

#DONTMISSTHESIGNS | #PHJW | #ASBCSERMONSERIES



# DON'T MISS the Signs

MARCH 19/20

JOHN 5:9-18 NRSV

A SERMON SERIES BY REV. DR. HOWARD-JOHN WESLEY | @PastorHJW

Part 3



VILLAGE

@ASBC

MOVING FROM CROWD TO COMMUNITY

Sunday,  
Preacher:  
Sermon:

March 19/20, 2022  
Rev. Dr. Howard-John Wesley Don't  
Miss the Signs - Part 3

## CURRICULUM GUIDE





## Sermon Summary

As we enter this third week in Lent, Pastor Wesley takes up the third sign in the Gospel of John. As he has noted before, the Gospel of John is dramatically different from the other gospels. One instance of that difference is John's use of "signs" as opposed to miracles. While miracles might arrest our attention, signs are meant to reveal something about the identity and purpose of Jesus.

The third sign in John addresses the man, crippled for thirty-eight years, who is healed by Jesus beside the pool at Bethesda. Often, the preaching of this sermon points to the power of Jesus to heal us from all manner of dis-ease and to equip us to get up, take up and step up, moving beyond whatever binds us.

However, Pastor Wesley uses this text to identify a significant problem not with those who are lying beside pools in need of healing, but those who would encounter the healed and seek to continue to hold them down. Pastor Wesley focuses on the religious leaders in the story who want to kill Jesus, because they have missed the signs.

Why do the religious leaders in the text miss the signs? Further, why does our version of contemporary religion sometimes do the same; clouding, confusing and concealing the grace of God more than they reveal it?" Pastor Wesley suggests the ancient and contemporary church suffer from JDD, **Jesus Deficit Disorder** and points to four primary causes for this disorder.

Religion and misguided Christianity can:

1. Reduce the Bible to a handful of scriptures, missing the centrality of Jesus' message to love God, neighbor, and yourself.
2. Operate as a culture of condemnation and not celebration, ignoring the growth and progress present in a person's journey.
3. Force God into a box made by human thoughts, while ignoring the majesty, magnificence and mystery no human can ever grasp.
4. Overlook the fullness of God in the face of Jesus and therefore, miss the image of God in the face of others. This can allow religious people to injure others as they miss the image of God in them.

Don't miss the signs!

## KEY POINTS

1. The healing of the man at the pool of Bethesda occurs only in the Gospel of John.
2. In Hebrew, the word Bethesda is derived from two words, "beth el" "hesed" which mean house of mercy. In the text, the Pool of Bethesda was known as a place of healing.
3. Initially, the religious leaders were angry at the man for breaking the law of rest on the Sabbath because he was found carrying his mat. However, soon their ire turned to Jesus for healing the man on the Sabbath.
4. In this ancient text, the religious leaders adhere to some of the laws, but ignore others. In doing so, they pervert the law of love which Jesus came to fulfill and they are willing to kill him to maintain their limited understanding of God and the relationship of humanity to the law.
5. Contemporary religious leaders also may twist the law of Jesus by selectively applying some portions of the Bible, while ignoring others.
6. When we miss the signs and lose sight of what Jesus calls us to do, we fall prey to Mission Drift.

## Getting To Know You Questions:

1. In his opening prayer, Pastor Wesley asks that the power of the preached word rise above the frailty of his flesh. Just like everyone else, pastors are human beings. What prayer do you pray for Pastor Wesley, or any pastor, as she or he stands in human flesh to bring us the divine word of God?
2. As a child, or a new convert to Christianity, what was the first verse you learned? How has your concept of that verse and/or God changed since you first learned it?
3. Bethesda means house of mercy. Do you have a physical space where you go to find God's love, grace, and mercy?



# Into The Bible Questions:

1. Using John 3:16-17, Pastor Wesley focuses on Jesus' mission to save the world and not condemn it. When we move toward condemnation as our primary focus, Pastor Wesley suggests we are guilty of "mission drift". From your perspective, where has the church committed "mission drift"? Could you share one way the church can get back on track with the message and mission of Jesus Christ?
2. Matthew 22: 37-40 says, "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'" You will notice internal quotes around these two phrases. This is because Jesus is quoting Leviticus 19:18 and Deuteronomy 6:5, respectively. However, Jesus adds one new component to Leviticus 19:18, he adds loving God with your mind. Why do you think Jesus adds this way of loving God?
3. The Gospel of John begins with "In the beginning . . ." What other book of the Bible begins in this manner? Why do you think the writer of the Gospel of John uses a pattern so close to this other book?
4. Pastor Wesley notes that some translations of the Bible omit verse 4 from John 5 (e.g., The NIV and NRSV), while others include it (e.g., KJV). If we re-read the first six verses of John 5 with and without verse 4, how might it change your understanding of the text?





