

Signs, Wonders, and Mighty Deeds

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As most of you know, I grew up in the Church of God all of my life from birth and there is a statement I've heard most of my life that is well intentioned by the people who say it, but really misses the mark on being accurate. What I mean by that is, I've oftentimes heard the statement made in a wishful sense, saying if only we had the faith today of people back in Biblical times. We could witness all the fantastic miracles regularly in our life that we read about in the Bible. This is a well-intentioned notion, because people want to witness these miraculous events and see God's power, but often the thought in their mind is, if we could just build faith and get stronger and closer to God then we would be blessed with all of these miracles. In reality, if you study this subject in the Bible, what you'll find is the majority of the time it's the exact opposite. What I mean by that is, if we study the subject of miracles throughout the Bible and how God has used them, in the Old and New Testament, very often it was not the case that these were rewards for people's faith and how righteous they were and how close they were to God. In fact, it was typically the exact opposite. It was done to get the attention of the people who had no faith. Who would not believe God under any other circumstances. It was something done to get their attention and to make God's power real to them. Or to demonstrate to them—make it obvious—who God was working through and validate His message, to an audience who would not believe it under any other circumstance.

What we're going to do today is take a closer look at this subject of these miraculous miracles we see throughout the Bible. If you would like a title for this sermon it's

Signs, Wonder, and Mighty Deeds

We'll see later in this sermon that that's a direct quote from the book of 2 Corinthians. We'll get to that later today. To start off, we're going to begin with the story of Moses. As we're going to see, from the beginning of this subject, miracles weren't used as a reward for people's great faith or their righteousness, it was the exact opposite. It was to get the attention of those who had no faith and wouldn't believe under any other circumstance. Turn to Exodus 4; the account we're going to pick up is a part of the famous "burning bush" encounter where God appears to Moses in the burning bush and tells them,

"I have a job for you. I'm going to use you to lead the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt and to Mount Sinai to make a covenant and then lead them off to the Promised Land."

As part of this conversation, there's a point where Moses responds to God and says,

"No one is going to believe me. What if I go and tell them you've told me all of this and they just dismiss me as some nut making wild claims?"

Notice in Exodus 4:1.

Exodus 4:1 *Then Moses answered and said, "But suppose they will not believe me or listen to my voice; suppose they say, 'The LORD has not appeared to you.' " (NKJV)*

In other words, they are just going to dismiss me and say that he's just some crazy guy making wild claims. Notice how God deals with this.

- 2) *So the LORD said to him, "What is that in your hand?" He said, "A rod."*
- 3) *And He said, "Cast it on the ground." So he cast it on the ground, and it became a serpent; and Moses fled from it.*
- 4) *Then the LORD said to Moses, "Reach out your hand and take it by the tail" (and he reached out his hand and caught it, and it became a rod in his hand),*
- 5) *that they may believe that the LORD God of their fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has appeared to you."*
- 6) *Furthermore the LORD said to him, "Now put your hand in your bosom." And he put his hand in his bosom, and when he took it out, behold, his hand was leprous, like snow.*
- 7) *And He said, "Put your hand in your bosom again." So he put his hand in his bosom again, and drew it out of his bosom, and behold, it was restored like his other flesh.*
- 8) *Then it will be, if they do not believe you, nor heed the message of the first sign, that they may believe the message of the latter sign.*
- 9) *And it shall be, if they do not believe even these two signs, or listen to your voice, that you shall take water from the river and pour it on the dry land. The water which you take from the river will become blood on the dry land." (NKJV)*

God gives Moses basically these three miracles that he can perform and what this is, is to prove that he is for real. He's not just some crazy guy making wild claims and trying to get a following after himself. That God is legitimately working through him; that's the purpose here. It's not a reward for people's righteousness and faithful. It's the exact opposite. It's to get the attention of people who wouldn't believe under any other circumstances.

As the story goes, Moses then goes to the people of Israel—to the leaders—and tells them about this and presents the miracles and it accomplishes the intentions and purpose. Skip to verse 29 and we'll see this.

- 29) *Then Moses and Aaron went and gathered together all the elders of the children of Israel.*
- 30) *And Aaron spoke all the words which the LORD had spoken to Moses. Then he did the signs in the sight of the people. (NKJV)*

They didn't just say, God appeared to Moses and gave him these instructions. He then performs the miracles so they will take him seriously.

31) So the people believed; and when they heard that the LORD had visited the children of Israel and that He had looked on their affliction, then they bowed their heads and worshiped. (NKJV)

Now people started to believe him. As you can imagine, as this plays out with all the plagues on the Egyptians, a lot of miracles take place. So, the people see very graphic evidence. Even the parting of the Red Sea—that this God is real. If you're familiar, having read this story, even throughout all of this, every time things get difficult, the people doubt. They think God just brought us out here to kill us. If only we had died in Egypt. These are not people with great faith. They aren't seeing these miracles as a reward for their righteousness and faith. It's the exact opposite. They are seeing this and constantly being reassured through all of this because they are quick to doubt. They are quick to turn on God.

When they actually get to Mount Sinai, God speaks in the hearing of everyone there and they see the mountain on fire. They see these graphic demonstrations of God's presence and power. As he tells us in Exodus 19, this wasn't just God showing Himself to the people, it was also so they would believe Moses. Moses was the mediator coming to them and telling them that here are God's instructions that He has given to me. God wanted the people to know that Moses is for real. There is really a God that is telling him to do this. This was basically a demonstration to prove that, and He purposefully made the people see and hear this so they would have the evidence themselves.

Turn to Exodus 19 and we'll pick up the story where they actually arrive at Mount Sinai. We'll jump down to verse 9. What I want you to see is where God directly says, one of the reasons He is going to do this powerful demonstration in Mount Sinai is so the people will believe Moses. You're going to see a theme throughout the sermon where these powerful miracles are done and it's not a reward for people's faithfulness or their great faith in God or how close they were to God. Very often, it's the exact opposite. It is because people wouldn't believe under any other circumstances.

