



“What Simon Saw”
‘Jesus Saves’ Series
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In our series in **the Book of Acts**, we come today to **Acts 8**. Last week, we studied the events of Pentecost in **Acts 2**. That Pentecost marked the establishment of the church of Christ, the beginning of Christ’s kingdom here on earth, the beginning of the apostles carrying out of the great commission that Jesus gave them before ascending back to heaven. If you read through **Acts 7**, you learn about the explosive growth of the Jerusalem church. The apostles continued to preach there in that city in an effort to convert the Jewish leaders and the people to Christ. The gospel was extended to the Jewish nation. Thousands more after the Day of Pentecost believed and obeyed the gospel. In fact, on one occasion, the Bible tells us that more than 5,000 Old Testament priests became obedient to the faith. So, it was a thrilling time for the church as it saw rapid and exponential growth and the name of Christ continued to spread.

It’s not all a rosy picture though. While thousands upon thousands believed the apostle’s preaching and obeyed the truth, still many did not. In fact, the more success the apostles had, the angrier the Jewish leaders became, until finally in **Acts 7**, an all-out persecution began against the apostles and the early church. It began with the stoning of Stephen.

Acts 8:1-9 “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. And devout men carried Stephen to his burial, and made great lamentation over him. As for Saul, he made havoc of the church, entering every house, and dragging off men and women, committing them to prison. Therefore those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the word. Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria and preached Christ to them. And the multitudes with one accord heeded the things spoken by Philip, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did. For unclean spirits, crying with a loud voice, came out of many who

were possessed; and many who were paralyzed and lame were healed. And there was great joy in that city. 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,"

So, now the focus of the gospel begins to shift away from Jerusalem and into other parts of the Jewish community before it will, finally, in **Acts 10** find its way into the Gentile world. The first place outside of Jerusalem where the Bible gives us an indication the gospel message was carried was to the city of Samaria. Extraordinary things took place there. Philip—not the apostle, but the evangelist—went there and preached and performed miracles, and there was a great response in that town. What makes it especially interesting is the presence and influence of this man named Simon. When Simon met Philip and observed all that took place, he became a convert and some remarkable things happened involving him. Our study today will focus on Simon, along with the other Samaritans. But in particular, I want us to see some things that the Bible says that Simon saw. Ask yourself as we study, *can I see clearly enough to see the same things that Simon saw?*

When the preacher Philip traveled to the city of Samaria, he found a city filled with people who were under the superstitious sway of a man named Simon. The Bible says that Simon was a sorcerer, meaning he was a magician.

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

This created a challenge for Philip as it would for any true gospel preacher because the people were under the spell of this flashy, charismatic magic-worker. It would take something greater than what he was doing and saying to win the people away from him and win them to Christ. Sometimes you see religious charlatans who, for some reason, gain a great following. They bilk people out of a lot of money and deceive them with utterly false and unbiblical teachings and philosophies. It can be hard to get people to see through all of that and be willing to listen to what the Bible says. The man's charm or persona may be so overwhelming that people are emotionally manipulated into believing whatever the man says, thinking that he's a man of God. Nonetheless, Philip got the people's attention and he preached the gospel to open ears and honest hearts.

Acts 8:12-25 "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. 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. Now when the apostles who were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them, who, when they had come down, prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit. For as yet He had fallen upon none of them. They had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then they laid hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit. And when Simon saw that through the laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Spirit was given, he offered them money, saying, "Give me this power also, that anyone on whom I lay hands may receive the Holy Spirit." But Peter said to him, "Your money perish with you, because you thought that the gift of God could be purchased with money! You have neither part nor portion in this matter, for your heart is not right in the sight of God. Repent therefore of this your wickedness, and pray God if perhaps the thought of your heart may be forgiven

you. For I see that you are poisoned by bitterness and bound by iniquity." Then Simon answered and said, "Pray to the Lord for me, that none of the things which you have spoken may come upon me." 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."

Notice that the Bible says in **verse 12** that when the people of Samaria believed Philip, they were baptized. Just like Jesus did in giving the great commission, now Luke joins the acts of believing and being baptized into one proposition. I think you're going to find that over and over throughout our study in **the Book of Acts**. Remember what Jesus said in **Mark 16:16**:

Mark 16:16 "He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned."

Here, the Bible says that Philip preached, they believed, and they were baptized. The great commission is being carried out. It's not being changed. The commandments of Jesus are not being set aside or reasoned away as not being important or essential. Rather, they heeded what was preached when the gospel was preached to them. Just as in **Acts 2**, here we have a clear example of that pattern being followed and those things taking place. They believed the gospel when they heard it preached, and the result of their belief was that they obeyed the command of Jesus and were baptized. I submit that any time the gospel is truly preached, and people truly believe it, that it will be followed by people immediately being baptized as well. They were baptized when? When they believed.

Now, the record then tells us that *Simon also believed and was baptized*. Make a note of that because it's important. I didn't say that Simon also believed; in other words, Simon believed just like the others of Samaria believed. The Bible says that Simon also believed. Simon, too, became a convert to Christ when he heard the gospel preached. We don't have to speculate about that; the Bible says so. In the process of this, the Bible says that Simon saw some things and he learned some critical lessons that we need to be able to see as well.

