

The Role of an Apostle

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If you've ever studied the Bible to any degree at all, you're probably familiar with the 12 Apostles. You're probably familiar with the fact that these are 12 individuals that Christ Himself personally selected at the beginning of His ministry on earth. And then He hands-on personally trained them and then sent them out to do a very specific job that He had in mind for them. In fact, in addition to these 12 individuals, there are several others that the Bible directly tells us also fulfilled the role of an Apostle. A very common example you're probably familiar with is the Apostle Paul. You're probably aware that he wrote the majority of the books of the New Testament, more than any other author. In the letters that he wrote, that we have recorded in the Bible, he typically at the very beginning of them directly identifies himself as fulfilling the role of an Apostle.

Well, over the years, throughout history, there's been a number of individuals who have also asserted that they too fulfill the role of an Apostle just like the Apostles that are identified specifically in the Bible. In fact, throughout my lifetime -- just in the almost 60 years that I've lived on this earth -- I've personally been aware of a handful of individuals who have also asserted that they also fulfill the role of an Apostle and have compared themselves to the Apostles that are described in the Bible.

Well, what we're going to do today in the sermon is take a look at the role of an Apostle to see what the Bible tells us is the job of an Apostle. What was an Apostle commissioned to do? More importantly, we're also going to look at the criteria that the Bible lays out to identify whether a person is a legitimate Apostle or just someone making claims that they cannot back up. So, if you'd like a title for this sermon, it's:

The Role of an Apostle

Because as I mentioned, we're probably all familiar with the fact that the 12 Apostles -- the 12 individuals that Christ Himself selected, trained and identified in this role. These were the very first Apostles. Because if you look in the Old Testament, you never find the word "Apostle". I mean, if you take a Bible search program, and do a search on the word "Apostle", you'll quickly see it does not appear in the Old Testament. It's not a role that existed prior to the ministry of Jesus Christ.

To see the first mention of this, turn over to Luke 6, because we'll see here in the Gospel accounts where Christ selected 12 individuals and then He trains them and commissions them to do the role of an Apostle. We'll see them listed here in Luke 6, and we'll start reading in verse 12.

Luke 6:12 *"Now it came to pass in those days that He went out to the mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God. 13) And when it was day, He called His disciples to Himself; and from them He chose twelve whom He also*

named apostles: 14) Simon, whom He also named Peter, and Andrew his brother; James and John; Philip and Bartholomew; 15) Matthew and Thomas; James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon called the Zealot; 16) Judas the son of James, and Judas Iscariot who also became a traitor.” (NKJV)

Now, we'll look at this in detail a little bit later today, but as it mentioned here, Judas Iscariot -- who was originally chosen as part of the 12 -- he betrays Christ at the very end of His life. By the time Christ is resurrected, Judas is already dead and he has to then be replaced in that role so that they maintain 12 Apostles. But as I mentioned, this is the original 12 Apostles that we typically think of most often when we hear the term “Apostle”.

But the Bible does identify a few others and directly tells us that they too fulfilled the role of an Apostle. To see some of those, turn over to Acts 14 and we'll see here where the Bible refers to Paul -- as we've already mentioned -- but also Barnabas. And directly tells us that both of these individuals, they also fulfilled the role of an Apostle. So, let's start reading in Acts 14 and verse 8.

Acts 14:8 *“And in Lystra a certain man without strength in his feet was sitting, a cripple from his mother’s womb, who had never walked. 9) This man heard Paul speaking. Paul, observing him intently and seeing that he had faith to be healed, 10) said with a loud voice, “Stand up straight on your feet!” And he leaped and walked. 11) Now when the people saw what Paul had done, they raised their voices, saying in the Lycaonian language, “The gods have come down to us in the likeness of men!” 12) And Barnabas they called Zeus, and Paul, Hermes, because he was the chief speaker. 13) Then the priest of Zeus, whose temple was in front of their city, brought oxen and garlands to the gates, intending to sacrifice with the multitudes. 14) But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard this, they tore their clothes and ran in among the multitude, crying out 15) and saying, “Men, why are you doing these things? We also are men with the same nature as you, and preach to you that you should turn from these useless things to the living God, who made the heaven, the earth, the sea, and all things that are in them, 16) who in bygone generations allowed all nations to walk in their own ways. Now, notice there, it specifically tells us that Paul and Barnabas were apostles, that they were a part of the group that are called Apostles, and they fulfilled the role of an Apostle. So we don't have to speculate or guess in their situation at all.” (NKJV)*

Now, the Bible also tells us that James, the brother of Christ, was also an Apostle. This is different than James, the brother of John, who is mentioned as part of the original 12 Apostles. But just turn over to Galatians 1, and we'll see that James, the brother of Christ, is specifically listed as an Apostle as well. This is Galatians 1, and we'll start reading in verse 18.

