He's the Christ." I said, "Yes, it is." He says, "We had a raising of the dead too, in one of our services. The person was right there in the casket and they were having the funeral and they prayed over the casket," and he says, "The person rose right up out of casket." Now, I don't know if it is true or not, and I did not know what to say to that because, basically, what he's saying is, "We raise the dead too." And the only thing I could say is, and I trust that was Lord because I think it was the right answer, I said, "Yes, but it wasn't Jesus raising from the dead." Satan can raise from the dead. Satan can perform miracles. And people will say, people admit to this, they will say, "Yes, the Scripture does indicate that Satan can perform miracles, but he can't perform miracles in the name of Jesus. It's impossible."

Well, Jesus said differently in Matthew 7:21-23. Jesus said, "Not everyone that says unto me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that is doing the will of My Father, who is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name? and in Your name have we not cast out demons? and in Your name have we not done many wonderful works,' (which literally translated is *works of power*) And then will I confess unto them, 'I never knew you: depart from Me, you who are working lawlessness.'" So, He is telling people who actually went out and prophesied in His name, who actually went out and cast out demons in His name, who actually went out and did works of power in His name, and yet Jesus will confess, "I never knew you. You weren't of me." That should cause people to be alarmed, and be alert, and be cautious, and awake.

Even Satan himself in the last days during the tribulation period, it says, "The antichrist is going to perform signs and wonders to deceive people." In Matthew 24:24, "For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall show great signs and wonders; so that, if it were possible," and the text is very pointed and clear in the grammar, it's not possible, "and if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect." So, if it was not for God protecting the elect - and the elect, by the way, **ἐκλεκτός** (EKLEKTOS) is an official title for Jewish believers in the tribulation period - if God did not protect them, the text indicates, if it were possible, they would've been deceived too; but it is not possible. That's how powerful the signs and wonders will be performed by these false Christs and falls prophets.

Paul said in II Thessalonians 2:9-10 that the antichrist when he comes, who is coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders, and in all deceit of unrighteousness among them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. So, people rejected the love of the truth, so they were given over to deceitful signs and lying wonders because they did not love the truth.

So, there are two kinds of signs: confirmation signs and authorization signs. We've studied the two types of confirmation signs. And you might be saying, "Why would Satan want to give confirmation signs about Christ?" Well, see, he is not. When Satan perform signs and wonders it doesn't lead people to Christ, it leads people to signs and wonders. It gets people hooked on chasing after. We will see this in the last verse of this section, in verse 4. When people pursue and chase after signs and wonders they get hooked on it, the stimulation of it, the amazement of it, the excitement of it. And they want to perform the signs and wonders

themselves. They even have conventions, signs and wonders conventions, where they gather people together to teach people how to do signs and wonders. You see it leads people to signs and wonders, not to Jesus Christ, and we will talk about that in just a moment. So, it is to get people hooked.

The second kind of sign is authorization. We have studied confirmation, now we study authorization. This is where God miraculously gives a sign directly from heaven, directly from God, where there's no human vessels involved. And this comes from the Jewish Scriptures themselves. And again, the Jews believed this. They believed in confirmation signs and authorization signs. And they believed the confirmation signs can be done either by God or by Satan. And they attributed Jesus' ministry to be of Satan. They said, "Yes, He's performing miracles, but it's of Satan," because they believed it could be either God or it could be Satan. You see, that's why they are coming to Jesus and they are saying, "We seek from you a sign from out of heaven." He's already given many signs. He's performing miracles all over the place, healings where every single person is healed. But now they want a sign from heaven. They want a verification sign.

The verification sign is based on I Kings 18:19-39. This is Elijah. You remember, Elijah came, and he asked the people, "How long are you going to be halt between two opinions? If Baal is god, then serve him. If Yahweh is God, then serve Him. How long are you going to be halt between these two opinions?" So, Elijah says, "Okay let's get proof as to who is God here." So, he gathered 450 prophets of Baal and in front of all the people he says, "Here is what we are going to do. I'm going to ask them to choose two animal sacrifices. One animal sacrifice they are going to choose for themselves and they're going to dress the animal, they are going to kill the animal, they are going to dress it, and they are going to put it on the altar with wood. And they are going to call on Baal from heaven to bring fire down and consume this sacrifice and the altar and everything as a sign from out of heaven as to who is God. If they call on Baal and Baal does it, then Baal is god." He says, "But then after they get through with their sacrifice," Elijah said, "I'm going to take my sacrifice, dress it, sacrifice the animal, and put it up on the altar. I'm going to put it on an altar of stone. And I am going to take four barrels of water and I'm going to pour over the sacrifice in a trench all the way around the sacrifice." He is going to pour water in, and he did it three times, so that that altar and that sacrifice was soaked. There is no there is any trick of a fire starting mystically through deceit. And so, then Elijah, he calls out and he says, "Lord God, let it be known that you are the God of Israel." And the fire of the Lord fell down upon the sacrifice, consumed everything, the sacrifice, the altar, everything around there. And the people proclaimed that Yahweh was God. He's the God of Israel. He is the true and living God. And so, they took the prophets out and killed them because they were now false prophets. But it is interesting this authorization where God from heaven, not through any human beings, but God from heaven brought fire down to give authorization as to who He is at the direction of Elijah.