Exodus 19:9 *And the LORD said to Moses, "Behold, I come to you in the thick cloud, that the people may hear when I speak with you, and believe you forever." So Moses told the words of the people to the LORD. (NKJV)*

Notice what He specifically says is, I'm doing this so that *they will believe you*. So, they will know God is for real and that God is working directly with Moses, and all of this is legitimate. If you read through this story, God thunders the Ten Commandments for them. They see fire on the mountain. There is thunder and lightning and a big dramatic display that gets the people's attention. In fact, it really frightens them. The people's response is, this God is scary. They eventually say to Moses, we don't want to hear from Him directly anymore. You go talk to Him and be the intermediary. You go and tell us what He says, and we will listen to what you say because we will die if we have to listen to this God anymore. This is recorded in Exodus 20:18.

Exodus 20:18 *Now all the people witnessed the thunderings, the lightning flashes, the sound of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking; and when the people saw it, they trembled and stood afar off. (NKJV)*

They saw a very dramatic display here and the purpose was to get their attention because they wouldn't believe any other way.

19) Then they said to Moses, "You speak with us, and we will hear; but let not God speak with us, lest we die."

20) And Moses said to the people, "Do not fear; for God has come to test you, and that His fear may be before you, so that you may not sin."

21) So the people stood afar off, but Moses drew near the thick darkness where God was. (NKJV)

At the people's request, they are saying, you go talk to God and tell us what He said. This has all been validated that there is a real God here. They've seen a powerful demonstration and can't go away saying Moses is just a crazy guy making stuff up. He's just making these wild claims that this God appeared to him. They've seen evidence that God is real. Notice if you go through the story, their lack of faith is very evident. Even in the Exodus 32 account—we won't go through that today—it's the famous golden calf account where Moses was gone longer than they were expecting and the people immediately started saying, we don't know what happened to Moses so let's make a golden calf and worship it. They want to make pagan gods. They are still being fed Manna six days a week—food is still falling from the sky mysteriously and they are not even thinking about that. Obviously, this isn't a people with great faith. These are people that will go astray at the drop of a hat and turn on God in a hot second as soon as things go wrong. As you can see, all these powerful miracles aren't an issue of rewarding them for their great faith or their righteousness, it's the exact opposite. It's because they have so little faith, and they are so full of doubt and quick to disobey that they are seeing all of this.

As we pointed out, God actually spoke directly from the mountain and directly made His presence known to all the people there to validate that Moses is who he says he was. This is the individual that God was working through. God the Father did the same thing with Jesus Christ. Imagine when Christ comes as a human being, to go and tell people I'm a God Being that has been born as a human being. I'm the Son of God brought here to be the Savior of mankind. That is one wild claim to make. You can imagine people saying, "This guy is crazy! He has lost His mind!" That would be a logical conclusion to come to because anybody can make wild claims like that. It's easy to just make wild, boastful claims, but God through not only making His own presence known but inspiring Christ to be able to do a lot of very fantastic miracles, this was a way to validate and show graphic evidence to everyone that Christ was Who He says He was. Turn over to Matthew 3. We'll see first of all how God the Father made His own presence known with people hearing His voice. We'll see this in Matthew 3, the account of Christ being baptized.

Matthew 3:13 *Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan to be baptized by him.*

14) *And John tried to prevent Him, saying, "I need to be baptized by You, and are You coming to me?"* (NKJV)

John understood who he was dealing with here.

15) *But Jesus answered and said to him, "Permit it to be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." Then he allowed Him.*

16) *When He had been baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened to Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting upon Him.*

17) *And suddenly a voice came from heaven, saying, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."* (NKJV)

It's not hard to figure out who would say this. There is only one individual in all the universe who can claim that Christ is His Son—that's God the Father. Historically in the Church of God, we have done mental gymnastics around this verse and numerous verses similar to this, saying it really wasn't God the Father speaking. It was an angel speaking on His behalf. The Bible never says that. Where is the verse that says it wasn't God the Father speaking, it was an angel? There isn't one. That's something we made up because we misunderstood John 5:37. I won't take the time to go through that verse today, if you look on the website there is a paper titled [Hearing and Seeing God](#). It goes through not only John 5:37 because that is the only verse that can be taken to mean that no one has ever heard the voice of God the Father, but in terms of seeing God, the verses that speak to God appearing to people, that paper goes through and explains what the Hebrew and Greek are talking about and gets to unraveling the misunderstandings there. As you can see in this account, if you just ask the question, who can claim that Christ is His Son, that's obviously God the Father. This happened more than once. Turn to Matthew 17 and we'll see the story of the transfiguration. We'll see again we are human beings hearing a voice from heaven, saying "This is My beloved Son." Only one individual in all the universe can make that claim. This is Matthew 17:1.

Matthew 17:1 *Now after six days Jesus took Peter, James, and John his brother, led them up on a high mountain by themselves;*

2) *and He was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and His clothes became as white as the light.*

3) *And behold, Moses and Elijah appeared to them, talking with Him.* (NKJV)

Obviously, the Apostles were divinely inspired to realize this was Moses and Elijah. These guys were long since dead by the time this took place and there weren't photographs on the internet to see what the guys looked like. They had to be divinely inspired to realize that's who they were seeing.

4) Then Peter answered and said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good for us to be here; if You wish, let us make here three tabernacles: one for You, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." (NKJV)

Notice, the reaction of the apostles is treating the three of them as equals. They aren't fully getting who Christ is and we will see this as this account plays out. They aren't really grasping the significance of who Christ is.

