

Well, last week, we sort of finished our series on the Gospel of Mark, but not really... You see, we finished what we understand to be what **Mark** wrote, but there's an additional ending to the Gospel of Mark, which is bit of a summary of **other** accounts of what happened (following the resurrection), and the sending out of the church on mission... And, we really only brushed over it (last week)...

And, even though the place of Vs9-20 are in dispute, as to whether they belong in the Canon (the official Bible) or not, I said last week, "I do see it as Scripture", because:

- it's a record of witnesses to the resurrection of Jesus; and
- much of the Early church, saw it as authoritative; and
- most of it, is simply a summary of what we read in **other** places of the Bible...

So today, we're going to talk about "Signs" – **Spiritual** signs. And I reckon it's important we do this because sometimes this ending of Mark gets used as a basis for a whole theology of having an expectation of signs and wonders, for **every** Christian, in their every-day Christian life... - And basically, some people use it to justify their expectation of having "Signs on demand"...

So, up on the screen there, are some pictures of QLD road signs. Alright, so I think it would be fair to say, "These signs are found on Queensland roads." ... True???

One of my favourite signs there, has a white background, a red circle, and the number 110 in black writing, inside the

*circle... That would have to be my favourite Qld road sign...
Is that anybody else's favourite sign???*

*... Now, if these are Queensland road signs, and the street
that I live in, Barlee Street (in St George QLD), is a Qld road,
then should I expect to see these QLD road signs on my street,
Hey????*

*Especially my favourite sign - should I expect, to see a
110km/h road sign on my street... No??? How come??? I
mean, it's a QLD road. Why can't I have the sign???*

*And in fact, out of all of those Qld road signs, I think the only
2 road signs, that **are** on my street, are 2 of my **least-favourite**
signs – a Stop sign, and a Give-way sign ... There's no:*

- *Start of Motorway sign;*
- *Transit Lane*
- *Wrong way go back;*
- *Bike lane*
- *There's not even a roundabout sign...*

*In fact, you won't find a roundabout sign anywhere in the
whole of St George...*

You see, whilst these **are** signs of Queensland roads, Not all
roads will have every sign, and in fact, many roads in
Queensland have no road signs at all...

And I want to use this, as an analogy for Spiritual signs...

When it comes to Signs & wonders; and Gifts of the Spirit,
and workings of the Spirit, there are two common errors that

we can fall into, and of course they've gotta be opposites of each other, haven't they – they always are....:

Imagine, if you lived out on an obscure country road somewhere, and the road that you regularly travelled, had no Qld road signs on it at all... And imagine, if from your experience, you came to the conclusion "I've never seen any road signs – they mustn't make them anymore." And in fact, your neighbour agreed with you, and he told you, "No, of course they don't have signs anymore – but I do know, that in some places, they have false signs – and you've gotta watch out for them – they're trying to trick you..."

But then imagine, that your travels take you onto a different road, and you see a road sign, that you'd heard about, and seen pictures of, but you just hadn't seen it before... What would you conclude? Would you conclude, "They don't use road-signs anymore – that sign must be a false sign." It's saying "Wrong way! Go back!" – it's trying to trick me..." Because it's a false sign...

Now, that's a bit of a silly illustration, but that's exactly how some people view **spiritual** signs and wonders:

Some people have had no personal experience of Spiritual signs and wonders, and so they've come to the conclusion, that there **are** no Spiritual signs – these things mustn't exist anymore... And in fact, other Christians have told them – "No, they don't exist anymore – but watch out for false signs – anything that looks like a sign these days, is from the devil..."

That's one extreme... - to believe that the age of signs has passed, and to conclude that anything that looks like a spiritual sign today, is a false-sign, from Satan...

But the other extreme, is the exact opposite – *It's where we become so captivated by signs, and so fixated on signs, that we want to see signs wherever we go...*

- *I want a 110km/hr sign on my street*
- *Start of Motorway sign*
- *Bike lane sign...*

It's like, some people want to see so many signs, we can never drive down the road on high beam, because we get blinded...

And some folk are like that with Spiritual signs... They expect that they should be able to see whatever sign they want to see, and that **all** signs, should follow **all** Christians... But that misses the whole point of signs...

So, what do we learn from today's Bible reading?

1. Firstly, just as this additional ending to the Gospel of Mark, is a summary of resurrection events, it's also a summary of the signs that the Early Church would (and did) witness... In fact, I think there is only **one** sign here, that **isn't** mentioned in the book of Acts... In the Book of Acts, there are examples:

- Cast out demons;
- Spoke in languages they had never learned;
- They laid their hands on the sick, and they were healed;
- On the Island of Malta, Paul was bitten by a snake, and all the islanders expected him to die a horrible death, but it never affected him;

In fact, the only sign mentioned here (that I can't think of a New Testament example of), is the drinking of deadly poison and not getting sick... But that doesn't at all mean, that it didn't happen...

But the point is, this is a summary of the signs, that would accompany those who believe... It is not a promise that every believer would experience (or even get to see) every (or any) signs...

