

Acts 8:9-25

“For all the wrong reasons”

Jesus had told, HAS told, His followers to

Matthew 28:19-20

“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Teaching them to obey all that I have commanded you.” Matthew 28:19-20

He told them:

Acts 1:8

“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”

The Holy Spirit had come- The Disciples had received power – and through their faith and in the name of Jesus of Nazareth the ministry and the message of Christ Jesus was evident in Jerusalem.

And because of this – the contempt the religious leaders had for Jesus left them seething, conspiring, and holding nothing back to again try to silence that message.

The apostles had been arrested, threatened and beaten.

They had brutally, and publicly murdered Stephen, a devout man, one of the first deacons of the church, a man filled with the Holy Spirit.

The Pharisee Saul was now “ravaging the church, entering house after house, and dragging off men and women, he would put them in prison.”

And all of this, God permitted – for His purposes, and according to His will.

Because of these things, faithful disciples of Jesus Christ were scattered, as Jesus had instructed, and the message went out from Jerusalem, into Judea, and into Samaria.

Because of these things, those who would publicly declare themselves disciples of Jesus Christ – understood the cost, the risk, **and yet trusted the reward of the upward calling of Christ was worth it all.**

One of these men, Philip, another of those first faithful deacons, went into Samaria, there to preach the word.

Many saw the signs and wonders that God was working through him. Unclean spirits were cast out, the paralyzed and the lame were healed.

God received the glory, and the people rejoiced.

But what about those who were proclaiming Christ for all the wrong reasons?

ACTS 8:9-11

⁹ Now there was a man named Simon, who formerly was practicing magic in the city and astonishing the people of Samaria, claiming to be someone great; ¹⁰ and they all, from smallest to greatest, were giving attention to him, saying, "This man is what is called the Great Power of God." ¹¹ And they were giving him attention because he had for a long time astonished them with his magic arts.

Simon was a big somebody in Samaria!

- An accomplished and gifted Magician/Sorcerer who amazed the crowds with his awe-inspiring, supernatural performances.
- From the least to the greatest, Simon had the attention of the town.
- "*Simon the Great!*" "*Simon the Magnificent!*"
- And the people heralded him as one who had the "Great Power of God!"

ACTS 8:12-13

¹² But when they believed Philip preaching the good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were being baptized, men and women alike.¹³ Even Simon himself believed; and after being baptized, he continued on with Philip, and as he observed signs and great miracles taking place, he was constantly amazed.

Three points of Philip's sermon about the Good News

- 1) The Kingdom of God
- 2) The Name of Jesus Christ
- 3) The proper response to the truth

1) The Kingdom of God

Any attempt to share the joy of the gospel, the hope we have in Jesus, and the need of man to repent and follow Christ is lost without the foundation that all of this is from God!

- The message that God IS –
- The understanding the God created all things for HIS glory –
- The acknowledgment that we have ALL FALLEN SHORT OF THE GLORY OF GOD
- The understanding that because of this we ALL DESERVE God’s wrath.
- And the knowledge that if we trust these things by FAITH – REPENT- and commit to following Christ – our sins are forgiven.

This is the starting point for the journey from-

- Sinner to Saint.
- From Lost to Redeemed.
- From spiritually dead – to having eternal life.

Without at least an acknowledgment of the Sovereignty of God and His Kingdom – all other conversations on salvation have no reference point!

- Saved from what? / Saved by whom? / Saved for what reason?

We know that Old Testament and New Testament saints alike are saved by God’s grace through their faith.

- So, **what** we believe, and **who** we believe in matters!

Having faith in a false God or a false gospel is of no eternal benefit to anyone!

And no one is going to seek God unless they first believe that God IS, and that He can be found!

The writer of Hebrews declares:

Hebrews 11:6

*And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God **must believe that He is** and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him.*

2) The name of Jesus Christ

Once a person has a grasp of the Kingdom of God and the dire circumstances they are living in – Then it is time to introduce them to the One, and only one, who is **worthy** and **able** to save them.

