

Foothills Christian Assembly Sermon November 20, 2022

Acts 8: 9 – 25 “Simon the Sorcerer”

1 Now Saul was consenting to his death. At that time a great persecution arose against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. 2 And devout men carried Stephen to his burial, and made great lamentation over him. 3 As for Saul, he made havoc of the church, entering every house, and dragging off men and women, committing them to prison. 4 Therefore those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the word. 5 Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria and preached Christ to them. 6 And the multitudes with one accord heeded the things spoken by Philip, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did. 7 For unclean spirits, crying with a loud voice, came out of many who were possessed; and many who were paralyzed and lame were healed. 8 And there was great joy in that city.

9 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, 10 to whom they all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying, "This man is the great power of God." 11 And they heeded him because he had astonished them with his sorceries for a long time. 12 But 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. 13 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.

14 Now when the apostles who were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them, 15 who, when they had come down, prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit. 16 For as yet He had fallen upon none of them. They had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. 17 Then 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, 19 saying, "Give me this power also, that anyone on whom I lay hands may receive the Holy Spirit." 20 But Peter said to him, "Your money perish with you, because you thought that the gift of God could be purchased with money! 21 "You have neither part nor portion in this matter, for your heart is not right in the sight of God. 22 "Repent therefore of this your wickedness, and pray God if perhaps the thought of your heart may be forgiven you. 23 "For I see that you are poisoned by bitterness and bound by iniquity." 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." 25 So when they had testified and preached the word of the Lord, they returned to Jerusalem, preaching the gospel in many villages of the Samaritans.

26 Now an angel of the Lord spoke to Philip, saying, "Arise and go toward the south along the road which goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza." This is desert. 27 So he arose and went. And behold, a man of Ethiopia, a eunuch of great authority under Candace the queen of the Ethiopians, who had charge of all her treasury, and had come to Jerusalem to worship, 28 was returning. And sitting in his chariot, he was reading Isaiah the prophet. 29 Then the Spirit said to Philip, "Go near and overtake this chariot."

I. Introduction

a. Soil is critical to germination and long-term success of planted seeds. In today's sermon, we will see some bad soil interacting with the good and mighty Word of God, and we will have the opportunity to examine ourselves. Paul wrote, "Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves." (2 Cor 13:5) And, these are words Paul wrote to the entire church at Corinth, not just the young, not just new converts. Luke wrote down the words of Christ comparing soul soils. (Lk 8)

i. "And when a great multitude had gathered, and they had come to Him from every city, He spoke by a parable: 5 "A sower went out to sow his seed. And as he sowed, some fell by the wayside; and it was trampled down, and the birds of the air devoured it. 6 "Some fell on rock; and as soon as it sprang up, it withered away because it lacked moisture. 7 "And some fell among thorns, and the thorns sprang up with it and choked it. 8 "But others fell on good ground, sprang up, and yielded a crop a hundredfold." When He had said these things He cried, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear!" ... 11 "Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God. 12 "Those by the wayside are the ones who hear; then the devil comes and takes away the word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved. 13 "But the ones on the rock are those who, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no root, who believe for a while and in time of temptation fall away. 14 "Now the ones that fell among thorns are those who, when they have heard, go out and are choked with cares, riches, and pleasures of life, and bring no fruit to maturity. 15 "But the ones that fell on the good ground are those who, having heard the word with a noble and good heart, keep it and bear fruit with patience."

1. Wayside = devil steals the word out of their hearts. Never sprang up. No belief. No saving faith.
2. Rock = "as soon as it sprang up, it withered away"; joyful at first; intellectual belief. No saving faith. Fall away when tempted. No moisture. No root. Brief appearance of "life".
3. Thorns = sprang up, but choked by cares, riches, pleasures. No fruit. Longer appearance of "life".
4. Good ground = sprang up, yielded fruit. Noble and good heart. Hear and keep the Word, bearing lifelong fruit, enduring to the end.

a. Patience v15 = ὑπομονή

- i. steadfastness, constancy, endurance, sustained, perseverance
- ii. in the NT the characteristic of a man who is not swerved from his deliberate purpose and his loyalty to faith and piety by even the greatest trials and sufferings