First of all, Simon saw the difference between genuine and counterfeit miracles. Philip was endued with the power of the Holy Spirit to perform miracles, and when he came to Samaria doing so, it didn't take very long for the people—including Simon—to see a big difference. Remember that Simon was a magician. I don't know what his act consisted of, but whatever he had been doing, it was compelling and convincing enough that he practically had the whole city under his spell and believing that he was the great power of God, according to **verse 10**. But here comes Philip, performing *genuine* miracles and the result is the people forgot all about Simon. Even Simon himself couldn't resist the convincing nature of the things Philip was doing and saying, until he, too, became and follower and convert.

Friend, I want to point out here that never in the history of miracles has there been dispute over whether something supernatural took place. People sometimes question the source of the miracle or the power behind the miracle, but they didn't dispute that they had witnessed a miracle. You may remember the Pharisees got into serious trouble when they attributed the miracles of Jesus to the power of the devil. But they would've appeared as fools to all had they denied the miracle itself because it was evident to all who saw it that a miracle had occurred. That's the nature and the very definition of miracles.

People today often attach the word *miracle* to things that aren't necessarily miraculous. A miracle is not merely something unusual or amazing; a miracle—at least as the Bible sets forth miracles—is when the

laws that govern the natural universe are suspended and something takes place that defies them. Walking on top of the water was a miracle because it defied the laws of physics and gravity. Raising a dead man who had been dead for four days and whose body had begun to decompose back to life—well, that’s a miracle. There’s no such natural law that can explain such. To touch the forehead of someone and a raging fever instantly leave them, that’s a miracle. To speak a command to a man who was completely unable to walk and, instantly, he stands up and walks is a miracle. For a man to instantly see who had been blind from birth, that’s a miracle. Nobody questioned that Jesus or His apostles had supernatural power; they could SEE that they did. They simply foolishly questioned where they got that power.

Today, on the other hand, there are those who claim to have the power to work miracles, just like Philip or the apostles or others in the early church. They claim that these supernatural gifts still exist and are being performed in the church today, but I deny that they have that power. I believe that God is just as powerful as He has always been—that’s not the question. I believe that God can do whatever He sovereignly chooses to do and I believe that God hears and answers prayer. I believe that God providentially works in this world in a way that you and I don’t understand and can’t necessarily see. But people today do not have the power to perform miracles like the apostles did.

I can tell you this: if people had that power today, there would be no question in anybody’s mind that miracles were taking place, regardless of where the power came from to perform them. The miracles themselves would be obvious and beyond question. Simon saw the difference between what he claimed to be miracles and what actually were the miracles that Philip, a true man of God, had the power to perform. Can you see what Simon saw? There IS a difference.

Secondly, Simon saw that the kingdom of God had come to this earth. There is great dispute over that today. Most religious bodies, I would say, in the so-called Christian world teach that we are awaiting the coming of Christ’s kingdom when Jesus comes again. They believe in the doctrine of dispensational premillennialism, which says that because the Jews rejected Christ when He came the first time, the time was not right for Christ to set up His kingdom, so He delayed it until a future time when He will come again. Then the Jews will be converted to Him and He will at last set up His kingdom in Jerusalem and reign there for a thousand years. Now, the Bible doesn’t teach that. You can go to our website and watch other sermons where we explain why I don’t believe the Bible teaches that. I don’t believe the people of Samaria or Simon himself believed that. Notice **verse 12** of our text passage.

Acts 8:12 “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.”

Philip came to Samaria to preach the gospel. That was his mission. The word *gospel* literally means *good news*. In fact, other versions of the Bible render the verse this way:

Acts 8:12 “But when they believed Philip preaching good tidings concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women.” (ASV)

Acts 8:12 “But when they believed Philip as he preached good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women.” (ESV)

Friend, I want to ask you: what would’ve been *good news* about the fact that the kingdom of God was more than 2,000 years away? Doesn’t it make more sense that the *good news* about the promised, long

awaited, Old Testament prophesied kingdom was that it had finally arrived after all of that time? Yes, Simon saw that the kingdom of God had come. That was good tidings. It was good news to he and the others in Samaria.

Thirdly, Simon saw that miraculous spiritual gifts were given to Christians through the laying on of the apostles' hands.

Acts 8:14-18 “Now when the apostles which were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent unto them Peter and John: Who, when they were come down, prayed for them, that they might receive the Holy Ghost: (For as yet he was fallen upon none of them: only they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.) Then laid they their hands on them, and they received the Holy Ghost. And when Simon saw that through laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Ghost was given, he offered them money,”

Now this is one of the reasons we know that miraculous gifts belonged to the early church until the completed revelation of the New Testament—when it was completed and confirmed (**I Corinthians 13:8-13**), then those gifts passed away. One of the reasons was that it took the laying on of the apostles' hands to receive those powers. Philip was a preacher, a man of God, and he himself possessed power to perform wonders and miracles. He had received that power from the apostles at some point. But it was still necessary for an apostle to come to Samaria and impart those gifts to those believers.