5) While he was still speaking, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them; and suddenly a voice came out of the cloud, saying, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!" (NKJV)

Just ask a simple question, who can make the claim that Christ is His Son? Only God the Father can say this. We're going to see when Peter in one of his epistles later recounts this story, he directly says it was God the Father who spoke to them. We're going to read that in a minute.

6) And when the disciples heard it, they fell on their faces and were greatly afraid.

7) But Jesus came and touched them and said, "Arise, and do not be afraid."

8) When they had lifted up their eyes, they saw no one but Jesus only.

9) Now as they came down from the mountain, Jesus commanded them, saying, "Tell the vision to no one until the Son of Man is risen from the dead."

10) And His disciples asked Him, saying, "Why then do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?" (NKJV)

Notice they are still having trouble wrapping their heads around this. If you are the Messiah, weren't we supposed to see Elijah first? Isn't that how the order of events is supposed to go? We are confused because if you are the Son of God, where is Elijah, weren't we supposed to see him first? Christ addresses this in verse 11.

11) Jesus answered and said to them, "Indeed, Elijah is coming first and will restore all things.

12) But I say to you that Elijah has come already, and they did not know him but did to him whatever they wished. Likewise the Son of Man is also about to suffer at their hands."

13) Then the disciples understood that He spoke to them of John the Baptist. (NKJV)

That's when they realize, John the Baptist came in the spirit and power of Elijah. So, Elijah did come before the Messiah. Now they are starting to put the pieces of the puzzle together and grasp who Christ really is. To verify this was God the Father speaking, this is what Peter tells us. Peter is one of the individuals that this account tells

us, was there to witness all of this. In one of his epistles, he references this account. Turn to 2 Peter 1:16.

2 Peter 1:16 *For we did not follow cunningly devised fables when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of His majesty. (NKJV)*

He's basically proving that Christ really is who He says He was; that's the point he is trying to make here.

17) For He received from God the Father honor and glory when such a voice came to Him from the Excellent Glory: (NKJV)

It's obvious who the Excellent Glory is; he's saying it came from God the Father, that's who is speaking.

17 continued) ... "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." (NKJV)

All you have to do is ask the question, who can make the claim that Christ is His Son? There can only be one; it has to be God the Father saying this. This wasn't done to an audience to reward them for having such great faith. It wasn't like the apostles were so solid in their belief and faith and closeness to God that He rewarded them for this by hearing His voice. It was the exact opposite. They were having a hard time wrapping their heads around this and this was to provide them with graphic evidence that this is the Son of God. This really is the Messiah. Even after they hear it, they say "Weren't we supposed to see Elijah first? It's not making sense to us." Then Christ has to explain that John the Baptist fulfilled the role of Elijah. So, he did come first.

All of this was not a reward for people's righteousness and faith, it's the opposite. It's to give very graphic, undeniable evidence for those who don't have the faith to believe the things they don't see. As we're going to see later in this sermon, the very definition of faith is believing when you're not given graphic evidence—when you don't have dramatic miracles that are undeniable. When no rational person could deny what's taking place because there is just no other way to explain it. Faith is believing in the absence of that. When you believe what God says even when you haven't seen the dramatic miracles. That's by definition what faith is.

As you can see, not only did God the Father validate that Christ is Who He says He is, through acts like this, He also did it by inspiring Christ to be able to perform a lot of dramatic miracles all throughout His ministry. We'll look at a few examples here. I gave a sermon a few months ago addressing this, but turn to Acts 2 and we'll see this took place on the day of Pentecost and we're looking more specifically at the miracles associated with that later in this sermon. Specifically focusing on Christ Himself:

Acts 2:22 *Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a Man attested by God to you by miracles, wonders, and signs... (NKJV)*

In other words, these signs and miracles are to prove to you who He says He is.

22 continued) ... which God did through Him in your midst, as you yourselves also know—

23) Him, being delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God, you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death;

24) whom God raised up, having loosed the pains of death, because it was not possible that He should be held by it. (NKJV)

Notice what Peter is saying here. He's not saying this evidence was provided to you because of your great righteousness. He was attested to you and you put Him to death. Christ even said as He performed miracles, He was doing this because people wouldn't believe any other way. Turn to John 4, to look at one example. We'll look at one particular miracle that Christ performed during His ministry. You'll notice through this account that Christ directly says, if you don't see these miracles, you won't believe.

John 4:46 *So Jesus came again to Cana of Galilee where He had made the water wine. And there was a certain nobleman whose son was sick at Capernaum.*

47) When he heard that Jesus had come out of Judea into Galilee, he went to Him and implored Him to come down and heal his son, for he was at the point of death.

48) Then Jesus said to him, "Unless you people see signs and wonders, you will by no means believe." (NKJV)

Once again, this is a theme throughout this sermon, the signs and wonders weren't a reward for great belief. It's, you guys won't believe unless you see this dramatic evidence—it was the exact opposite.

49) The nobleman said to Him, "Sir, come down before my child dies!"

50) Jesus said to him, "Go your way; your son lives." So the man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him, and he went his way.

51) And as he was now going down, his servants met him and told him, saying, "Your son lives!"

52) Then he inquired of them the hour when he got better. And they said to him, "Yesterday at the seventh hour the fever left him."

53) So the father knew that it was at the same hour in which Jesus said to him, "Your son lives." And he himself believed, and his whole household.

54) This again is the second sign Jesus did when He had come out of Judea into Galilee. (NKJV)

I addressed this in a sermon back in April. We sometimes think, when we read about Him mentioning the sign of Jonah—that He would just give one sign. That Christ just gave one sign that He was who He says He is, but in this particular case He was giving a dismissive answer to a hostile audience who He knew wasn't interested in the truth in the first place. The Bible directly tells us, Christ gave numerous signs. As I pointed out

in the sermon I gave in April, even in the book of John, He enumerates several of them, showing them there was a series of signs that Christ gave, and it ultimately culminated in Christ being resurrected in the dead, just like He had predicted, to make it undeniable that He is who He says He was.

