

# G.O.A.T. (Matthew 12:38-50)

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Date: 10 October 2021

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[ 0 : 00 ] Matthew chapter 12, verse 38 to 15. So, then some of the Pharisees and teachers of the law said to him, Teacher, we want to see a sign from you.

He answered, A wicked and adulterous generation asks for a sign, but none will be given it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.

The men of Nineveh will stand up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it. So they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and now something greater than Jonah is here.

The Queen of the South will rise at the judgment with this generation and condemn it. For she came from the ends of the earth to listen to Solomon's wisdom, and now something greater than Solomon is here.

When an impure spirit comes out of a person, it goes through arid places seeking rest and does not find it. Then it says, I will return to the house I left.

[ 1 : 01 ] When it arrives, it finds the house unoccupied, swept clean, and put in order. Then it goes and takes with it seven other spirits, more wicked than itself, and they go in and live there. And the final condition of that person is worse than the first.

That is how it will be with this wicked generation. While Jesus was still talking to the crowd, his mother and brothers stood outside wanting to speak to him. Someone told him, Your mother and brothers are standing outside wanting to speak to you.

He replied to him, Who is my mother and who are my brothers? Pointing to his disciples, he said, Here are my mother and my brothers. For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother.

So this is the word of the Lord. And thanks be to God. And thank you too, Matthew, for sharing your testimony. It's great to continue praying with you.

Yeah. Right. We're about to hear from God's word as I try and explain this and apply it to our lives. But would you pray that God would help us as we listen to him?

[ 2 : 10 ] Our Father in heaven, we thank you for your word. And we thank you for Jesus, a greater prophet, a greater king, who gives us greater deliverance from all other demons that we face in our life.

And ultimately knits us together into a family, as we've just heard, that spans different churches, even time zones. As we all sit now to listen to your word, would you be with us?

Give us sharp minds to hear from you and then to do what your word says to us. I pray all these things in Jesus' name. Amen. Right, everyone.

I'm going to type a phrase in the chat. And I want you to reply with the first thing that comes to your head, okay? It comes to mind. So it is four letters and it is goat.

Cheap. Okay. Interesting. All right. Let me try again. Yes. Jensen, you got it right. Greatest of all time. I'll try again. Who comes to mind when I say goat?

[ 3 : 22 ] Greatest of all time. Jesus. Oh, that's the nice Bible answer. Well, when Olympic champion Simone Biles unveiled her 2020 gymnastics costume, what she actually did was she embroidered a little goat on the side of a leotard.

I wonder if you know why. That was actually her very humbly saying that she was the greatest of all time. Some of you might be ballers.

And when LeBron James tattooed a chosen one on his back, he was doing something similar, right? He was inking into his very skin a sign of greatness to announce that he was a goat, the greatest of all time.

I wonder what kinds of signs of greatness you and I have seen or dabbled in over seven, eight weeks of lockdown.

Maybe it's carefully curated stories of your life to show how great you are. Maybe it's putting together a CV of your best work or achievements.

[ 4 : 29 ] Maybe it's all your Insta-worthy lockdown food shops. Or maybe you're the opposite. Maybe you've got that Asian humility, right? So we don't put ourselves up.

We don't tell others that we're very great. And yet we long to latch onto someone else's greatness. Maybe you've been spending lockdown tasting victory and greatness as a gamer on the winning team.

Maybe you've been finding a slice of success by buying up designer labels, right? Sharing in their glory. Or maybe it's all those TV shows you've been visioning because you just want to be a little bit closer to all the greatness that you see on film.

And our passage, I think we want to ask, as we see this passage that Matthew read, how does Jesus demonstrate greatness? If he got a tattoo on his back, what would it say?

How would he show his greatness? This past term, we've looked closely at Matthew chapter 8 to 12, haven't we? We've seen Jesus's early ministry from all kinds of different angles, different people.

[ 5 : 41 ] In our series, we've even had different preachers to help us explain these stories. And what we've seen is that we've seen Jesus preach the gospel, heal the sick. He's calmed storms.