- ii. Simon the sorcerer serves as a cautionary tale for us all. Consider the parable of the soils from Luke 8 as we look at Simon, and as we examine ourselves to see if we are in the faith.
 - b. Acts 8: 9 – 25 “Simon the Sorcerer”
 - i. Simon’s past as a sorcerer v9-11
 - ii. Simon’s belief, baptism and amazement v12,13
 - iii. Simon’s attempt to buy Holy Spirit power v14-19
 - iv. Simon rebuked by Peter v20-23
 - v. Simon’s response v24
 - vi. Real faith in action v25
 - vii. Questions to know, love and obey God
- II. Simon’s past as a sorcerer v9-11
 - a. 9 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, 10 to whom they all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying, "This man is the great power of God." 11 And they heeded him because he had astonished them with his sorceries for a long time.
 - b. Simon had been a sorcerer for a long time, and the people had been very astonished by his magic arts. Simon claimed to be someone great, and all the people of Samaria had listened to him and followed him, giving heed to his word.
 - i. Practiced sorcery = μαγεύω = to be a magician, to practice magical arts
 - 1. Sorceries = magic = μαγεία
 - 2. Simon was accustomed to working with demons, using magic to engage with the invisible realm for his own personal aims
 - ii. Astonished the people = KJV = bewitched = ἐξίστημι
 - 1. to throw out of position, displace
 - 2. to amaze, to astonish, throw into wonderment
 - 3. to be out of one’s mind, besides one’s self, insane
 - 4. The people heeded Simon because they were bewitched by his magical powers.
 - iii. Self-promotion = Simon routinely compared himself with God
 - 1. “claiming that he was someone great”
 - 2. People all said of him, “This man is the great power of God.”
 - 3. Building himself up. Building up his own name and kingdom.
 - c. About sorcery
 - i. OT
 - 1. Sorcery Prohibited:
 - a. “You shall not ... practice divination or soothsaying.” (Lev 19:26)
 - b. Divination = ψῆξις = KJV = enchantment
 - i. observe signs, practice fortunetelling, seek omens
 - c. Soothsaying = ἰσχυρῶς = KJV = observer of times
 - i. to conjure; to observe times, practice spiritism or magic or augury or witchcraft

- ii. enchanter, sorceress, diviner, fortuneteller
- 2. Sorcery is a Capital crime:
 - a. "You shall not permit a sorceress to live." (Ex 22:18)
 - i. Sorceress = קַשְׁפָּה = witch = female who practices witchcraft or sorcery
 - b. "A man or a woman who is a medium, or who has familiar spirits, shall surely be put to death; they shall stone them with stones. Their blood shall be upon them" (Lev 20:27)
 - i. Medium = מְדַבֵּר = KJV = wizard
 - 1. a knower, one who has a familiar spirit, a soothsayer, a necromancer
 - ii. On that has a familiar spirit = רֹחַ = necromancer; familiar spirit
 - 1. The spirit of a dead one
 - 2. The practice of necromancy
- 3. Prohibited to regard or seek after sorcerers:
 - a. "Give no regard to mediums and familiar spirits; do not seek after them, to be defiled by them: I am the LORD your God." (Lev 19:31)
- 4. Excommunication for those who regard or seek after sorcerers:
 - a. "And the person who turns to mediums and familiar spirits, to prostitute himself with them, I will set My face against that person and cut him off from his people." (Lev 20:6)
 - i. Prostitute himself = fornication, prostitution
- 5. Sorcery an abomination leading to national judgment
 - a. "When you come into the land which the LORD your God is giving you, you shall not learn to follow the abominations of those nations. 10 "There shall not be found among you anyone who makes his son or his daughter pass through the fire, or one who practices witchcraft, or a soothsayer, or one who interprets omens, or a sorcerer, 11 "or one who conjures spells, or a medium, or a spiritist, or one who calls up the dead. 12 "For all who do these things are an abomination to the LORD, and because of these abominations the LORD your God drives them out from before you." (Deut 18:9-12)
 - i. Abominations = תּוֹעֵבָה = a disgusting thing
 - ii. Witchcraft = divination, of Balaam
 - iii. Interpret omens = divination as Lev 19:26
 - iv. Sorcerer = one who practices sorcery, witchcraft
 - v. Linked to human sacrifice

