

## Simon's Confession

- Some of you may remember back to the start of the Iraq War, four years ago now
  - As our troops began advancing toward Baghdad, the Iraqi ruling authorities still in the city were determined to put a happy face on their circumstances
  - And in particular, one unusual character, the Iraqi Minister of Communication, would hold daily press conferences for the media
    - And his statements to the press were remarkable, to say the least
    - He would routinely tell the press corps how the Iraqi military were soundly defeating the advancing American troops
    - At one point, Iraq began launching their remaining scud missiles at Israel and at Kuwait
  - When the minister was asked about these missiles, he said this:

It has been rumored that we have fired scud missiles into Kuwait. I am here to tell you we do not have any scud missiles and I don't know why they were fired into Kuwait

- What's even more interesting though, is that this man continued to give press conferences every day at exactly the same hour each day for virtually every day of the war
  - But despite his repeated statements that Americans were being defeated and they were not advancing on Baghdad
  - Just before the Americans arrived in the city, the minister unexplainably failed to show for his regular daily briefing
  - And he disappeared altogether
- So despite his statements, it became clear what he actually believed to be true
  - That regardless of what he said, his behavior told the true story about what he believed
  - And this leads us to our study tonight
  - Acts 8 (start in verse 9)

[Acts 8:5](#) Philip went down to the city of Samaria and *began* proclaiming Christ to them.

[Acts 8:6](#) The crowds with one accord were giving attention to what was said by Philip, as they heard and saw the signs which he was performing.

[Acts 8:7](#) For *in the case of* many who had unclean spirits, they were coming out of *them* shouting with a loud voice; and many who had been paralyzed and lame were healed.

[Acts 8:8](#) So there was much rejoicing in that city.

[Acts 8:9](#) ¶ 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;

[Acts 8:10](#) and they all, from smallest to greatest, were giving attention to him, saying, "This man is what is called the Great Power of God."

[Acts 8:11](#) And they were giving him attention because he had for a long time astonished them with his magic arts.

[Acts 8:12](#) 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.

[Acts 8:13](#) 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.

- As this chapter opens, we learn that the early church in Jerusalem began to experience persecution at the hands of Saul, the man who would become the Apostle Paul
  - As a result of that persecution, the church leadership is scattered
  - As we glance at those opening verse we see in verse 4 that the scattering had the effect of seeing God's word preached throughout the region
  - And an evangelist Phillip went to Samaria to proclaim that Jesus was the Messiah
    - Phillip you may remember was one of the seven men selected in chapter 6 of Acts to begin serving the widows in the church
    - Now we see him taking the role of evangelist
    - I can't ignore the opportunity to mention here how someone like Phillip entered into this opportunity
      - What began as a desire to serve others through feeding widows – a lowly manner of service

- Now He has become an evangelist given power by God to perform miracles
  - What can God do with just a little step of faith and obedience to serve in His name?
- Phillip we're told proclaims Christ and Phillip's was also performing signs among the people in Samaria
  - And His preaching results in receiving attention (prosecho) means addicted to
  - Great amazement at all that Phillip was doing
    - And much rejoicing
    - And I suspect even Phillip was surprised at all that God was doing in Samaria to bring about repentance and faith among the people
- But in the midst of all this miraculous work, we hear of a man named Simon
  - The first religious charlatan
    - If there had been cable tv and 1-800 numbers this guy would probably be using them
    - He's described as performing magic, astonishing the people, and claiming to be someone great
    - In fact the people were calling Simon the Great Power of God
      - It's interesting to see right from the beginning how Luke juxtaposes Simon and Phillip
      - Phillip is astonishing the people, as is Simon
      - But Phillip's work is the result of God's power
      - Simon's work is the result of magic, dark arts, real power, but demonic
      - Simon's work is intended to make himself look powerful and important before the people – and it was working
      - While Phillip's work causes the people to rejoice and give God glory