This was also true of the giving of the Holy Spirit. If you think about this, the claim that the very presence of the creator God is going to come down and dwell in human beings—to actually give human beings the mind and character of God, the ability to understand His truth and be able to transform your minds, to develop His character, and to offer the opportunity for eternal life, that is an incredible claim to make. It's easy to go and make wild claims, but how do you validate that they are true? That there is actually something to it and it's legitimate. This is the very reason why when the Holy Spirit was given, in Acts 2 on the day of Pentecost, that it was accompanied by a lot of miracles. God again had to show and graphically demonstrate to this audience that this was real. This wasn't just a bunch of crazy guys making wild claims. That there was really something to this, that they were literally receiving the mind and power of God, to come and dwell inside carnal human beings. Turn over to Acts 2 and we'll go through part of the account on Pentecost.

Acts 2:1 *When the Day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. (NKJV)*

This is an obvious reference to the 50-day count to Pentecost. A 7 week count from wave sheaf Sunday, that you count to know when Pentecost is. Pentecost is the one Holy Day of the year that is not on a specific day. Every other Holy Day throughout the year, you have on this day of this month, you shall have a holy convocation. Pentecost is not done like that. You're not given a specific calendar date for it; you have to actually count Pentecost. Pick up in verse 2.

2) *And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. (NKJV)*

If you're like me, I have to admit a lot of my life I would read over this and what I pictured in my mind is that they experienced this great wind that came through and was blowing everything. That's not what it actually says. What it says is, they heard a sound like it was a great wind. It wasn't like they were there and all of a sudden, these hurricane-forced winds came through and they were trying to hold everything down to keep it from blowing away. That's not what was happening. It's that they heard a sound and what the sound sounded like was the sound of a great wind coming through. What we're going to see is, God gave them auditory and visual miracles that took place to get their attention so they would realize that something special was taking place. If He had given the Holy Spirit to people and had not provided this, how would they know that something special is taking place? This was a way to graphically illustrate it to them.

3) *Then there appeared to them divided tongues, as of fire, and one sat upon each of them. (NKJV)*

They have auditory and visual miracles that are taking place that gets everybody's attention.

4) And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance. (NKJV)

Just to clarify here in verse 4, oftentimes we read over this and we see the comment, *filled with the Holy Spirit*, and because of what the rest of the chapter says, and we know this is when the Church received the Holy Spirit and it was made available to more than just the few exceptions that God had made up prior to this point, when this became available on a wider scaler to the Church in general, we think of being filled with the Holy Spirit as receiving the Holy Spirit in terms of initial conversion. That's not really what that phrase is getting at. If you do a search on the phrase "filled with the Holy Spirit" or phrases similar to that and you follow that through the Bible, what you're going to see is that it's not really a reference to people receiving the Holy Spirit like we do at baptism when you're first converted. This is more of a reference to the Holy Spirit moving upon a person to give them the power to perform miracles or for inspired preaching or various acts where they are basically being inspired to do things to further the will of God. Whatever God wants this particular person to do. The Holy Spirit is basically moving upon them to inspire them into the direction or the power to be able to do whatever it is that God has for them to do. If you just read this and take the whole verse into account, it makes it obvious. I'll just read this again.

4) And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance. (NKJV)

Being *filled with the Holy Spirit* was giving them the power to speak in tongues. That's what that verse is really saying. In verse 5.

5) And there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men, from every nation under heaven. (NKJV)

Take particular note to that, it's going to become important later in this sermon. The reason I mention that is, we're going to see when we read the next several verses, it's going to mention people who are from various areas and as a result, they speak a variety of languages. This was because of the scattering of Israel—the diaspora, as it's referred to. All these people wind up speaking a variety of languages and this is why the speaking of tongues gets everyone's attention. The Apostles can speak and then everyone hears in their own unique language and they know something unique is happening here. The reason I point this out is, even though there were people from all these locations, they all have a Jewish/Israelite lineage. This is going to become important later when the Holy Spirit is given to the Gentiles. It's pointing out that although there is a diverse audience in terms of the languages that they spoke, everyone is from an Israelite/Jewish lineage and they are seeing this as something unique happening to the descendants of Abraham. Pick up in verse 6.

6) And when this sound occurred, the multitude came together, and were confused, because everyone heard them speak in his own language. (NKJV)

We're going to notice in the next several verses that there are people from a variety of areas and because of the diaspora they wound up speaking a variety of different languages, yet everyone hears a single person speak and they hear it in their own language, and they know something unique is happening because this isn't possible.

7) Then they were all amazed and marveled, saying to one another, "Look, are not all these who speak Galileans? (NKJV)

The guys who were speaking were all from Galilee, but all the rest are from all over the place and they hear it in their own unique language. Something supernatural is happening.

8) And how is it that we hear, each in our own language in which we were born?

9) Parthians and Medes and Elamites, those dwelling in Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia,

10) Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya adjoining Cyrene, visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes,

11) Cretans and Arabs—we hear them speaking in our own tongues the wonderful works of God."

12) So they were all amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, "Whatever could this mean?"

13) Others mocking said, "They are full of new wine." (NKJV)

In other words, they are all just drunk.

14) But Peter, standing up with the eleven, raised his voice and said to them, "Men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and heed my words.

15) For these are not drunk, as you suppose, since it is only the third hour of the day.

16) But this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel: (NKJV)

In other words, what you are witnessing is a fulfillment of prophecy.

17) And it shall come to pass in the last days, says God, That I will pour out of My Spirit on all flesh; Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, Your young men shall see visions, Your old men shall dream dreams.

18) And on My menservants and on My maidservants I will pour out My Spirit in those days; And they shall prophesy.

19) I will show wonders in heaven above And signs in the earth beneath: Blood and fire and vapor of smoke.