Gal 1:18 *"Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter, and remained with him fifteen days. 19) But I saw none of the other apostles except James, the Lord's brother."* (NKJV)

See, Paul is telling us here that James, the brother of Christ, he's an Apostle as well. So, we actually have a handful of individuals that fulfilled this role, that the Bible directly tells us fulfilled the role of an Apostle. And there were several Apostles in addition to the original 12, that we oftentimes think of first when we think of the role of an Apostle.

But now let's ask, what actually was the job of an Apostle? What was this role created for, and what were they intended to do? In other words, to put it in modern-day terminology, what's the job description of an Apostle? Well, to see this, turn over to Mark 16 and we'll see here the instructions that Christ Himself gave to the original 11 Apostles. I say 11 here, because Judas is dead at this point, and his role has not been replaced yet. So, when we start here in verse 14, Christ is speaking to the 11 that are still living at that point.

Mark 16:14 *"Later He appeared to the eleven as they sat at the table; and He rebuked their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they did not believe those who had seen Him after He had risen. 15) And He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. 16) He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned."* (NKJV)

See, what He's basically commissioning them to do after Acts 2, when they receive the Holy Spirit, is for these guys to spread out in different directions over the earth preaching the gospel and spreading the good news to others.

As we're going to see here later when we look at the criteria, they were to be witnesses to Christ's ministry and to His resurrection and all that that meant. Because you see, baptism -- notice it mentions here that one of the things they were also supposed to do was to baptize those who believed and repented. Well, again, baptism is kind of similar to the role of an Apostle. What I mean by that is it's a New Testament concept that you don't find in the Old Testament. The concept of repentance and water baptism and receiving the Holy Spirit, that's a New Testament concept. That's a concept you don't find in the Old Testament. Again, kind of similar to the fact that the role of an Apostle, that's a New Testament concept. You don't find the word "Apostle" in the Old Testament.

But what this tells us is that the Apostles were basically establishing the New Covenant Church. Because think in terms of what the New Covenant Church is. Because, oftentimes, today, the word "Church" gets associated in our modern day English with a building. But in reality, when you look at the Greek term there, "ecclesia", that's translated into our English word "Church", it refers to the assembly. It refers to the people. And it's specifically referring to those who've received the Spirit of God in them. That's why it refers to the Church as we are the temple of God, having the Father's presence dwelling inside us.

So, what this is, is the Apostles are sent out to preach the gospel. To spread this message throughout the world, and then to baptize all those that are willing to respond and basically establish the Church. But not only are they witnesses to Christ and that He's legitimate. These are also the guys -- many of them are authors of the New Testament. They're writing the Bible. And even in some of the books that were not directly authored by Apostles, like Luke, for example. He wrote the book of Luke and the book of Acts. Well, he's not listed as an Apostle, but yet his writings are part of the New Testament. But when you look at both of those books -- and through all the books of the New Testament -- who are the major players? Who are the major characters in the story? It's the Apostles. It's the 12 Apostles. And it's Paul, it's Barnabas, and James, the brother of Christ. They're the major players in all of this.

See, this is why the Bible refers to them as the "foundation of the Church". Because think of it in terms of when you're building a house, or you're building a building. What's one of the first things you do? You lay the foundation. Typically in our modern-day construction, that's a concrete slab. You do that first. You lay it down, the concrete slab, and then you build the rest of the structure on top of that. See, that's the role that these guys were fulfilling. That's the role of an Apostle. They were establishing that foundation that would then be built upon going forward from there to build the rest of the structure. That structure being the Church of God.

So, to see this concept mentioned several times in the Bible, turn over to Ephesians 2. We'll see here where it specifically refers to the Apostles as the "foundation of the Church". This is Ephesians 2 and verse 19.

Eph 2:19 *"Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, 20) having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, 21) in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, 22) in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit."* (NKJV)

It's referring to the assembly, the ecclesia. All those who have responded to the message and received the Holy Spirit. That's the Church. But it's saying the foundation of the Church, that's the Apostles and the Prophets. Because see, the Prophets in the Old Testament fulfilled a lot of the same type of role that the Apostles do in the New Testament. What I mean by that is most of the New Testament is written by Apostles. And again, even in the books that are not written by them, they're the main characters in the book. Well, you see, the Prophets in the Old Testament, it's the same type of thing. So, this is what establishes the foundation that everything else is built upon.

To see this concept again, turn over to Revelation 21, and we'll pick up here in verse 9. Just to give an overview of what's being addressed here, what's being described in this chapter is what's referred to as "New Jerusalem". As we're going to see here, this is a symbolic description. Because as we're going to notice here, when we start right off in verse 9, it's going to tell us what's being described is "the bride, the Lamb's wife".