Acts 4:12

“There is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved.”

Spurgeon said, “We have a great need for Christ and a great Christ for our needs.”

Oh how I love Jesus!

At some point during every message on the gospel the conversation must come to a discussion of **the Man, the Savior, and our Lord, Jesus.**

This is one of the **essential truths** that separates the **reality** of Christianity from all the other religions of the ages.

- Religion is nothing more than a system of faith and worship to a particular deity.

We are not called to a religion pertaining to the God of creation, the God of the scriptures, ***BUT A RELATIONSHIP!***

God walked with man in the Garden of Eden – He has been manifesting Himself to man ever since.

God provided the prophets and the writings of His word to connect with us – So that we can connect with Him.

He has sent the Son, the ultimate expression of His love, so that the sins of those who believe are atoned by His sacrifice on the cross.

The broken relationship is restored.

In the current age He has even given His people of faith the Holy Spirit of God to dwell in us that we might know Him.

We of faith have no fear of death. Death has no sting. The day of our death is the last day we are separated from the Kingdom of our God and the first day we enter His courts with praise!

3) The proper response to the truth

Following Philips preaching we see people having heard the message, and having believed the message, we see them being baptized in response.

There are only two responses to the message of the Kingdom of God and the Name of Jesus-

- **Believe or do not believe – (To be... or not to be...)**

- Those who do not believe often scoff, mock, or become violent.
- Others will ponder but will not commit. Which is still unbelief.

Philip rightly taught that the next step after receiving and believing the message of the kingdom of God and of Jesus Christ, was to be baptized.

Baptism is a commandment from our Lord.

- How odd that a Christian would declare faith and then begin that relationship with an act of defiance in not being baptized? May it never be.
- **The same is true of all the Lord's commands.**

And it is in the setting of these teachings that our street magician Simon heard the message, saw the miracles, and declared he believed.

Even being baptized as a public sign of his faith.

And from there Simon continued on with Philip, observing, and amazed at the things he observed.

ACTS 8:14-17

¹⁴ Now when the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent them Peter and John, ¹⁵ who came down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit. ¹⁶ For He had not yet fallen upon any of them; they had simply been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. ¹⁷ Then they *began* laying their hands on them, and they were receiving the Holy Spirit.

Expositing this passage can be challenging.

It is simple enough to see that Peter and John were excited to hear that the church was growing **OUTSIDE the walls of Jerusalem** and even **OUTSIDE the borders of Judea!**

But when they arrived to be a part of these things, they determined those who were professing faith **had not yet received the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.**

It begs the question: WHY NOT?

We know for those who believe – their whole life WILL change.

Romans 10:9

if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved;

Said another way, if you have believed, you are saved.

- If you are saved, you have been born again.
- If you have been born again, you have been given a new heart.
- If you have been given a new heart, you have received the Holy Spirit
- If you have received the Holy Spirit... YOU ARE CHANGED.

The filter you see everything through changes.

- It's not about me, but about Christ who died for me.
- My goals are not for me, but to glorify Jesus.
- I am no longer my master, nor is sin master over me, but Christ Jesus now reigns over my life.

Two of the possibilities that have been put forth are these:

1) Although Philip had preached on the kingdom of God and of Jesus, and of responding obediently – **Perhaps he had not clearly spoken on the role the Holy Spirit plays in the life of the new believer.**

It is still a common error in evangelism today where those sharing the gospel talk about the role God the Father plays, in creation, and righteousness and wrath.

And the role that God the Son plays, as a teacher, example, and sacrificial offering to redeem the faithful from the wrath of the Father.

Sadly, God the Holy Spirit is often overlooked in these conversations. For all that He does in the cleansing, rebirth, and sustaining of the new believer.

Galatians 5:17 tells us:

For the desire of the flesh is against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, in order to keep you from doing whatever you want.

