

I want to start with a little highway code re-training for the drivers in the room. We recently had cause to need to run through this in our house so I think a bit of civic duty here at Hope City is a good thing. I'm going to use the international best seller

When you see a sign like this what is it doing? Rectangles = inform. What about this [TRIANGLE] = warning. Some may be upside to catch your eye. What about this one? [ROUND black] – an order – and if it's red it is something you MUST NOT do. OK final one to pass your driving theory test, what does this one indicate? [BUS LANE]

Yes that's right Bus Lane, which you would think is one of the easiest identify and easiest to abide by because it's also printed on the road itself too so there's really no way you can miss it, right? WRONG. Here is our car in said bus lane in contravention of Transport Scotland Act 2001. Now it's probably as well that we can't actually see who the driver is and I wonder if they deliberately blur the driver to save embarrassment and perhaps marriages. But nonetheless this is our car and we're going to say that we're not totally sure who was driving at this time – could have been either myself or my wife Becky but either way it's a painful £50 fine.

The point about a bus lane sign and every other sign is that it's telling you something. A sign isn't a piece art that you enjoy looking at it's always about something else, pointing to something else, telling you look for something else. You don't need to just see the sign, you need you take it in, understand it and act or you'll miss the information it's trying to give you – in my case how to avoid a £50 fine for being in a bus lane.

We've been inching our way through an eye witness account of the life of Jesus written by a first century Jewish accountant called Matthew. And Matthew makes a big deal of the importance of signs.

He fills his account of Jesus life with story after story about the signs that show us that Jesus, is more than just a good natured, Jewish carpenter and travelling teacher, but that he is the fulfilment of promises made by God hundreds of years before that God will one day come and enter his creation to being to redeem and restore it from its brokenness, to fix that which otherwise cannot be fixed. And that this Jesus is that promised one, the chosen one, the Messiah, God himself entering into creation to put it right.

And this section is written to us as a warning. That there are signs all through Matthew's account with information for us, critical information. And whether we follow Jesus or not, these cannot be ignored. They must be read and responded to – we must take action because these are the most important signs there could ever be because these signs point to matters of eternal significance.

Read these signs right and we can be welcomed into God's family. Ignore these signs and you will find yourself on a path towards being shut out of his presence forever.

So let's get into today's section

READING Matthew 16:1-12

Up till here in his account Jesus has been doing amazing stuff - miracles. But these aren't just impressive marks of his power, they point to something. Healing the sick, raising the dead, feeding crowds of thousands from crumbs aren't just demonstrating Jesus greatness although of course they do that. These miracles are signs, they are pointers – pointing back to promises made in earlier parts of the bible and point to who Jesus is and how we should respond to him.

And in Matthew's account Jesus warns 2 groups of people who are making mistakes in reading these signs, both groups are getting it wrong so we need to pay attention and learn from their mistakes.

DON'T IGNORE THE SIGNS v1-4

V1 *The Pharisees and Sadducees came to Jesus and tested him by asking him to show them a sign from heaven.* On first reading this might seem quite a reasonable situation. Jesus has been waves in 1st C Judea, people travelling for days just to catch a glimpse of him. People hanging so intently on his every word they forget to eat – we're talking beyond even Taylor Swift levels of super stardom here.

So the Jewish leaders of the day the Pharisees and Saducees, might quite reasonably ask for a sign. But some the details here that tell a different story. Firstly the Pharisees and the Saducees are the worst of enemies. They represent the 2 wings of ruling establishment of the day – the Sanhedrin. But these guys hate each other. And although they don't have much in common both groups prefer things the way they are and have no interest in a radical working class carpenters son turning the world upside with his crazy teaching.

It's not a million miles away from saying the story with *The Republicans and the Democrats came to Jesus and...* Immediately we're like *woah, what are those guys doing together!?* Our eyebrows go up, our radar goes up and that's exactly what Matthew wants when he says *Pharisees and Sadducees*.

So as they saying goes 'my enemies enemy is my friend' and they turn up and Matthew says they 'tested' him and the word there is 'testing with a view to breaking' it's stress testing, it's to challenge him, it's deliberately to catch him out.

And they ask for a sign. Now you might have a bit of biblical De-ja vu as Tom was talking about last week and you'd be right because they 've done this before back in Chapter 12. But this time they say a sign 'from heaven'. An undeniably divine sign.

So all that is to say Matthew wants us to get that this is not a genuine request. They've already asked the same thing before and they're coming to catch him. They want him to fail.

And so Jesus responds in kind to the nature of their request and repeats essentially 'red sky at night...' And then he rebukes them. *You can read complexity of the weather, you can see the subtlety of it red sky doesn't always mean rain, it depends when it comes.* The point he's making is that these are intelligent men capable of reading signs but that they cannot interpret the sign of the times.