Now, if you just think about that in terms of New Testament theology, who marries Christ? Christ is the Lamb, and who marries Christ? Well, that's the Church, right? You see, what's being pictured here in New Jerusalem, it's not a literal city as we think of a city today like New York or Los Angeles or Chicago or Dallas. That's not what we're talking about here. This is a spiritual symbolic picture. It's basically picturing the spirit realm of the resurrected Firstfruits who are now dwelling together in the spirit realm with God the Father and Jesus Christ. It's picturing this in symbolic language as a city. But let's just notice how it's once again going to refer to the Apostles as the foundation of it. So, pick up here in Revelation 21 in verse 9.

Rev 21:9 *"Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls filled with the seven last plagues came to me and talked with me, saying, 'Come, I will show you the bride, the Lamb's wife.'" (NKJV)*

Notice that he's going to show him "the bride, the Lamb's wife" and then notice he immediately goes into a description describing a city. Because again, it's a symbolic picture that we're talking about here.

"10) And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me the great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God, 11) having the glory of God. Her light was like a most precious stone, like a jasper stone, clear as crystal. 12) Also she had a great and high wall with twelve gates, and twelve angels at the gates, and names written on them, which are the names of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel: 13) three gates on the east, three gates on the north, three gates on the south, and three gates on the west. 14) Now the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb." (NKJV)

See, once again, we have this concept of the Apostles being the foundation. Because again, just think of the Church with the analogy of a physical building, like a house. What's the first thing you do in constructing it? You lay the foundation. You lay the concrete slab that you're going to build everything else upon. See, that was the job of an Apostle. They're establishing the foundation of the Church. That is what this role is.

Now, to see the criteria for an Apostle -- because again, this is very helpful for us today. Because as I mentioned, in the first century -- in the time the Bible was being written -- it identifies a number of individuals and specifically tells us that they were Apostles. So, we don't have to guess in those cases. If we believe scripture, it just directly tells us and identifies individuals as Apostles. But since that time, there's been a number of individuals who've also asserted that they too are Apostles and they too are in this role. Again, as I mentioned, throughout my lifetime, I've seen a number of individuals who've also asserted that they too are in the role of an Apostle.

Well, now let's look at the criteria that the Bible lays out that we can use as a measuring stick to see if someone is legitimately in the role of an Apostle or not. To see that, turn over to Acts 1. What we're going to see here is the discussion that takes place when the 11 Apostles are choosing another individual to fulfill the role that was made vacant

when Judas betrayed Christ. Judas dies even before Christ is resurrected. By the time Christ comes back at the resurrection and meets with the Apostles, Judas is already dead. So now there's only 11. Well, they have to replace him so there can be the 12.

But in doing this -- let's notice as we read through this -- it gives a criteria that they had to use in selecting an individual to fulfill that role. It wasn't just anybody that they could put into that role. They had to meet a specific criteria. Now let's notice in Acts 1, and we'll start reading in verse 15.

Acts 1:15 *"And in those days Peter stood up in the midst of the disciples (altogether the number of names was about a hundred and twenty), and said, 16) 'Men and brethren, this Scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit spoke before by the mouth of David concerning Judas, who became a guide to those who arrested Jesus; 17) for he was numbered with us and obtained a part in this ministry.' 18) (Now this man purchased a field with the wages of iniquity; and falling headlong, he burst open in the middle and all his entrails gushed out. 19) And it became known to all those dwelling in Jerusalem; so that field is called in their own language, Akel Dama, that is, Field of Blood.) 20) 'For it is written in the Book of Psalms: 'Let his dwelling place be desolate, And let no one live in it'; and, 'Let another take his office.' 21) 'Therefore, of these men who have accompanied us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, 22) beginning from the baptism of John to that day when He was taken up from us, one of these must become a witness with us of His resurrection.' 23) And they proposed two: Joseph called Barsabas, who was surnamed Justus, and Matthias. 24) And they prayed and said, 'You, O Lord, who know the hearts of all, show which of these two You have chosen 25) to take part in this ministry and apostleship from which Judas by transgression fell, that he might go to his own place.' 26) And they cast their lots, and the lot fell on Matthias. And he was numbered with the eleven apostles." (NKJV)*

So, we can see here, Matthias becomes the 12th Apostle in replacement of Judas. But now let's just jump back and look in more detail at verses 21 and 22. Because notice it gives us a very specific criteria. It wasn't just anybody who believed in Christ and was a follower of His. No. There was a specific criteria the person had to meet to be a candidate for this role. This is described in verses 21 and 22. So let's just read over this again.

Acts 1:21 *"Therefore, of these men who have accompanied us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, 22) beginning from the baptism of John to that day when He was taken up from us, one of these must become a witness with us of His resurrection." (NKJV)*

Notice that they're basically defining this as someone who's a witness to the ministry of Christ. Because they're saying from the baptism of John up until Christ finished His ministry on earth. So, again, they're just referring to being a witness to His physical ministry, and also to Christ's resurrection. To be able to testify to its legitimacy. Notice when he mentions here, they had to become a "witness".