6. Example: witch of En Dor → acted as necromancer. Is described as having a familiar spirit. Called for Samuel from amongst the dead. (1 Samuel 28)
7. Sorcery in America: “From 1990 to 2008, Trinity College in Connecticut ran three large, detailed religion surveys. Those have shown that Wicca grew tremendously over this period. From an estimated 8,000 Wiccans in 1990, they found there were about 340,000 practitioners in 2008. They also estimated there were around 340,000 Pagans in 2008. ... The Pew Research Center in 2014 ... found that 0.4% of Americans, or around 1 to 1.5 million people, identify as Wicca or Pagan—which suggests continued robust growth for the communities.”
(<https://qz.com/quartz/1411909/the-explosive-growth-of-witches-wiccans-and-pagans-in-the-us>)

d. About Samaritan syncretism

- i. “After the conquest by the Assyrians under Sargon II in 722 BC, Samaria was destroyed and both the city and the region depopulated, later to be resettled by colonists from other regions of the Assyrian Empire”¹
- ii. 2 Kings 17:24-41 “Then the king of Assyria brought people from Babylon, Cuthah, Ava, Hamath, and from Sepharvaim, and placed them in the cities of Samaria instead of the children of Israel; and they took possession of Samaria and dwelt in its cities. 25 And it was so, at the beginning of their dwelling there, that they did not fear the LORD; therefore the LORD sent lions among them, which killed some of them. 26 So they spoke to the king of Assyria, saying, "The nations whom you have removed and placed in the cities of Samaria do not know the rituals of the God of the land; therefore He has sent lions among them, and indeed, they are killing them because they do not know the rituals of the God of the land." 27 Then the king of Assyria commanded, saying, "Send there one of the priests whom you brought from there; let him go and dwell there, and let him teach them the rituals of the God of the land." 28 Then one of the priests whom they had carried away from Samaria came and dwelt in Bethel, and taught them how they should fear the LORD. 29 However every nation continued to make gods of its own, and put them in the shrines on the high places which the Samaritans had made, every nation in the cities where they dwelt. 30 The men of Babylon made Succoth Benoth, the men of Cuth made Nergal, the men of Hamath made Ashima, 31 and the Avites made Nibhaz and Tartak; and the Sepharvites burned their children in fire to Adrammelech and Anammelech, the gods of Sepharvaim. 32 So they feared the LORD, and from every class they appointed for themselves priests of the high places, who sacrificed for

¹ Eckhard J. Schnabel, [Acts](#), Expanded Digital Edition., Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), Ac 8:5.

them in the shrines of the high places. 33 They feared the LORD, yet served their own gods--according to the rituals of the nations from among whom they were carried away. 34 To this day they continue practicing the former rituals; they do not fear the LORD, nor do they follow their statutes or their ordinances, or the law and commandment which the LORD had commanded the children of Jacob, whom He named Israel, 35 with whom the LORD had made a covenant ... 40 However they did not obey, but they followed their former rituals. 41 So these nations feared the LORD, yet served their carved images; also their children and their children's children have continued doing as their fathers did, even to this day."

- iii. So, while faithful Jews likely existed in Samaria, the culture was based upon syncretism, the combining of different religions, cultures, or schools of thought. Hence, it is no wonder that a sorcerer like Simon would thrive in Samaria.

III. Simon's belief, baptism and amazement v12,13

- a. 12 But 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. 13 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.
- b. Philip preached Christ to the people of Samaria, and many miracles occurred through his ministry. The multitudes believed the Gospel, with "one accord".
 - i. "6 And the multitudes with one accord heeded the things spoken by Philip, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did. 7 For unclean spirits, crying with a loud voice, came out of many who were possessed; and many who were paralyzed and lame were healed. 8 And there was great joy in that city."
 - ii. What did they believe? Philip's focus?
 1. The Name of Jesus Christ - v5,12
 2. Destruction of demonic realm - v7
 3. The Kingdom of God – v12
 4. Baptism – v12
 5. Lk 24:46-49 "Then He said to them, "Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day, 47 "and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. 48 "And you are witnesses of these things. 49 "Behold, I send the Promise of My Father upon you; but tarry in the city of Jerusalem until you are endued with power from on high."
- c. So, the context here of v12,13 points to the people of Samaria leaving behind the influence of Simon, and Simon then choosing to believe and be baptized within the context of losing his position of power amongst the people of Samaria. Next,

after his baptism, we see Simon continuing with Philip, and Simon's focus is upon the miracles and signs being done via Philip's Gospel ministry.

