

True Apostleship Acts 19:11-17

Several years ago I read an article about a faith-healing crusade somewhere in Africa. They came to a certain area, and built a stage of wood in the open air, because there was no coliseum large enough in the town to accommodate all the people who were to attend. And when the night finally arrived tens of thousands came. The music was loud and the atmosphere was celebratory. Then the faith healer arrived. The crowd applauded and cheered. There were various individuals who were selected to come up on stage and be healed. People seemed to be given sight, the ability to stand who were lame, and healed of various afflictions. Most people were amazed, and the night ended with people enthralled with the faith-healer, and they gave huge sums of money to the man and his ministry in hopes that they too could be healed of their afflictions.

After that night the wooden stage was dismantled, and it was cut up into little cubes, and the article went on to say that if you send such and such amount of money you could have a piece of this stage where the faith-healer did theses miracles, and if you touch and pray over this piece of wood you could have the healing that you desire. Now, this has more in common with witchcraft than it does Christianity, but where would they ever get that notion or that teaching? I think it is obvious to most that those individuals are trying to defraud individuals who are afflicted and suffering and vulnerable. They want their money. But where could they ever validate that? Some advertise that a certain person has prayed over a cloth, and it now has certain powers, and you can buy that cloth. This is very popular in Charismatic circles. The passage that they many turn to is this passage that we are going to look at this morning, where we see people healed by the very handkerchief or apron of the apostle Paul.

Many individuals faith in Jesus have been destroyed because they have given money and believed that God would heal them, but in the end nothing has happened. And it is important to note a few of things. One is that false teachers were around from the very beginning trying to use the name of Jesus in a way that would line their own pockets. The second thing is that we should be able to truly spot the counterfeit. We are to be followers of Christ that love Christ so much and his salvation so much that we can spot the counterfeit. Listen to 1 John 4:1, **“Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world.”** We are not to be gullible but to test the spirits to see if they are really from God. John says there are “many false prophets have gone out into the world.” Not a few but many! There are spiritual dangers not just on the outside but inside professing Christianity. People often get offended when you say that this is right and that is wrong pointing out error. You are too judgmental. And some can shoot just about everyone they meet. The bible doesn’t condemn us being discerning and judging things biblically. We do that every day. It condemns hypocritical judgment. And what is at stake is a false gospel through false representatives of Christ masquerading as his representatives for some sort of gain in this world.

The third thing is there is nothing like the true Jesus of the Bible. Once you know the authentic Christ you just can’t look away. Your mind and heart are captivated with him. And what we have in these verses here in chapter 19 is really a contrast of ministries between Paul and the sons of Sceva. And I want us to look at the first part of

that contrast this morning. I hope when we look at Paul's ministry and the uniqueness of it, it will cause us to love our Lord and Saviour that much more. Because that is what any true minister and representative of the gospel does — he says — Behold your King! Behold Jesus! There is a point in getting away from self to the Christ of our salvation. So let's look at Paul's ministry, and may God give us a greater love for Christ.

1. We see the apostolic credentials of Paul. Vv. 11.

We often point this out, that there is both similarities and differences between what we see in the Book of Acts and what we see now. There is both continuity and discontinuity. The continuity is that salvation is always and only through the sacrifice and merits of Christ. There is no other name and no other way than through Jesus and him alone that individuals can have forgiveness of sins before a holy God. The discontinuity is what we see in these verses. They are the signs and wonders that take place through the hand of Paul. Here is the thing, Paul has been preaching and teaching in the last several verses about Jesus being the Christ. There is no New Testament at this time. There are very few letters that were written and they are certainly not in wide circulation. God the Spirit works through His Word to open our hearts through the truth of Christ. We are thankful for that ministry.

But think of it, because false Messiah's have come and gone in the history of Israel, and even as we see in the text there are always many who are claiming to represent God, so how do you know Paul is an authentic preacher, and authentic representative of God? And here is the answer — God gave miraculous gifts to be done through the hands of the apostles to authenticate they were truly his representatives. God gave a taste of that coming kingdom that was preached about.

Think of it, there were at least three credentials that validated a person to be an apostle, those called of God to lay the foundation of the church. First, they had to have seen the resurrected Lord. They had to be eyewitnesses of his resurrection. When the apostles choose a replacement for Judas, he says in Acts 1:22, **“beginning from the baptism of John until the day when he was taken up from us—one of these men must become with us a witness to his resurrection.”** Listen to what Paul says in 1 Corinthians 9:1, **“Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? Are not you my workmanship in the Lord?”** Now here is what should be an easy conclusion to make — there are no apostles today, because none have seen the resurrected Lord no matter what kind of vision they say they had. Paul was the last, and even as he says in 1 Corinthians 15 as one untimely born.

The second criteria is an individual had to be personal appointed or selected by the Lord. Someone could not take up this position on their own or be self appointed. After the apostles had selected two men who might replace Judas, they drew lots to see who would replace Judas, listen to their prayer in Acts 1:24-25, **“And they prayed and said, ‘You, Lord, who know the hearts of all, show which one of these two you have chosen to take the place in this ministry and apostleship from which Judas turned aside to go to his own place.’”** Certainly we saw Paul's calling earlier in this Book to the apostolic office.

