

THE GOSPEL OF MARK: WEEK 7

Galilee: "Of Miracles & Signs" – Mark 6:30-8:30

Commentary: "Signs, signs, everywhere are signs – and Wonders."

The phrase "*signs and wonders*" is repeated 12 times in the New Testament (20 more times in the OT) to describe the visible works of God in and through the Holy Spirit – they were literally 'signs' (tangible examples of God's grace, power, intervention) that created 'wonder' and awe that resulted in a response – typically joy; but also, often, fear.

In my heady days as an 'English Major', I was immersed in the tidal forces of language theory – most notably the mind-bending French theory of semiotics: the idea that tore words down to an almost atomic-level to the point that they were not just words but signs **AND** signifiers that, together, provide the meaning that is given to it – that it 'stands for'. Don't get me started.....! Suffice-it-to-say, many lost their way – truly unable to see the literal 'signs' warning them of the abyss they were heading toward. (But I digress.)

I mention this because, in many ways, this is what the writers of both the Old and New Testaments mean when they are referring to the 'signs' of God's work in the world and on behalf of the People of God. These 'signs' – actions, events, physical/visible symbols (pillar of fire/sand, manna, parting the Red Sea, multiplying loaves of bread and fish, even healing the deaf, blind, and lame) of God's power were not just acts committed to their own end: they were offered as 'guideposts' to point the world toward God and God's saving plan and purpose for His People. The problem – then, as it is now – is that the meaning of 'signs' (as every semiotic theorist knows), is left up to the individual: no sign has a 'universal' truth or meaning! One person's saving Cross is another person's stumbling block.

The many 'signs' that are recorded in the Bible were acts of love and compassion by a caring and loving 'Creator' toward His creation – they

were signs of God's power to save, provide, protect, and guide the People of God; yet, to the Egyptians – and, later, to the Temple Priests and Pharisees – these acts/signs were interpreted as acts of terror and violence, or as violations against God and God's laws. This is the root of the problem Jesus has with the religious authorities: His acts of God's grace and power, meant to point the lost toward God, were seen as by them as pointing people away from God. There's no clear answer, but, as with everything in the Gospel of Mark; they are given to us to get us to respond to them. But, this isn't the only problematic thing about "*signs and wonders*."

In many ways God's "*signs and wonders*" served a purpose – and still do. First, they helped to validate and endorse God's messenger – Moses' authority as God's messenger was made clear through the 'signs' that God did in and through him; it was the same for Isaiah, Jonah, including

Jesus and the disciples. Next, the signs were not just part of God's message – they were the message. And, third, they served as a foretaste of the promised, coming kingdom. But, as we read in our reading this week, even Jesus knew that they served a limited purpose – and that there will always people who can't read the signs.... Not everyone has eyes to see or ears to hear what God is offering to them – even when it was Jesus doing to offering!

The other, more modern problem with "*signs and wonders*" is they lose their power – the wonder fades, needing bigger 'signs' –

and those who need these 'fixes' to boost their faith grow restless, demanding more; asking 'what have you done for us lately?' "*Signs and wonders*" are a complicated, double-edged sword!

In the end, I choose to see "*signs and wonders*" – miracles – as being the works of God which, rather than going against the natural order of things, work toward restoring God's creation by undoing the world's brokenness. And, this, is something God is still doing in and through – and all around – us every day; all we have to do is look! As the song says, the "signs, signs, are everywhere – can't you see the signs?"

Signs and Wonders

Signs and wonders are different ways of talking about miracles. 'Signs' point beyond themselves to a greater meaning, concept, or purpose. In the Bible, 'signs' are the miraculous works of God that point to who He is and is doing in the world.

*'Wonder' are similar to signs, but have a different emphasis. A 'sign' appeals to the understanding; a 'wonder' appeals to the imagination. 'Sign' emphasizes **what** the miracle proves and 'wonder' emphasizes **how** the miracle inspires worship.*

(Source: Seth Troutt; <https://gateway.redemptionaz.com/how-should-we-be-thinking-about-signs-and-wonders-today/>)