You won't find an apostle of Christ in the world today. I know there are people who claim that they're apostles, but they don't fit the definition of an apostle of Christ to whom was given that authority and that power. You don't find apostles of Jesus in the world today. The apostles died a long time ago, and the power they possessed and imparted to others passed away as well because the divine mission and purpose of those miracles and signs were fulfilled. They served their purpose when the apostles completed their ministry and left us with the completed and confirmed testimony of the truth of Christ. Well, Simon saw that it was through the laying on of hands that these gifts were given. If one today wants those gifts or claims to have those gifts, you've got to find an apostle from whom to receive them, and there are no apostles and haven't been for 1900 some years.

Finally, Simon saw that it's possible for a child of God to fall from grace. It should be enough that the apostle Paul said of those who were turning back to Moses for their salvation that they had fallen from grace.

Galatians 5:4 “Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace.”

But strangely, in spite of that, you have people who say that you can't fall from grace. Once in grace, always in grace, they say. Once saved, always saved. Once you become a child of God, there is nothing you could ever do, no sin you could ever commit, no course of action you could ever take that will cause you to forfeit your salvation. But here in the case of Simon, we see that's exactly what happened to him. When he saw that the apostles gave this miraculous power to the Christians there, he made an unscrupulous and foolish offer to Peter and John to try to buy this power for himself. Oh, Peter didn't counter such an evil proposition!

Acts 8:20 “But Peter said unto him, Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money.”

Peter is literally saying, *you can take your money to hell with you when you go because unless you repent, that's what's going to happen!* Here is a man who obeyed the gospel, but his soul is now in jeopardy—exactly what many people tell us is impossible. They say that once a person is saved, he will always be saved, and he can never forfeit his salvation and never be lost. The case of Simon shows the exact opposite.

Now, I realize that people will argue with that. Some will say that Simon was never a Christian, he was a fraud who never really became a disciple in the first place. He was just faking it and had ulterior motives. He wasn't a real convert to Jesus, but a hypocrite. But that's in direct contradiction to what the Holy Spirit says about him.

Acts 8:13 “Then Simon himself believed also: and when he was baptized, he continued with Philip, and wondered, beholding the miracles and signs which were done.”

It doesn't say that Simon said he believed or that he claimed to believe. It doesn't say that the other disciples or Philip thought that Simon believed. Luke, writing by inspiration of the Spirit, simply says *he himself also believed*. Also? Yes, just like the people in Samaria believed. They believed and were baptized, he himself also believed and was baptized. The writer is equating the belief of Simon with the belief of the others. Just like the people in Samaria believed, so Simon believed. If Simon's belief was false and ineffectual, so was everyone else's.

The fact is that Simon was confronted with a great temptation that appealed to his fleshly man. And he foolishly gave in to that temptation. He did not trust or heed Christ. He gave in to that temptation and committed a grievous sin. Peter tells him what he needs to do.

Acts 8:22 “Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee.”

That's exactly what Christians are told to do when we sin.

1 John 1:7-9 “But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin. If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

It's not an idea that you're saved, you're in Christ and from one minute to the next you're out of Christ, you're saved, you're lost, you're saved, you're lost...that's not the idea here. The idea here is that Simon's heart, at some point, had become poisoned. Somewhere in this process, Simon's faith faltered to where he got to the point that he could commit this grievous sin. This was, perhaps, several days or even weeks after his conversion because of the time it took in those days for word of all these events to reach Jerusalem and for the apostles to go there. We don't exactly know how long it took, but in the course of that time, Simon allowed himself to be tempted to go back into his old way of life. Just like we see Christians sometimes do even today. And when they do, the Bible says it is worse for them than it was in the beginning.

There is grace and there is mercy for the Christian. The Christian can always confess his faults to God and God is willing, able, and ready to forgive every sin and transgression when we walk in the light and we live a repentant life. But, friend, I want to tell you this: when you forfeit and renounce your faith in

Christ and you turn away from Him, there are eternal consequences to that. The books of **Galatians** and **Hebrews** are both urgent pleas to wavering Christians not to turn back, not to forsake Christ, not to forsake the gospel because the eternal consequences for doing so are grave. And Simon saw this as well.

Can you see what Simon saw? I want to believe that Simon repented, was restored to a right relationship with Christ, and never did that again. I'd like to believe that and perhaps that is the case, but regardless, we can certainly learn some important lessons about his experience when Philip came to Samaria and preached the saving gospel of Christ to that city. I hope that today we will see the same things about the gospel that Simon saw. That we'll obey the gospel, just like Simon obeyed the gospel—in faith and in baptism. I hope that we'll understand some things about the kingdom and the work of the Holy Spirit that Simon came to see. And, also, that we'll take heed and avoid the spiritually deadly mistakes that Simon made because it is possible to fall away from Christ in whom and only in whom is there salvation, safety, and security. May we also see and understand and heed all of the things that Simon saw.

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