He's loved lost and outcast people. And he has confronted those who are unrepentant. The Father delights in him. The Spirit empowers him to bring, as we heard last week, a kingdom of gentleness and justice.

And as we come to the end of chapter 12 and the end of our series, this term through going deeper into following Jesus, I think the theme that rises to the surface from these three sections is Jesus's claim to be something greater.

I want to be noticed when we heard the passage twice in our passage, Jesus announced that something greater is here. Greater than Jonah, 41. Greater than Solomon, 42.

And so today, all I want to do is point out three signs of greatness from the Lord Jesus. Three signs of greatness from the Lord Jesus. I think in our passage, we see him claim to be a greater prophet and king.

[ 6 : 52 ] We see him offer a greater deliverance. And we see him point to a greater family. Those are the three points today. Greater prophet and king, greater deliverance, and a greater family if you want to follow along.

So keep your Bibles open. We're going to look through this together. I think first we see in this passage that in Jesus, there is a greater prophet and king for God's people.

In Jesus, there is a greater prophet and king for God's people. I mean, who was Jesus talking to here? We need to ask that question, right? Otherwise, we'll be confused.

And the answer comes in verse 38. It says here, then some of the Pharisees and teachers of the law said to him, teacher, we want to see a miraculous sign from you.

But we need to remember what the Pharisees said last time, what they were up to. Remember how last week we heard as a crowd was sincerely wondering, is Jesus really the son of David, the king we've been waiting for?

[ 7 : 51 ] What did the Pharisees? What did the Pharisees do but accuse Jesus of being on team Satan? And in doing so, they blasphemed. They spoke against the Holy Spirit's work.

And their hurtful words about Jesus means, actually, Jesus warned them. They were in danger of not being forgiven on the day of judgment. And yet here, they now ask, show us a miracle, Jesus. Are they genuine? Jesus knows their hearts. He already knows that, actually, that's probably not a genuine request. After all, actually, we've already heard in verse 14 of chapter 12, that they'd already decided to kill him.

So this is not a sincere request. And because it's not a sincere request, Jesus' reply is firm and harsh. What does he say? He says, a wicked and adulterous generation asks for a miraculous sign. None will be given except the sign of Jonah. You see, the religious rulers demanding a sign. Well, that's actually a sign itself of their hard, wayward hearts.

[ 9 : 04 ] Jesus knows this. And so he's not going to give him another miracle for them to just throw it back at him. He will, though, throw one bone at him. He points them to Jonah.

Now, if there was ever a goat, right, greatest of all time prophet, it would have been Jonah to the Jewish people. Okay. He was one of the Jewish people's most beloved prophets, a true patriot, some might say.

Jesus says that here, he says, just like Jonah spent three days buried in the belly of a fish. So the son of man, that's a reference to himself, is going to spend three days and nights in the heart of the earth.

The Pharisees may think that Jonah is the best prophet. But actually, Jesus says there's something even greater. The one sign of greatness that even the Pharisees will see one day is Jesus's own death and resurrection.

Just like Jonah went down into the belly of the fish and up again. Jesus is going to go down into the earth, buried and raise again, be risen again on the third day. Even here in the first half of Matthew's gospel, can you see Jesus has made a claim to the climax of his story?

[10:18] The greatest sign of who Jesus really is, what kind of king he will be, we see at the cross, his death on the cross. We see at the empty tomb where he is raised from the dead three days later.

Make no mistake, his rescue plan for sinners is the sign of true, true greatness. Notice 2 and verse 41, that actually when he speaks about Jonah's story, he's actually throwing shade on the Pharisees themselves.

He's actually kind of shaming them and their reputation because he says, even the Ninevites repented. Remember, we heard from Jonah's story last year, some of you who remember, right? We preached through Jonah over two sermons. And remember how I shared, if you were a loyal Israelite, okay, like Jonah, you hated the Ninevites, okay?

They were part of the invading forces, all right? A good Israelite would hate the Ninevites. And so actually for Jesus to compare the Pharisees to unclean outsiders was to offend them.