- i. "Simon believed with an historical faith, that it was indeed true, that our Saviour had done miracles, and did rise from the dead; but his faith, to be sure, was dead all the while; neither did he believe with his heart, or purpose to live according to the law of Christ, which is the life of faith. *He continued with Philip*; kept him constantly company, and was amongst the forwardest of the professors of Christ's faith. *And wondered, beholding the miracles and signs which were done*; thus the magicians of Egypt were brought to acknowledge the finger of God, Exod. 8:19, although their hearts were hardened."²
- d. What kind of belief do we see here from Simon? The rest of the text tells us his belief was like the springing up of the seed on rocky or thorny soil – a brief show of life.
 - i. "Nay, though he was now but a hypocrite, and really in *the gall of bitterness and bond of iniquity* all this while, and would soon have been found to be so if he had been tried awhile, yet Philip baptized him; for it is God's prerogative to know the heart. The church and its ministers must go by a judgment of charity, as far as there is room for it."³
- e. What was motivating Simon to believe, be baptized and follow Philip? Given Simon's long-term connection with demonic powers, continual self-promotion, and obsession with power, we can guess.

IV. Simon's attempt to buy Holy Spirit power v14-19

- a. 14 Now when the apostles who were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them, 15 who, when they had come down, prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit. 16 For as yet He had fallen upon none of them. They had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. 17 Then 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, 19 saying, "Give me this power also, that anyone on whom I lay hands may receive the Holy Spirit."
- b. This significance of Samaria receiving the Word of God
 - i. The apostles in Jerusalem send Peter and John
 - ii. Peter and John pray for the people of Samaria to receive the Holy Spirit
 - iii. The people had not yet had the Holy Spirit fall upon them
 - iv. The people had only been baptized in the name of Jesus
 - v. Peter and John lay hands on them, and they receive the Holy Spirit
 - vi. "They were none of them endued with the gift of tongues, which seems then to have been the most usual immediate effect of the pouring out of

² Matthew Poole, [Annotations upon the Holy Bible](#), vol. 3 (New York: Robert Carter and Brothers, 1853), 410.

³ Matthew Henry, [Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume](#) (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994), 2097.

the Spirit. ... This was both an eminent sign to those that believed not, and of excellent service to those that did. This, and other such gifts, they had not, *only they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus*, and so engaged in him and interested in him, which was necessary to salvation, and in this they had joy and satisfaction (v. 8), though they could not speak with tongues. Those that are indeed given up to Christ, and have experienced the sanctifying influences and operations of the Spirit of grace, have great reason to be thankful, and no reason to complain, though they have not those gifts that are for ornament, and would make them bright.”⁴

- c. Simon’s sorcerous thinking continues
 - i. He offers money to Peter and John
 - 1. Simon likely sees Peter and John as sorcerers like himself
 - 2. “It gave [Simon] a notion of Christianity as no other than an exalted piece of sorcery, in which he thought himself capable of being equal to the apostles”⁵
 - ii. Simon wants power
 - 1. He wants to join with Peter and John in their great sorcery
 - 2. “[Simon] does not desire them to lay their hands on him, that he might receive the Holy Ghost himself (for he did not foresee that any thing was to [gain] by that), but that they would convey to him a power to bestow the gift upon others. He was ambitious to have the honor of an apostle, but not at all solicitous to have the spirit and disposition of a Christian. He was more desirous to gain honor to himself than to do good to others.”⁶
 - iii. Simon wants to control the Holy Spirit
 - 1. Simon wants to control the Holy Spirit with more sorcery
 - 2. “his own ambition drives and carries him headlong, so that he desires to become excellent; and to make the world subject to himself, setting God apart, he will buy the Holy Ghost, as if He could be bought with money.”⁷
- V. Simon rebuked by Peter v20-23
 - a. 20 But Peter said to him, "Your money perish with you, because you thought that the gift of God could be purchased with money! 21 "You have neither part nor portion in this matter, for your heart is not right in the sight of God. 22 "Repent

⁴ Matthew Henry, [*Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume*](#) (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994), 2097.

⁵ Matthew Henry, [*Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume*](#) (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994), 2097.

⁶ Matthew Henry, [*Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume*](#) (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994), 2097.

⁷ John Calvin and Henry Beveridge, [*Commentary upon the Acts of the Apostles*](#), vol. 1 (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2010), 342.

therefore of this your wickedness, and pray God if perhaps the thought of your heart may be forgiven you. 23 "For I see that you are poisoned by bitterness and bound by iniquity."