Now, the New Testament we also have an authorization, Matthew 3:16-17, "And Jesus, when He was baptized, by John the Baptist, came up immediately out of the water: and, behold, the heavens were opened unto Him, and John saw the Spirit of God descending as if a dove, and lighting (or coming) upon Him." This was something that John was told would happen that would be an indication that Jesus is the one who's been chosen to be the Messiah. But then in

verse 17 it says, "And behold a voice from out of heaven, said, 'This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.'" A voice from out of heaven. Not through people, but directly from out of heaven. God giving authorization as to who His Son is. So, we have the two kinds of signs and wonders from God and from Satan, and directly from heaven.

Now in verse 2. Verses 2 and 3, The Contradiction. They asked for a sign from out of heaven, now you know what they're asking for. They are asking for authorization. They are asking for God to directly perform a miracle from out of heaven in order to authorize Him to be the Messiah. Jesus said, **And having answered, He said into them, "When it becomes Evening, you say, 'Good weather,' for the sky is red. And in the morning, you say, 'Today a winter storm is coming,' for the sky is red being overcast. You hypocrites!"** And again, He wasn't calling them names. The word *hypocrite* is actually a theatrical term that means *to answer according to the script*. He says, "All you do is answer according to the script, the religious script. There's no reality or life in you." He says, **"Hypocrites! You indeed know how to discern the face of the sky, but you are not able to discern the signs of the times."** In those days prophets were also called *seers* and they could tell the weather, as well as prophesy about the things of God. So, he says, "Well, you have the ability to discern what the weather is going to be like, but you seemingly have no ability to discern the signs of the times. You are totally blind to that."

So, then He says in verse 4 about their condition, **"A wicked (literally, *an evil*) and adulterous generation seeks after a sign."** Be careful what you seek after. Mark chapter 16 tells us that Jesus talked about signs following believers, which they did in Jesus' day and after Jesus rose from the dead and the Holy Spirit was given, signs followed believers to verify and confirm that what they were preaching was the truth. But it is interesting that Jesus is talking about following after signs, not signs following you. "An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign." That is true today. As I said earlier, they even have conventions on teaching people how to perform signs and wonders so that you can go out and do it. And Jesus said, **"And a sign will not be given to it, except the sign of Jonah the prophet." And after having left them He went away.**

The only sign that Jesus is going to give is the sign of Jonah the prophet, when Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the whale, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. How is that a sign? When Jesus rose up from the dead, it wasn't through a person. No one came and laid hands on the tomb to have Jesus raised from the dead. God raised Him from the dead. That's what makes the resurrection of Jesus Christ God's authorization, His approval as to who Jesus is, because God raised Him from the dead. It didn't involve people. It was the authorization of God Himself.

So, in closing, let me just say that legitimate signs and wonders that are performed by God's Spirit are done to reveal and confirm the testimony of Christ, in fact, Christ Himself. To reveal Christ, especially to nonbelievers. A physical manifestation that God gave to do that. There is no longer a need to confirm that. We have all the confirmation we need. We have a book full of signs and wonders that give both the confirmation and the authorization about who Jesus is. So, there's no longer a need.

In fact, it tells us, II Corinthians 5:7, Paul says, "We are those who live by faith, not by sight." Faith and sight are opposites, and there are people who are chasing signs and wonders in order to see things, in order to experience things, stimulations. People today are being taken in by the signs and wonders movement, and many will be deceived by a false spirit performing signs.

Remember we said earlier from II Thessalonians chapter 2 is that God will give people over to signs and wonders performed by the antichrist because they rejected the love of the truth. I say all these things to you, it makes everything cut and dried, it is either by God's Spirit or it's not by God's Spirit. It is either directly from God or it's not. And with that we can discern between the various miracles and the various signs and the various wonders movement that's going on, as we compare it to Scripture. Just so you understand Scripture, why the Jews held for both confirmation signs and authorization signs, and how they tried to fit Jesus into this mold. And they were right. They based it all on the Old Testament Scriptures. They said, "In the Old Testament this is how it happened, so that's how we judge things," and they tried to make Jesus a messenger of Satan, rather than a messenger of God. They didn't deny the miracles, they just attributed them to be of the devil, rather than to be from God.

Let's close in prayer.