- And as Phillip was preaching that Jesus of Nazareth was in fact the Messiah the people had been expecting
  - And as the Holy Spirit performed signs through Phillip, the people in Samaria believed and were baptized
  - And then most curious of all, we're told in verse 13 that Simon himself believed and was baptized
  - And Simon we're told continued to be amazed by what Phillip could do
    - You know, that's an interesting footnote that Luke inserts
    - As you read this, you're left with the impression that Simon is following Phillip merely because he's so fascinated by the miracles that Phillip continues to do
      - That in other words his purpose in following is not to be a follower of Jesus
      - Rather, he's expressing professional admiration, professional curiosity
      - As if he sees Phillip as simply a more skilled competitor for the crowd's attention
- But we were told in verse 13 that Simon believed what Phillip was preaching
  - If the story ended here, we would have to assume that Simon believed the Gospel – that Jesus was the Messiah, and that His death on the cross was the atoning payment for all men's sins
  - He believed unto salvation
  - This would have to be the conclusion we draw from the simple language of the text
    - But fortunately, the chapter doesn't end with verse 13.
    - In fact, Luke tells a far different ending in the rest of the chapter
- The act of belief in the Gospel is a simple thing, in one sense, but profoundly deep in another
  - The Bible tells us repeatedly about the need to repent and believe

[Mark 1:15](#) and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel."

- But what does that mean?
- Repent of every sin we've ever committed?
- Repent of our life lived in rebellion to God
  - To a life of disobedience
  - Of chasing after the world's idols
  - Of seeking to work our way to heaven
  - Of a life lived apart from God
- Turn toward God's gracious provision of life through His Son
  - Believing that Jesus is the one and only way God has made available to men to be saved and receive Heaven
  - Trust in nothing else
  - Cease working our way to heaven and trust in God's work on the cross
- Is this what Simon did in the moment he heard Phillip preaching?
  - Is this what he was thinking when he volunteered to be baptized?
  - How would we know what was truly in his heart?
- Well, word of Phillip's ministry makes it's way back to Jerusalem

[Acts 8:14](#) ¶ Now when the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent them Peter and John, [Acts 8:15](#) who came down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit.

[Acts 8:16](#) For He had not yet fallen upon any of them; they had simply been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.

[Acts 8:17](#) Then they *began* laying their hands on them, and they were receiving the Holy Spirit.

- Back in Jerusalem, the Apostles Peter and John have heard that Phillip's ministry is bearing tremendous fruit among the Samaritans

- Specifically, the Apostles hear that the Samaria had heard the word of God and received it
  - It seems logical to us, but this was a remarkable result for the Jewish church
  - Samaritans were despised – But God's plan for His church was bigger than the Apostle's dreamed
- I think it's critical to note that the thing which opened their eyes and drew them to the truth was the Word of God
  - Despite Phillip's miracles and signs, these were not the things that converted the people
    - They attracted the crowds
    - They proved the validity of Phillip's ministry
    - But it was the Word of God that did the work of salvation
      - After all, Simon's magic act also gained crowds and included miraculous events
      - But only the Word of God can change hearts
      - Don't even take your eye off the ball in ministry
    - Our one best and primary tool for ministry is the word of God.
- Now in these verse we hear something very interesting
  - Though many in the crowds had believed, the Holy Spirit had not yet come upon them
    - We know from other scripture that the Holy Spirit is given to a believe as a permanent indwelling presence upon the moment of new life
    - At the moment that a heart changes and belief in the gospel becomes a reality, the Spirit is at work in the believer's heart

[Rom. 8:9](#) ¶ However, you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him.

- So the HS is the defining characteristic of true faith
- So why would the scriptures say here that the HS didn't indwell the new believers
  - The answer is in found in the days and times of the early church
    - Christ had promised that the Spirit would come after Jesus departure

[John 14:26](#) "But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you.

- But this was a new event in the history of God's people
  - How would God give evidence of keeping this promise?
    - We know that believers will eventually show the fruit of the Spirit in their walk and that fruit gives evidence to God's faithfulness to send the Spirit
  - But Fruit takes time
    - And the early church was a time when God desired to show immediate change, and make visible the Spirit's arrival
    - To prove His faithfulness to the early church
- So God purposed to have His Spirit manifest Himself in ways that were unique
  - Ways that didn't persist beyond the early years of the church
    - Because once the proof had been provided, it was no longer necessary to continue with such dramatic manifestations
    - Fruit of the faithful became the primary way to witness to God's faithfulness and to the reality of the Gospel

[1Th. 1:5](#) for our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction; just as you know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake.

[1Th. 1:6](#) You also became imitators of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much tribulation with the joy of the Holy Spirit,

[1Th. 1:7](#) so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia.