Now, let's look at the Greek word that's translated into English as a "witness" here. Because, again, this is going to help clarify this criteria for us. Now, the Greek word here is transliterated into English as "martus". It's Strong's # 3144. And the definition I'm going to read to you comes from The Complete Word Study Dictionary of the New Testament by Spiros Zodhiates. He defines it as:

"A witness. One who has information or knowledge of something, and hence, one who can give information, bring to light, or confirm something...."

Now, if they're going to confirm this, they're a first-hand witness of it. Just think of this, again, in terms of a modern-day courtroom setting. Because you may not have ever been in a courtroom, but you've probably watched TV shows before where there's a court battle taking place. And there's someone up on the witness stand, and they're testifying to something, but they're not a first-hand witness. They start basically saying, "Well, so-and-so told me this, and they told me this is true." You typically see the attorney on the opposing side immediately jump up and say, "Objection, your honor, hearsay."

What they're pointing out is this person, they can't confirm what they're saying is true or false. All they're telling you is somebody told them that this was true. They can't testify for us that, "I saw it and I can tell you it's true because I was there." That's why they always object to that testimony and say, "Well, it's hearsay, so it's inadmissible."

Well, see, this is the concept that it's getting at here. It's referring to those who were to fulfill the role of an Apostle, they had to be first-hand witnesses. They had to be able to testify that, "Yes, this guy named Jesus Christ, He was legit. I was there. I saw His ministry. I know this guy was resurrected from the dead because I'm a first-hand witness. I just didn't hear it from somebody else, and I believed their tale. I saw it. I was there." That's what he's referring to here.

See, what that tells us is, anyone beyond the first century who claims that they were in the role of an Apostle, they're making a false claim. Because there's no way that they can be a first-hand witness to Christ, His ministry and His resurrection. They may proclaim the truth, and they may accurately tell you what the Bible says. But they're not a first-hand witness of Christ's ministry and His resurrection. That is important and part of the criteria for being an Apostle.

To further see this, turn over to 1 Corinthians 9. It's obvious from the discussions that Paul is having here that he's defending his Apostleship to the Corinthian Church. That he's legitimate. Let's just notice the criteria that he lays out in these discussions. Because he gives us some very important information. Starting here in 1 Corinthians 9 and verse 1.

1 Cor 9:1 *"Am I not an apostle? Am I not free? Have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord?..."* (NKJV)

Notice he's proving he is legitimate by saying, "I'm a personal witness to Christ's resurrection."

"...Are you not my work in the Lord? 2) If I am not an apostle to others, yet doubtless I am to you. For you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord."
(NKJV)

So, notice he's basically saying I'm a legitimate Apostle because I can say I personally saw the resurrected Christ and I can personally testify and confirm this to be correct because I'm a first-hand witness.

Also notice over here in 1 Corinthians 15, how Paul tells us that all the Apostles fit this criteria. That they were all first-hand witnesses to Christ's resurrection. Because think about this. The idea that a God being came down to earth, lived as a human being, and then was murdered, then after three days and three nights, He is resurrected back to life. That is a wild claim to make. So obviously, Christ would want to send out individuals who could say not just, "I heard it from a guy who heard it from a guy who heard it from somebody else, and I just believe the story." No. He wanted to send out guys that could say, "I was there and I saw the guy. I was familiar with Him before He got killed and I saw that He was alive again. I can personally verify the fact that this really happened." Notice this, pick up in 1 Corinthians 15 and verse 3.

1 Cor 15:3 *"For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, 4) and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures, 5) and that He was seen by Cephas, then by the twelve. 6) After that He was seen by over five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain to the present, but some have fallen asleep. 7) After that He was seen by James, then by all the apostles. 8) Then last of all He was seen by me also, as by one born out of due time."* (NKJV)

Noticed there in verse 8, Paul is kind of saying, "Well, my situation is a little different. I'm kind of unique from the others." That's true in the fact that Paul wasn't a follower of Christ during His physical ministry. In fact, he was persecuting the Church. But you can easily see, when you read through the Gospel accounts, the Pharisees, and particularly the leadership among the Pharisees, were quite familiar with Christ's ministry. They were often following Him around, following what He had to say, and looking for some way to discredit Him. Then plotting to kill Him. So, they're very familiar with this.

Now, again, the Bible doesn't go into great detail telling us what Paul's role was there during all of this. But obviously, as we can read in the book of Acts, Paul was on a mission persecuting the Church. He's there at the stoning of Stephen. He's actively going after and trying to persecute and kill Christians. He was obviously familiar with the ministry of Christ. And as we'll read later, in Acts 9, he obviously saw the resurrected Christ because Christ Himself strikes down Paul on the road to Damascus.

So even though he wasn't a follower of Christ during His physical ministry, I'm sure he was familiar with it, and familiar with who Christ was. He had witnessed that Christ was preaching. Witnessed Him during His physical life, even though he was opposed to Him. Then he's also a witness of Christ after He's resurrected. So even though he was more adversarial on the front end of this versus the other Apostles who were followers of Christ, he still fits this criteria.