Where does the hope that dwells in us come from? From our own will? No

But through the power of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit!

Romans 5:13

"May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope."

Perhaps there had been no speaking in tongues as seen before and would be seen again in future conversions.

In fact, the power that had been witnessed working through the hands of the apostles and Philip were attributed to the Holy Spirit's presence.

Again, *Acts 1:8*

But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

2) The other possible reason for the delay in the manifesting of the Holy Spirit was to wait for the presence of Peter and John for the sake of unifying the Church of Jerusalem with the gentile believers.

For many years there had been hostility between the Jews of Jerusalem and the Hellenistic Jews who lived among the gentiles.

The emerging church would be something completely new. The animosities of the past had no place in the Fellowship to come.

Jew and Gentile would be of one fellowship – united in their faith in Christ Jesus.

Romans 10:11-12

*For the Scripture says, "WHOEVER BELIEVES IN HIM WILL NOT BE DISAPPOINTED." For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, abounding in riches for **all** who call on Him;*

As we have said many times, these days we are studying are of the Apostolic Age.

– that transitional period when the Apostles and some among the early church were granted the power through the Holy Spirit to perform signs and wonders.

Peter had been instrumental in the empowering of the church in **Jerusalem**.

Here he was instrumental in the empowering of the church in **Samaria**.

By the time we get to Chapter 10, we will see him finally be used by the Lord to empower the church among the **gentiles**.

But we need to be careful - It is very dangerous to build doctrines that affect the whole church age based on what God was doing during these early days of the Apostles.

ACTS 8:18-21

¹⁸ Now when Simon saw that the Spirit was bestowed through the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money, ¹⁹ saying, "Give this authority to me as well, so that everyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit."

²⁰ But Peter said to him, "May your silver perish with you, because you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money! ²¹ You have no part or portion in this matter, for your heart is not right before God."

Ouch.

Revealed now is the misalignment of Simon the magician's beliefs and confession.

We read in Acts 8:13 that Simon had "believed" – we are left now to ask "what was it that he had believed in?"

Here was a man who claimed to believe, made public displays of his faith, but had no relationship with the true Christ.

- **How many today are on that same misleading path?**

Simon believed what he could see. He saw the miracles, the signs and the wonders, and for a trickster such as himself, **he saw not an opportunity for salvation, but for success!**

He had heard the word – but within it perceived the wealth that could be his.

We are tempted to give Simon the benefit of the doubt, but Peter's Spirit led discernment to see Simon's heart tells us that Simon's heart was not right with God.

Simon, sadly like many through the ages, was more interested in the **OFFICE** than the **OFFERING**.

Becoming part of the church for ALL THE WRONG REASONS.

Recall from verse 9 that Simon had been "*practicing magic, claiming to be someone great,*" and he had been the talk of town, from the smallest to the greatest.

But with the introduction of REAL miracles – **Seeing the power of GOD working** - and the influence of the gospel – **the attention of the people was shifting** – **And Simon wanted back on center stage.**

Like so many people, Simon wanted it ALL, he wanted it NOW, and he wanted it for the WRONG REASONS.

Rather than committing himself to a life of prayer, study and service – He tried to buy his way in.

This practice of buying one's way into church office became so problematic for the Roman Catholic Church in the 9th century that the pope actually condemned the practice which was given the name of "**Simony**"

- Offenses under Simony included paying bribes to enter the priesthood.
- Purchasing holy orders, or blessings from the church
- Purchasing or selling of holy artifacts for personal gain.

Throughout the church age, there have been examples of men and women who have entered the ranks of church leadership for the wrong reasons.

Men and women who have sought the office over the offering.

The same is true in the congregation.

Many a pew, or pew chair, has been filled by attendees who are attending for the wrong reasons.

