

# The Missing Mark of Apostolic Ministry

by Keith Malcomson

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*The sermon emphasizes the importance of discerning true apostles and the marks of apostolic ministry, including death to self, the foundation of apostolic ministry, and the importance of suffering and death.*

**Scripture:** Matthew 10:40, Matthew 20:16, Luke 10:16, John 20:27, 1 Corinthians 4:9, 2 Corinthians 4:12, Ephesians 5:1, Philippians 2:17, 1 Peter 2:21, 1 Peter 4:12

**Topics:** "Apostolic Ministry", "Self Denial"

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## Description

Keith Malcomson emphasizes the importance of discerning true apostles from false ones in the Church, highlighting the need for the entire congregation to test those who claim to be apostles based on their qualities and qualifications, not just their titles. He points out that the primary mark of a true apostle is death to self, where they have surrendered their own desires, motives, and needs for the sake of God's work. Drawing from Paul's example, he explains that apostolic ministry involves enduring trials, persecution, and being a spectacle for all to see, ultimately leading to life in the Church through death to self.

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## Transcript

For the past century there have been more claims to apostleship, more talk of it and controversy over it than since the early days of the church. With such an overwhelming swell of professions to possession of this great ministry gift we as the Church must as at no other time be sure we receive those 'sent ones' which come from God, but reject those who claim it, but are not sent of God (Jn.20v27; Mt.10v40-41; Lk.10v16).

To make a mistake in this will have far reaching repercussions.

We must follow the example of the Church at Ephesus, which was commended by the Lord, because they "tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and has found them liars." This shows it was the responsibility of the whole Church not just leaders or elders, to try these so called apostles.

This also shows that it is possible to try those who "say they are apostles" and to find if they are or not. It shows that men will claim apostleship, yet be liars.

The Church at Ephesus did not reject those calling themselves apostles because they thought only the twelve could carry such a ministry. They rejected them because they failed to find in them the qualities or

qualifications of apostleship. The issue was not 'are there apostles today?' but 'are these men apostles?'

There are various marks which I believe we can test today's so-called apostles by, such as their finance, their fruit and their fortitude (endurance through trials).

In Paul's day there were those who came calling themselves apostles, but they came ministering "another Jesus, gospel and spirit." These he called "false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ."

If such false apostles are mimicking true apostles and attempting to look like them, if they are being deceitful in their works and claims, how are we to know the difference? I believe the great mark of apostolic ministry is death to self.

## DEATH TO SELF

"For I think that God hath set forth us the apostles last, as it were appointed to death: for we are made a spectacle unto the world, and to angels, and to men. (I Cor.4v9).

Much has been made of miracles, new churches planted and revelations of lost truth to the Church, by today's apostles, but what of death? I think the foundational sign of a true apostle is that of having died to his own desires, motives, glory and needs.

One who from his own heart is not looking recognition for self, provision for self and security for self. Such a ministry which carries authority in decision making, appointments and direction in local Churches, amongst leaders and believers MUST be built on a foundation of death to self.

Paul felt that this ministry of the apostle was "appointed to death" by God more so than any other ministry. They were set forth and made a "spectacle", which literally means 'placed in the open for all to see', not for their own glory or prominence but for all to see death at work in them.

They are set forth "last" not first, "...the last shall be first and the first last...he that is greatest among you shall be your servant. And whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased; and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted whosoever shall lose his life for my sake and the gospel's, the same shall save it." (Mt.20v16; 23v11-12; Mk.8v35).

This must be central in a believer's life never mind an apostle. Being "last" a servant, abased, reviled, persecuted, killed all the day long, is a key note of this ministry. The above verse defines to be "set forth last" as "appointed to death." The men who are called to this ministry will be made a "spectacle" to all, both to the unseen realm and the seen.

"So then death worketh in us but life in you." (II Cor.4v12). When Paul says "us" he means himself as well as the other apostles which were ministering with him. As they laboured in pioneering the Churches, establishing them and caring for them, there was a cost.