Just to notice the accounts here, where all these guys were witnesses of Christ's resurrection, turn back over to John 20. We'll see here in John 20, when Christ appears on Wave Sheaf Sunday to the Apostles, and proves to them that He is who He's claiming to be. He shows them His wounds where He was pierced and such to prove to them that He's been resurrected from the dead. So now they can claim to be first-hand witnesses that this guy that they followed around during His ministry, He came back to life after He was killed. They're not just saying it because they heard it from somebody. They're first-hand witnesses. Pick up here in John 20 and verse 19.

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."* (NKJV)

So, He's shown them the evidence that, "I'm really the guy who was up on the cross who got crucified." Because He's showing them the wounds, and now they're seeing Him back alive. They're first-hand witnesses.

"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. 23) If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained." 24) Now Thomas, called the Twin, one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. 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)

So, we can see here, the original 11 Apostles -- before Matthias and the others are selected -- we know for a fact that these 11 saw Christ after He's resurrected. Well, let's also keep in mind that Paul told us there were numerous other brethren -- even 500 at

one time -- that Christ appeared to after He was resurrected. So, we can easily assume then that Matthias, Barnabas and James, Christ's brother, that were included in this. They were witnesses as well.

If we turn over to Acts 9, we'll see where Paul is struck down on the road to Damascus and he is then a personal witness of Christ's resurrection as well. Because it's Christ who directly interacts with him here. This is Acts 9, and we'll start reading in verse 1.

Acts 9:1 *"Then Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest 2) and asked letters from him to the synagogues of Damascus, so that if he found any who were of the Way, whether men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. 3) As he journeyed he came near Damascus, and suddenly a light shone around him from heaven. 4) Then he fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying to him, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?' 5) And he said, 'Who are You, Lord?' Then the Lord said, 'I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. It is hard for you to kick against the goads.'" (NKJV)*

See, Christ Himself is appearing to Paul here. So now he can claim to be a first-hand witness that Christ was resurrected from the dead.

"6) So he, trembling and astonished, said, 'Lord, what do You want me to do?' Then the Lord said to him, 'Arise and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do.' 7) And the men who journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice but seeing no one. 8) Then Saul arose from the ground, and when his eyes were opened he saw no one. But they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus. 9) And he was three days without sight, and neither ate nor drank.'" (NKJV)

So, we can see that all of the Apostles fit this criteria. They were all first-hand witnesses to Christ's ministry and to the fact that He was resurrected from the dead. Now again, as I mentioned, Paul, although he was adversarial during Christ's ministry on earth -- because obviously he's not called until Acts 9, after Christ has already been resurrected and ascended up to the Father. Being a Pharisee and being a very active opponent of the Church, and everything Christ was doing, I'm sure he was familiar with Christ's ministry and what He was preaching at the time because he was on a mission to destroy the Church. So, we can see all of them fit this particular criteria.

Now, as I mentioned before, this eliminates for us the possibility -- it's not even a possibility -- that there have been any legitimate Apostles since the time of the first century going forward. Because anyone who was born after the first century didn't live in the time where it was even a possibility for them to be a witness of Christ's ministry and His resurrection. So, they simply cannot fit the criteria.

But making a false claim that one is an Apostle isn't a concept that's unique to our time or to the time beyond the first century. This is something that was happening during the

first century as well. To see this, turn over to 2 Corinthians 11. As we'll see here in 2 Corinthians 11, that Paul directly addresses the issue of people who are making false claims that they are Apostles as well. We'll start reading here in 2 Corinthians 11 and verse 12.

2 Cor 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. 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)

See, Paul directly tells us here that one of the things that was happening during his ministry and the time that he served, is there were individuals who were claiming to be Apostles that God never placed in that role. So, this is why in the letters that Paul writes to the Corinthian Church, he's addressing this. Because we saw in 1 Corinthians where he's defending that he is a legitimate Apostle. Again, one of the ways he defends that is by directly telling them that he is a first-hand witness of Christ.

But if you turn over to Revelation 2, we'll see another reference here where we can see that it was an ongoing issue in the first-century Church for individuals to be claiming to be an Apostle and making false claims. And this is in Revelation 2 in verse 1. This is the letter to the Church at Ephesus. If you have ever looked at the concept of Church eras - - basically predominant conditions of the Church throughout time, which is part of the description through Revelation 2 and 3 in these seven letters. Well, the Church at Ephesus, that's the first-century Church. This is the time frame of the ministry of the Apostles. Let's notice here in verse 1 of chapter 2.

Rev 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;'"* (NKJV)

In other words, a common problem that they were dealing with at the time was individuals who were appointing themselves into this role. Just basically making a false claim that they were Apostles because they were just like so many others that we see in our world today who are just trying to exalt themselves and to glorify their ego. Proclaiming themselves into roles that God didn't put them into just basically due to their own pride and vanity.

