

Follow the Signs

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When I was a teenager, my dad took a job working for Hitachi Medical Corporation. He traveled the country installing MRI machines. From Maine to California, his work took him all over the country. He even had a project in Katy, Texas, and visited this congregation! I was always amazed at how he traveled. Often alone, he had to navigate big cities and off-the-beaten-path country communities. I asked him once about how he was able to travel to unknown places. He told me, "Follow the signs."

The Gospel of John is a book of signs. A sign is a miracle. These events were moments in which God by Jesus intervened into time and space. Each sign revealed some aspect of Jesus and what He wanted to give believers. In the following article, we will consider the meaning of the signs of Jesus.

About Signs...

1. Signs give direction. Signs point seekers and travelers in a specific direction. They can redirect if we are on the wrong course. They also can reassure us that we are on the correct course. The signs in the Gospel of John direct readers. They point us to new creation by faith in Jesus.

Each sign conveys important aspects of the new life God wants to give us through Jesus. Depending on how they are counted, there are six or seven signs noted in the first twelve chapters of John. The reason for the discrepancy in number is found in chapter six. Some combine the feeding of the 5,000 and Jesus walking on water since they are part of the same event. Regardless of how they are categorized, the signs of the Gospel of John direct us to the sign of all signs: the cross. The signs of the Gospel of John are...

Changing water into wine: John 2:1-11.

Healing the royal official's son: John 4:46-54

Healing the paralytic: John 5:1-15

Feeding the 5000/Jesus walking on water: John 6

Healing the blind man: John 9:1-7

The raising Lazarus from the dead: John 11:1-45

2. Signs are representative. We recently took a trip home to Ohio. The drive was long: 1,322 miles. When we finally got to the state line there was a large sign that read, "Welcome to Ohio." When the boys saw the sign they got very excited. Why? Was their excitement due to the color of the sign or the font of the letters? Of course, not. They were excited because of what the sign represented. For the boys, the sign represented being with their grandparents!

Jesus' signs are representative of greater blessings He wants us to experience. For example, after miraculously turning water into wine, John wrote, "This, the first of his signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and manifested his glory. And his disciples believed in him" (John 2:11). This joyous wedding reception was not the summation of what Jesus wanted those present to experience. Sharing in the glory of Jesus was but a representation of something greater to be shared eternally by obeying Jesus presently.

3. Signs cannot be ignored. Signs are fixed and communicate facts. If we ignore them, we can get lost or even hurt. No one disputed the signs of Jesus. They were undeniable evidence of the power of God. Regarding the signs of Jesus, Nicodemus expressed the consensus of his colleagues: "...Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him" (John 3:2).

When Jesus gave sight to a blind man on the Sabbath, some criticized Jesus. However, the signs could not be ignored: "Some of the Pharisees said, "This man is not from God, for he does not keep the Sabbath." But others said, "How can a man who is a sinner do such signs?" And there was a division among them" (John 9:16). Later, when Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, the chief priests and Pharisees said, "...What are we to do? For this man performs many signs" (John 11:47).

The signs of Jesus demanded attention. Witnesses of Jesus' miracles could not continue to live as if they had not saw the signs. Yet, some ignored the signs. Readers can almost hear the sadness in John when he wrote, "Though he had done so many signs before them, they still did not believe in him" (John 12:37).

4. Signs lead to life. The signs Jesus performed were intended to produce faith in those who witnessed them. Some believed because of the signs: "Now when he was in Jerusalem at the Passover Feast, many believed in his name when they saw the signs that he was doing" (John 2:23). However, the signs of Jesus were not just posted for those who saw them.

John documented the signs of Jesus for the sake of faith being produced in those who read: "Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name" (John 20:30-31). If we believe, the signs will lead us to life.

Conclusion

When we read the signs of Jesus, how will we respond? Will we ignore them and chart another course? Or, will we follow the signs? The signs lead to new creation. The signs lead to life. They show us the joy and goodness God wants us to experience by believing in Jesus. God wants us to share in His glory. God wants us to become signs, pointing those who are lost to Jesus.