

The Master versus the Magician (Acts 8)

Introduction: *A terrible trial, or a blessed beginning?*

God has plans to overcome evil with good. What was intended to destroy the church is the very thing that greatly increases it. While the scene in Jerusalem from which the Christians flee is one of misery, the next two scenes in Judea and Samaria to which they flee are said here to be full of joy. “Death is at work in us, but life in you” (2 Cor 4:12).

1. The Missionaries of the Church

“While there were no professional missionaries devoting their whole life to this specific work, *every congregation* was a missionary society, and *every Christian* believer a missionary, inflamed by the love of Christ to convert his fellow-men” (Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, 2.1.6).

2. The Multi-ethnicity of the Church

There had been a centuries-long hatred between the Jews and the Samaritans (see John 4:9). But Christ is the end of this hostility and ethno-centrism. All believers receive the Holy Spirit through faith at the moment of salvation (Gal. 3:2-5). He seals us as a pledge of our inheritance (Eph. 1:13; 4:30). He dwells in our bodies (1 Cor. 6:19). He baptizes us all into the body of Christ, so that we all drink from the same Spirit (1 Cor. 12:13).

3. The Master Versus the Magician

Simon’s conversion, although temporary, made a great impression on the Samaritans. The power of Christ had broken the spell of the sorcerer over the people, and many of them found new life in Christ. Simon’s power could not compete with that of Christ. Previously, the Samaritans paid attention to Simon (8:10-11), but now to what Philip was saying (8:6). Before, they’d been astonished or amazed by Simon’s magic (8:9, 11), but now the miracles performed by Philip (8:13). Previously, Simon had boasted “that he was someone *great*” (Acts 8:9-10), but now, this man stood astonished at the “signs and *great* miracles performed” (Acts 8:13). What the Lord is doing here, and as the word of Christ goes from city to city, country to country, is demonstrating in a very powerful and dramatic way that what the people have been trusting in to bring them power and happiness and success is worthless.

Lessons

1. The Faith of Christ’s people: *Christ alone can see the heart*

There’s never an attempt made to separate the true converts from the temporary. Simon was baptized, though he soon fell away. They didn’t do what the church did a couple centuries later: Wait and see if they’re “really born again” and then baptize them.

2. The Freeness of Christ’s grace: *Christianity is not for sale*

Beware of all who think “that godliness is a means of gain” (1 Tim 6:5). The Spirit of God is not a product you can purchase, not a service you can contract, not a wage you can earn (see Acts 2:38; 3:6, 16; 5:31-32; 10:45; 11:17; 15:8; 20:32). The God who gave his own Son will freely give you all the grace you need now and forever. Yet “God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble” (Jas 4:6).

3. The Fullness of Christ’s power: *Christ is Lord of all*

We mustn’t live in fear. What good is it to try to serve the Lord and Baal? Choose this day whom you will serve, said Joshua (24:15). The reality trumpeted in this book is that Jesus is lord of all, and salvation is found in no other name.

Sphere Sovereignty (Colossians 3:22-24)

Introduction: *The claims of Christ in a world of relativism and falsehood*

The concept of truth, in any absolute sense, is now denied by a majority of our population.

1. God has created every sphere of life

God created a variety of spheres within human life and culture, each with its own responsibilities, its own sovereignty, and its own method of social engagement. The family is one sphere, business another, education another, the state another, and the church still another. The family is not the marketplace; the church is not the government. The state has no authority over the church or the arts; the church should not run the army, the university should not control business, and so on. As God created it, each sphere has its own work to do for the welfare of the human community as a whole and for the welfare of the people of God within that community. Human life is designed to work best when each sphere is playing its proper role in society.

2. The Bible speaks to every sphere of life

The Bible has a very wide scope. God addresses kings, judges, teachers, families, and whole nations. In other words, the Bible tells us about faith *and life*. It tells us how to live all of our lives to the glory of God.

3. Christ is served in every sphere of life.

In every sphere, we proclaim, “Jesus is Lord, to the glory of God the father.” In every area of life, he is the highest authority. And we are “bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ” (2Cor 10:5), so that “in all things He may have the preeminence” (Col 1:18). Bach, for example, would write at the top of every manuscript scores either the letters I. N. D., “in the name of the Lord,” or the letters J. J., “Jesu Juva,” Jesus help me. At the bottom of each score he would write the letters S. D. G., “Soli Deo Gloria,” to God alone the glory.

Illustration: *Abraham Kuyper*

He was a Dutch polymath, a theologian, churchman, politician, educator, and journalist. In the Stone lectures at Princeton, he famously said, “There exists not the breadth of a thumb in all the universe but Christ says ‘It is mine!’” Founder of the first national daily newspaper in the Netherlands, of a major university, of a Christian labor union, of a political party that was to dominate Dutch politics for a generation, for many years a member of Parliament, for four years at the turn of the 20th century Prime Minister of the Netherlands; an eminent theologian and professor of theology, a superb churchman and leader of the evangelical Reformed church in his country for most of his adult life, the author of a great many books, both scholarly and popular; it is hard to find any other man prominent in so many parts in human history, much less Christian history.

Conclusion

In our world, we have put God on a reservation, just like we did the American Indians, “Thank you for this new world that you have given us, but now this is your little place over there where you are sovereign.” Not very long ago, many businesses were Christian businesses, guilds, and unions, and they served God’s purposes, and operated on Christian principles. Not very long ago, all western nations and states were explicitly Christian nations and Christian states. Not very long ago, most colleges and universities were explicitly Christian schools. We’re not to abandon the world, but we should advance the work of every sphere of life in the service of Christ the Lord.