



Acts of the Apostles - Lesson 8B

Chapter 8:14:40

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- We're in the middle of Philip's experience in Samaria where he has brought the Gospel
 - He's performing signs and wonders and many are believing
 - He's also confounding a man named Simon
 - Before Philip, Simon the magician has long impressed the crowds with signs and wonders
 - But he did these things with the power of the demonic realm
 - And he's transfixed by the greater power of Philip
 - And he has professional jealousy over Philip's stunning success
 - So Simon joins in
 - Scripture says even Simon believed and was baptized
 - And then Simon began following Philip studying his technique
- Meanwhile, we saw the Apostles Peter and John come down (north) to see if what they heard was true

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.

- The apostles traveled to validate the reports of Samaritans coming to faith
 - As we discussed last week, Peter had the keys to the Kingdom

Matt. 16:17 And Jesus said to him, "Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in heaven.

Matt. 16:18 "I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it.

Matt. 16:19 "I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven."

- With each new group that received the Gospel, Peter was always the one God used to usher them into the family of God
 - This was the honor Peter received since he was the first Apostle to recognize Christ
 - He in turn would be the one to open the Gospel to Jews, Samaritans and later Gentiles
 - Once Peter "turned" the key for a given group, they remained an open door for the Gospel

- The opening of one of these doors by Peter was always marked by the arrival of the baptism of the Holy Spirit in a visible, obvious way
 - Once that manifestation of the Spirit had occurred, it quickly subsided
 - In its place came the normal experience of new faith accompanied by an invisible dwelling of the Spirit
- It's also worth noting that the three parts of a salvation experience are shown to happen in a different order in each of the first two groups
 - In the case of the Jewish disciples who began the church, first they experience faith, then they experience the indwelling of the Holy Spirit (Spirit baptism) at Pentecost, and lastly they performed water baptism after Peter's speech
 - In Chapter 8 as the Samaritans enter the church for the first time, the order is first belief followed by water baptism and then lastly by Spirit baptism with the laying on of hands
 - And the Jewish church never experienced the laying on of hands by apostles
 - This step is only employed for the Samaritan and Gentile converts
- Finally, we need to note that there is no speaking in tongues reported among this group in Samaria
 - This makes sense, since the stated purpose of the gift of tongues is as a sign to unbelieving Jews, according to Paul in 1 Corinthians 14:22
 - Since there are no unbelieving Jews present in Samaria, there was no need for this sign to be manifested
 - This is further confirmation that the moment of salvation will not include this special manifestation of the Spirit except under Biblically-correct circumstances

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.

- Back to Simon, he finally believes he's found the source of Phillip's power to perform the miracles – the Spirit, and more specifically the Apostles' ability to bestow the Spirit
 - Clearly the Apostles are in charge here
 - Philip would have shown them respect and honor when they arrived
 - So Simon draws the obvious conclusion: these men are the source of Philip's power
 - And naturally, he hopes that these men may be willing to empower other men...men like Simon
 - Especially if he offers them an incentive
 - And Simon goes a step further
 - He doesn't just want Philip's power
 - He wants the Apostles to grant him their power
 - He wants to go to the top of the ladder if possible
 - It's fair to conclude from this scene that Simon has not received the laying on of hands himself
 - And therefore, he never experienced the arrival of the Spirit
 - It's never described in the text
 - And what is described is very disturbing – his willingness to obtain something spiritual with money
- So as we consider Simon's offer, we have to ask ourselves the obvious question
 - Is Simon merely an immature believer still caught up in his old ways or is he an unbeliever posing as a Christian and now he shows his true nature?
 - Many commentators have lined up on either side
 - Rather than trying to guess, I believe we should leave it to eyewitnesses who were present in that moment
 - We should ask Peter what he thinks about Simon's heart
- Let's 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 is in The Word
 - Part means present, while portion means future
 - 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
 - This is the unbeliever's "brush off"
 - We hear this whenever we encourage them to read the Bible, come to church, repent and believe in the Gospel
 - They tell us to pray for them or they compliment us on our faith
 - These are polite ways to deflect the conversation away from them and back toward us
 - Simon clearly isn't interested in the truth
 - And Peter's own statements concerning his heart are a clear indictment
 - They tell us that Peter himself believed Simon was without faith
- Simon merely saw Phillip as a competitor, and he was willing to play along to get what he wanted from Jesus
 - Simon has attached himself to a movement for selfish, cynical, hypocritical reasons
 - Simon is a type or example in Scripture of the false confessor
 - Someone who attaches themselves to the faith superficially but has purely carnal motives
 - And even Christians can reduce Christianity to a "means to an end" rather than an end in itself
 - The Christian faith brings benefits...immeasurable benefits
 - But they are largely spiritual and almost always delayed
 - When we expect them to be immediate and earthly, then we are destined to be disappointed
 - And if we preach a carnal "gospel," which is no gospel at all, we will only attract more Simons
- What kind of response might we have expected from Simon had he truly believed?

- Well, a later experience in the book of Acts gives us a clue:
- Another group of magicians will hear the Gospel in Acts 19 and profess faith in Christ, but then look at what they do next:

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.