[11:30] This is not polite conversation Jesus is throwing here. And remember, too, when we were in Jonah, how he actually only preached five lousy words. And then the whole city repented, right?

The Ninevites, they turned around, they repented at so little. And Jesus is saying, imagine though, if they could hear and see what Jesus did today, preaching with authority, healing the sick, casting out demons, forgiving sins.

They would have surely repented at even more. And yet the Pharisees, they see all this, yet refuse to repent, refuse to acknowledge that Jesus is Lord.

Jesus is saying to them, look, these outsiders are doing far better than you guys. And they would have recognized who the greater prophet was. And there's a similar theme, a similar thing that he does here in verse 42 as well.

Here he says, the queen of the south would have recognized me. Here he's referring to an account in the book of One Kings. And in One Kings, set during the time when Solomon was the king of Israel.

[12:42] When the queen of Sheba heard about the fame of Solomon and his relationship to the Lord, she comes from a far country to test his wisdom. And in One Kings 10 verse 9, after seeing all of the earthly splendor, she says to Solomon, praise be to the Lord your God, who was delighted in you.

And place you on the throne of Israel because of the Lord's eternal love for Israel. He has made you king to maintain justice and righteousness. That's high praise, right, from an outsider who recognized true greatness.

Who saw a king of justice and righteousness. And yet Jesus shames the Pharisees. He says, you think you're in the inner circle of power and prestige where you are?

How come the outsiders are seeing what you can't? Something greater than Jonah the prophet. Someone greater than King Solomon is walking among you right now.

Here is true greatness. If you have eyes to see and hearts willing to repent. That's what's going on here with Jesus. He is pointing to himself as a greater prophet and king.

[13:56] I think at this point we can learn a couple of things. I'll point out two. One is that how we read the Bible matters, doesn't it? Did you notice when Jesus reads the Old Testament, right?

You know, actually, you know, most of our Bibles, the Old Testament, he's actually always connecting it to the big picture of God's saving promises ultimately fulfilled in Christ.

You see, when the Pharisees and religious leaders read the Old Testament, all they could do, all they did was extract laws and rules and regulations and then build some more on top of them. Like we heard from Baia and Tuisco. Like, that's missing the point, says Jesus. I mean, hands up if you've ever heard the Jonah story like this. Don't run away like Jonah did. But go and do what Jonah does later. Right? Don't do this. Do that. Oh, yeah. There's a fish too. True. But incomplete.

[14:57] I think Jesus would say. Rather, if we have a biblical theology of the story of Jonah, we would recognize his big story. Right? Actually is a big signpost to a bigger prophet, Jesus.

And if Jesus himself reads the scriptures this way, so should we. We'd do no worse. We wouldn't be doing the worst thing if we followed his lead.

Children's author, Sally Lloyd-Jones, she puts it this way. Right? The Bible is first and foremost not a book of rules or a book of heroes. The Bible is most of all a story.

And at the center of that story is a baby. And every single story in the Bible whispers his name.

When we read our scriptures with the same glasses as our Lord Jesus, we will then see how the prophets and kings in the Old Testament should be read.

Yes, they have wisdom for life. Yet their story should ultimately point us to Jesus for something greater. There is a greater prophet and king in Jesus if we open our eyes to see clearly.

[16:06] And if this is who Jesus truly is, a greater prophet and king, even at this point in Matthew's gospel, how we respond to him matters, doesn't it?

Don't be the Pharisees. They knew their Bibles inside out, rules and regulations. And yet they refuse to see true greatness before them. Jesus, the Messiah, King of Kings, greater than Jonah, greater than Solomon.

If Jesus really is true greatness, he should have no rivals in our lives and our hearts. If he is true greatness, then our lives are only truly whole when we follow him.

So I wonder if you've ever asked through these past few months how deeply you have heard and seen Jesus as we've gone through Matthew's gospel.

Has he made you and I more compassionate, more gentle in those family relationships, extra hard right now because of lockdown pressures? Has he helped you and I to notice people on the fringes like Jesus has been doing all through Matthew's gospel?