The trials and troubles that followed them because of this work, were used of God to work death in the hearts of these men. As they ministered in such a way to bring life to the Churches they had to deny themselves, take up their cross and follow Christ. This work meant death to all their own ways and desires, but by doing so spiritual life was birthed in others.

As they endured under the pressure of these trials they were "Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus," and again "For we which live are always delivered unto death for Jesus' sake."(v10-11). The result of this was a manifestation of life in themselves as well as those they were ministering to.

Under such constant pressure it would have been easy to draw back, take it easy and find an easier way, but if they had done so it would have been disobedience to Christ. If they would have lived unto themselves and saved their lives the cross would have had no inward work. The temptation would be very strong to carry on ministry but to sidestep that process of death.

But because the apostle Paul's eyes were on eternity and not the natural things of this life, because he seen the cross at work in his heart and not just outward circumstances and troubles, because he laboured for God's glory, the sake of Christ and the good of the body, all these things were NOT working against him but for him an "exceeding and eternal weight of glory" and so he counted all his troubles as "light afflictions."(v15-18).

This ministry that was always working death in him was always working life in the Church, yet this was a joy to him. "If I be offered (poured forth) upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I joy, and rejoice with you all." (Phil.2v17). "I Paul am made a minister; who now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up that which is behind in the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for his body's sake, which is the Church;"(Col.1v23-24).

Death was not the primary focus but the life, resurrection and consolation which would come from it. It was as the apostles walked this 'way of the cross' that they were then able to preach such truths, having their lives as an example, and to call the saints to follow them even as they followed Christ.

"Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: But rejoice, insomuch as ye are partakers of Christs sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy." (I Pet.Pet.4v12-13). It's amazing to see the joy in the early Church which surrounded this subject of death.

"For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps:"(I Pet.2v21). "Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children; And walk in love, as Christ also loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweetsmelling savour."(Eph.5v1).

We are told in scripture to consider, or think about Christ as our Apostle. He was the One sent of the Father from heaven itself. This sending marks the beginning of an apostolic ministry. He was to lay the foundation of the Church and work of God. He raised up leaders and appointed them. He preached and taught the multitude as well as small bands of dedicated disciples. He worked mighty signs and wonders amongst the people. He persevered in His appointed task until its completion.

In all this we see Christ as the first and great example of an apostle. But who could deny the place of suffering, the cross and death as foundational to this calling? If Christ had done all the above and yet not suffered and died could we really say that He was a "sent one" who faithfully fulfilled the will of the Father?

If suffering and death was so fundamental to Christ's ministry then we can be sure it will be the mark of all those who are sent by Him and follow Him. We are told that Christ "gave gifts unto men" and first amongst

these were "he gave some apostles." Through these men He would continue to work in an apostolic way on the earth.

When He washed the feet of the twelve, His future leaders, He said "For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you." Central to Christ's commissioning and sending forth was His future death. All His days on earth His constant theme was that He was not building His own ministry, but doing the will of Him that sent Him.

He was doing the deeds and speaking the words of Him who set Him. He had come to glorify and honour the Father, not Himself. When in the garden we are told "And he went a little further, and fell on his face, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt."

And again "Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit. He that loveth his life shall lose it; and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal. If any man serve me, let him follow me; and where I am, there shall also my servant be: if any man serve me, him will my Father honour. Now is my soul troubled; and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour: but for this cause came I unto this hour."

This was not just correct theological teaching but an outworked experience of death, not just at Calvary but every step from His birth to His death. "He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth."

And again "Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth: Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously:"

This is indeed just something of the spirit of apostolic ministry as seen in Christ and to be followed not only by the apostles in the early church but all true apostles and all true Church.

We now come to the three points of finance, fruit and fortitude as we look for the application of the death of the cross in the ministry of apostles.

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