- So the disciples lay hands on the believers and the Holy Spirit comes as promised
  - But this scene is too much for Simon...and so

[Acts 8:18](#) Now when Simon saw that the Spirit was bestowed through the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money,

[Acts 8:19](#) saying, "Give this authority to me as well, so that everyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit."

[Acts 8:20](#) But Peter said to him, "May your silver perish with you, because you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money!

[Acts 8:21](#) "You have no part or portion in this matter, for your heart is not right before God.

[Acts 8:22](#) "Therefore repent of this wickedness of yours, and pray the Lord that, if possible, the intention of your heart may be forgiven you.

[Acts 8:23](#) "For I see that you are in the gall of bitterness and in the bondage of iniquity."

[Acts 8:24](#) But Simon answered and said, "Pray to the Lord for me yourselves, so that nothing of what you have said may come upon me."

[Acts 8:25](#) ¶ 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.

- Simon finally sees the source of Phillip's power to perform the miracles – The Spirit
  - He must have listened to the Apostles describing the ministry of the Spirit
  - And of course Simon sees the power that the Spirit provides as He arrives
    - And now by his actions, we begin to gain an insight into his true heart
    - Simon desires this power for himself
    - And though he may have been hanging around hoping to learn the secret of Phillip's success, he's finally given up
- Phillip decides that his only hope to acquire what Phillip has is to buy the secret
  - So we're told Simon offers the Apostles money to have the power of the Spirit
    - He wants to add it to his magician's toolbox



- Not only does his request tell us something important about his heart,
- But it also means he doesn't have the Holy Spirit in the true sense
- Though everyone who believed has been receiving the Holy Spirit by the Apostles laying on of hands
  - It's clear by Phillip's request that he hasn't received the Holy Spirit
    - Which tells me that his profession of belief wasn't legitimate
    - It was a show intended to allow him to obtain the secret to Phillip's power
- In fact, if you want a quick comparison of how faith influences people who practiced magic, you only have to go as far as Acts 19

[Acts 19:18](#) Many also of those who had believed kept coming, confessing and disclosing their practices.

[Acts 19:19](#) And many of those who practiced magic brought their books together and *began* burning them in the sight of everyone; and they counted up the price of them and found it fifty thousand pieces of silver.

[Acts 19:20](#) So the word of the Lord was growing mightily and prevailing.

- If I'm being too harsh, look at Peter's response
  - In v.20 Peter says may your silver perish with you
    - Literally in the Greek Peter said you and your silver go to Hell
      - Strong words, but Peter is being literal
      - He is declaring that this man is on the road to Hell, not heaven
  - In v.21 he says Simon's heart is not right before the Lord
    - Because of that, Simon has no part or portion in this matter
      - The Greek word for "matter" is logos
      - Logos as in The Word

- Simon has no part in the Word – in Christ
- In v.22 he says that Simon should repent of his wickedness
  - Pray for forgiveness, that if possible the Lord would forgive Simon
    - A believer would never need to hear such a statement
    - While a believer could certainly sin, and should pray for forgiveness, there is never any doubt that a believer would be forgiven
    - Only an unbeliever should hear such a statement
    - Clearly, the apostles didn't believe that Simon was a believer
- In v.23 Peter says I see that you are still in the bondage of iniquity
  - This word in Greek for iniquity literally means unrighteousness
    - This man is still in bondage to sin, he is an unbeliever

[Rom. 7:14](#) ¶ For we know that the Law is spiritual, but I am of flesh, sold into bondage to sin.

- Then perhaps most telling of all
  - Simon says to Peter please pray for me
  - Unbelievers brush off
    - He isn't interested in the truth
    - He merely saw Phillip as a competitor, and he was willing to play along to get what he wanted from Jesus
- Are you more interested in what you can get from Jesus in your Christian walk
  - Are you using your Christian faith as a tool
  - As a means to an end
    - Or do you realize that God made you and saved you for an eternal purpose, and that purpose begins now?

- Are we more interested in chasing after the things of this world forgetting that we only have so much time here

[Acts 8:26](#) ¶ But an angel of the Lord spoke to Philip saying, "Get up and go south to the road that descends from Jerusalem to Gaza." (This is a desert *road*.)

