

Stop!

1 of 7 "Signs for the Summer" Rev. Michael J. Mattil

Show video clip of "Signs" by Five Man Electric Band

One of the protest songs from the early seventies leads us right into the series of sermons I have entitled "Signs for the Summer." There are several phrases from that song that speak right to this topic. I want you to consider with me how signs that we see all around us everyday can convey a message to us that God wants you to hear.

So often we find ourselves in situations where we would like to have a clear sign from God telling us what to do, but we don't see it. I'm not convinced that the signs are not there – I believe they are! They may not be as obvious or as easily understood as you would like them to be, but they are still there. I think we would like it to be just super plain and obvious, kind of like that billboard campaign a few years back with the messages from God:

- Let's meet at my house Sunday before the game. –God
- What part of "Thou Shalt Not..." didn't you understand? –God
- We need to talk. –God
- Tell the kids I love them. –God
- That "Love Thy Neighbor" thing ... I meant it. –God
- I love you, I love you, I love you. –God
- It's a small world. I know...I made it. –God

As I said, we'd like the signs from God to be plain and obvious, but I think we miss many of the signs God gives us because we are not paying attention. Here's what Jesus said in response to a request for signs:

Matthew 16:1-4 The Pharisees and Sadducees came to Jesus and tested him by asking him to show them a sign from heaven. 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. A wicked and adulterous generation looks for a miraculous sign, but none will be given it except the sign of Jonah." Jesus then left them and went away.

Jesus talked about signs. He almost sounds like the man in the song: **Can't you read the signs?** The signs Jesus spoke of were sometimes miraculous, sometimes not. He did some miraculous signs, like turning water into wine and healing people and even raising some from the dead. But there were signs that were ordinary, like being wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger. Jesus tells us there are signs of the times. He implies here that there are signs all around us that we do not see.

Maybe it is just a matter of paying attention. Like when you are **driving**. There are all kinds of signs that vie for your attention when you drive. You learn to look for the ones that tell you the rules of the road. But when it comes to life, we kind of feel like this: [**Sign that says “Caution No Warning signs”**]. You may feel that way, but it is not true. There are signs all around you, signs that you see everyday. Even if these signs are not sent directly from God, they can serve as reminders of what God has said to you in His Word. And we start today with one of the most common signs, one that is everywhere. **STOP!**

That sign is a warning and meant to keep you safe. When you see that sign, it tells you to be aware of what is happening around you and not to proceed until you are sure that it is safe. Shouldn't that be true of the way we live as followers of Jesus?

Too many people ignore the signs in their lives. Way too many people think they know better than what God tells us in His Word.

- They let greed and avarice control their actions, like a congressman with \$90,000 of payoff money in his freezer, or cheating people in financial dealings, selling inferior products and not standing behind what they sell, or scamming people with false promises. Stop! Don't tell yourself it is ok to act this way because everyone else is.
- Gossip and slander are rampant in our world. You might feel justified in knocking and being critical of someone who has treated you badly or who is obviously living outside of God's will. But you are just letting yourself get dragged down to his or her level, making yourself guilty by your unkind words. God tells you to STOP! That is not how He wants you to live. Luther reminds us in the catechism to speak well of your neighbor, defend him or her, and explain things in the best possible way.
- Too many people looking for happiness in sex outside of marriage, whether it is before marriage or an adulterous affair or just saying “we don't need to be married.” This is true for people of all ages. Cheryl and I both have people in our families who are living this way, even though they should know better. It is clearly outside of God's will. That is what Jesus told that woman at the well. Stop sinning!

I've hit a few of the commandments already (6, 7, and 8) and could go through every one of them this way. They all have a STOP SIGN for you to consider. God has a way he wants you to live. Go past a certain point and it is not safe for you. A stop sign can remind you to be aware of your spiritual surroundings and ask yourself whether or not it is safe to proceed! STOP can be a cue for you to remember who you are.

When we think about signs from God, we have to remember the clearest sign of all that He has given us is a cross that shows us the depth of God's love for you. The Father in heaven was willing to sacrifice His perfect Son to pay for your sins so that you could have forgiveness and eternal life. That is history. That has already been done for you. You have been brought to faith in Jesus by the power of the Holy Spirit, so you know this to be true. That sign of the cross, which we make on ourselves, is a reminder of the tremendous love of God.

There was a line in that song that I played at the start of this message that said, **"If God was here He'd tell you to your face, 'Man, you're some kinda sinner!'"** You know that is true for all of us. We have not lived up to what God would have us do. The **Stop Sign** can be your reminder to stop and be safe. Live according to the new life to which you have been called as a redeemed Child of God, a life that responds to the forgiveness and salvation you already have through Jesus.

This summer I encourage you to look at the signs around you and ask yourself, "How do these speak to my faith? Are these signs from God?" We'll speak about more of them over the next few months. But for now, think about this one. Remember that Jesus said things like "Stop Doubting, Stop judging, Stop grumbling, Stop Sinning." The stop sign tells you to look at your surroundings, be aware of what is going on around you, and remember who you are through faith in Jesus.