- In the early years of our country, to hold public office, one had to be a member in good standing of the church.
 - This practice prevailed for many years in various regions of the country until 1787 when an article was introduced to officially bar religious tests for office – **even so – culturally the majority of those holding office at least claim some manner of Christianity.**
- Others fill the pew – because it's the right thing to do, or out of habit, having grown up in the church.
- **Still others attend, or even serve, due to their relationship with their spouse, rather than their relationship with the Lord.**
- Some are just curious. Some embrace the safety, comfort and fellowship of the church.
- **Others believe that having made a confession with their mouth, taken a quick dip in a creek, and paying generous tithes secures their place in heaven.**

- **But as we know – without a confession in faith, and without a baptism due to repentance – the words, the works, and the tithes mean nothing before God.**
- And sadly some – are in it primarily for the prestige, power, position, or financial rewards.
 - *After all, most pastors make a living wage and only have to work one day a week, right??*

People proclaiming Christ for the wrong reasons is nothing new

Back in *John 2:23-24*, we read of a similar incident where people were making decisions of the head, without engaging the heart.

Now when He was in Jerusalem at the Passover, during the feast, many believed in His name, observing His signs which He was doing. But Jesus, on His part, was not entrusting Himself to them, for He knew all men, and because He did not need anyone to testify concerning man, for He Himself knew what was in man.

Jesus was a highly visible representative of His Father's Kingdom.

People saw the things Jesus did, and it attracted them.

People heard the things Jesus taught, and it changed them.

But like Simon the Magician, there were some who came for attractions but never believed the truth of the teaching.

We have seen this word pop-up in both our sermons and our Sunday School classes – *pisteuō* – it is the same word used in this passage for believed and entrusted, or commit.

- What this means is that the people believed in Jesus, but He did not believe their faith was genuine.
- Certainly not a faith in the right things or for the right reasons!

This creates the incredibly sad class of some people within Christendom who are “unsaved believers.”

It's amazing when people are drawn to the church, hear the word of God, and respond with words of faith.

- Maybe they even get baptized.
- Maybe they even attend for a while.
- Maybe they still are.

But over time, the shiny polish of walking with Jesus wears off for them.

Over time, it becomes more and more evident as their walk and their talk looks less like Jesus and more like the rest of the world.

- It takes more than believing that God is.
- It takes more than believing that Heaven and Hell are real.
- It even takes more than believing Jesus is the Son of God.

A person can believe all of these things – but if they do not commit to submitting to God’s authority, Jesus’ Kingship in our lives, and the leading of the Holy Spirit then their faith is not **“Saving faith.”**

Consider this –

In the book of James, we read of having a faith and works that are dead, and a faith and works that saves, being a demonstration of our changed life and in response to our salvation.

James 2:1

My brethren, do not hold your faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ with an attitude of personal favoritism.

- Our faith and salvation do not put us on a pedestal – but on our knees – before the throne of God
 - **Our salvation should make us humble, not proud.**

James 2:14

What use is it, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but he has no works? Can that faith save him?

- Faith saves, but as we have seen – **faith for the wrong reasons** – and with the wrong heart – is **NOT “saving faith”**

The “unsaved believer” will argue:

“I believe in God – I believe in Heaven and Hell – I believe in Jesus and the Holy Spirit”

James would reply as he does in *James 2:19-20*

You believe that God is one. You do well;

The demons also believe, and shudder.

But are you willing to recognize, you foolish fellow, that faith without works is useless?

So I ask you, assuming that you believe in God, Heaven, Hell, Jesus and the Holy Spirit –

What does that mean to you?

This is the difference between a faith that knows these things are true – and a faith that saves.

What do you believe in – and how does that belief change you?

- **Saving faith** not only **acknowledges** these things – **but submits to them.**
- If I trust these things to be true, **FOR THE RIGHT REASONS** –
 - That faith will result, must result, in faithful works and a desire to glorify God **FIRST.**
 - A desire to grow, mature, and to serve God's people for **THEIR** sake – and for God's glory.
- My labors, going to church, worshipping, **my LIFE**, - have nothing to do with what I GET OUT OF IT – and everything to do with seeing God honored, worshipped, and glorified **in** my life and **by** my life.