20) The sun shall be turned into darkness, And the moon into blood, Before the coming of the great and awesome day of the LORD.

21) And it shall come to pass That whoever calls on the name of the LORD Shall be saved.’ (NKJV)

If you notice in verse 21, it's saying that all those who call upon the name of Yehovah shall be saved. That's obviously referring to the New Covenant here. It's the offering of salvation. The New Covenant is more than just the offering of the Holy Spirit. We won't take the time to go through all of this today but if you follow the scriptures that refer to the New Covenant, it's about the forgiveness of sin, the offering of the Holy Spirit and the offering of salvation. The opportunity to be born into the Kingdom of God. It's a lot more than just the opportunity to receive the Holy Spirit. That's how we know that what is happening on the day of Pentecost is the establishment of the New Covenant Church.

I like to refer to the Feast of Pentecost really as the day of salvation for the Firstfruits. The reason I say that is, not only is it the establishing of the New Covenant—the forgiveness of sin, the offering of the Holy Spirit and the opportunity for salvation, for eternal life—establishing that covenant with mankind or the New Covenant church, but if you go through Leviticus 23, the two loaves for the wave offering ceremony that is referred to obviously pictures the resurrection. It specifically tells you that these loaves picture the Firstfruits—it's specific to the Firstfruits. What you have is offering of the covenant—the establishing of it with the Church and the fulfillment, the receiving of salvation. You have the whole process, so that's why I like to refer to it as the day of salvation for the Firstfruits.

As I pointed out when we started at the beginning of this in Acts 2, when it mentioned *the rushing mighty wind*, I made the point of pointing out that it doesn't actually say that there are hurricane-force winds blowing that day. I have to admit, for a lot of my life that's how I pictured it in my head until a number of years ago when I read it closer and thought, it doesn't really say that there is a wind blowing, it says that that's the sound that they heard. There are auditory and visual miracles that are provided so that the people know something unique is happening.

Christ actually foreshadowed this on the day He fulfilled the wave sheaf. Turn over to John 20, we'll see after Christ had already gone up and appeared before the Father to officially present Himself to the Father as a sacrifice for mankind and to enable salvation for mankind. He then, later that day, appears to the Apostles and makes a statement to them that is foreshadowing what is taking place and foreshadowing the sound they are going to hear that day when they receive the Holy Spirit.

John 20:19 *Then, the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in the midst, and said to them, “Peace be with you.”*

20) When He had said this, He showed them His hands and His side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord.

21) So Jesus said to them again, “Peace to you! As the Father has sent Me, I also send you.”

22) And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. (NKJV)

Notice what He does here. He blows at them and then says, *“Receive the Holy Spirit.”* He makes the sound similar to what they are going to hear in Acts 2 when they receive the Holy Spirit. If you look up this section of scripture in a number of Biblical commentaries, you’ll see an interesting debate that takes place over this. The reason I call it an interesting debate is, you’ll see very opposing arguments but what is interesting, in a number of cases you’ll find people using the exact the same argument to argue to totally opposite conclusions. What I mean by that is, some will argue what I’ve just stated—that Christ has foreshadowed what was going to take place in Acts 2 when the Apostles were to receive the Holy Spirit. You’ll see others will argue that Christ is saying that they are going to receive the Holy Spirit right at that moment on that particular day.

The reason I say it’s an interesting argument, you will find people on both sides of this debate. If you just do an internet search and read some commentaries, you’ll see people argue both sides of this argument and you’ll find people on both sides that will tell you that they are experts in Greek and in Greek grammar and the Greek requires it to be whatever their conclusion is. Both sides will tell you that they are experts in Greek and that the Greek conclusively proves their side of the argument, and they will come to completely opposite conclusions. So, you really can’t solve the argument because you’ll find people who have credentials and will claim in both cases, they are an expert in Greek, and both will have polar opposite conclusions. There is a much simpler way to solve this debate, and we can look to the words of Jesus Christ Himself that very clearly solves it, and you don’t have to be an expert in Greek. You just have to understand English and do your homework in the Bible.

The answer to this debate is found in Acts 1:4.

Acts 1:4 *And being assembled together with them, He commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the Promise of the Father ... (NKJV)*

Notice that particular phrase, because understanding what the promise of the Father is, is the solution to that entire debate. Continue on in verse 4.

*4 continued) ... “which,” He said, “you have heard from Me;
5) for John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.”
6) Therefore, when they had come together, they asked Him, saying, “Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?”
7) And He said to them, “It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority.
8) But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” (NKJV)*

I won’t take the time to read through the verses that lead up to this, but if you read that, what you’re going to see is the timing of this conversation is right towards the end of the 40 days that Christ spends with the Apostles before He ascends to the Father. So, you’re

approximately about 40 days into the 50 day gap between wave sheaf Sunday and Pentecost. So, about 40 days away from wave sheaf Sunday and approximately 10 days prior to Pentecost and Christ is clearly telling the Apostles, “You haven’t yet received the promise of the Father. But hang around in Jerusalem and on Pentecost you’re going to receive it.” All you have to do is understand what the promise of the Father is. I did a sermon on this about a year or two ago. The sermon is titled, The Promise of the Father. It’s easy to find on the website and the YouTube channel. If you understand the promise of the Father, that refers to a promise that God the Father made to Abraham not only in Genesis 12, but also Genesis 22. The promise is that all of the earth will be blessed through Abraham and it’s a reference to Christ being a descendant of his and salvation being offered to mankind as a result of Christ and His sacrifice and all that accomplishes for mankind. That’s the promise of the Father. If the Apostles have not yet received the promise of the Father at this point, they obviously have not received the Holy Spirit. So, that alone solves that whole particular issue.

