

Xplore Signs

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[0 : 00] This is the evening service of Holy Trinity on the 27th of July 2003. The preacher is Steve Brown. His sermon is entitled Explore Signs and is based on Matthew chapter 16 verses 1 to 4.

Well, my first date with Melissa was spent trying to interpret the signs. I rang her up and asked her to go to the movies and she said yes, that was a good sign.

Then she said, can I bring two friends along? Not so good sign. I put on a brave face and said, sure, who are they?

Matt and Victor. Really bad sign. I got to the theatre and I met Matt and Victor and they were really nice guys and they were just friends from uni.

That was a good sign. Mel wouldn't let me pay for her ticket. Bad sign. But she sat next to me in the cinema. Good sign. I decided that I needed a sure sign.

[1 : 23] So I decided to test her by holding her hand. So my hand slowly moved over the arm of the chair and grabbed onto her hand.

And she didn't pull away, which was the final sign. That was the clincher. And we got married two and a half years later. You see, it can be hard to read the signs.

Sometimes you need a test to get that final sign. That final clincher. I don't know if you've been on a first date before.

Some of you here are probably a little bit too young to have done that. That's a good thing because they're terrifying. The entire first date is an exercise in trying to interpret the signs.

Now, girls who have been on first dates, you'll know how it is. The entire time you're trying to figure out whether this is a genuine date or whether he's just being friendly.

[2 : 24] You know, was he just yawning or attempting to put his arm around me? Or was he complimenting me when he said, Your hair looks different tonight. Was he being nice and letting me win air hockey?

Or was he just uncoordinated? You see, it's hard to read the signs, isn't it? Sometimes you need a final test, girls. Like not offering to pay for anything.

That's a good test. And if he pays, and that's the clincher sign that you've been looking for, he really likes you. You guys, you know how it is too, don't you?

Is she bored or interested in me when she's quiet? Was she really cold? Or did she just want to wear my jacket to show that she likes me?

Does she think I'm a wimp because she beat me at air hockey? You see, it's hard to read the signs, isn't it? Sometimes you need a final test, guys.

[3 : 26] Like asking her to go to the footy. Even when you know she doesn't like the football. If she says yes, then that's the clincher sign that you've been looking for.

For the Pharisees and the Sadducees, it was a bit like a first date, wasn't it? Listen to this. The Pharisees and Sadducees came to Jesus and tested him by asking him to show them a sign from heaven.

You see, they found it really hard to read the signs when it came to Jesus. They couldn't figure him out. Was he their long-awaited saviour?

The one to save them from the Roman occupation of their land? Was he the servant God had promised to send? The one to serve God properly?

The one that would help them to serve God properly? Was he their Messiah? The one God had promised that would fulfill all their expectations and all of his promises to his people?

[4 : 30] Was he their king? The one to rule over them and the entire world? All nations? You see, they still hadn't found what they were looking for.

They found it hard to read the signs when it came to Jesus. So they go for the clincher. A sign that will for once and all prove whether Jesus is their saviour or whether he's an enemy. A sign that will prove once and for all whether Jesus is sent from God or just a false prophet. A sign that will prove once and for all whether Jesus is the Messiah or just another would-be leader. A sign that will prove once and for all whether Jesus is their king or just another upstart troublemaker. So they go for the clincher. They want Jesus to show them a sign from heaven. Today, for us, we find it hard to read the signs when it comes to God. When we're trying to work out God, we feel like we're on a first date sometimes.

[5 : 43] Some of us, we're not sure whether he's really there at all, whether he exists. So we want a big sign to prove that he exists.

Maybe him popping out of the sky. He's saying, I'm here. For some of us, we're not sure whether he really cares about us. So we want a big sign to prove that he cares.

Maybe we want to experience a miraculous healing in our lives or in the lives of people that we know to show that he cares. For some of us, we're not sure that he's interested in the hassles that we go through every day.

So we want a big sign that proves that he's interested in us, in our troubles. Maybe the next day you'll go to work and all your troubles will be gone.