Well, the way to sort this out, -- Paul points this out in his letter in 2 Corinthians -- is he gives us the "sign of an Apostle". We can assume beyond the first century that anyone who's claimed to be an Apostle, well, they're making a false claim because they don't meet the criteria. They were not a first-hand witness to Christ's ministry and to His

resurrection. But during the first century, it was theoretically possible that someone could fit that criteria, who wasn't necessarily someone that God had chosen for that role. What Paul points out here is another very telling sign that separated those who were legitimately in the role of an Apostle versus those who were just making false claims. To see what that is, look here in 2 Corinthians 12 in verse 11.

2 Cor 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 accomplished among you with all perseverance, in signs and wonders and mighty deeds."* (NKJV)

See, what he's saying is the sign of an Apostle is "signs, wonders, and mighty deeds". Now, to understand exactly what he's getting at here, I'm going to give you the definitions of the Greek words that are translated in English as "signs, wonders, and mighty deeds". There's three different Greek words involved here. What you're going to see when we go through the definitions of these is what they're all basically getting at is performing supernatural miracles. Things that you just cannot explain through physical means. That anyone who was legitimately an Apostle was performing miracles. This was a sign that would separate them from individuals who were just making wild claims and just trying to exalt themselves, just to try to feed their narcissistic egos.

Now, the first word we're going to look at here is the word that's translated into English as "signs". The Greek word here is transliterated into English as "semeion". It's Strong's # 4592. Again, the definitions for all of these are going to come from Zodhiates. He defines this word as:

"Sign, mark, token, miracle with a spiritual end and purpose....miracles which lead to something out of and beyond themselves; finger-marks of God, valuable not so much for what they are as for what they indicate of the grace and power of the Doer...."

In other words, they're miracles with a spiritual purpose. That is what he's getting at. We'll see a little bit later here in the sermon, what this was, was exactly what Paul was describing. It's the sign of an Apostle. It was to prove their legitimacy and to call attention to them so that people would pay attention to their message and accept what they were saying.

Now, the Greek word that's translated as "wonders" in English, this word is transliterated into English as "teras". It's Strong's # 5059. Zodhiates defines this word as:

"A wonder or omen....It is a miracle regarded as startling, imposing or amazing."

In other words, it's a miracle that's going to get your attention. Then when you look at what in English is called "mighty deeds", the Greek word that's translated as "mighty deeds" in English, this is "dunamis". It's Strong's # 1411. And Zodhiates defines this as:

“...Spoken of miraculous power, “the mighty power of signs and wonders”...means the power of working miracles....”

In other words, what Paul is telling us here in 2 Corinthians is, the way you can tell a legitimate Apostle is they're going to perform miracles that get everybody's attention.

Now, again, also just think of that in terms of our modern day. Now, as I mentioned, during my lifetime, I'm aware of a handful of individuals -- even associated with the Church of God -- who have proclaimed themselves to be in the role of an Apostle. Now, as we've already seen from the Bible, that's obviously a false claim because no one living in our lifetimes today can claim that they were alive back when Christ's ministry was taking place and they're a first-hand witness to His ministry and to His resurrection.

But in addition to that, none of the individuals that I'm aware of that have made the claim that they're Apostles have been able to perform miracles. If you just use the sign of an Apostle alone as the litmus test to measure their claim, that proves all by itself as well that they're making false claims. As we can see all throughout the book of Acts, it very clearly demonstrates for us that performing miracles was something the Apostles did regularly and this was truly the sign of an Apostle.

Just to notice some of this, turn over to Acts 2. This is right after the Pentecost account here where the Holy Spirit is poured out and the New Covenant Church is established. But let's just pick up here in chapter 2 in verse 40.

Acts 2:40 *“And with many other words he testified and exhorted them, saying, “Be saved from this perverse generation.” 41) Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them. 42) And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers. 43) Then fear came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles.” (NKJV)*

Notice the signs and wonders the Apostles were doing caused fear and amazement on the people. In other words, they were performing supernatural miracles that got everyone's attention. That is basically what this is telling us. And we see similar comments like this all throughout the book of Acts. So, turn over to Acts 5 and we'll start reading in verse 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)*

And notice that this isn't the case where people were just coming and requesting anointing, and being anointed, and some were healed, and some got better over time, and some God decided not to heal them at this time, and they just had to suffer with their illness. That's not what this is saying. This is saying they just healed everybody. They're performing miracles. That is what's taking place.