The third criteria was signs and wonders that were done. Listen again to Acts 5:12, **“Now many signs and wonders were regularly done among the people by**

the hands of the apostles. And they were all together in Solomon's Portico."

Notice that these were done by the apostles. They were the unique representatives of Jesus Christ who were commissioned to lay the foundation of the church of Christ. These were not everyone in the church doing these miraculous works but they were done by an apostle or someone closely associated with an apostle. Paul when defending his apostolic ministry among the Corinthians, writes in 2 Corinthians 12:12, **"The signs of a true apostle were performed among you with utmost patience, with signs and wonders and mighty works."** John MacArthur writes in his book *Strange Fire*, **"Those qualifications alone conclusively demonstrate that there are no apostles in the church today. No living person has seen the risen Christ with his or her own eyes; no one is able to perform miraculous signs like those done by the apostles in the book of Acts (cf. Acts 3:3–11; 5:15–16; 9:36–42; 20:6–12; 28:1–6); and—in spite of presumptuous claims to the contrary—no one in the modern church has been personally and directly appointed as an apostle by the Lord Jesus."**

So verse 11 here is speaking of that apostolic ministry, and something of the discontinuity of the Book of Acts that brings us into what is known as the church age. Look at what it says, **"And God was doing extraordinary miracles by the hands of Paul."** Now I want us to notice a number of things in this verse. One is that these were not ordinary things. They were extraordinary things. These were miracles that were being performed. There was no way to naturally explain them. People were sick and then through the immediate power and work of God they were well. You see that over and over again through the gospels and Acts. People received sight, the lame could walk, diseases were banished at once. I mean it was stunning and immediate! There was no recuperation or stages of healing. It was full and complete. These were extraordinary. They were miracles. And the amount and the quality of them spoke of the presence and the power of God.

And that is the second thing here, notice that these miracles didn't come through the power of Paul but God working through the hand of Paul. This was God's doing. So often faith healers want to point to themselves. They want to point to their own importance because they want individuals not to trust Christ but themselves. Luke is very careful here to give the cause and the glory to God. God is the great healer. And certainly these healings point to a day where God will banish all infirmities and diseases and we will be forever before him. His kingdom, earthly reign will come!

But the third thing I want to point out here is the context. I think so many of the errors and false teachings could be corrected just by looking at the context. Many try to validate their practice just by pointing out these verses. But they never ask why these miracles are mentioned, and what they have to do with Paul's ministry? Because Paul's ministry was not being a miracle worker. He just did not come into cities and towns and villages and heal people and then leave. There were no healing crusades. Look back at verse 8, **"And he entered the synagogue and for three months spoke boldly, reasoning and persuading them about the kingdom of God."** What is Paul doing? Speaking boldly about the kingdom of God — preaching Christ and the need for him. And we realize that there arose opposition. So what did God give in the midst of that preaching to validate the truth of Jesus? He gave these extraordinary miracles

to authenticate the message of Jesus Christ crucified and arise from the grave. He gave these miracles as a taste of the kingdom of God that he was preaching on. There is no doubt that the kingdom of God is founded on the work of Christ. But these miracles are not our hope is here but in the kingdom to come. You can be in that kingdom through the grace and merits of Christ. His message is about Christ.

So here is one way that you can really spot a counterfeit — are they pointing to Christ, the gospel of Christ, sinners need of him, or is the preacher pointing to himself and his power and his ability, and the need to trust in him? All these miracles that were done were not meant to shine the light on Paul but shine the light on Christ. The main aspect of Paul's ministry was the presentation of Jesus Christ. So think of an authentic ministry today. Here is the continuity — that preaching points to Christ. The preacher points away from self or reliance on him or his power and authority to Jesus Christ. People are always running to something, but all we need is found in Jesus. People might be building a kingdom, huge ministries, but it doesn't mean it is God's kingdom.

There is so much talk about what the Spirit can do and cannot do today that we miss his glorious work, his extraordinary work in our lives. Listen to 2 Corinthians 3:17-18, **“Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.”** You want to see the glorious work of the Spirit? It is not in focussing attention on the Spirit or preacher but he causes us to behold the glory of Christ, and he transforms us from one degree of glory to another. He transforms us into the image of Christ. Folks that is extraordinary. All the people that Paul healed in Ephesus died. But all who trusted in Christ have lived with Christ for the last two thousand years. Healings always have only a limited value. Christ has eternal value. What or who are you chasing today?

