

Scripture Reading:

Acts 8: “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, & 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 [Peter & John] had testified and preached the Word of the Lord, they returned to Jerusalem, preaching the gospel in many villages of the Samaritans.”

"The Spirit Shows Simon Real Power"

The Spirit of God has disrupted the calm and quiet of the Church at Jerusalem and sent the Saints out to be witnesses for Jesus... They will be witnesses in Judea and all of Samaria and then they will take the Good News to the Gentiles and be witnesses to the entire world...

- **Bringing the blessings promised to Abraham to all the nations!**

This is the great story that Luke is telling in the orderly account for his friend Theophilus.

- **Jesus has come to save His people from their sins, conquering the curse and death as we saw last week.**
- **The Spirit has come to empower these Saints and to shape them into the Church, the bride of Jesus**
- **And the Church will take the Kingdom of Jesus to all the earth!**

As part of this great plan, Phillip has gone to preach the Gospel in Samaria where it has been received and brought great joy! As part of Luke's account, we now meet one of the more interesting and controversial figures in all of the New Testament ...

- **Simon the sorcerer**
- **I pray that our study of Simon this morning will result in some comforting lessons for us all**

There have been many great myths that have grown up around Simon or another Simon of that day which can be very distracting...

- They certainly were for most of the commentators!

IF we stick with the text, that which the Holy Spirit intended us to have and to study, then we will find the hard and comforting lessons that the Spirit would teach us! There is a lot going on here in Samaria as the Spirit brings the Church to them, with miracles accompanying Phillip's teaching, much as we saw with the ministry of Jesus and the Apostles.

- We also see a demonstration of the Spirit's coming in power similar to what we saw at Pentecost.

We have discussed how miracles played a critical part in the early Church and how the Spirit can continue to use them today. We also discussed how the Spirit was poured out with great signs at Pentecost and I will argue that we see the same here in Samaria and again when the Gospel is taken to the Gentiles: We will consider these events in more detail at that time.

- I want to focus on Simon this morning because he is such a good example of the pride we see in modern man and the struggles that many of us have with our Christian walk.

So let's take a moment to consider what happens with Simon in his encounters with Phillip and the Apostles. Luke introduces Simon in verse 9:

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,"

- Simon is a very proud man...
- Someone we might say today who was full of himself.

However, we must also note that he was a very powerful man: He had mastered the dark arts and was able to astonish people with his magic. This is not magic like we would see at the carnival where a sharp person gets us to look somewhere else when he switches things or your favorite card trick. Here we are talking about the kind of magician that Pharaoh had in his courts when Moses came. When Moses cast down his staff and it became a snake, these magicians did the same, and it was not a trick...

- There were REAL snakes there for God's snake, which came from the staff of Moses, to eat!

The Bible has some very strong warning about witchcraft of this sort and it is not because they are tricks. The Bible warns us away from them because they are REAL and they are powerful because the ultimate source of their power is Satan himself.

This is why we read in Deuteronomy 18:10 "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 Jehovah, and because of these abominations Jehovah your God drives them out from before you."

This is why sorcery or witchcraft makes the list of REALLY bad sins in Revelation 21:8 "But the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death."

We see it again in Revelation 22:15 "But outside are dogs and sorcerers and sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters, and whoever loves and practices a lie."

Now kids, I hope you can sense that there are a couple of lessons here for you...

- Did you notice that lying is also on both of those lists?

You may be too young to be tempted or even understand most of the sins on those lists, but the fact that you did not have to be taught to lie should remind you of how much you need Jesus and the lessons we will be learning today! The other important lesson for you and the older children and adults is that we must not treat such things lightly:

- The list in Revelation does not talk about BIG lies, so why do we act as if little lies or what we like to call “white lies” are OK?

We do the same with the dark arts: Our text says they involve real power and yet we treat them as if they are no big deal... I am sure most Christians would reject an open invitation to worship Satan, and yet why do we act as if Ouija boards are not a problem or laugh at the daily horoscopes and fortunes?

- Simon had allowed himself to become a servant of Satan and he influenced many others ...

Luke reminds us that Simon had astonished those around him with his powerful actions... 11 “And they heeded him because he had astonished them with his sorceries for a long time.”

BUT things were about to change: *[tell story of the light bulb]*

- With the coming of Phillip and his preaching of the Word, the true power of the Gospel has come:

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 & signs which were done.”

There are lots of tortured answers to the simple question we can ask here:

- Did Simon become a Christian?

What does the text say?

- Simon also believed; Simon was baptized and Simon followed Phillip!

The **ONLY** reason that we struggle to give the obvious answer of YES, Simon became a Christian, is that we have read ahead in the story!