Just notice another example here. Turn over to Acts 14. Now we're going to pick up here in verse 1. I'm not going to take the time to read the latter part of chapter 13. But the reason I mention that is it's important to have the context of the latter part of chapter 13 to know who's being referred to here in the beginning of chapter 14. Because we're going to see here when we read through the beginning of chapter 14, it's just going to use the pronoun "they", and it doesn't give us specific names. But if you read the latter part of chapter 13, you realize that the "they" that it's referring to are Paul and Barnabas, who we've already seen are two individuals that are specifically mentioned to be Apostles. But now let's just start reading now in verse 1 of chapter 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)

In other words, God is proving that what they're preaching is legitimate. And the way He's doing it is by inspiring them to perform miracles that get everybody's attention. Then the onlookers realize these two aren't just making wild, unsubstantiated claims. There's something going on here. Pick up in verse 4.

"4) But the multitude of the city was divided: part sided with the Jews, and part with the apostles." (NKJV)

So again, that confirms for us the two individuals we're talking about here. Again, if you read the latter part of chapter 13, it's Paul and Barnabas. That is who the pronoun "they" is referring to here. And they're both identified as Apostles and they're performing miracles here. Because you can see this role of performing miracles is part of the job of an Apostle.

If you turn back over to Matthew 10, we'll see Matthew's account here that's similar to what we read earlier in Luke 6, where Christ initially selects the original 12 Apostles. We read that previously. Well, Matthew's account here of the same event gives us some additional details. It points out for us that when Christ selected them, He also specifically was giving them the authority to perform miracles that got everyone's attention. Let's pick up now in chapter 10 and verse 1.

Matt 10:1 *"And when He had called His twelve disciples to Him, He gave them power over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all kinds of sickness and*

all kinds of disease. 2) Now the names of the twelve apostles are these: first, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother; James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother; 3) Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James the son of Alphaeus, and Lebbaeus, whose surname was Thaddaeus; 4) Simon the Cananite, and Judas Iscariot, who also betrayed Him. 5) These twelve Jesus sent out and commanded them, saying: "Do not go into the way of the Gentiles, and do not enter a city of the Samaritans. 6) But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. 7) And as you go, preach, saying, 'The kingdom of heaven is at hand.' 8) Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out demons. Freely you have received, freely give." (NKJV)

Notice, one of the things He mentioned for them to do was to raise the dead. Now that's a miracle that gets everyone's attention. Because as I mentioned before, one of the things the Apostles would do was "heal all manner of diseases". Again, this isn't like just anointing someone with oil as described in James 5, because anyone who's an Elder in the Church can fulfill that as James 5 specifically says. That's not specific to an Apostle.

But what the Apostles were doing was different than that. It wasn't just anointing and requesting that God heal someone, and God might choose to heal them and He might not. No. They were given the power to do supernatural healing. In addition to that, they were given the ability to raise the dead. Now, you don't see any other instructions in the New Testament for the ministry beyond them saying, "Well, here's the protocol you do to raise somebody from the dead back to physical life." That's not a concept like anointing for healing. That's not included. Because again, this is a supernatural miracle that got everyone's attention and identified them as Apostles.

Just to see a couple of examples of this, turn over to Acts 9. We'll see here an example where it tells us how Peter literally resurrected someone from the dead. This is Acts 9 and we'll start reading in verse 36.

Acts 9:36 *"At Joppa there was a certain disciple named Tabitha, which is translated Dorcas. This woman was full of good works and charitable deeds which she did. 37) But it happened in those days that she became sick and died. When they had washed her, they laid her in an upper room. 38) And since Lydda was near Joppa, and the disciples had heard that Peter was there, they sent two men to him, imploring him not to delay in coming to them. 39) Then Peter arose and went with them. When he had come, they brought him to the upper room. And all the widows stood by him weeping, showing the tunics and garments which Dorcas had made while she was with them. 40) But Peter put them all out, and knelt down and prayed. And turning to the body he said, 'Tabitha, arise.' And she opened her eyes, and when she saw Peter she sat up. 41) Then he gave her his hand and lifted her up; and when he had called the saints and widows, he presented her alive. 42) And it became known throughout all Joppa, and many believed on the Lord. 43) So it was that he stayed many days in Joppa with Simon, a tanner." (NKJV)*

And it is there in verse 42. This got everyone's attention, and many people then believed what Peter was preaching. They believed in the Lord because they saw him resurrect someone from the dead. So just like when we were going over the definitions of the Greek words there for "signs, wonders, and mighty deeds", part of the definition for the word is translated as "signs". It told us it was a "miracle with a spiritual purpose". Well, that's exactly what happened here. This wasn't just a miracle so Peter could beat his chest and say, "Look how great I am." No. This was a miracle for a spiritual purpose that got people to pay attention to what Peter was preaching and to believe in Christ, to believe that He was real.

Now, to see an example where the Apostle Paul did something similar here, turn over to Acts 20. And we'll see here an account where Paul resurrects someone from the dead. This is Acts 20 and verse 7.

