

# SIGNS

**Acts 2:22-33**

**April 11, 2004**

**Bethany Church**

**Wesley J. Gabel**

Up until Congress passed the Highway Beautification Act in 1965 that banned many road signs, you often saw clever signs on roadways. One store built an international reputation with them. It began when a druggist and his wife moved to an isolated South Dakota town believing God was leading them. They thought they would give the store 5 years. However, five years nearly had passed and things still looked grim. On a hot and lonely day in the store, Dorothy Hustead received a sudden inspiration. She urged her husband Ted to put up a road sign advertising free ice water. By the time he had finished, customers started to come. Soon they not only gave out free ice water. They also gave out free signs to post wherever. At one point, there were signs in every state and dozens of nations like France, England, Germany, Kenya and Vietnam. Embarrassed by the crowds and little to offer beyond a drugstore, Bill, the Hustead's son, added entertainment. Thousands flock there each day, and the store now employs a third of the local residents. If every resident in Wall, South Dakota booked a local hotel room, some 400 rooms would still be vacant. The road to God's blessing for that community began with a single couple's faith in Christ, and then their gifts of free water and signs.

If the Hustead's were motivated to reach out to people, how much more is God? Do you think God puts out signs for you and me? Some years ago, some major newspapers refused to run this cartoon. Johnny Hart's character from BC asks:

*Are you listening, God?  
 Faith is knowing you're not just talking to a rock.  
 It's not easy to believe in you, God... We never see you.  
 How come you never show yourself?  
 How do we know you even exist...  
 I give up!  
 Every time I bring up this subject, all we get is interruptions!*

That little character missed the obvious, didn't he? Jesus once made that point to very religious people. They were missing God's signs. He told the story of a beggar named Lazarus and a rich man who lived in opulent luxury. Lazarus sat at the gate of the rich man's property and begged for help. Lazarus longed to eat even the crumbs that fell to the ground at the rich man's feasts. Instead, dogs came and licked the beggar's sores. When they died, the beggar was comforted but the rich man suffered great torment. The rich man cried out for relief, but Jesus said that none would come. When the rich man learned that there was no escape, he asked Abraham to send Lazarus to his family and warn them. Abraham told him that his family had Moses and the prophets to listen to, but the rich man argued that they would certainly repent if a dead man appeared to them. Abraham responded:

***If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.*** (Luke 16:31, NIV)

Jesus was telling us that God was erecting signs along our path. If we ignore them, we ignore them. More signs won't catch our attention or make us believe.

On Easter all Jerusalem was confronted with a sign: an empty tomb. Mary Magdalene saw the empty tomb and wept at the sight wondering who took Jesus' body (John 20:1-15). Men walking to Emmaus hung their heads in confusion and discussed the matter (Luke 24:13-27). Soldiers and Jewish leaders charged the disciples with theft (Matthew 28:11-15). Thomas, a disciple of Jesus, saw and heard it all, yet would not believe (John 20:24-28).

***Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe it.*** (John 20:25, NIV)

The sign of an empty tomb was missed by most. What signs are you missing? What are you doing about God's signs? Are you reading Moses and the prophets or do you feel they have little to say to you? Do you know what God says through his apostles or is it too much reading? Is the Bible too big of a sign to read? Have you like some Pharisees and scribes been reading the Bible and placing God in a historical box so that you can not see him signaling you today?

The Greek term for signs is peppered throughout the New Testament, occurring at least 62 times. Listen to what Peter said about signs and Easter.

***Men of Israel, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know. This man was handed over to you by God's set purpose and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross. But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him.*** (Acts 2:22-24, NIV)

Peter spoke of a God who is far more eager to be known than we are to know him. Peter witnessed to a God who sent Jesus with miracles, wonders and signs so that people would understand who sent him and receive the gifts that God had been waiting to give. This God had another great sign. Jesus called it the sign of Jonah because Jonah was as good as dead for three days. The prophet was buried in the belly of a large fish. Instead of a fish, God handed Jesus over to people, people to whom he had given dominion. This would be their hour when darkness reigned. They in their wickedness and with God's foreknowledge put Jesus to death. They nailed him to a cross, and he experienced the agony of death. However, God raised Jesus from the dead. He no longer was numbered with those who had died. He no longer could be numbered with Abraham and Moses, David and Daniel. He could not be numbered with

grandpas and grandmas, uncles and aunts, people we love who have fallen asleep. He was raised from the ranks of the dead.

Peter not only tells us that Jesus was raised from the dead, but he also tells us why. He says, ***“It was impossible for death to keep its hold on him.”*** Why was it impossible? Why could death not keep its hold on Jesus? One reason. Death had no right to keep him. It had no sin to claim him. It had no way to curse him. Jesus was put to death carrying the judgment of our sins; and when he died, our sins were judged. What could claim him then? God rightfully raised him to life, and now at the proper time, God will rightfully raise from the curse of death all, both the living and the dead, whose sins were judged with Jesus. Whose sins were judged with Jesus? Who no longer needs to fear death?

When an earthquake moved the stone blocking Jesus’ tomb, a door opened to us. Not just a door! There are many doors. People go through many doors looking for fulfillment and help. Some believe a career door will give them fulfillment. Some pour their life into family believing that is the way. Some seek money, power or prestige. There’s a mantra: when I do this, achieve this or get this, then I will be fulfilled. Some try those doors and find them locked. Others enter through them, see the deception and quickly retreat. There are religious doors where people seek the favor of God. They try religious ritual, religious service or just good deeds. They work for approval. However, the door of life swung open to the human family when the stone rolled aside from Jesus’ grave. God was signaling to all humanity that Jesus is the door to life.

The Apostle John wrote:

***And this is what God has testified: He has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. So whoever has God's Son has life; whoever does not have his Son does not have life. I write this to you who believe in the Son of God, so that you may know you have eternal life.*** (1 John 5:11-13, NLT)

John wrote that God spoke to humanity, that God revealed both his gift of eternal life and how we can receive it. Life is in Jesus. If you have Jesus, you have life. If you don't, you are on the wrong side of the door. John wrote that because God wants you to know that. He doesn't want you guessing. He doesn't want you walking through life wondering if you are loved, forgiven or accepted. God wants you to know if you have Jesus, you have life; and that settles it.

Who has Jesus? Well, it's quite simple. He's the door. You have Jesus when you leave the other doors and go to him alone. You can't enter two doors at once because they are not aligned that way. You have to choose between doors. You can rely on your own goodness, your own effort, your own religious thinking, you can try those doors; or you can rely on Jesus. They are different doors and put you in different places. Jesus said:

***Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.*** (Matthew 7:13-14, NIV)

Why is that true? The gate and road to destruction are wide because there are so many doors that lead there. The road to life is so narrow because only one stone rolled away, only one man was sent, only one man died and was raised to life for you. Only one man carried your sin and died your death. He's the door.

Have you seen God's signs and followed them to life? Or will Easter come and go with you trying other doors? Whatever the hurt or whatever the hunger, there is one door, one way, one truth and one life. See the stone rolled away. It's God's sign to you.