- b. Peter calls for both Simon and his money to perish
 - i. Perish = ἀπώλεια
 - 1. destroying, utter destruction, ruin
 - 2. the destruction which consists of eternal misery in hell
- c. Peter defines Simon's mind: thinking God's gift can be purchased with money
 - i. Highest insult to the Gospel of grace. Of infinite worth, fools and fiends offer money.
 - 1. "He thought the power of an apostle might as well be had for a good fee as the advice of a physician or a lawyer, which was the greatest despite that could be done to the Spirit of grace. All the buying and selling of pardons and indulgences in the church of Rome is the product of this same wicked *thought, that the gift of God may be purchased with money*, when the offer of divine grace so expressly runs, *without money and without price.*"⁸
- d. Peter defines Simon's status: "neither part nor portion in this matter"
 - i. "thou hast nothing to do with the gifts of the Holy Ghost, thou dost not understand them, thou art excluded from them, hast put a bar in thine own door; thou canst not receive the Holy Ghost thyself, nor power to confer the Holy Ghost upon others, for *thy heart is not right in the sight of God*, if thou thinkest that Christianity is a trade to live by in this world, and therefore *thou hast no part nor lot* in the eternal life in the other world which the gospel offers"⁹
- e. Peter defines Simon's heart:
 - i. not right in the sight of God
 - 1. "Though thou profess to believe, and art baptized, yet thou art not sincere. We are as our hearts are; if they be not right, we are wrong; and they are open in the sight of God, who knows them, judges them, and judges of us by them. Our hearts are that which they are in the sight of God, who cannot be deceived; and if they be not right in his sight, whatever our pretensions be, our religion is vain, and will stand us in no stead"¹⁰
 - ii. poisoned by bitterness; in the gall of bitterness

⁸ Matthew Henry, [*Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume*](#) (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994), 2097.

⁹ Matthew Henry, [*Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume*](#) (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994), 2098.

¹⁰ Matthew Henry, [*Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume*](#) (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994), 2097.

1. *“in the gall of bitterness—odious to God, as that which is bitter as gall is to us. Sin is an abominable thing, which the Lord hates, and sinners are by it made abominable to him”*¹¹
 2. *“Therefore Peter’s meaning is, that Simon fell not only in one point, but that his very heart root was corrupt and bitter; that he fell into Satan’s snares not only in one kind of sin, but that all his senses were ensnared, so that he was wholly given over to Satan”*¹²
- iii. bound by iniquity
1. *“bound over to the judgment of God by the guilt of sin, and bound under the dominion of Satan by the power of sin; led captive by him at his will, and it is a sore bondage”*¹³
- f. Peter calls for Simon to repent of this wickedness (mind, heart and behavior)
- i. Simon’s apostate status is not hopeless. He is still offered the gift of salvation.
 - ii. *“The thought of the heart, though ever so wicked, shall be forgiven, upon our repentance, and not laid to our charge. When Peter here puts a *perhaps* upon it, the doubt is of the sincerity of his repentance, not of his pardon if his repentance be sincere”*¹⁴
- VI. Simon’s response v24
- a. 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.”
 - b. Simon’s focus upon himself continues. He appears concerned for his own safety because he has bumped into greater power than his own.
 - i. *“He begged of them to pray for him, but did not pray for himself, as he ought to have done; and, in desiring them to pray for him, his concern is more that the judgments he had made himself liable to might be prevented than that his corruptions might be mortified, and his heart, by divine grace, be made right in the sight of God”*¹⁵
- VII. Real faith in action v25
- a. 25 So when they had testified and preached the word of the Lord, they returned to Jerusalem, preaching the gospel in many villages of the Samaritans.
 - b. Testifying – to Christ

¹¹ Matthew Henry, [*Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume*](#) (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994), 2098.

¹² John Calvin and Henry Beveridge, [*Commentary upon the Acts of the Apostles*](#), vol. 1 (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2010), 347.

¹³ Matthew Henry, [*Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume*](#) (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994), 2098.

¹⁴ Matthew Henry, [*Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume*](#) (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994), 2098.

¹⁵ Matthew Henry, [*Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume*](#) (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994), 2098.

- c. Preached the Word of the Lord – about Jesus Christ
 - d. Preaching the Gospel in many villages – spreading the Gospel of Christ
 - e. Returned to their calling in Jerusalem
 - f. Great joy in the city – v8
- VIII. Questions to know, love and obey God