

Acts Week 24

The Sorcerer's Profession of Faith

Acts 8:9-13; 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.

Now we find that Simon has great interest in Philip as he performed numerous miracles in public. This Philip is not Jesus' disciple but is often referred to in studies as Philip the evangelist or Philip the deacon. He was one of the seven chosen in Acts 6 by the disciples to serve others when the disciples said they needed to be about. **Acts 21:8; On the next day we who were Paul's companions departed and came to Caesarea, and entered the house of Philip the evangelist, who was one of the seven, and stayed with him.** Philip the evangelist had four daughters of prophetic gifts, **21:9; 9 And the same man had four daughters, virgins, which did prophesy.**

What we can learn from this is that God graciously gives gifts, Philip was powerful in the gifts he received and demonstrated an unrelenting faith in sharing to those who were of different beliefs and mindsets. He preached to both Hellenist "those who used the Septuagint Greek and Orthodox Jews." John Stott teaches of the dissension which took place when the ten tribes defected and went north.¹ It brought about an even greater conflict between those in Samaria and those in Judea. John Stott says this of Philip, "It is hard for us to imagine the boldness of the step Philip took preaching the gospel to the Samaritans."² This was after almost a thousand years of trouble. Tensions increased in 722 BC when Assyria invaded ushering in even more intermingling between cultures which cause hostility between the northern and southern tribes.

Despite the challenges facing rejection and perhaps physical reproach, Philip believed this is what God was calling him to do. The fact that Philip like Stephen were not of the twelve disciples, we still find it is God who empowered both men as the Scripture indicates. If we ponder just how frightening this must have seemed and yet still the call was stronger than the fear, we may be better able to put ourselves in their shoes. Has there ever been a moment in your life where what needed to get done seemed

¹ John R. W. Stott, "The Message Of Acts" Inter Varsity Press, USA. Downers Grove, Ill, pages 127-128.T\

² Ibid 127

impossible” Perhaps it is for the simple reason of stepping out of your boundaries, your comfort zone and focusing more on your shortcomings and fears as opposed to trusting in God to deliver to you both strength and power of the word? We can think to ourselves God will send someone, just not me God. There is a good chance if it is difficult to do... then it is most likely you who God seeks to use. However, if you believe it is by your strength and you can get it done for the Father, then perhaps after you fail you will see the humility God desires from us. We can be strong when it is His power but not in pride. We do not find in either Stephen or Philip an ounce of pride, but instead a willingness to humbly serve, the very definition of a deacon.

Proverbs 29:23; A man's pride will bring him low, But the humble in spirit will retain honor.

1 John 2:16; For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world.

If we compare these two men, Stephen and Philip with King Saul and observe how they gained and how Saul lost, we can plainly see the differences in growth in the offices of which they served. We come to repent in humility, any less is of no gain for we quench the work of the Spirit who knows just what we need, we put up roadblocks that say to Him, “I got this one” as He shakes His head and leaves.

Simon the sorcerer had gained fame, people believed him to have power like God. **9 He 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.”**

I believe we find it over and over throughout the Bible that a lot of believers came to believe due to the miracles that were performed. We find it here in Acts with Simon through his sorcery, and we see it with Philip the evangelist, with the disciples and with Jesus Himself. The Pharisees asked Jesus for a sign and Jesus said , John 16:4; “and no sign shall be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah.” But what is faith? Is it not a gift that offers hope through the miracle of the new birth, the changed heart of stone to the replaced heart and the replaced heart of flesh, the new man, are these evidences not enough, do we need to see sorcery or things outside of us in order to believe? Is not the inward work, the first work of the Holy Spirit that bares the greatest miracle?

The people were astonished with Simon but here came another greater than he who used no magic, no potions. **Verse 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.** There was no magic involved here, it was the word, the preaching of those things concerning the kingdom of God and in the name of Jesus. **John 20:29; “Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed are**

those who have not seen and yet have believed.” Oh that the word is more powerful than the miracles they wanted to see. than a double edge sword.

Hebrews 4:12; For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. Is this fact not a promoter of its own? I believe Philip must have thought so, he was a servant, not a wealthy man, but one of humble means who's heart's desire was to share the gospel and see others come.

Verse 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. It seems it would have been better if we read here that Simon believed the preaching and came to salvation by the word. Yet he still struggled with wanting the power of the disciples.

“The history that follows is interesting as one of the few records in the New Testament of the process of individual conversion. A brief sentence tells us that Philip continued his work as a preacher at Azotes (Ashdod) and among the other cities that had formerly belonged to the Philistines, and, following the coast-line, came to Caesarea.”³

There are not many things in this life that can best the conversion of a sinner. As a caterpillar morphs into a butterfly so is the likeness of a man who comes from death to life through the power of preaching. The sinner once dressed in darkness sheds the old flesh and becomes a new creation, shining the light of Christ who lives inside him. The frustrations and the calamities slowly begin to fade away and the once stern agitated look is softened and welcoming.

Verses 14:-25; The Sorcerer's Sin

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.

We need to remember the animosity that had run for over a hundred years between God's people. Now people came to see each other through the eyes of others, than only themselves. Would my perspective of myself change if I could see myself as others do? The disciples wanted to share the love of God with these they had for so long been embattled against. It seems all our senses are heightened as God begins His work in us. We find ourselves caring more for others, we begin to think of others' needs ahead

³ <https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/Dictionary/viewTopic.cfm?topic=BT0003363>

of our own, and we begin to look at the world through a new set of eyes and listen with intense hearing.

Janet had the football game on last night and at the end of a tough fight the 49ers won by 3 points. However, everyone greeted the opposing team with handshakes and hugs, conversation and friendship. The adrenaline had tapered off and both teams were respectful to one another. This is what I was discussing a couple of weeks ago when I was talking about soldiers on a battlefield slowing down and getting to know each other. I was not implying that everyone was being led to Jesus, I was merely talking about how we are indoctrinated and made to follow a path that others set us on. These groups that had such hostility for each other were all God's chosen, those who were to set an example to the world as to how to live toward God and each other. The ordinance to love your neighbor was first written in Leviticus 19:18. 'You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the children of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD. Yet we find this ordinance violated more so not against strangers but instead against God's people, the tribes He has chosen and made.

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.

Simon was a man who loved attention and fame. Irenaeus is said to have written "toward the end of the second century Irenaeus presented him both glorified by man as if he were "a god" and author of all sorts of heresies."⁴

It is made certain here that Simon may have never repented for his sin but he did ask Peter for prayer after being rebuked for wanting to buy power. Although it looks as though Simon never repented, the door is open to ask. Peter had very little use for

⁴ Ibid 123

Simon so what we read may be the reaction of Peter toward the one he struggled with. It seems most believe he was never saved. So was his prayer request to Peter of no use? Did it not demonstrate a moment of repentance, **“Pray to the Lord for me, that none of the things which you have spoken may come upon me.”** Was he wanting salvation or just to escape all that Peter warned him of. What is your reason for going to heaven? To glorify the Father or not go to hell?

What was it that so many believed as Philip preached the gospel as opposed to Jesus entering the land and talking to the women at the well who carried the word back to town and many believed? We may never know, but Peter hits him with strong conviction, he is told to pray but instead he asks Peter to do so. Many see the pastor as the one who needs to pray over them when all the time they too can be asking in prayer. Pastors do not have a direct line to God, we are not much different from those we preach to, but it is nice when people do feel comfortable to ask us to pray for them.