As you notice, when we started reading in Acts 2, in the account of Pentecost, I pointed out the fact that it’s talking about the audience that’s there are from a variety of areas and speak a number of languages but all from an Israelite background. They all have a Jewish lineage. So, in the mind of the people there, they are seeing something incredible and the Holy Spirit is being offered, but still, in their mind God is doing that for the Israelites but not for those bad old Gentiles. God also has to perform miracles to make it clear to them that He’s making it available to the Gentiles as well. You’ll find this in Acts 10 and we’ll see this same miracle of speaking in tongues is used to make it clear to the Apostles -- particularly Peter who is telling the account and recites it to others—they see this miracle taking place and it becomes obvious to everyone there that God is making the Holy Spirit available to the Gentiles just like He did to the Israelites. We’ll pick up the account in Acts 10:44. Just to summarize what is taking place, Peter is speaking to a mixed audience. What I mean by that is, there are people from both an Israelite lineage and Gentiles.

Acts 10:44 *While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who heard the word.*

45) And those of the circumcision who believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles also. (NKJV)

So, you have people with Israelite lineage and Gentiles as well. The Israelis are astonished that God is working with those Gentiles. They viewed Gentiles as less than themselves. Notice how they knew that.

46) For they heard them speak with tongues and magnify God. Then Peter answered,

47) Can anyone forbid water, that these should not be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?”

48) And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord. Then they asked him to stay a few days. (NKJV)

You can see that God used the same miracles—the speaking of tongues that was done in Acts 2. He provided that same miracle with the Gentiles to make it painfully obvious to an audience who, it wasn't like these people had great faith that God would be giving the Holy Spirit to the Gentiles. They didn't think that was something that God would do. So, this miracle was provided to make it obvious to them—something that they wouldn't believe if they hadn't seen the miracle themselves.

We've seen with both the case of Moses and with Christ, that God performed miracles to make it blatantly obvious to those around them, that these were individuals that He was working with. The claims that they made that they represented God and were there as His messenger and in Christ's case He was the Son of God—the Messiah—that these claims were valid. One of the reasons they were able to perform these miracles was to validate this. This was true of the Apostles as well. You can imagine, today our measure of credibility is, "Don't believe me, believe your Bible." You hear what a person is teaching and representing to be the truth, then you search the scriptures like Acts 17 says, to see if these things are true. You measure them against it. If you are the guys writing the New Testament and establishing new doctrines, that really doesn't work because you have to have a measure of credibility. One of the things that God did to show to the world that they were legitimate was performing miracles. As we're going to see later in this sermon, it was also a way to separate who was a real Apostle, who God was working with and who was just a fraud, claiming this to exalt themselves. Turn to 2 Corinthians 12 and we'll see what Paul directly refers to as the sign of an apostle. If you want to know if someone who has claimed to be an Apostle was legitimate, here was the litmus test.

2 Corinthians 12:11 *I have become a fool in boasting; you have compelled me. For I ought to have been commended by you; for in nothing was I behind the most eminent apostles, though I am nothing.*

12) Truly the signs of an apostle were wrought among you in all patience, by signs and wonders and mighty works. (NKJV)

As I mentioned when I first started this sermon, my title was taken from the book of 2 Corinthians; I took it directly from this particular scripture.

13) For what is there wherein ye were made inferior to the rest of the churches, except it be that I myself was not a burden to you? forgive me this wrong. (NKJV)

You can see, Paul is directly saying that—"I perform signs, wonders, and mighty deeds and that proves I'm a legitimate Apostle." If you look through the book of Acts—we're going to look at a few examples today—it makes a point numerous times, talking about how the Apostles as a whole, perform signs, wonders, and mighty deeds. It makes that blanket statement numerous times and provides a number of specific examples of very dramatic miracles that they performed to prove two things. One, that they were legitimate; that the claims they were making and the message they were preaching truly did come from God. They were truly apostles representing God. But as we're also going

to see in a minute, once Christianity started getting a following and these guys started getting noticed and there were organizations forming behind them and a following there, then you had people that wanted to get in on the act. Self promoters trying to claim the title for themselves. This was a way to sort out who was legitimate and who was just a fraud. Turn back to Acts 2 and we'll follow a few of the references, starting with the day of Pentecost.

Acts 2:40 *And with many other words he testified, and exhorted them, saying, Save yourselves from this crooked generation.*

41) *They then that received his word were baptized: and there were added unto them in that day about three thousand souls.*

42) *And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread and the prayers.*

43) *And fear came upon every soul: and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles. (NKJV)*

There are numerous references to this throughout the book of Acts—of the miracles, signs, and wonders that were done by them. We're only going to look at a few examples today. You can see that the book of Acts makes a very big deal that this was the sign of credibility that someone's claim of being an Apostle was valid. Turn to Acts 5:12.

Acts 5:12 *And through the hands of the apostles many signs and wonders were done among the people. And they were all with one accord in Solomon's Porch.*

13) *Yet none of the rest dared join them, but the people esteemed them highly.*

14) *And believers were increasingly added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women,*

15) *so that they brought the sick out into the streets and laid them on beds and couches, that at least the shadow of Peter passing by might fall on some of them.*

16) *Also a multitude gathered from the surrounding cities to Jerusalem, bringing sick people and those who were tormented by unclean spirits, and they were all healed. (NKJV)*

It's getting everybody's attention. These guys are pulling off stuff that is just not physically possible and it's causing people to take note and to pay attention to what they are preaching. We're going to see in a moment that this also attracted frauds and charlatans who wanted to get in on the act of getting attention for themselves and exalting themselves, but they were frauds. Let's just notice one more reference in Acts 14.