[17:20] Do you look out for the quiet ones, the neurodiverse ones among us, those who have just gradually stopped coming to church? Do you and I cry out to him when we're desperate like all these other people that we've seen do the same when they met Jesus?

Well, have we just seen these stories and then gone, thanks, but no thanks. I'm going to gun it through life right now without his word, without his spirit driving me. But if Jesus is a greater prophet and king, then he deserves to rule over your quiet time, your work time, your family time, your screen time.

If you and I understand Jesus rightly, we should see in him a greater prophet and king for God's people. I think secondly, in our passage, we see that in Jesus, there is a greater deliverance by his spirit.

Let me read verse 43 onwards again. When an evil spirit comes out of a person that goes through arid places seeking rest and does not find it. Then it says, I will return to the house I left.

When it arrives, it finds a house unoccupied, swept clean and put in order. So then it goes and takes with it seven other spirits, more wicked than itself. And they go in and live there.

[18:46] And the final condition of that person is worse than the first. That's how it will be with this wicked generation. Now, this might seem like a bit of a confusing story to us.

Why is Jesus talking about evil spirits in this kind of story? The key here, the clue, I think that will help us unlock it is that remember how early in this chapter, Jesus, remember, was accused of driving out demons by Satan's power, right?

By the Pharisees. And in response, you can look at verse 27. You'll see Jesus replies to the Pharisees. And if I drive out demons by the Elzevub, i.e. the prince of demons, by whom do your people drive them out?

You see, Jesus is having a subtle dig at the Pharisees. They've been doing some demon casting too. Except when they do it, it sucks, right?

This is a subtle dig at the Pharisees' band-aid solution to the people's spiritual oppression. And the key difference is this. Because the Pharisees did not have God's spirit in them, right, it seems like

what Jesus is implying is that they would cast demons out only for them to come back seven times worse.

[ 20 : 01 ] And this is part of the course, right? The Pharisees would come up with laws and more laws. And so they create more joyless, lifeless, rule-keeping people. Right? The Pharisees would pray and fast and tithe in very legalistic ways.

And so it just turns out all kinds of two-faced hypocrites who lack mercy and goodness among God's people. I mean, imagine weeding your garden, right, without planting anything in its place. Imagine chasing flies out the door, now that summer's coming, and then you leave your window wide open. That is what the Pharisees' ministry was like, because it lacked the Holy Spirit's power. You see, all they did when they cast out spirits by their own authority was just to create space for something even worse, to bind these people again. All they could do when they call people to extra rules, to inconsistent and two-faced ways of living, was to just burden and oppress people in a sad and heartbreaking way.

But when Christ enters the scene, God's Spirit descends from heaven. Do you remember that at the baptism, right, in chapter 3?

[ 21 : 17 ] God's Spirit descends on the Lord Jesus. When Jesus heals and restores, He drives out demons. He has the Spirit of God in Him. He announces that God's kingdom is here to stay.

He can forgive sin. He can raise the dead to life. And when Jesus finally triumphs over all evil spirits and demons at the cross, He does not leave His children vulnerable to something worse.

No. When people cling to Him by faith, the Bible tells us they are sealed with the Holy Spirit, the very power of Christ Himself. What can we take away from this thought, this section?

One thing I want to suggest, and this may be a little bit controversial. One thing verse 43 to 45 suggests, I think, is that when we want to think about demon possession, right, we need to make clear demon possession cannot be an ongoing struggle for a true follower of Christ who has the Holy Spirit dwelling in them.

I want you to think about it this way. If Christ dwells in your hearts by faith, right, the Bible promises the Holy Spirit lives in you.

[ 22 : 32 ] And so actually your house, as it were, is already occupied. Verse 44, when we read that, we actually have to remind ourselves, well, in Christ, the Spirit dwells in you.

And the Holy Spirit does not do flatmates. Maybe you know someone who dabbles with active spiritual warfare, praying for deliverance and so on. I'm not saying that all of that is wrong.

But I am pointing out that I think this verse tells us, unless you believe the Holy Spirit leaves a believer's heart, and I don't think He does, I want to assure you that the Bible does not teach us to worry about a fellow brother or sister in Christ becoming demon possessed.