- While I am not suggesting that every new believer will immediately take dramatic steps to reform their life (for we know many do not), still we should demand progress in discipleship
 - If the progress is lacking, we either treat the person as an unbeliever (i.e., continue to present the Gospel)
 - Or we admonish them as a believer to serve the Lord more faithfully
 - We should not ignore it
- Having established the church in Samaria (north of Jerusalem), the Lord now uses Philip to spread the Gospel to the southern parts of Palestine
 - But we'll notice the message is still being directed outside the Jews and to those who are closely associated with Israel

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.

- Philip leaves Samaria, which was about 50 miles North-Northwest of Jerusalem
 - The Lord directs Philip (through an angel of the Lord) to a desert road in the middle of nowhere about 50 miles to the South
 - Here again we see the Lord directing the affairs of the Church
 - Philip went to Samaria because of persecution, not because he had a great idea to reach Samaritans
 - Likewise, he goes south to the Desert not because it made sense to proclaim the gospel in the Desert, but because the Lord wanted His word preached there
 - This road in Gaza connects Jerusalem with the Via Mars, which ran north-south along the Mediterranean
 - The Gaza road runs southwest from Jerusalem through the Negev desert

- and connects to the Via Mars in the town of Gaza on the coast
 - For long stretches of the road, you find yourself in the middle of nowhere
 - What do we assume Philip was thinking as he made this trip?
 - He was literally in nowhere with no idea (presumably) of what would come next
 - How could he spread the Gospel to an empty desert?
 - But the Lord knew there would be an opportunity to reach new places through an encounter on this road
 - At a point along the road a chariot comes up (probably from behind) and passes Philip
 - In the chariot is an interesting character
 - He was Ethiopian – not a Jew
 - Yet he had been worshipping in Jerusalem we're told
 - Proselytes
 - God-fearers
 - And he owned a Jewish scroll of Isaiah, which would have been rare and expensive
 - He was clearly devoted to his faith in a sincere and serious way
 - He was therefore wealthy
 - And as a Eunuch in the court, we know he was powerful and important, riding in a chariot driven by a chauffeur
 - So here we have a man who, in some ways, represents the other side of the coin in connection with the Samaritans
 - Like Samaritans, he was not a Jew, but he worshipped as a Jew
 - Therefore, like the Samaritans he represented a unique group that knew of a Messiah and anticipated His arrival
 - Unlike true Gentiles, who never heard of a Jewish Messiah much less were anticipating His arrival, he was in a unique position to receive the Gospel
 - So the Lord uses Philip to reach him in the same way as the Samaritans
 - And the second half of the story in Acts 8 fills in the picture for the opening of the Gospel to the “nearly” Jewish camp
- The man is reading Isaiah aloud we're told, which was the normal tradition for men in the East, especially in reading God's word

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.

- Notice Luke’s emphasis on the actions of the Spirit and the importance of God’s word in this encounter
 - As Luke tells this story, he is intentionally contrasting several elements between the first story with Simon and the Samaritans with this man’s conversion
 - 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 that explanation of the scripture, Jesus Christ is revealed to the man’s heart
- Philip first asks if the man understands what he is reading
 - The question in Greek implies, did the man understand the person described in Isaiah’s account?
 - Philip knows to ask because the man is reading out loud
 - The eunuch invites Philip up to explain, and so now they ride on together for a distance
 - Philip doesn’t know where he’s going and has no plan for the evening
 - He has apparently put all earthly issues or concerns away for the moment and is simply riding along with the Spirit...literally
 - The man was reading Isaiah 53
 - And in the verses quoted, there is an interesting line
 - In v.33, the Scripture asks who will “relate” His generation?
 - This means who will explain Jesus to Jesus’ own generation, or family?
 - The sense of this line in Isaiah 53 is a lament that Jesus’ own people will not believe in the gospel
 - Ironically, here is a non-Jew reading about and seeking to know this Christ
 - While a Jew explains it to him
 - Fulfilling Isaiah’s very words, that Jesus’ own generation will not follow while others will

- The man then asks who is this speaking about, Isaiah himself or someone else?
 - Then Philip seized the opportunity
 - He explained that this was Jesus of Nazareth
 - But Luke says Philip used many other Old Testament Scripture as well to preach who Jesus was according to Scripture
 - While the text never covers the eunuch's reaction to this news, we understand by what follows that he believed it
- This conversion is in stark contrast to the way Samaria experienced evangelism
 - Here, belief in the gospel wasn't produced by signs and wonders
 - In Samaria the signs were included to validate the opening of the Gospel to Samaritans
 - And to show the Apostles of its reality
 - But even though the Holy Spirit may use such things to further His purposes, this is not the appointed method for new faith
 - Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of Christ (Romans 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 designed 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.

- 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

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.

Acts 8:40 But Philip found himself at Azotus, and as he passed through he kept preaching the gospel to all the cities until he came to Caesarea.

- Lastly, the encounter ends while Philip is still standing in the pool next to the Eunuch
 - The word snatched is the same word Paul uses to describe the rapture of the Church
 - He's not saying that Philip is raptured here, because Philip lands somewhere else on earth
 - In fact, Philip is placed in Ashdod, which is about 20 miles northeast of the city Gaza on the coast
 - There Philip continues to minister along the plains of Palestine eventually reaching Caesarea where he stays