

“SIGNS OF LIFE”
 (John 3:1-2; Luke 12:32-34)
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**[PROPS NEEDED: Pictures of & from NASA’s “Viking”
 and “Opportunity” Spacecraft]**

[East Cobb U.M.C.; 10-23-11]

--I--

1. **[Traditional Service ONLY:]** Read Texts: John 3:1-2; Luke 12:32-34 and Pray.
2. **[SHOW PICTURES OF “VIKING”]** On July 20, 1976, the NASA spacecraft *Viking 1* touched down on the surface of the Mars, making it the first human object to successfully land on another planet.

A--For nearly four years, it carried out its primary mission of searching for evidence of life on the “Red Planet.”

B--And although it found no current life, it did find indications that Mars may have supported some kind of microb-level life in the past.¹

C--Since that time, eight other robotic orbiters, landers and rovers have reached Mars, including the highly successful rover “*Opportunity*”**[SHOW PICTURE OF “OPPORTUNITY”]**, which landed in 2004, and is still in operation today.²

D--And even though the results of these have likewise proven inconclusive,³ current plans are for even more missions to continue the search for past/present life on Mars, including the launch of the NASA rover “*Curiosity*” later this year, and a proposed mission in 2018 called “*Red Dragon*” to search for evidence of DNA molecules.⁴

3. Now, each of these missions went to Mars looking for what we often call “*Signs of Life*” – things like fossils or microbes that might indicate the presence of current or past life.

A--The medical profession here on earth uses a similar phrase:... during a hospital visit, patients are often hooked up to monitors that display what’s called “life signs”-- e.g., outward indicators (like heart-rate, blood pressure, and oxygen level) which measure how “alive” a patient is.

B--And my point is that if something is alive (or has ever *had* life), there will always be some kind of outward, noticeable indicator that points to that fact.

C-- Now, you’ve heard me say before that if something is “true for the body,” then it’s probably also “true for the soul”? Well, I believe a corollary for this is also valid: if it’s “true in the *physical* world,” then it probably also has a *spiritual* counterpart.

--II—

4. So that’s why the words we find in today’s two scriptures really shouldn’t surprise us.

A--In John 3, we find the religious leader Nicodemus talking to Jesus about the nature and meaning of salvation, and he begins by making the following statement...
 (Vs. 2:) *“Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do apart from the presence of God.”*

1--Now, in this passage the “*signs*” that Nicodemus was seeing and referring to that (to him) revealed God at work were Jesus’ healing miracles.

2--But I want you to notice his main point: he’s acknowledging that there are always “*signs*” (or, outward indicators / evidence) of the “*presence of God*” in a person’s life.

3--Now, we sometimes call these “*Fruit of the Spirit*” (Galatians 5:22-23) or “*Marks of a Christian*” (Romans 12:9-21), and there are undoubtedly many of them that we normally associate with “being a Christian” (such as practicing love, joy, peace, patience, gentleness, and humility).

B--But there’s one “*sign*”/ indicator of God’s presence in our lives that we often overlook (or that we perhaps conveniently *leave out!*), and it’s the one Jesus gives in today’s second scripture from Luke 22.

1--It’s in the middle of a passage where Jesus is responding to his Disciples who are worrying about the details of their lives -- what they will eat and wear, where they’ll sleep, and how they’ll make ends meet (sounds like today, huh?)

2--And so he responds to them in this way (Verses 32-34), *“Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions, and give alms. Make purses for yourselves that do not wear out, an unfailing treasure in heaven, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”*

5. Now, you may already know that the word “*treasure*” is a biblical metaphor *not* just for “money” and “finances,” but really for *anything* that we hold of value in life.

A--So what Jesus is saying here is that one way we reveal the nature / depth of our spiritual life *with God* is by what we do with the things that are of value to us...

1--...So that (for example) if we *say* we follow God, then that should reveal itself through how we spend our time, talents, and (yes) our money.

2--And if our use of these things *don’t* reveal a devotion to God, then they’ll instead uncover what our *real* priorities are.

3--If you don’t believe me, go look at your credit card and checking account statements; look at where your money went last month, and you’ll get an idea of your priorities: did it include payment on a house? a car? groceries? did it include *any* charitable gifts at all? if so, what percentage?

