

“Signs of an Apostle”  
Mark 16:17-20  
(Preached at Trinity, December 2, 2015)

I'm supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord's Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

**Disclaimer:** These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I'll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. As we come to the closing verses of the Gospel of Mark we find the powerful signs that would accompany the ministry of the Apostles.  
**2 Corinthians 12:12 NAU** - "The signs of a true apostle were performed among you with all perseverance, by signs and wonders and miracles."  
**Acts 5:12 NAU** - "At the hands of the apostles many signs and wonders were taking place among the people"  
**Mark 16:20 NAU** - "And they went out and preached everywhere, while the Lord worked with them, and confirmed the word by the signs that followed."
  2. It has been suggested that one reason these verses fell into dispute was the insistence by some that these miraculous signs did not cease with the apostles but continued as normative in the church. We have to be clear here. The apostolic office was unique and non-repeatable. These signs are indeed extraordinary, but they were signs that were attached to the apostolic office.
  3. Tonight I want us to see the uniqueness of the Apostolic office.
- I. Their qualifications were unique
- A. There were basically three qualifications for the office of Apostle – An Apostle had to meet *all* of the qualifications – which definitely demonstrates that this was a unique and temporary office.
    1. They were eyewitnesses of the life and ministry of Christ from the testimony of John the Baptist to the resurrection
      - a. When Matthias was chosen:  
**Acts 1:21-22 NAU** - "Therefore it is necessary that of the men who have accompanied us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us-- <sup>22</sup> beginning with the baptism of John until the day that He was taken up from us-- one of these *must* become a witness with us of His resurrection."
      - b. Peter described his office of Apostle  
**Acts 10:39-41 NAU** - "We are witnesses of all the things He did both in the land of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They also put Him to death by hanging Him on a cross. <sup>40</sup> "God raised Him up on the third day and granted that He become visible, <sup>41</sup> not to all the people, but to witnesses who were chosen beforehand by God, *that is*, to us who ate and drank with Him after He arose from the dead."

- c. The apostle John described the unique experience of the apostles  
**1 John 1:1-2 NAU** - "What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the Word of Life-- <sup>2</sup> and the life was manifested, and we have seen and testify and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was manifested to us--"
  - d. Paul described his own qualification as one who witnessed the resurrected Christ.  
**1 Corinthians 9:1 NAU** – “Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? Are you not my work in the Lord?”  
 It is important to emphasize they were witnesses with their physical eyes. Some would claim apostleship because they have seen Him spiritually or in visions or dreams.
2. They were personally and directly appointed by Jesus Christ
    - a. Jesus personally called His Apostles  
 No one else is qualified to give such a calling
    - b. Apostles are those personally sent by Christ  
NASB **Mark 3:14** – “And He appointed twelve, that they might be with Him, and that He might send them out to preach,”  
NASB **Luke 6:13** – “And when day came, He called His disciples to Him; and chose twelve of them, whom He also named as apostles.”  
NASB **Acts 1:2** – “until the day when He was taken up, after He had by the Holy Spirit given orders to the apostles whom He had chosen.”
    - c. This explains the approach the Apostles took when they chose Matthias to replace Judas. They cast lots to determine the choice of Christ.
  3. They were able to affirm their office with miraculous signs  
**Matthew 10:1 NAU** - "Jesus summoned His twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal every kind of disease and every kind of sickness."  
**Acts 2:43 NAU** - " Everyone kept feeling a sense of awe; and many wonders and signs were taking place through the apostles."  
**2 Corinthians 12:12 NAU** - "The signs of a true apostle were performed among you with all perseverance, by signs and wonders and miracles."
- C. The absence of the Apostles today is significant as it speaks strongly to the issue of cessationism
1. The extraordinary gifts were uniquely connected to the Apostles
  2. The cessation of the Apostles also brought the cessation of the miraculous gifts. This is also important as we consider the revelatory gifts.

