**Acts 8:4-25 “Simon the Magician: Believe it or Not?”**

Sermon Goal:

*My hope is that we will be able to identify and renounce false teachers, examine ourselves regarding our level and quality of belief, and encourage others to live out the faith. That, folks, is a tall order!*

Review of “Philip Takes the Gospel to Samaria”

**Acts 8:4-25**

**“Therefore those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the word. 5Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria and preached Christ to them. 6And the multitudes with one accord heeded the things spoken by Philip, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did. 7For unclean spirits, crying with a loud voice, came out of many who were possessed; and many who were paralyzed and lame were healed. 8And there was great joy in that city. 9But there was a certain man called Simon, who previously practiced sorcery in the city and astonished the people of Samaria, claiming that he was someone great, 10to whom they all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying, “This man is the great power of God.” 11And they heeded him because he had astonished them with his sorceries for a long time. 12But when they believed Philip as he preached the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, both men and women were baptized. 13Then Simon himself also believed; and when he was baptized he continued with Philip, and was amazed, seeing the miracles and signs which were done. 14Now when the apostles who were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them, 15who, when they had come down, prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit. 16For as yet He had fallen upon none of them. They had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. 17Then they laid hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit. 18****And when Simon saw that through the laying on of the apostles’ hands the Holy Spirit was given, he offered them money, 19saying, “Give me this power also, that anyone on whom I lay hands may receive the Holy Spirit.”**

**20But Peter said to him, “Your money perish with you, because you thought that the gift of God could be purchased with money! 21You have neither part nor portion in this matter, for your heart is not right in the sight of God. 22Repent therefore of this your wickedness, and pray God if perhaps the thought of your heart may be forgiven you. 23For I see that you are poisoned by bitterness and bound by iniquity.”**

**24Then Simon answered and said, “Pray to the Lord for me, that none of the things which you have spoken may come upon me.” 25So when they had testified and preached the word of the Lord, they returned to Jerusalem, preaching the gospel in many villages of the Samaritans.**

**SLIDE 1**

**5 Points of Context for Today’s Passage:**

**1. Acts as a Book of Transitions**

**2. Jesus’ Directive to the Apostles**

**3. A History of Hatred between the Jews and the Samaritans**

**4. Philip’s Identity and Calling**

**5. Persecution Causes the Gospel Message to be Spread**

**SLIDE 2**

**A closer look at the Acts as a book of Transition Context**

**Acts: A Book of Transition**

**1. Doctrinal Transition –** doctrinal immaturity to doctrinal maturity

**2. Communal Transition –** Jewish community to Christian community

**3. Focal Transition –** Christ’s earthly Kingdom to Christ’s Church (physical to spiritual)

**4. Geographical Transition –** Jerusalem to Rome

**5. Theological Transition –** Christ present/active to Holy Spirit present/active

**6. Identity Transition –** What you once were to your identity as a Christian

**7. National Transition –** Nation of Israel to One People, One Faith

Last Week we looked at Philip’s message to the Samaritans, and the fact that God mysteriously (in the eyes of the Apostles) brought them into His Kingdom. We also highlighted how they laid their hands on the Samaritans and the Holy Spirit filled them, but this is not normative after the church was established in the book of Acts, and indeed it wasn’t even normative within the book of Acts. (See chapter 10, for example).

**SLIDE 3**

**Application** from Last Week’s message regarding Philip’s Obedience in taking the Gospel to the Samaritans...

1. *Don’t be discouraged by the evil all around us. God is at work.*

 Isaiah 41:10 - **Fear not, for I am with you; Be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, Yes, I will help you, I will uphold you with My righteous right hand.’**

2. *Have compassion for the people you don’t like. God loves them.*

 2 Peter 3:9 – **“The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.**

3. *Be willing to do the things God asks you to do, even when you don’t want to. God is the Boss.*

 James 1:22 – **“But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.”**

**Today:**

**Simon the Magician (Believe it or Not?)**

**Simon is an enigma – What is the deal with Simon? We meet him in verse 9 of our text.**

**Acts 8:9-11**

**“But there was a certain man called Simon, who previously practiced sorcery in the city and astonished the people of Samaria, claiming that he was someone great, 10to whom they all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying, “This man is the great power of God.” 11And they heeded him because he had astonished them with his sorceries for a long time.”**

**Observations:**

Simon was a sorcerer, which is more than a mere magician. He was a demonic conjurer, and he was very good at it.

The people gave him heed (Greek = they devoted themselves and attached themselves to him). When he spoke, the people listened. They followed him.

He was renowned. He was a big deal.

He elevated his own name. He was in it for Simon.

They called him the “Great Power of God.”

(This is a title of the grand vizier) - the grand vizier was the chief spokesmen of a kingand whatever he said that was the word of the king and was to be obeyed.

So they are identifying him as God’s spokesman and whatever he says is God’s word.