B--Now, think about what Jesus says in Verses 32-33 about “*selling our possessions*” -- Does he mean that if we’re Christian, we need to give everything away? No.

1--But he *is* saying, I think, that since God has given us “*the Kingdom*” (e.g., love, hope, and joy in Him), then we who claim to follow Him should live a life of generosity by sharing with others in need, to the extent of “*selling our possessions*,” if necessary, so that we *can* help others.

2--He’s saying here that the nature and passion of our *giving* demonstrates where our “heart” truly is -- it shows how “alive” we are in our faith, & is therefore one of the obvious indicators of a healthy spiritual life.

3--Giving, in other words, is one of the “*signs of life*” with God -- as Nicodemus put it, it’s a “*sign*” of “*the (active) presence of God*” at work in our lives.⁵

C--And to be honest, this is something I’ve seen over and over again in my ministry:...

1--Healthy, *spiritually growing Christians* tend to be generous givers to God’s church of their volunteer time/talents, as well as of their personal finances;

2--And I’ve noticed that the reverse has also been true: ...*pew-warmer Christians* (those who don’t really make attention to their spiritual life a priority) tend to be those who give little or nothing to the work of God’s kingdom through His church --...

3--... They may throw some bills in the offering basket/plate here or there, but it’s mostly the “left-overs” of their income, rather than a priority, and they’re thinking of it more as a “business transaction” than as a way to spiritually connect their heart to God.

D--Perhaps this is why, in the Bible, Jesus talks more about money and possessions than he does about love, prayer, & worship *combined*⁶-- he knew that our possessions are what keep most of us from truly full life in God, and that the only way to keep our money and possessions from possessing *us* is by learning to give them away.

--III--

6. So, let me wrap this up with an analogy & a question (please pardon its “corny-ness”)...

A--If a “spacecraft” from heaven landed on YOU, would your generosity and giving indicate “signs of (spiritual) life” with God? Or, like the Mars spacecraft, would the search for (spiritual) life be inconclusive?

B—Now, it’s true that “giving” is not the *only* sign of a healthy spiritual life. But according to Jesus in today’s text, you and I *cannot* have a healthy spiritual life *without* it, because *giving* is one of the “signs of life” in God.

C--So, based on what you *give* (of yourself, of your time and your money), how “alive” in God are you? Is generous giving one of the “signs” of *God’s* life in *yours*?

14. [PRAY]

ENDNOTES:

¹ Viking 1 landed July 20, 1976 and continued its mission until August 17, 1980. Viking 2 landed in September 1976 and continued its mission until April 1978 (www.wikipedia.org/wiki/Viking_1).

² The following orbiters have successfully reached Mars orbit from Earth: Mars Global Surveyor (Sept. 1997-Nov. 2006); Mars Odyssey (2001 - present); Mars Express (launched by the European Space Agency, 2003-present); and Mars Reconnaissance Orbiter (2006-present). In addition, the following NASA landers have successfully touched down: Mars Pathfinder Sojourner rover (July 1997-March 1998); Phoenix (May-November 2008); Spirit rover (Jan. 2004- March 2010); and Opportunity rovers (January 2004-present). For further information about these, see generally www.wikipedia.org/wiki/Exploration_of_Mars.

³ See generally the Wikipedia article “*Life on Mars*” at www.wikipedia.org/wiki/Life-on-Mars; Read also the 28 April 2010 article “*NASA: Evidence of Life on Mars*” at www.thesun.co.uk/sol/homepage/news/2951855/Nasa-Evidence-of-life-on-Mars.html, reporting the continuing results from the 2004 NASA rovers “*Spirit*” and “*Opportunity*.”

⁴ See generally www.wikipedia.org/wiki/Exploration_of_Mars for a “*Timeline of Mars Exploration*.”

⁵ A converse way of thinking of this in terms of local congregations is that a church’s *need* for finances is a “sign of life”, as well -- i.e., a church’s *need* for finances is evidence that it is “alive in Christ” (if it were declining or dying, it wouldn’t need money!).

⁶ 20% of **Error! Main Document Only**.the gospels, including 1 out of every 3 parables of Jesus, deals with stewardship of money and possessions.