The word 'cannot' mean total and utter refusal. These guys should be the experts in in the signs of the times – God's appearing on earth. They know the scriptures better than anyone, they should be able to see who Jesus is better than anyone but they have ignored the signs, they've seen the sign but refused to read it, refused to heed it, refused to see what it so clearly points to. Refused to see that God is at work, that God has come to restore his creation that this is the time of God's long promised appearing.

And Jesus says you now 'cannot' read the signs. What should be simple is now impossible for you to read these sign because you are so closed minded. They cannot, they will not see what is right in front of them. The very fact that they are asking for a sign shows they will be unable to interpret it even if Jesus does it.

You might think – Jesus just do it, right then and there and it will convince them. But Jesus knows their hearts, they CANNOT see the signs, they have close themselves to the possibility that Jesus is who he says and nothing can change their minds.

V4 A wicked and adulterous generation looks for a sign, but none will be given it except the sign of Jonah. Jesus calls them back to the sign he talked about in Matthew 12 - and doesn't even bother to explain it again here. But there he explains the sign of Jonah. If you've been to Sunday school in your youth you'll know the story of Jonah and the big fish where God rescues a drowning Jonah by sending a fish to swallow him and puke him back out on the beach 3 days later.

Jesus is saying not just that it's a true story, this actually happened but it was also pointing forward to something he himself would do, a foreshadowing of an even greater sign that Jesus himself would show.

The greatest sign, the sign to out sign all other signs, that in a few months Jesus submit himself willingly to death as Jonah did, but not spend time in a great fish as if he was dead like Jonah but actually be murdered and spend 3 days dead. And like Jonah who is unceremoniously spat out, Jesus walks right out of the grave in triumph – death defeated.

That's the sign of Jonah and there is no greater sign, no greater proof, no other sign from heaven that can be done that can demonstrate Jesus power and who he is.

Maybe you're not a Christian here today and you have said to yourself *if only God made it obvious I would believe. If only God would do something that couldn't be explained away.* Let me ask you, what more can he do?

How about God creates a world so incredible, so unbelievably complex and beautiful that even a child knows deep down that it takes something more than atoms, electrons and chemicals to explain the world around us.

How about over 2000 years God gives individuals and groups of people promises about what he's going to do, that he will one day come to enter his creation and gives hundreds of signs to look for so you'll know when this is taking place. How about these promises and signs to look for are written down for us in place that we can easily read them and that they hang together with a level coordination over thousand years that would be simply impossible to fake.

How about then God enters his own creation in. He doesn't just write in the sky saying "hey it's me God", he condenses himself into a body in the humblest of circumstances and becomes one of us, walks among us, not keeping his distance, healing those who are sick, touching the unclean, feeding the hungry, just as he promised.

How about he fulfils over 300 of these signs promised hundreds of years before to crowds of witnesses.

How about when he's doing that he explains that the most crucial part of his plan to restore us and this world will mean him submitting to death, for us.

How about he proves everything he has said is true by rising back to life again

How about eye witnesses record his life, death and resurrection in minute detail from different angles so you can see all the evidence for yourself even though you weren't there.

How about God institutes a radical community of broken and messed up people unites across age groups, racial boundaries, socio economic groups, backgrounds, life circumstances, positions, likes and dislikes. Who gather in his name to celebrate what he's done in their lives and encourage each other to share that good news with others no matter the cost?

How about God does all that?

And you say "*Yeah yeah but I wanna see a sign from heaven*". There's signs everywhere, if you cannot read those signs, it's because you **will** not read the signs.

So if you don't know Jesus, raise your eyes from the dashboard to pay attention t the signs. Have you ever made any effort to look at the claims of Jesus?

Look at that little bit we passed over, see it there at the end of v4. *Jesus then left them and went away*. It's a scary little foretaste of what's to come. The bible makes it clear that there will be a day when there will be no more chances to respond to the signs. Time will be up and the consequences of our decisions about Jesus must be borne into eternity forever.

Don't be like the pharisees and Saducees, ignoring the signs. You're on the wrong path heading the wrong way, careering towards eternal darkness. Jesus is shouting at you through the pages of this book - **Don't ignore the signs**

Now in all honesty I think we decided it was most likely Becky driving on this particular occasion but I can admit that I've made this same mistake myself. But here it's one of those times that smugness brings with it the ability to be the bigger person. "*Don't worry it could happen to anyone – not me. It doesn't matter who it was – it was you and we both know it. No, no I'll deal with it for you.*

Then we went on holiday and it wasn't till we got back that Becky was like *did you pay the bus charge thing?* Now obviously I had failed to take action and now the charge was £150. So even if it was Becky driving, she got a £50 fine but it was me that took £100 fine for late payment so my mistake was twice as bad as hers!

Now If we're followers of Jesus we might be sitting there going – *phew I'm glad I've read the signs and recognised Jesus for who he is. I'm glad I'm not one of those pharisees who rejected those signs.*

Well don't crow too loudly because there's a warning here for followers of Jesus too. You might not have ignored the sign, but that's not enough. Like me and my letter, I saw the sign that there was a £50 fine but fail to take action and ended up worse than before.