Acts 14:1 *Now it happened in Iconium that they went together to the synagogue of the Jews, and so spoke that a great multitude both of the Jews and of the Greeks believed.*

2) *But the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brethren.*

3) Therefore, they stayed there a long time, speaking boldly in the Lord, who was bearing witness to the word of His grace, granting signs and wonders to be done by their hands. (NKJV)

Notice they are dealing with a hostile audience. This isn't a reward for people's great faithfulness and their faith in God and how close they are to Him. These are a lot of signs and wonders done to convince a very skeptical, hostile audience. To make it obvious who God is working through. As you can imagine, as the Apostles start going around doing this and getting people's attention and there is a following and support for them, you always have people who want to get in on the attention. "I want to get in on the following—I'm a big shot and important too." They want to self promote themselves into roles that God didn't place them in. This has been an issue since the very beginning of the Church of God. This is like in Korah's rebellion, you can see in the Old Testament, human nature hasn't changed. There are always people who want to exalt themselves into roles that God didn't place them in. If you turn back to 2 Corinthians, this is the context that leads up to Paul mentioning the sign of an Apostle. If you read through chapter 11, prior to this, a lot of what he is addressing are people who are falsely claiming they are Apostles. That's what causes him to say, you saw the sign of the Apostles—the signs, wonders, and mighty deeds—that was the litmus test that someone's claim to be an Apostle was valid.

2 Corinthians 11:12 *But what I do, I will also continue to do, that I may cut off the opportunity from those who desire an opportunity to be regarded just as we are in the things of which they boast. (NKJV)*

In other words, they wanted the praise, as I'll explain in a minute, a good friend of mine put it, they wanted the title but not the job description.

13) For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ.

14) And no wonder! For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light.

15) Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works. (NKJV)

He's directly stating that one of the problems they dealt with in the first century was people falsely claiming that they were an Apostle. They see the attention that the Apostles are getting and people hanging on to the words they say and paying attention to them. You might say some of the praise and honor that they see real believers giving them and other people think, "I want some of that, I'm a big shot, I need attention". They start promoting themselves into this because they want to be seen as a big shot—the big alpha male in charge. It's just how human nature and the ego tends to go.

There was a good friend of mine who was an Elder—he's been deceased for a number of years—he put it like this. He wasn't just talking about specifically being an Apostle but just the roles of the ministry. The way he loved to put it was, this isn't a title, this is a job description. What he was trying to get at was, often people may seek a title. They want

an ordination certificate so they can say, “I have this title and I’m a big shot now and everyone should honor me, praise me, and put me on a pedestal.” This isn’t about getting a title; this is a job description. This is about the sacrifice and about being persecuted and being attacked and dealing with the stressful and unglamorous parts of the job. It all comes as a package. His point was, when you see people who are self promoters, who want to put themselves into a role that God didn’t place them in, they aren’t seeking the crappy part of the job.

Just look at the Apostles specifically and how almost all of these guys died. The vast majority of them, with maybe John being the exception, were violently murdered. John got basically exiled to a deserted island and he got seriously persecuted as well. Most of them not only got attacked and persecuted, but violently murdered. They got thrown in prison and really rough stuff thrown at them. What my friend was getting at, was this comes as a package. This isn’t just about being on camera, being behind the podium and speaking and having people listen to your words and address you with a title. It’s about taking on the persecution and the flack and the stress and all of the other issues that come with this. It’s part of a package and a job description, not just a title. There’s always been—even going back to the Old Testament—people wanting a title and to be perceived as a big shot with power, but they don’t want all that comes with it. This was a common problem in the first century when the Apostles were teaching.

Turn to Revelation 2 and we’ll see another scripture that mentions this. You’re probably familiar in Revelation 2 and 3 there are letters to seven churches—seven literal churches that existed on a mail route. Many people believe, myself included, that this refers to eras in time throughout the history of the Church of God. The Ephesian Church—the Church at Ephesus—would be representative of the first century Church, the time that the Apostles were teaching. Notice one of the specific issues that this refers to.

Revelation 2:1 *“To the angel of the church of Ephesus write, ‘These things says He who holds the seven stars in His right hand, who walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands:*

2) ‘I know your works, your labor, your patience, and that you cannot bear those who are evil. And you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars;

3) and you have persevered and have patience, and have labored for My name’s sake and have not become weary. (NKJV)

They dealt with self promoters. People who wanted to appoint themselves to the role of Apostle. God didn’t place them in that role, they wanted to be big shots. “I’m important too. I want everybody to look at me. I want to be put on a pedestal.” These are individuals who want a title. They don’t want a job description. I’m sure they weren’t saying, “Persecute me and throw me in prison and violently murder me too.” They didn’t want that part. They wanted people to listen to their words and see them as someone who is important and gets a lot of attention. They weren’t looking to be violently persecuted. This has been a common problem throughout the history of the Church.

Just to see another popular example of this, turn to Acts 8 and we'll see the account of Simon who literally tries to buy his way into a role—to get a title in the Church.

Acts 8:9 *But there was a certain man called Simon, who previously practiced sorcery in the city and astonished the people of Samaria, claiming that he was someone great ... (NKJV)*

This guy desired attention. He wanted everybody to look at him as a big shot. To put it in modern terminology, he wanted everyone to see him as the big alpha male in charge.

10) *to whom they all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying, "This man is the great power of God."*

11) *And they heeded him because he had astonished them with his sorceries for a long time.*

12) *But when they believed Philip as he preached the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, both men and women were baptized.*

13) *Then Simon himself also believed; and when he was baptized, he continued with Philip, and was amazed, seeing the miracles and signs which were done.*

14) *Now when the apostles who were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them,*

15) *who, when they had come down, prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit.*

16) *For as yet He had fallen upon none of them. They had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.*

17) *Then they laid hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit. (NKJV)*

Notice what Simon does when he sees this.