Rather, what your discouraged and anxious and depressed brother or sister needs right now is to remember and to pray for Christ to dwell in their hearts through faith, but to know that His Spirit is already in them to make that happen.

That is what Paul prays for. That is how he prays when you read the book of Ephesians, for example, if you remember. So let me say to you, if you're listening in, whatever struggle you're going through right now, whatever anxiety or hurt that you are wrestling with right now in lockdown, do not forget, if you are a child of God, if you are a Christian, the home of your heart is not unoccupied.

[ 23 : 59 ] You have the Holy Spirit in you to fight sin, to drive away doubt and despair. Please don't look at yourself without remembering Christ through His Spirit in you.

And with the Spirit in you, that's how we will produce fruits like love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, gentleness, goodness, faithfulness and self-control.

It is when we turn our eyes upon Jesus that the things of this world will look strangely dim. It is when we take up our cross daily and we follow Jesus by the Spirit that we experience true freedom. And I want to warn as well, those of you, maybe you're listening and maybe you're actually not a genuine follower of Jesus. Whether it's because you've yet to decide whether Jesus is worth following.

Maybe you call yourself a Christian, but you'd never admit it if your friends or family asked. Maybe Jesus is just a label you wear, not a master you follow. I want to be careful here.

[ 25 : 06 ] The God we worship is compassionate and tender. He is rich in mercy. But this story tells us that the more you deal with demons in your life with another authority rejecting Jesus, the worse

your final condition might be.

Right? That's what it says here. If you're turning to other saviors, your credit card, your good looks, your CV, your GPA, they cannot make you whole.

Only Jesus can. We've seen his strong and kind, his heart for you is full of compassion and love. I would plead with you, if you haven't yet, turn from your sin. Turn to Jesus while you still can. While there isn't a greater judgment for refusing the greater deliverance of Jesus through his spirit.

Right? He is a greater prophet and king. The way he delivers is so much greater and better. We dare not refuse him. And so how do we follow him?

[ 26 : 18 ] Does God give us to help us along the way? And I think on this, the last four verses of this chapter is beautiful, isn't it? Because it tells us Jesus, he provides us a greater family who do the father's will.

A greater family who do the father's will. That's what we have in Jesus. Verse 46 says, while Jesus was still talking to the crowd, his mother and brother stood outside wanting to speak to him.

And someone told him, your mother and brothers are standing outside wanting to speak to you.

None of the gospel writers tell us what Jesus' family wanted to speak to him about.

But I don't know. Maybe we can speculate. Maybe Jesus had been away from his Nazareth bubble a bit too long and they were a bit worried. Maybe they'd heard in horror how his disciples were eating like raw grain, you know, to be themselves so poor.

And they've come to tell him to eat more, eat more. Maybe they were just worried actually, because Jesus was stirring up opposition. And so, but whatever they want to do, they're here and they're concerned enough to want to speak to him directly.

[ 27 : 25 ] And yet what does Jesus say? Verse 48, he replied to him, who is my mother? And who are my brothers? You know, that sinking feeling when you're out with your friends at the movies and the phone rings and it's your mom or dad, you know, away, away.

Or that kind of crawl under your hoodie moment. I don't know. Maybe you're mid-game with your friends. And then the door opens behind you and you've been live streaming this. And your whole party hears, hey, it's dinner time.

Oh, man, who is my mother? It's pretty shocking that I hear that kind of, oh, from the son of God, right? Who is my mother? Who are my brothers?

Does he really mean to dismiss or to hate on his own flesh and blood? Surely not. I think to understand this, we want to read scripture with scripture. Actually, only two chapters later in Matthew 15, verse 3, Jesus actually scolds the Pharisees again.

It looks like they don't learn for not honoring their father and mother. And then we think about it. Jesus, the way he lived his own life, he honored his father and mother. Actually, Luke 2, verse 51 reminds us that Jesus was 12 years old and he actually went with Joseph and Mary when they found him at the temple.