## Life Application Questions:

1. The religious leaders wanted to kill Jesus because he claimed to be the son of God. With this claim, Jesus broke open the small, limiting box that held their concept of God. Where in your own life have you locked God into a small, limited box?
  - a. Where have you locked God in a box when it comes to your neighbor?
  - b. What is one thing you can do today to break God out of the box in either case?
2. Pastor notes that not all people want to be healed. Do you believe this?
  - a. Why would someone not want to be healed?
  - b. If you know someone who is clinging to their dis-ease (either physical or otherwise), what might you pray for them?
3. Has institutionalized religion ever misinterpreted Jesus' mission, and gotten it wrong in your experience of the church? How did the moment land on you then? What have you learned since that experience which might now enable you to meet a similar situation differently?
  - a. Have you ever misinterpreted Jesus' mission and gotten it wrong? What have you learned that has helped you to operate differently?



4. One understanding of sin is “to miss the mark set for us by God.” In the Bible, there is no hierarchy of sin including healing on the Sabbath. No matter how we miss the mark, we sin. Jesus does not make grand theft more or less important than lying to your neighbor. How does this understanding of sin impact your thinking?
  - a. How might it change the way you go before God for forgiveness or pray for the forgiveness of others?
  
5. Pastor Wesley describes convenient sins as “...the ones I am not guilty of.” That seems to suggest that inconvenient sins are “...the ones that plague me regularly”. Without sharing your inconvenient sins, do you think God ever gets tired of your coming with that constant sin still on your back? Why, or why not?
  - a. How do you pray for yourself when those sins show up?





# "Can I Push It?"

1. Pastor Wesley says that God has more question marks than exclamation points. He also mentions the need for us to delve into the mystery of God instead of relying on our limited knowledge of God. Where does your definition of God have question marks, and exclamation points?
  - a. How would that impact the way you think about and represent God's mystery in the world?
  - b. How do you investigate those question marks?
  - c. How can you make room for God to surprise you this week?
2. Mission Drift is a thing in the institutional church. When you look at Alfred Street, or your own church, where have you seen Mission Drift? How might the church respond? If the church did respond positively and effectively, how would the church engage differently in the world?
3. While God's grace and mercy will forgive all unrighteousness, oftentimes consequences for past sin remain. How might the enemy use the stigma of public consequences to keep people locked in sin?
4. There are occasions when an individual confesses their sin but people in the church hold the individual's sin against them in perpetuity. What is the cost of such behavior on those who will not forgive? What is the cost of such behavior on the one who is not forgiven? How does this circumstance speak to the issue of Mission Drift in the church?





## Activity:

1. Draw the Circle Wider
  - a. What are your “go to” verses for strength?
  - b. Share your top three with the group.
  - c. Look for similarities and differences.
  - d. Expand your list of verses with the objective of drawing the circle wider for those who are accepted into the kingdom of God.
  
2. Pastor Wesley says, “Lazy religion always reduces the Bible down to a few verses.” How can we continue to expand our knowledge about the breadth and depth of the Bible, without being so overwhelmed that we give up learning? What practices have you used in your life?

## Spirit Work:

How can you expand your knowledge of scripture for the next forty days? Make a plan, implement it, and stick to it. Even reading one new verse a day is an improvement. If you have a chance, report back the fruits of this spirit work to your Village.



## ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS: MARRIED COUPLES

1. Pastor Wesley said that religion tends to look at what's wrong instead of what's right.
  - a. Share with your spouse an area where you have seen growth and are delighted to celebrate their progress.
  - b. Share with your spouse an area where you choose to offer forgiveness and to cover the issue with love, grace, and mercy and cast it into the sea of forgetfulness.
2. Have you ever written a mission statement for your marriage? If you have not, it is hard to know when you enter the territory of Mission Drift. Spend some time with your spouse completing this sentence, "Our marriage exists so that we might . . ." Do you have a plan to accomplish this?
  - a. Are you on track to accomplish this?
  - b. Is Mission Drift a challenge?
  - c. What might you do to get back on track for the mission for your marriage?

## ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS: YOUNG ADULTS

1. Pastor Wesley said that if you cannot see the fullness of God in Jesus Christ then you cannot see the image of God in people. Social media's 'expose' culture has a way of causing us to see what's wrong in others and not in ourselves. How can you see the image of God in people who have been 'exposed' on social media?
  - a. How does seeing ourselves and others in God's image change our perception and interaction on social media?
  
2. Have you ever written a mission statement for your life? If you have not, it is hard to know when you enter the territory of Mission Drift. Spend some time thinking about a mission statement for your life. Start by completing this sentence, "It is my desire to use my life to . . ." Do you have a plan to accomplish this?
  - a. Are you on track?
  
  - b. Is Mission Drift a challenge?
  
  - c. What might you do to get back on track for the mission for your life?



## ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS: PARENTS

1. Pastor Wesley says that religion tends to look at what's wrong instead of what's right. As a parent, sometimes it's hard to get everything right. How can you show yourself some love, grace, and mercy by focusing on what you've done right based on the knowledge and tools you had at the time?
  - a. How can you extend that same grace to your children?
  - b. If you co-parent, how can you extend grace?
2. Pastor Wesley says that "...everyone doesn't want to be healed or made well. Some people like living off mercy and pity. You've got to want what Jesus is offering." As parents, we are like Jesus, wanting what's best for our children? However, our children have to want what we are offering. How do you know when to allow your children to use their free will to make decisions?
  - a. When do you as a parent stand by and allow your children to make decisions, even when they may lead to negative consequences?
  - b. When and how do you intervene?
3. Pastor Wesley makes a point of saying the man who was unable to walk for thirty-eight years neither asks for Jesus' help or readily accepts it when it is offered. Instead, he makes excuses. Have you ever needed help, but found it difficult to ask for it?
  - a. Has help ever been extended and you found it difficult to accept?
  - b. If you accepted the help, and it was beneficial, how did you react?
  - c. If either of these scenarios is true for you, what did you learn from this experience?
  - d. What would you do differently if you were in that former position now, and help was offered?

## ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS: WOMEN

1. Pastor Wesley said that if you can't see the fullness of God in Jesus Christ then you can't see the image of God in people. Society and the entertainment industry loves pitting women against each other. Think of a woman that you have always seen in a negative light. How can you see the image of God in her? How does seeing her in that image change your perception and interaction with her?
2. The man at the pool of Bethesda had been there for thirty-eight years. That is a very long time to wait for healing. Have you waited for something in your life for what seemed like a long time? What does the story of the man at the pool say to you?
  - a. If what you awaited has been achieved, how well did you wait? What practices did you employ?
  - b. If it has not been achieved, how do you continue to wait in expectation? What practices will you employ?
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## ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS: MEN

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## ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS: RETURNING CITIZEN

1. Pastor Wesley references JDD, “Jesus Deficit Disorder”. How has the Church, or religion at large, misrepresented the message of the Gospel regarding Returning Citizens?
2. Is it possible for a Returning Citizen to truly be transformed during an incarceration experience?
  - a. What challenges could contribute to a saved, born-again Returning Citizen not having a successful reintegration into society?
  - b. What should the church's responsibility be to those challenges and barriers?
3. After Jesus has commanded you, a Returning Citizen, to “take up your a mat (past, pain, and mistakes) and walk”, how has the Church supported, or not supported you in that process?
4. What is the sign of the Image of God being revealed through a Returning Citizen?



## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

1. There are 613 laws in the Hebrew Bible. For more information, please refer to the following link: <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/the-613-mitzvot-commandments>
2. LinkedIn has defined Mission Drift. For more information, please see <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/mission-drift-what-does-mean-sudeep-mohandas>
3. How to Write a Personal Mission Statement. Several of the managers on staff with ASBC have participated in a class lead by member of the Stephen Covey organization. One of the sessions invited us to write a personal mission statement. The tool we used can be found here, <https://msb.franklincovey.com/missions/personal>
4. The Seven Signs noted in the Gospel of John are
  - a. Changing Water Into Wine (John 2:1-11)
  - b. Healing the Royal Official's Son (John 4:46-54)
  - c. Healing the paralytic at the pool (John 5:1-18)
  - d. Feeding over 5,000 with fish and loaves (John 6:1-14)
  - e. Walking on the water (John 6:15-25)
  - f. Healing a man born blind (John 9:1-41)
  - g. Raising Lazarus from the dead (John 11:1-46)