18) *And when Simon saw that through the laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Spirit was given, he offered them money,*

19) *saying, "Give me this power also, that anyone on whom I lay hands may receive the Holy Spirit."*

20) *But Peter said to him, "Your money perish with you, because you thought that the gift of God could be purchased with money!"*

21) *You have neither part nor portion in this matter, for your heart is not right in the sight of God.*

22) *Repent therefore of this your wickedness, and pray God if perhaps the thought of your heart may be forgiven you.*

23) *For I see that you are poisoned by bitterness and bound by iniquity."*

24) *Then Simon answered and said, "Pray to the Lord for me, that none of the things which you have spoken may come upon me."*

25) *So when they had testified and preached the word of the Lord, they returned to Jerusalem, preaching the gospel in many villages of the Samaritans. (NKJV)*

Simon isn't looking to repent of his actions. He just wants to be protected from the consequences. He wants a title; he doesn't want a job description. We'll see that the Apostle John dealt with this type of problem as well. Turn to 3 John 1:9.

3 John 1:9 *I wrote to the church, but Diotrephes, who loves to have the preeminence among them, does not receive us.*

10) *Therefore, if I come, I will call to mind his deeds which he does, prating against us with malicious words. And not content with that, he himself does not receive the brethren, and forbids those who wish to, putting them out of the church.*

11) *Beloved, do not imitate what is evil, but what is good. He who does good is of God, but he who does evil has not seen God. (NKJV)*

Notice it mentioned that he wants the preeminence. Let me share with you the meaning of the Greek word that is translated as *preeminence* in English. I'll likely mispronounce this, but I'll spell it for you—*proteouo*, Strong's #4409 and the definition I'm going to give you is from The Complete Word Study Dictionary by Spiros Zodhiates. He defines it as "first; to be first; chief; to hold the first rank; highest dignity". In other words, this is a guy who wants to be seen, to put it in modern terminology, he wants to be the big alpha male in charge. He wants to be seen as powerful and the center of attention. He doesn't want to be abused and persecuted to serve the brethren and to face pain for that, he just wants to be exalted and for others to hang upon his every word. He wants a title and not a job description.

As I mentioned throughout all of this sermon, we think in terms of the miracles that the Bible describes and think if we just had the faith, we would be rewarded with all of these miracles. We need to understand the very definition of faith is believing when you don't see the dramatic evidence. This is a point that Christ got out in John 20. We read the account before when He speaks a number of the Apostles, where Thomas who is often referred to as *Doubting Thomas*, who wasn't present in that particular account but shows up later—let's notice what he says to Thomas. It gets to this point that faith is believing when you don't see the graphic evidence or the dramatic miracles.

John 20:24 *Now Thomas, called the Twin, one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. (NKJV)*

In other words, he wasn't a part of the original account that we read.

25) *The other disciples therefore said to him, "We have seen the Lord."*

So he said to them, "Unless I see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe."

26) *And after eight days His disciples were again inside, and Thomas with them. Jesus came, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, "Peace to you!"*

27) *Then He said to Thomas, "Reach your finger here, and look at My hands; and reach your hand here, and put it into My side. Do not be unbelieving, but believing."*

28) *And Thomas answered and said to Him, "My Lord and my God!"*

29) *Jesus said to him, "Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed." (NKJV)*

That is actually the key to faith. It's not about being rewarded with the great miracles because you have the faith.

Faith is being able to be faithful to God, to endure, to faithfully obey Him in spite of our circumstances even when we don't see His dramatic intervention—even when things are going wrong and things are painful and life is hard and we are not seeing all of the dramatic miracles and deliverance in our life. That's the true test of faith.

Turn to Hebrews. We often think of Hebrews 11 and that is where we are going—in terms of the definition of faith—but I want to start at the end of chapter 10 because it gives us the context leading up to this. Notice the emphasis here is upon believing even when life is difficult and painful and you aren't seeing the dramatic evidence.

Hebrews 10:32 *But recall the former days in which, after you were illuminated, you endured a great struggle with sufferings: (NKJV)*

In other words, when life is painful and hard.

*33) partly while you were made a spectacle both by reproaches and tribulations, and partly while you became companions of those who were so treated;
34) for you had compassion on me in my chains, and joyfully accepted the plundering of your goods, knowing that you have a better and an enduring possession for yourselves in heaven.
35) Therefore do not cast away your confidence, which has great reward.
36) For you have need of endurance, so that after you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise:
37) For yet a little while, And He who is coming will come and will not tarry.
38) Now the just shall live by faith; But if anyone draws back, My soul has no pleasure in him.” (NKJV)*

Let's keep reading and notice the definition of faith.

39) But we are not of those who draw back to perdition, but of those who believe to the saving of the soul. (NKJV)

Hebrews 11:1 *Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.*

2) For by it the elders obtained a good testimony. (NKJV)

Faith is by definition is believing when we haven't seen great miracles. We shouldn't be discouraged when we live our lives today and think, why don't we see the dramatic miracles that they saw back in Biblical times? It's not a matter of having to develop this great faith and we will be rewarded with that—we demonstrate our faith by believing even when we don't see that. By faithfully believing God, even when it's painful and it's

difficult in our lives and we haven't seen those miracles. It's like Christ said to Thomas, you believe because you saw, blessed are those who believe and they haven't seen. That's the real test of faith. It's not about being rewarded with miracles because of great faith. Yes, we should believe in God and His ability to perform all of that, but we have to be faithful to Him and endure regardless of our circumstances and to be willing to face pain.

As I've covered in this sermon, we should understand that the definition of faith is believing when we haven't seen great miracles. The reason these great miracles were given all throughout the Old and New Testament, wasn't a reward for great faith. It was to get the attention of those who had no faith. We can look and take great comfort and strengthen in our faith from understanding those accounts, but realize that just because we don't see those great miracles in our lives today, is not saying we don't have great faith, because we have to have faith. The very definition of faith is *believing in God and being faithful to Him, even when we haven't seen that*.

As we go forward in our Christian lives, let's focus on the real definition of faith and be faithful to God, even when we don't see dramatic miracles.