Acts 20:7 *"Now on the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul, ready to depart the next day, spoke to them and continued his message until midnight. 8) There were many lamps in the upper room where they were gathered together. 9) And in a window sat a certain young man named Eutychus, who was sinking into a deep sleep. He was overcome by sleep; and as Paul continued speaking, he fell down from the third story and was taken up dead. 10) But Paul went down, fell on him, and embracing him said, 'Do not trouble yourselves, for his life is in him.' 11) Now when he had come up, had broken bread and eaten, and talked a long while, even till daybreak, he departed. 12) And they brought the young man in alive, and they were not a little comforted."* (NKJV)

That's kind of an understatement there to basically say they were highly encouraged by this. That is the concept of what it's getting at. See, it was a miracle with a spiritual purpose. It encouraged the brethren and it proved legitimacy. That Paul really was who he said he was. That he was an Apostle and the message that he was bringing was true and legitimate. And that he was a true representative of God in doing this.

And see, this use of miracles like this for this purpose, very often, that is how this is used throughout the Bible. Because we sometimes get a false concept associated with miracles. What I mean by that is, because of the references to faith connected with miracles, oftentimes people think, "Well, if we just had lots of faith. If we just had the faith of those people in the Bible, we'd be rewarded with seeing all these fantastic miracles." But what that misses is very often in the Bible, the purpose of miracles wasn't to reward people for their great faith. It was to provide evidence to people who wouldn't have faith and wouldn't believe unless something was proven to them by miracles.

And see, this was even true of Christ Himself. Turn over to Acts 2 here. We'll see here in Peter's sermon on the Day of Pentecost, how he mentions that the performing of the miracles that Christ did, this was evidence to prove to people that He was legitimate. In other words, they wouldn't believe without that. That is the point that we need to get from this. This is Acts 2 and verse 22.

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

But notice there in verse 22, when it said basically God was attesting to Christ's legitimacy -- Christ is who He says He was. He was a God being that came to earth. He is the son of God, and He did come down to be the savior of mankind. This was attested through the “signs, wonders, and mighty deeds”. This was through the miracles with a spiritual purpose.

Just to further clarify this, I'd like to share with you the Greek word that's translated as “attested” here in English. It's transliterated into English as “apodeiknumi”. It's Strong's # 584. Again, the definition I'm going to read to you comes from Zodhiates. He defines it as:

“To show, demonstrate, exhibit.... To show by argument, to demonstrate, prove. In Acts 2:22...meaning approved, confirmed of God through miracles, wonders, and signs...They showed that He had power to accomplish anything He chose to, i.e., anything out of the ordinary..., and that what He did was a sign as to who He really was, the Messiah, the One approved of God.”

So, what you can see by this is the signs, wonders, and mighty deeds, the performing of miracles with a spiritual purpose. Christ did this. If you read through the Gospels, you can see numerous examples of this. I mean, He even resurrects people from the dead. Because I'm sure you're probably familiar with the story of Lazarus, where Lazarus had been dead long enough that he even started to smell. So, there was no question for anybody that this guy was dead. And Christ comes and resurrects him. What does this do? This proves to everybody that's around watching this, Christ is who He says He is. He's not just some wild lunatic making crazy claims. This guy's legitimate. He was truly sent by God, and He is who He says He is.

Well, see, the same was true of the Apostles. But as I pointed out at the beginning of this sermon, the Apostles fulfilled a very unique and special role. As we covered earlier, they established the foundation of the Church. Again, when you put up a building or you put up a house, what's the first thing you do? You lay the foundation, you pour the concrete slab, because you're going to build everything else on top of that. See, this is the unique role of an Apostle. They were the guys building the foundation.

But it was a limited role to that. What I mean by that is, there were only Apostles in the first century. Because as we've covered today, part of the criteria for being an Apostle was being a first-hand witness to the ministry and resurrection of Jesus Christ. It wasn't

just testifying to it simply because we believe the account of the Bible. I mean, yes, the ministry today, God's ministry today, part of our job is to teach what the book says and to proclaim that Christ is resurrected. He is the savior of mankind, and we do have to accept Him as our savior. But none of us can claim to be first-hand witnesses. That's something that only those in the first century could do.

So, you see, when we look at the claims of people in our modern day that they're Apostles, we can see two major problems with the claims that they make. One, you had to live in the first century to be a legitimate Apostle. Because that was not a role that continued on. The criteria that we read out of Acts all by itself proves that. In addition, if you're like myself, I've seen lots of individuals in our modern day who claim to be Apostles, but I've never seen a single one of them performing miracles.

So, I hope we can learn from this sermon what the role of an Apostle is. Again, it's a very unique and specific role that we should all be thankful for that God established because it built the foundation of the Church and recorded the truth for all of us to learn in our Christian lives. But we should also learn from this that the role of an Apostle is a role that is unique to the first century. To the time that Jesus Christ was on the earth. A person had to have lived at that time to fulfill the role of an Apostle. Again, the sign of an Apostle is the performing of miracles with a spiritual purpose. So, with that knowledge, we can realize that any time you see an individual today who's claiming to be in the role of an Apostle, you can realize that they are making a false claim and you can dismiss that accordingly.