That might be the sign. For us, we're not sure sometimes whether God actually wants to share our lives. So we want a big sign from him to prove that he wants to share them with us.

[6 : 51] For us, trying to figure out God is sometimes like being on a first date. So we, today, you and me, we go for the clincher, the sign that will prove beyond all doubt.

And we ask God for some sort of sign from heaven to prove himself. Just like the Sadducees and the Pharisees did.

Take a listen to what Jesus says about those type of people. He replied, When evening comes, you say, It will be fair weather, for the sky is red.

And in the morning, Today it will be stormy, for the sky is red and overcast. You know how to interpret the appearance of the sky, but you cannot interpret the signs of the times.

When I was a kid, I was about eight or nine, and my dad had a boat. And it was a great boat. It was a Quintrex five-metre fishing boat.

[7 : 50] Aluminium. And the great thing about Quintrex aluminium fishing boats is that they're virtually impossible to sink, which is a good thing in a boat. It had everything we needed for fishing.

It had rod holders, it had the stainless steel bait board at the back that we'd cut everything up on. It had a centre console so that we could fish right around the boat. You didn't need it.

The point is, it was a good boat. Dad and I would go out every weekend on Port Phillip Bay with this boat, this Quintrex, to go chase after the snapper.

And Dad taught me a very important rhyme for fishermen. Every fisherman knows this. Most people actually know this rhyme. And it says, Red sky at night, a sailor's delight. Red sky at morning, sailor take warning.

So every evening and morning before we went out fishing, I would go outside and I'd look up at the sky for a sign. And in the evening, if the sky was red, it was a good sign.

[8 : 58] It was obvious that we were going to go fishing the next day. In the morning, if the sky was red, it was a bad sign. It was obvious that we probably weren't going to risk it, even in our Quintrex unsinkable five metre aluminium boat.

See, just by looking at the signs in the sky, I was able to, as a child, to interpret whether it was going to be good fishing or not. You see, for the Sadducees and the Pharisees, it should have been that easy.

They didn't have to test Jesus. They didn't have to ask for a clincher sign from him. They didn't have to ask for a sign from heaven.

Because they had already, he had already shown them many signs to show them who he was. It should have been obvious. It should have been as obvious as Bruce, in Bruce Almighty.

I don't know if you've seen the movie. It's a good one. Go see it. Bruce is a pretty self-reliant type of guy. He gets by through life by himself, and he attempts to get a promotion at work by working really hard, but it fails.

[10 : 13] And in fact, he loses his job. He attempts to make his marriage better, but that fails. His wife separates from him because of his obsession with his work.

He attempts to toilet train his dog, which I've tried to do, and he fails. And his sadistic dog pees all over his furniture.

You see, at this point, Bruce is not sure whether God exists. His faith in God is at its lowest at this low point in his life.

He doubts that God cares. He's not sure that God is even interested in him, interested in his work, and his marriage, and even his dog. He's not sure whether God wants to share in his life.

And at this lowest point, when he's really desperate, he asks God for a sign. He starts asking God for a clincher.

[11 : 17] And as he's driving along, he starts to pray to God, show me a sign, please God, show me a sign, anything, just help me out of this mess. And at that moment, a truck pulls out, and in the back of the truck, there's hundreds of signs, all pointing towards him, road signs, with written on it, on these signs, caution, beware, stop, go back.

And Bruce keeps praying, show me a sign, please God, show me a sign, anything, just get me out of this mess. And at that moment, he passes one of those big electronic billboards on the side of the road, which flashes, caution, beware, stop, go back.

But Bruce keeps praying, show me a sign, please God, show me a sign, anything, just help me out of this mess. And at that moment, bang, he smashes his car, a door light pole, he jumps out of his car in a rage, and starts abusing God.

You don't care, you're not listening to me, you're doing a lousy job, God. And at that moment, his pager on his hip goes off, and starts beeping, and he grabs it in a fit of anger, and he reads the number, and it says, 1, 2, 3, 7, 7, 7, 7, ring this number.