[ 28 : 39 ] And it actually says in the scriptures, he was submissive to them. And some of you will know that at his dying breath, at the cross, John records in his gospel how Jesus actually provides for his mother by entrusting her to John's care.

Right? One of his last words, he says, behold your mother. So don't head off to dinner after this tonight thinking, oh, Jesus ghosted his parents, so I can too.

Jesus does not do away with a filial piety, respecting and honoring your parents. What he does do though, is that he makes a point that we all need to know, that every follower of Jesus must understand.

When we honor our earthly family, that fits within the broader and more important call to honor our spiritual family. Because that is what he does, right?

Verse 49, pointing to his disciples, he said, here are my mother and my brothers. Whoever does the will of my father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother.

[ 29 : 44 ] When Maria grew up, just change the name, she felt like an orphan. Because her childhood was filled with abuse, she grew up believing lies. Lies like, I'm not my parents' child.

I'm just an orphan. Or a lie like this, only the beautiful and clever I accepted. I'm not one of them. But then she met Christians at a local church.

Then a Christian neighbor, who was a friend of mine, invited her home and read Ephesians chapter 1 with her. And by the Spirit's work, God changed her view of herself overnight.

As she could then, in just a day or two's time, now say, I'm loved because of Jesus. I'm God's daughter because he chose me before the foundation of the world to be holy and bled before her. You see, for Maria, the church became the greater family she never had. When Joe decided to follow Jesus, his parents warned him, don't let it get in the way of your family.

[ 30 : 52 ] And so on Sundays, he would do this awkward balance. He would feel the silent judgment as he kind of slipped away from the family barbecue to join church or Bible study. Whenever Joe visited his grandfather's grave, he would watch awkwardly as his parents would just give him the glare as they made the offering.

I don't know what your story is, but because every family is different, your story will be different too. But all of us will face some level of pressure and tension between our earthly families and our spiritual families.

And Jesus, in this point, reminds us, reminds us, PCBC English, we have a greater family, a spiritual family. Our family here in Christ is a family of sinners, yes.

But in Christ, it can be a family. It should be a family where grace flows, where the weaker welcome, where we have and we discover brothers and sisters, mothers and fathers in the faith. And some of you might think, oh, that sounds really familiar, right? This view of church, right? Sounds very familiar in an Asian culture, full of aunties and uncles and so on. But again, we must not confuse earthly family for spiritual family.

[ 32 : 12 ] PCBC, Jesus is longing to gather something greater among us than just a collection of culturally comfortable Kiwi Asians. He wants to build in us a greater family, one that transcends bloodlines, languages, cultures, time zones, because we are first and foremost united in Christ.

Did you see what verse 50 said? Wherever God's people are gathered to do the Father's will, that is where you'll find a greater spiritual family.

And what is the Father's will for you and I? Of early in Matthew's gospel, he announces what his own thoughts are. Do you remember at his baptism, at Jesus' baptism, the Father, his voice from heaven says, this is my son whom I love.

I am delighted in him. And so if you delight in Jesus, you are doing the Father's will. And remember, earlier Matthew, chapter 11, 27, Jesus told us no one knows the Father except the Son, right? So we can look to Jesus to know what the Father's will is, what he's thinking. And so if the Son says, come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, that is the Father's will for us.

[ 33 : 26 ] If the Son says, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that is the Father's will for us. If the Son says, come follow me, that is the Father's will for you.

That's a choice that you and I make once again and again daily. We repent from our sins. We believe in the Lord Jesus. We die to ourselves and we rise again with Jesus.

Because there is no one greater. In him, there's a greater prophet and king for God's people. In him, we have a greater deliverance by God's spirit. And in him, we can have a greater family. United by more than life stage or skin color, passport, culture. United by faith in the life, death and resurrection of King Jesus.

So let us follow the King wherever he takes us. Will you pray with me? Lord Jesus, time and time again through this series, you have painted before us a picture of your greatness.

[ 34 : 36 ] And most clearly at the cross. And with the cross before us. With the world behind us. We wish to follow you.

And go deeper into that. Help us by your spirit. To follow you with our true spiritual family. And not turn back. In Jesus' name we pray.

Amen.