Peter's rebuke: ACTS 8:22-23

²²Therefore repent of this wickedness of yours, and pray the Lord that, if possible, the intention of your heart may be forgiven you. ²³For I see that you are in the gall of bitterness and in the bondage of iniquity."

Magic, Sorcery, and the powers associated with them are not to be played with. Certainly not be practiced!

To clarify, I am not talking about illusions or the sleight of hand.

- Those are **natural practices**, skills to trick the eye and mind.

But when it comes to that which would be considered **supernatural**, divination, witchcraft, magics and sorcery, **we who belong to Christ ought to have no part in these things!**

- Examples: Divination, tarot cards, spells,

The powers associated with supernatural magic/sorcery are not from God – but through the powers of the demonic.

Peter's rebuke would seem uncharacteristic if it were given to a brother –

Peter calls out Simon for the “Intent of his heart” – which was **self-glory** rather than **God’s glory**.

Peter discerns that Simon’s heart was in the “Gall of bitterness”

- Gall itself represented something bitter.
 - Therefore, the phrase could be read that Simon’s heart was bitter, bitterness.
 - Or sinfully sinful – **that is full of bitterness and sin.**

And the “Bondage of iniquity”

- Here Peter declares that Simon is a slave to his sin.

Peter’s rebuke is consistent with confronting one who is still dead in their trespasses, with a hard heart of bitterness toward God.

One who is going through life with the chains of sin pulling them from place to place and binding them from the grace and the forgiveness of God.

Peter’s instruction is for the man to pray to the Lord – **Good advice!!**

- Simon’s heart was not right with God.
- Simon’s heart loved Simon first.
- Simon desired and the intention of his heart was to glorify Simon.

Simon – you – me – when found to be in sin, should pray to the Lord!

Isaiah 55:7

*Let the wicked forsake his way
And the unrighteous man his thoughts;
And let him return to the LORD,
And He will have compassion on him,
And to our God,
For He will abundantly pardon.*

1 John 1:9

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness

God is able to forgive – the question is; are we convicted of our sin and do we desire to seek His forgiveness.

As for Simon’s response

²⁴ But Simon answered and said, "Pray to the Lord for me yourselves, so that nothing of what you have said may come upon me."

Rather than feel the weight of his own sin – **rather than repent and turn to Jesus, whom he had earlier proclaimed and in whose name, he had been baptized**, Simon petitions Peter to pray for him.

Friend's when we sinned, you and I broke the relationship.

Jesus provided the door of salvation when He died on the cross as a payment for sin – but it remains for you and I to open that door and invite Him in.

Nobody can open that door for you.

Nobody can carry you through that door.

In the end – if you come to salvation – it is because **YOU** in your heart fell on your knees before the One, True, Holy God of all creation and asked Jesus to forgive your sin.

It is because **YOU** in faith declare that God is – that you have sinned – and deserve His wrath.

It is because **YOU**, trusting these things in your heart – turn to Jesus and commit to follow Him.

Nobody else can place you in a right relationship with God. – that's up to you.

ACTS 8:25

²⁵ So, when they had solemnly testified and spoken the word of the Lord, they started back to Jerusalem, and were preaching the gospel to many villages of the Samaritans.

In the end, scripture gives no indication that Simon repented. Such is the power of sin, that some will never let go of their chains to receive the freedom we have in Christ Jesus.

But what a powerful display to the church in Samaria these things had been.

Friends – as we leave this place today – I pray that you and I will be powerful and living testimonies that will draw people to Jesus.

I pray you and I will share the truth of the gospel with them.

Sharing with them:

- **The Kingdom of God**
- **The name of Jesus**
- **The proper response to the truth**
- **And the power of the Holy Spirit in the life of those who follow Jesus**

Let us pray