2. We see a description of these miracles. V.12.

Remember all of these miracles were to point to the greater need and that is sins forgiven. Remember the paralytic that was lowered through the roof where Jesus was preaching and teaching, and many would have thought his greatest need was physical healing, but it was spiritual cleansing. It was the forgiveness of sins. And Jesus says, “Son your sins are forgiven.” He later gives evidence that he has the authority to forgive sins by healing that man. But don't forget Christ has met our greatest need through him taking on the punishment for sin that I might be redeemed. This is what should astound us. Not, why doesn't God heal my body or my marriage or whatever misery we are in? No, why would God save a sinner like me? Oh the wonder of it all just to think that Jesus loves me. We will all die. People try to build their own kingdoms. But we can't bring anything in this world with us, only what we have done for the One whose kingdom is eternal. Whose kingdom are you living for?

And these passages, again remind us that as Paul preached on the kingdom, God gave a mere taste of the greatness of that kingdom that will come. This is quite an amazing verse, and the reason why is that Paul is not even present at many of these healings. But there are representative clothing of his that is present. Look at verse 12 and take in the wonder here, **“so that even handkerchiefs or aprons that had**

touched his skin were carried away to the sick, and their diseases left them and the evil spirits came out of them." Handkerchiefs might be something like a sweatband as he worked during the heat of the day. And the apron could have been the cloak he wore in his tent making. God healed individuals through the hand of Paul, and here we see items that touched his skin were carried away to were sick. And they were brought to a place where Paul wasn't, and as they touched the person afflicted with a disease or affliction left them. The meaning of left them would be like a person who left your present. It was no longer there. Health had been restored. There were many incurable eye diseases, there were cancers, and other maladies that were banished immediately from those afflicted.

Not only that, and this will come into play as we look at the seven sons of Sceva, and that is unclean spirits were cast out. And these evil spirits caused people to suffer. They are not like we hear about today where someone has an evil spirit of pornography or alcohol or anger. Many have life dominating sins, and we all have areas we struggle in, and it is easy to blame our actions and words on something else. But the main thing here is that these evil spirits are part and parcel of suffering under the fall. Some had manifestations, and certainly with the person he could have cooperated at first but later become slave to these spirits. But they never brought life but suffering.

Now think about it because the Ephesians were very superstitious and they trusted in amulets laden with power to heal and do something supernatural, but here are these common pieces of cloth that touched Paul, and Luke is very clear that the power and the healings came from God, but they are identified with Paul because of the gospel he preached. And to think of the awe this must have created — God through his Spirit uses means to bring conviction. You can imagine people seeing these wonders, people they know cured, people they love suddenly and fully healed. All their superstition couldn't do this! And then to think of the message. The fear of God, and the knowledge of his amazing grace through Jesus Christ. The gospel of Christ is so central here.

Now many wonder why God has chosen not to work this way today? And God can do any miracle he wants to do. And I believe he still does but they are very rare. Wouldn't it be neat, wouldn't it confirm our faith and trust in Christ if we witnessed things like this seen in the book of Acts? Wouldn't it even convince unbelievers of their need of Christ? And those are great questions. And let me give a couple of answers to those questions. One is that miracles, no matter how great never saved anyone. God did use it to authenticate the ministry's of Paul, but all those miracles are useless without the Spirit of God working through the Gospel of God, that is written in this book. Remember the story of the rich man and Lazarus. Remember the rich man wakes up in that place of torment and he asks father Abraham to send back Lazarus to warn his brothers, because surely they will believe if someone rises from the dead. Listen to Abraham's answer in Luke 16:31, **"He said to him, 'If they do not hear Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead.'"** It is the Spirit working through these signs. Without him no life!

And secondly, often in our quest for more or something extraordinary we miss the extraordinary we have. We miss that we are in a position far greater than any of those first century believers who witnessed these miracles. And that is we have the full

cannon of Scripture. We do not need anything else that validates our faith. God has given us his word that is sufficient for life and godliness. Peter talks about seeing something extraordinary in 1Peter 1 and that is the Transfiguration of Christ, but listen to what he says right after that, 2 Peter 1:19, **“And we have the prophetic word more fully confirmed, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts.”** We have this Word more fully confirmed, more sure, more glorious than any sign or wonder that could be done. God has given us this Scripture that speaks and witnesses to our inner person the truths about Christ. God speaks to us through this living Word the truths about Jesus.

One of the reasons why we are so apathetic about Christ is we really have a experiential Christianity today. Experiential, is that people want some kind of encounter with God or with Christ. They want some kind of experience, such as miracles or what Peter saw on the Mount of transfiguration. They want their lives to be changed, marriages, and families to be instantly altered through a miracle. It is microwave Christianity. Here is the thing, even with the miracles it is all about Christ. It is all about him. It is about his coming kingdom. it is all about his death, resurrection and his canceling the debt of sinners. Don't you realize that God has given us something greater? He had given us his Son. We see that Son most clearly through his Word!

Here is one of the easiest ways to assess whether a teacher is a true representative of God or not, and that is what they say about Jesus. Does their teaching line up with the Christ of the Word? And here is the way we can even diagnose our own heart, are we people of the Book? Are we people who love the Christ of the Book or are we looking for something else? There really is nothing greater than the Christ of the Scriptures. God has really given us the superior revelation of our Lord and Saviour. We do not need to look anywhere else.