1, 2, 3, 7, 7, 7, ring this number. It's obvious that God is calling him, and he looks at it, and he says this, I don't know you, and I wouldn't call you if I did.

[12 : 51] And he throws it away. Bruce misses the obvious. There are enough signs around to show him that God cared, that God existed, that God was interested in him, that he wanted to help, that he wanted to share in his life.

It should have been obvious. You see, for the Sadducees and the Pharisees, it should have been obvious. They didn't have to test Jesus. They didn't have to ask for a clincher.

They didn't have to ask for a sign from heaven, because there are signs enough, all around. We just have to look at the previous two chapters, in Matthew, chapter 14 and 15, to see what Jesus has been doing.

He's fed 5,000 and 4,000 people, without any provisions, to show that he is the great provider, that he cares. He's walked on water, to show that he's in control over nature, that he's the creator, of this world.

He's healed all the sick, to show that he's the great healer, that he's intimately involved in people's lives, and healing their lives. He's cast out demons, to show that he's victorious, over all his enemies, that he is the great king, who rules, his universe.

[14 : 19] It's just like Bruce Almighty, the Sadducees, and the Pharisees, miss the obvious. There are signs all over the place, but they're blind.

How can you ask, for a sign from heaven, when there are signs, all around? In essence, what they're doing, is they're saying, well they're looking at their pager, aren't they?

They're looking at the sign, at these signs, and they're saying, I don't know you. I wouldn't call you, if I did. And they're throwing it away.

You see, today when we go looking for signs, we're missing the obvious too. When we go looking for miracles, and healings, and visitations, from angels, or, weeping statues of Mary, whatever, we go looking for in our lives, day to day, we miss the obvious.

Verse 4, a wicked and adulterous generation, looks for a miraculous sign, that none will be given it, except the sign of Jonah. Jesus then left them, and went away.

[15 : 35] You see, that's the clincher. That's the sign, the Sadducees, and the Pharisees, need to look for. That's the sign, that you and I, need to look for.

You see, just like Jonah, was in the whale, for three days, Jesus was dead, and buried in the grave, for three days. Just like Jonah, was spat out of the whale, onto the shore, after three days.

Jesus was raised, from the grave, to new life, after three days. see, that's the clincher's sign, that the Pharisees, and the Sadducees, should have been looking for.

Because that sign, that proved, that Jesus is, the long awaited saviour. That sign proved, beyond all doubt, that he's the servant God, had promised to send.

That sign, proved, that Jesus was their Messiah, our Messiah, our Messiah, proved, beyond all doubt, that Jesus was king, over all things.

[16 : 46] But the Sadducees, and the Pharisees, miss the obvious, when it happens. Just like, Bruce Almighty, missed, his signs.

They look at the pager, they read the number, they see the sign, but they say, I don't know you, and I wouldn't call you, if I did.

And they throw it away. Tonight, don't miss the sign. Don't miss the sign, of Jesus' resurrection, because it's the clincher, that proves to us, that God exists.

Because no one, raises the dead, except God. Don't miss the sign, of Jesus' resurrection, because it's the clincher, that proves that God, really cares about us.

You see, it's a sign, that God will surely, raise us from the dead, if we believe in Jesus. Don't miss the sign, of Jesus' resurrection, because it's the clincher, that proves, that God is interested, in our troubles.

[17 : 57] You see, the resurrection points, to a time, when we will be raised, to perfection. We will get to be with God, in heaven, in a perfect place, where there won't be, any more troubles anymore. God will wipe, every tear away.

Don't miss the sign, of the resurrection, because it's the clincher, that proves, that God wants to share, that God wants to share, in our lives. For whoever believes, in this sign, will be raised eternally, to be with God, intimately, sharing our lives, with him, forever.

Tonight, don't be like, the Sadducees, and the Pharisees. Don't be like Bruce. Don't miss the clincher. When it comes to the resurrection, of Jesus, don't look at your pager, and say, don't know you.

Wouldn't call you, if I did. And throw it away. Tonight, don't miss the sign. Don't miss the clincher. Amen.

Thank you. Thank you.

[19 : 35] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.