Don't ignore the signs but Jesus also warns his followers

DON'T IGNORE The *sign*ificance v5-12. More briefly

Across the lake they go and Matthew points out some narrator insight that the disciples had forgotten bread. We don't know whether they have mentioned that out loud yet or even noticed but in some period of quiet, Jesus says "*Be careful, be on your guard against the yeast of the pharisees.*"

Now you can imagine the disciples nodding along sagely. *Yeah, good point, sure thing Jesus.* But they plainly don't have a clue what he means but no one wants to ask the stupid question everyone is thinking.

Either right then or a little later, Jesus is out of ear shot so they try to whisper to each other – *see the yeast thing, what was that about?* One of them pipes up *it'll be because we didn't bring any bread* and the rest go, *oh yeah that must be it. Cool.* Still not really understanding it at all.

Jesus is aware of this and says v8 *You of little faith, why are you talking among yourselves about having no bread? Do you still not understand?"*

Might seem harsh – little faith, do you still not understand, how is it you don't understand? In fairness to the disciples Jesus teaching is deep and can be a bit cryptic at times.

But notice what Jesus does next v9 *Don't you remember the five loaves for the five thousand, and how many basketfuls you gathered? Or the seven loaves for the four thousand, and how many basketfuls you gathered?*

*I can feed 5000 people from some crumbs, I feed 4000 from a couple of wee fish both with truckfuls of leftovers, do you think it matters if 12 of you forget lunch. 3 times the disciples have made this same mistake – Jesus we don't have enough bread, 5000 fed, Jesus we don't have any bread 4000 fed. Only 12 of them, Jesus we don't have bread. Jesus is like **GUYS I DON'T NEED YOUR BREAD.***

So what's going on here? the disciples are making a similar mistake to the pharisees. They can see Jesus is unique, they've left jobs and families to be near Jesus to learn and follow him. They've not ignored the signs but they've really followed what it points to.

If Jesus is God himself, the one who created the world from nothing but his words, can fashion bread from crumbs or nothing at all whenever he needs to. If you'd seen that, if you really got that, the only thing that matters is placing your trust in that person.

The only reasonable outcome of reading the signs of who Jesus is, is to place your trust in him. The fact that the disciples are arguing about bread shows they've failed to get it, failed to trust him. They've seen the signs but failed to see the significance.

What's the solution?

But he doesn't expect blind faith. He doesn't say you of little faith, just have faith, stop being silly, close your eyes, jump and cross your fingers it'll all work out. And perhaps I should pay attention and notice that Jesus doesn't preach them a sermon at them (too late for you).

He says remember, look back. He says park your faith on the solid ground of what you've seen and heard. Remember the taste of that bread I made, remember the weight of all those leftovers you lugged about. Put your faith there, rest it on something solid.

Friends I know that I'm in danger of making the same mistake as the disciples all the time. OK I've not ignored the signs, I've recognised who Jesus is but the busyness of life the concerns that swirl around me distract me and I live as though I've forgotten. Forgotten who Jesus is forgotten therefore to trust him.

I live as though this world and everything around me is what I need to cling to to get through life. I worry about bread, I perch my little tiny faith on the shaky ground of my career, my money, my reputation, my marriage, my family. Maybe for you its grades at school, getting to uni, getting a good job, the perfect body, perfect hair, excelling at your

interests, having an impact, leaving a legacy, political progress, justice, peace – all good things but not things that can I put my trust in and when I put my faith there it shrinks.

Does that sound familiar? Jesus says remember – what he's done for you, what he's done for those next to you. Celebrate what he's doing now in your life and those here. Remember. It's why we come to church week by week, it's why we celebrate communion together as we did last week.

Realign your faith back to the solid ground. Don't be little faith. Little faith is in your career – you'll retire one day, little faith in your health – you'll die like everyone else, little faith is in your bank balance – well we know that can be wiped out pretty quickly. These things are can't possibly hold the weight of your trust. It's not solid enough to balance your life upon, it's too small, too fragile.

Great faith is faith in the right thing. As the old hymn puts it – on Christ the solid rock I stand all other ground is WHAT? Sinking sand.

You of little faith, stop getting distracted by bread, stop putting your trust in things that won't support you. Remember, remember the solid rock, the cornerstone, the firm foundation. Remember remember remember. And if the guys next to you seem like their forgetting, then church remind your brothers and sisters!

This is one of the reasons we sing together. When I've forgotten what God is like, what he's done, I see you guys and my little faith moves back to where it should be, from the worries of this world to bedrock that is my creator and redeemer Jesus Christ who worthy to be praised. AMEN?!

Friends if you don't know Jesus, don't ignore the signs and if you know him don't ignore the sign-ificance but remember.