[Acts 8:27](#) So he got up and went; and there was an Ethiopian eunuch, a court official of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, who was in charge of all her treasure; and he had come to Jerusalem to worship,

[Acts 8:28](#) and he was returning and sitting in his chariot, and was reading the prophet Isaiah.

- Following his earlier experience, now Phillip is directed South to a desert road where he encounters a court official leaving Jerusalem
  - The scripture gives us some interesting clues about this man
    - He was Ethiopians – not Jew
    - Yet he had been worshipping in Jerusalem
      - Proselytes
      - God-Fearers
    - He is a man of wealth and power
      - And while he was worshipping in Jerusalem, he must have purchased a scroll of scripture (at least Isaiah)
    - He probably reads it aloud to himself, which is normal
  - This man is about to become the next opportunity for Philip to evangelize

[Acts 8:29](#) Then the Spirit said to Philip, "Go up and join this chariot."

[Acts 8:30](#) Philip ran up and heard him reading Isaiah the prophet, and said, "Do you understand what you are reading?"

[Acts 8:31](#) And he said, "Well, how could I, unless someone guides me?" And he invited Philip to come up and sit with him.

[Acts 8:32](#) Now the passage of Scripture which he was reading was this:

"HE WAS LED AS A SHEEP TO SLAUGHTER;  
AND AS A LAMB BEFORE ITS SHEARER IS SILENT,  
SO HE DOES NOT OPEN HIS MOUTH.

[Acts 8:33](#) "IN HUMILIATION HIS JUDGMENT WAS TAKEN AWAY;  
WHO WILL RELATE HIS GENERATION?  
FOR HIS LIFE IS REMOVED FROM THE EARTH."

[Acts 8:34](#) The eunuch answered Philip and said, "Please *tell me*, of whom does the prophet say this? Of himself or of someone else?"

[Acts 8:35](#) Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning from this Scripture he preached Jesus to him.

- This is a classic moment of evangelism
  - Look at the elements
    - A man seeking the true God
    - Reading the Word of God
    - Then the Spirit of God directs Philip to this man to explain the scripture
    - And by the explanation of the scripture, Jesus Christ is revealed to the man
  - This is a stark contrast to the way Samaria saw evangelism
    - Belief in the gospel isn't produced by signs and wonders
      - Though the HS may use such things to further His purposes
    - Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of Christ (Rom 10:17)
      - Here we see a man hearing the gospel on the basis of the Word of God
      - And unlike Simon
        - The man is impressed by the message, not the messenger
      - And he responds with true faith, not a manufactured response design to get something he wants
  - Remember, this man is rich and powerful and Philip is lowly, poor and thoroughly unimpressive
    - The tables have been turned here

- Nothing could argue for the eunuch's conversion except the power of God

[Acts 8:36](#) As they went along the road they came to some water; and the eunuch \*said, "Look! Water! What prevents me from being baptized?"

[Acts 8:37](#) [And Philip said, "If you believe with all your heart, you may." And he answered and said, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God."]

[Acts 8:38](#) And he ordered the chariot to stop; and they both went down into the water, Philip as well as the eunuch, and he baptized him.

- [Acts 8:39](#) When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord snatched Philip away; and the eunuch no longer saw him, but went on his way rejoicing.
- Evidently somewhere in Philip's discussions with this man, he had introduced the topic of baptism
  - Philip must have explained how Jesus Himself had commanded that any who believe in Him should demonstrate their faith through baptism
    - Of how the inward change of faith in Christ produced by the baptism of the Holy Spirit
    - Must be followed by an outward witness through a baptism of water
  - We can assume Phillip gave the eunuch this background because look what the eunuch asks next
    - He sees water and asks if he could be baptized
      - Now consider they are in the middle of a desert
      - The odds of finding a pool of standing water in the middle of a desert are so astronomical, that it can only be God providing the opportunity
    - And the eunuch recognizes the rarity of this opportunity, which is why he seizes on it and asks to be baptized
      - All believers are expected to respond to their new found faith in Christ in this same way
      - By seizing the first opportunity to be baptized
    - The eunuch didn't wait for the possibility of another pool later

- He knew this was the one
- And when he asked what prevented him from being baptized, Philip gave the right answers of course
  - If you believe, you may be baptized
    - No other requirement, but that is a real requirement