II. The apostolic office was also particular in function.

- A. The Apostles were used of our Lord in establishing His church
1. The Apostles were used of Christ to establish the doctrine of the church  
**Acts 2:42 KJV** – “And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.”
  2. Paul stated that the church was established upon foundation of the apostles  
**Ephesians 2:19-20 NAU** - "So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household, <sup>20</sup> having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner *stone*"
  3. In a building you first lay the foundation and then you build the building. You don't continue adding to the foundation of the building
- B. The apostles were given gifts particular to their apostolic office
1. Paul states this in 2 Corinthians  
**2 Corinthians 12:12 NAU** - "The signs of a true apostle were performed among you with all perseverance, by signs and wonders and miracles."
  2. These signs, wonders, and mighty deeds were in the form of what we refer to as extraordinary gifts. These gifts were given for the purpose of validating the gospel and confirming the Word of God prior to the completion of Scripture as well as validating God's messengers.  
**Hebrews 2:3-4 NAU** - "how will we escape if we neglect so great a salvation? After it was at the first spoken through the Lord, it was confirmed to us by those who heard, <sup>4</sup> God also testifying with them, both by signs and wonders and by various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit according to His own will."
  3. Mark mentions some of these extraordinary signs –  
"These signs will accompany those who have believed:"
    - In My name they will cast out demons
    - They will speak with new tongues
    - They will pick up serpents
    - If they drink any deadly *poison*, it will not hurt them
    - They will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover."
  4. Sometimes reading the NT it would appear that these miracles were performed constantly but the truth is they were relatively rare.
    - a. During the life of Christ there seemed to be an increase in demonic activity and the casting out of demons as a sign of His authority. The Apostles also demonstrated this. After the ascension of Christ, however, we find little emphasis upon demonic activity and none beyond the book of Acts
    - b. The use of tongues ceased with the apostles.

- c. We only have a single reference to Paul being bit by a serpent  
**Acts 28:3-5 NAU** - " But when Paul had gathered a bundle of sticks and laid them on the fire, a viper came out because of the heat and fastened itself on his hand. <sup>4</sup> When the natives saw the creature hanging from his hand, they *began* saying to one another, "Undoubtedly this man is a murderer, and though he has been saved from the sea, justice has not allowed him to live." <sup>5</sup> However he shook the creature off into the fire and suffered no harm."  
 This is also consistent with the words of our Lord:  
**Luke 10:19 NAU** - "Behold, I have given you authority to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing will injure you."
- d. We have no reference to the drinking of poison
- e. The gift of healing diminished even during the life of the apostles.  
 Paul told Timothy to drink some wine for his stomach ailment  
 Paul said Trophimus became too sick to travel  
**2 Timothy 4:20 NAU** - "Erastus remained at Corinth, but Trophimus I left sick at Miletus."

### III. The extraordinary and miraculous gifts passed with the Apostolic age

- A. Today the Word of God is powerful  
**Hebrews 4:12 NAU** - "For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart."
  - 1. For some, they are not satisfied with God's Word. They demand more. They crave the sensational.  
 God's Word is sufficient – The Reformers called it Sola Scriptura  
**Isaiah 55:10-11 NAU** - "For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, And do not return there without watering the earth And making it bear and sprout, And furnishing seed to the sower and bread to the eater; <sup>11</sup> So will My word be which goes forth from My mouth; It will not return to Me empty, Without accomplishing what I desire, And without succeeding *in the matter* for which I sent it."
  - 2. There is no need today to authenticate the Word of God through supernatural signs. God's Word by His Spirit authenticates itself.
  - 3. The Gospel message alone is powerful
- B. Most of the reformed tradition hold that the miraculous gifts have ceased.
  - 1. These include John Calvin, Martin Luther, John Owen, Jonathan Edwards, George Whitefield, Charles Spurgeon, Benjamin Warfield.  
 Warfield – "These gifts were part of the credentials of the apostles as the authoritative agents of God in founding the Church. They necessarily passed away with the apostolic age."  
 Jonathan Edwards – "Theses extra gifts were given in order to the founding and establishing of the church in the world. But since the canon of Scripture has been completed, and the church fully founded and established, these extraordinary gifts have ceased."

2. It is also important to note that this consistent with our Confession of Faith and it is the position of ARBCA, the association with which we are in fellowship. In a position paper on the subject we read:  
“We affirm *sola scriptura* as the clear position of the LBC identifying the only source of objective and prepositional revelation of God to man today. We deny the continuation of objective revelation in any form, “Those former ways of God’s revealing his will to his people, now being ceased.”

**Conclusion:**

1. The signs and wonders that accompanied the ministry of Christ and the office of Apostle were designed by God for a very particular period in church history.
2. Since these gifts were connected inseparably to the office of Apostle when this office ended the office of prophet has also ended.
3. We can carry forth the Word of God with great confidence today. It is powerful. It is sufficient.