- We know that he soon falls into great sin and that Peter warns him that he is in danger of hell fire.

Now be honest...

- we think to ourselves, IF I say that Simon is a Christian, and IF that can happen to him, well then it could happen to me!

First and foremost, to give any other answer than YES Simon became a Christian is not faithful to the text:

- And it would deprive us of some of the most important lessons we need to learn for our own Christian walks!

So as we consider what happens to Simon, remember Simon came to faith as a **VERY** proud man who had been steeped in very wicked ways that gave him a position of prominence & made him **LOTS** of money. Even where we see a very dramatic conversion like his, we know that bad habits do not go away overnight and there are always temptations to face.

- Simon’s temptation comes in the midst of the Spirit’s work in Samaria to confirm that we are all members of one Church!

There was not to be a Jewish Church and a Samaritan Church and later a Gentile Church...

- NO we are all members of the body of Christ and will grow to maturity as the Bride of Jesus!
- So we read that Peter and John come to Samaria and that they come with great power...

Later we will consider how profound the Spirit being poured out was when salvation comes to the Gentiles. For today, remember that Simon did not covet the various miracles that had surrounded Phillip's ministry.

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, & they received the Holy Spirit."

- What happened here was much like what we saw at Pentecost & it was too much for Simon to handle

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."

Proud Simon had made good money demonstrating Satan's power and now he had seen REAL power! It is easy to assume at this point that Simon had been faking it, that he was not really saved at all...

- That makes it so much easier to understand, but I believe it is also very wrong.
- Simon again wanted to be someone important!
- Does that make him so different from most of us sinners?

Was it not John the Apostle, whose mother came to Jesus asking for the really special seats next to Jesus? I am sure this crossed John's mind as he watched Simon sin in this way! And Peter had already dealt with a similar sin in the Church at Jerusalem when Ananias and his wife thought the appearance of giving of more money would make them important in the church!

- This is a grievous sin that has haunted the Church down through its entire history...

In fact poor Simon has a sin named after him: Simony

- It is the sin of purchasing a position in the church with money rather than being called and properly trained *[mention Wilkins history tapes and how bad things got]*

Just as he did with Ananias, Peter pulls no punches in responding to Simon...

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."

Again, we want to look at this and say, see Simon was not right with God... He was a FAKE!

- Real Christians would not have these sorts of problems, right?

Well, there was one Christian there that day who knew firsthand that Christians certainly CAN fall into such sin, and do so very quickly, even in the best of circumstances!

Yes, it was the one who spoke this strong rebuke, because Peter knew how important those rebukes can be!

Peter had heard the Lord Jesus Himself say to him, "Get thee behind me Satan!"

- Did this mean that Peter was a fake? Did this mean that Peter had lost his salvation?

Obviously the answer to both is NO. But, I am pretty sure that Peter would have remembered how easy it was to fall into this type of sin... And so he calls Simon to repentance:

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."

This brings up two quick questions:

- First, why does Simon get a chance to repent while Ananias was struck dead on the spot?

We are not told for sure, so ultimately this is in God's hand... But here we do have a new convert verses someone who was known in the Church with Ananias.

The more important second question is how could Peter say that he sees Simon as 'poisoned by bitterness and bound by iniquity' if we are claiming that he is a Christian?

- This is where we learn our most comforting lesson, provided that we do NOT take the easy way out by saying Simon was not really converted.

We all come to the faith with the baggage of the fall and our own personal sins and backgrounds. Even those who are baptized into the Kingdom as covenant children as Jack will be next week have their own fallen nature to content with and the sins of their fathers as well. Some of us have those acceptable sins like pride and lying to content with and others of us may have come with notorious sins like sorcery or sexual immorality. We must understand how easy it is for some of that baggage to come back to haunt us...

- We must learn to protect ourselves from such sins and understand that without proper repentance it can truly be the ruin of us and grieve the Spirit of God!

So was Peter being heartless and cruel with such a strong rebuke of Simon? Certainly not: He was doing what he had learned from his Master... We might think it cruel to tell Simon that he was "poisoned by bitterness and bound by iniquity,"

But, can you imagine being told by Jesus that you were Satan? Especially at a time when you thought you had just gotten an "A" on the quiz... In the Gospel accounts, we learn that Peter had properly answered the question of who Jesus was by saying He was the Son of the living God...

- In fact, Jesus said it was revealed to Peter by the Father.

Then as Jesus went on to instruct them about what it meant for Him to be the suffering Messiah, Peter quickly returns to his Jewish baggage of looking for an imperial Messiah and says that Jesus being crucified will NEVER happen.

- Jesus then says, "get thee behind me Satan. For you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men."."