They’re submitting to this man, they’re worshipping this man and who is he really but a false-Messiah. What is a false-Messiah but an antichrist, a demonic impostor?

What church tradition tells us of Simon the Magician:

1. Irenaeus in his *Against Heresies* says that Simon was the founder of Gnosticism. Modern parallels would be things like the New Age Movement, things like Masons or the Illuminati, all groups that claim a special knowledge that can be attained through mystical methods, normally you move through the ranks and when you get to the next level you get certain privileges and they impart more knowledge to you. Paul wrote the whole letter of Colossians against the doctrines of the Gnostics. John wrote his first epistle to combat people who had strains of Gnosticism in their thought.

2. Justin Martyr tells us Simon was a very influential magician, he gained followers in Samaria and eventually in Rome where he disturbed Christians and turned the Roman authorities on them.

3. Several of the apocryphal writings mention Simon as a rival and adversary of Peter. He was cast out by the apostles and ended up in Rome, making a name for himself as a magician. He also claimed to be at various times one or the other members of the Trinity, even claiming to be the Son!

4. There is a great deal written about Simon Magus in the writings of the church fathers and in the apocryphal writings. He is never mentioned favorably in light of his proposed “conversion.” He is painted as a profiteer and a developer of heretical doctrines. It’s interesting reading if you have time.

**So what next?**

**The next mention of Simon**

Verse 13 – Something remarkable happens. Simon believes...

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

**Observations:**

**SLIDE 4**

**How are we saved?**

We know that the criteria for salvation, or being justified in the eyes of God, is true belief in Jesus Christ. John tells us of the things he wrote in his gospel book about Jesus in chapter 20 verse 31 that,

**“...these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name.”**

We know that Abraham believed and it was credited to him as righteousness. Paul reminds us of this in Romans 4:3.

Later in Romans, Paul lays out clearly the means of our salvation:

**“...if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. 10For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.”**

So did Simon truly convert? Was he saved by his belief? I mean, he was baptized, right?

The clue is in the passage I just read, but...

Let’s read on.

Vs. 18-23

**“And when Simon saw that through the laying on of the apostles’ hands the Holy Spirit was given, he offered them money, 19saying, “Give me this power also, that anyone on whom I lay hands may receive the Holy Spirit.”**

**20But Peter said to him, “Your money perish with you, because you thought that the gift of God could be purchased with money! 21You have neither part nor portion in this matter, for your heart is not right in the sight of God. 22Repent therefore of this your wickedness, and pray God if perhaps the thought of your heart may be forgiven you. 23For I see that you are poisoned by bitterness and bound by iniquity.”**

**SLIDE 5**

**Before we get to how Simon responds to Peter, we must ask...**

What is the deal with Simon?

1. He is obsessed with and practices the magic arts (v. 9-11)

2. He is full of pride and works to elevate his own name (vs. 9-11)

3. He is drawn to a power greater than his own. (v. 13)

4. He wants to wield this power, and profit from it. (vs. 18-19)

5. He doesn’t understand this power he covets. (v. 20)

6. His heart is not right before God, therefore he is not a partaker in the things of the spirit. (v. 21)

7. He is called to repentance. (v. 22)

8. He is poisoned by bitterness and a slave to iniquity (v. 23)

Simon was a false teacher. How can we use him as a case study in what to avoid? Look again at this list. Can we see these characteristics in modern day Christians, teachers, and churches?

Now, how does Simon respond to Peter’s harsh rebuke?

Verse 24:

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

Simon doesn’t get it. He is not soft-hearted and repentant, but simply fearful that he will suffer God’s wrath. Parents, do you want your children to obey out of fear or love?

So here is the question:

Was Simon saved or not? Was he a believer, or not? Was he a Christian?

Remember, the word Christian means “of Christ.”

In order to answer this, we have to differentiate between Belief as a function of intellectual assent or acknowledgment, and Belief as a basis for faith. Faith is action based on belief.

So I want for us to contemplate a couple things based on this passage.

SLIDE 6 (Application)

First, we must beware of false teachers. Simon provides us a template for identifying false teachers. They are manipulators, elevating their own names, money oriented, and not interested in pointing people to Jesus. In other words, they are more interested in power than the source of the power. Watch out, folks, they are everywhere.

Matthew 7:15-16

**“Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves. 16You will know them by their fruits.”**

Secondly, don’t waste your time trying to figure out if the people around you or in your circle are saved or not. Instead, soberly examine yourself, your beliefs, your motivations, and the fruit of your own attitudes and actions. Have you truly believed? Do you have faith in Jesus and the work he did on the cross?

**2 Corinthians 13:5**

**“Examine yourselves *as to* whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not know yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?”**

Finally, If you are concerned with whether or not someone you know and love is truly saved, after having examined yourself, speak the truth in love to them and pray for them.

**James 5:16**

**“Confess *your* trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.”**

**Tell my story... Was I saved?**