2. Secondly, signs accompany believers – Signs, are **not** there to convince us to believe – they accompany disciples of Jesus who **already** believe.

A lot of people will say, “Just show me a miraculous sign, and then I'll believe...” No they won't... In fact, Jesus said “...**An evil and adulterous generation seeks a sign**”, but the only sign that's going to be given to unbelievers, was His own resurrection... And that's already been...

You see, they're generally not “signs that lead to belief”, but “signs that accompany believers”...

3. Thirdly, these signs are done in the Name of Jesus... Their purpose isn't simply

- so we can live longer; or
- have a nicer life; or
- so we can feel good about having an amazing supernatural experience of God...

They're done in the Name of Jesus – they're not only done **by** Him – they're done **for** Him.

Jesus said: **in my name they will cast out demons;**

Alright, Evil is overcome in the Name of Jesus – In the Name of Jesus, people are set free from their captivity to Satan... That's a sign...

He said: **they will speak in new tongues;** I once had a discussion with Pentecostal about the gift of speaking in other languages... And He insisted, that it didn't say that "**some** will speak in new tongues", and so he believed that (contrary to what we read elsewhere in the New Testament), every single Christian is given that particular gift... And my response to Him was, "It also says that they will pick up serpents, and they will drink deadly poison"... - how are you going with those???

But you see, the fact is: some people **are** given the gift of speaking in a language that they've never learned,, but we should never expect that everybody will have that same gift... In fact, there's only one example in the New Testament of someone surviving a snake-bite... We don't all have the same gift...

These are signs – done in the Name of Jesus, and we don't get to decide how these signs come about – that's the work of the Holy Spirit...

4. Fourthly, Spiritual signs accompany the preaching of the Gospel... V²⁰ And they went out and preached everywhere, while the Lord worked with them and confirmed the message by accompanying signs.

You see, in the New Testament, most examples of these Spiritual Signs (that I can think of), occurred when they were taking the Gospel (preaching the good news), to a people who hadn't heard it... - They were preaching the Gospel, and the message was being confirmed, by the signs that accompanied it...

And yet, in most churches that I've been into (who are seeking signs) (and who make a 'big deal' about being a ministry of signs and wonders),,, it's not at all about taking the Gospel out into the world and onto the streets – it's not at all about confirming the Gospel message,,,, because that's not where the signs are occurring – it's usually set up as some kind of “'in-house' spiritual benefit / experience”....

Spiritual signs confirm the message of the Gospel, as it's preached out into the world...

I actually suspect, that one of the reasons that so few of us see or experience authentic Spiritual Signs any more, is because

we're not preaching the Gospel out into the world... We're **not** preaching everywhere... And so there's no message for the Lord to confirm, with His accompanying signs...

And I **also** suspect, and I'm very sad that I have to say this,,, that a lot of the signs, that are proclaimed as signs and wonders in churches today, are not authentic at all...

For some, they're so desperate to see a sign, or experience a sign (and they expect it every week) – they are so desperate, that they quickly proclaim that something's a sign or a miracle, when it's not at all...

- I know a bloke, who, if he prays for somebody who has a cold, and 3 days later the cold is mostly gone, he proclaims it as a miracle of healing – God's healed this person...
- Someone once tried to teach me to speak in tongues ... I knew it wasn't of God – I knew I was just making meaningless noises... But they were certain that this was a Gift of God, and I was speaking in tongues... I knew I wasn't... I don't have that gift...

I don't have any intention of picking up snakes (that's what a .410 shot gun is for), and I don't have any intention of drinking deadly poison...

We shouldn't be seeking signs... Jesus describes those who seek signs as “evil and adulterous”. Our calling, is not to seek signs, but to believe, and to **preach**...

But occasionally, God chooses to use signs, to His glory... I do **not** believe that the age of signs and miracles has passed... But that doesn't mean we have the right, to expect signs upon our demand...

But,,,, when in the sovereignty of God, He does His amazing work, and He chooses to provide a sign (In the Name of Jesus), to His glory, then let us give all glory and praise to God...

I believe, our task, is to be discerning... Back in Mark 13, Jesus warned us: **²² For false christs and false prophets will arise and perform signs and wonders, to lead astray, if possible, the elect.** And He said: **Be on guard.....**

But the problem is, sometimes we become so wary of **false** signs, that we fail to give God glory, for **authentic** signs... Authentic spiritual signs are so few and far between, that we don't expect "authentic signs" any more, and so we fail to give God glory, when they come...

Spiritual signs accompany the preaching of the Gospel... And if that is in the DNA of our church – if that reflects our mission and our practice – if preaching the Gospel out into the

world, is what we do,,,, let's Give God the glory, when the message we preach, is confirmed by accompanying signs...

- Not signs that we attempt to contrive
- not a show that we've set up
- not a carefully scripted and planned bit of spontaneity....

But the Holy Spirit, unexpectedly doing what the Holy Spirit does, to the glory of Jesus Christ...

Let's give God glory for that...

Now we've finished the Gospel of Mark.

ⁱ Matthew 12:39