When you compare these two accounts it could be argued that Peter was actually kinder to Simon than Jesus was to Peter.

BUT we must see the similarity:

- Peter and Simon were mindful of the things of man and not God
- They both fell quickly back into their priorities rather than God's.

Simon had spent his adult life making a good living by working miracles via his sorcery. Simon sees the Spirit poured out after Peter and John laid hands on the new Samaritan Saints and he immediately saw an opportunity: Just as Peter quickly responded to Jesus, so Simon, as we would say today, put his foot in his mouth. Of course it was much more than a verbal blunder:

- Peter warns him that his very soul is in danger and then Luke tells us that Simon properly responded:

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."

This brings back echoes of the father who cried out to Jesus, “I believe, help thou my unbelief!” We see with Simon just what we had seen with Simon Peter: A quick fall into sin and a quick recovery... Listen to how Jesus instructed Peter and the others following his great sin, where he played the part of Satan:

24 “Then Jesus said to His disciples, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. 25 For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it. 26 For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul? 27 For the Son of Man will come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and then He will reward each according to his works.”

If Simon had refused to heed Peter’s strong admonition he would have put his own soul in danger.

- Peter knew firsthand how easy it was to fall into such sin and the importance of a strong warning.

I am convinced that Peter and John rejoiced to see Simon’s repentance and that they prayed for him often! Our text tells us that Peter and John continued to preach the Good News as they made their way back to Jerusalem, bringing joy to all of Samaria. Both of them remembering their encounter with Simon; and both of them remembering how merciful God had been in their lives as well!

Interestingly this return trip to Jerusalem is the last mention we will have of John in the Book of Acts! John may have passed the very place where some of the Samaritans refused to welcome Jesus because He had set His face to go to Jerusalem as the great sacrifice for sin... John is now preaching the Good News to people where in his flesh, not long ago, he had asked Jesus, ““Lord, do You want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them, just as Elijah did?”

So what does all of this mean for us today? Much in every way!

- Allow me to give you three quick things to meditate on as we consider the weight of the sins that which so easily ensnares us...

You covenant children who have faithful parents who are training you as they should must rejoice that they are helping you at a very young age: The proverbs tell us that, “Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child; The rod of correction will drive it far from him.”

- You should thank God each time you experience that pain, knowing it is keeping you from dangerous sins later in your life!

Those of us who came to Jesus later in life or have fallen away at times know the power and temptation of sin:

- Something we must not take lightly, but confront with the power of the Gospel

This is why we must be honest in our time of confession as we approach the Lord in worship and why we must keep **SHORT** accounts throughout the week always praying with David, "Against You and You only have I sinned." Whatever the sin is that we might struggle with, we all must remember where the solution and comfort lies:

- Our hope is only in Jesus!

And finally, just as many want to treat Simon as some sort of fake Christian so we can avoid his conflict, many also try to make the insights that Paul shares in Romans chapter seven to be mostly thoughts he had about his life **BEFORE** he became a Christian. He put that chapter in a strange place if that is what he intended and I will leave it as you homework for this week, remembering that we do not get to enjoy the blessings of Romans chapter eight if we do not face the struggles of chapter seven: It is Paul the Apostle, Paul the Christian who cries out,

- "O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?"

Paul answers that question as Peter and John did in preaching the Gospel and as we must all do throughout our Christian walk:

Romans 7:25 "I thank God--through Jesus Christ our Lord!

- It is to Jesus we must flee!

Our daily readings in the Psalms and Proverbs brought us to Psalm 139 yesterday and I will leave you with the opening and closing verses which remind us of our sad estate as those born to the race of Adam and that we can hide none of it from God!

David also reminds us that we have forgiveness and life in Jesus:

Psalm 139:1 "O Lord, You have searched me and known me. 2 You know my sitting down and my rising up; You understand my thought afar off. 3 You comprehend my path and my lying down, And are acquainted with all my ways... Search me, O God, and know my heart; Try me, and know my anxieties; 24 And see if there is any wicked way in me, And lead me in the way everlasting."

- May this prayer of David be often on our lips!

Communion Meditation: Psalm 81:10-16:

"I am the Lord your God, Who brought you out of the land of Egypt; Open your mouth wide, and I will fill it. 11 "But My people would not heed My voice, And Israel would have none of Me. 12 So I gave them over to their own stubborn heart, To walk in their own counsels. 13 "Oh, that My people would listen to Me, That Israel would walk in My ways! 14 I would soon subdue their enemies, And turn My hand against their adversaries. 15 The haters of the Lord would pretend submission to Him, But their fate would endure forever. 16 He would have fed them also with the finest of wheat; And with honey from the rock I would have satisfied you."