

Acts 8:9-25 "Samaria, Salvation, and Simon the Sorcerer"

Let's open our Bibles to Acts 8:9.

If you've been with us on Wednesday nights, we're going through the book of Acts. It is the record that God gives to us by His Spirit through Luke who, if we just go by volume, wrote more of the New Testament than anyone else. There are more words written by him than by Paul or than by John. And it is really God's record of the birth of the early church, as the Holy Spirit is poured out upon God's people after the ascension of our Lord, and then the gospel is preached, and lives are changed, and thousands upon thousands of souls are saved. It is a record of only thirty years. So you get thirty years of a look at the early church.

Our focus has been, and I think should be, as we go through Acts, twofold. Number one - what does the early church look like? Because this was as close to God's work as we could get to, that's where the work began. What do we learn as a church as far as what does God want us to do and be? And second of all, in particular, who does God use? And who did God use? As you go through the Scriptures, who do you see there, and what do they look like, and how can you be more like those whom God has used in times past?

In chapters 6 and 7, a problem came as a result of a growth by the Lord's working of His Spirit. Too many people were getting saved - five thousand men plus women and children. It might have been ten thousand by the time you get to chapter 6. God brought a problem, and the problem became the first reason the church organized. Before this, it wasn't really structured very much. But the deacons were really the first organizational step that the church took. The widows of the Hellenists (Hellenists were mostly Jews born in Greek countries, who had Greek practices, spoke Greek languages; a lot of times their worship was different than you'd find in the very staunch religious places like Jerusalem, and so they brought their cultures with them; there were synagogues, if you will, in Jerusalem to meet all of those different folks who came and brought their particular ways) in town felt like they were being slighted in the overall care that the church was giving to the widows in distributing food to them. Interestingly enough, the apostles felt that what they were doing was important enough to not leave the work of study and teaching to go and feed widows. You might say, "Well, gosh, that's kind of

hard-hearted or cold-hearted." It really wasn't. Everyone has a place, I think, to serve. And they chose seven men. They were all Hellenists. They all came from Greek backgrounds. They understood the needs. They were godly men that had reputation in the community already. They weren't apostles. They weren't church leaders. They were just willing servants.

And we are given seven of their names, two of them that really dominate chapters 6, 7 and 8 - their ministries, both Stephen and then Philip (before we get to Paul). And so these men were faithful in the little. God began to raise them up. In fact Stephen would go regularly to the synagogue after serving the food to the widows and just begin to minister to those who were gathered together in a place called the Synagogue of the Freedmen. But it was a Hellenistic synagogue, and they found the wisdom of God irresistible, but they weren't willing to receive it. And so over time they were angry that they couldn't get the jump on this young man, Stephen, who loved the Lord and had a good understanding of the Scriptures, and so they began to blaspheme against him. They spoke behind his back. They gave false witness against him. They blamed him for four things (blasphemy in all cases) - blasphemy against God, against Moses, against the Temple and even against the law of God. That was enough to get the Sanhedrin, the ruling members in Israel (the seventy members of Israel's government), to arrest Stephen. In chapter 7, if you were with us, we read Stephen's fifty-verse defense of the faith. Not only did he defend his position as far as preaching Jesus, he answered all of the questions that were thrown at him about blasphemy and really turned them around to say to the people, "Look, we've always been the people that have set God aside whenever He spoke, and we don't have a good track record. And now we missed Jesus and put Him to death, and now you're going after the church." And, as you might suspect, that didn't set well with these folks, and it was so convicting that they, in their emotional distress, grabbed Stephen, and they stoned him to death. And there's a mention of a fellow named Saul, who was not only agreeing to their actions and agreeing to their behavior but holding the coats of those who would murder Stephen. Stephen would be the first martyr of the church; he wouldn't be the last. And so Jesus had told the saints (before He ascended) that their world mission (chapter 1:8) was to start in Jerusalem but to end in the uttermost parts of the world. So Stephen brought the Old Testament and its types to paint a picture for Jesus the Messiah before the Hellenists and then before the Sanhedrin.

And so you get to chapter 8, and you watch this progression of the gospel as Philip, because of the persecution that came when Stephen was killed, runs up to Samaria. And he's there to present the gospel - not just to Hellenists, who were Jews with Greek backgrounds, but now to present the gospel to Jews who had been mixed with lots of other religions, a lot of Gentile practices, a lot of heathen practices. And then it would be Paul who would be coming next, sent by the Lord, eventually, to the Gentiles, as well as Peter coming to finish up his ministry as well. So Paul, the representation of the gospel to the Gentiles, will soon come upon the scene. But first we go from Jerusalem to Samaria before we come to the uttermost parts of the earth.

God used Stephen's brutal death to move the church along. We talked, I think, last week that we're not really comfortable leaving comfortable places or even step into new ground because everything is so unsure, and it's a difficult place to be. And yet the persecution was severe enough and dangerous enough where the church really felt like it didn't have any choice, and everyone began to run. The headquarters of the apostles stayed in Jerusalem for a while, but even that would be overthrown not long afterwards. And so Stephen is now the guy who takes center stage, if you will, and the gospel of Jesus hits the road for the first time. I don't know how many years it was in Jerusalem, but it was there for a while, and now it finds itself scattered. And the people that ran from Jerusalem ran with conviction about Jesus - without fear but yet not foolish enough to be brutalized by these with religious hatred of others. And so they don't run away, but they run and carry the gospel with them.

So last week, when we started chapter 8, we looked at Stephen who took center stage, and we looked at Samaria, that place in the middle of the country between Jerusalem or Judea and the Galilee in the north. And it was that place in the middle where Jesus had, remember, sat down in John 4 with a woman at the well about lunch time, and had sent the boys into town to get food and had ministered to her and had talked to her. And she started off pretty argumentatively, if you will, but He got to her, and the Lord ended up laying the groundwork for what Philip would now involve himself with. Jesus was asked by the town to stay, and He stayed and ministered there in Samaria for quite some time. So this was the first missionary work of the church, this outreach to Samaria, and it is carried out, again, not by an apostle. And I keep saying that because more than anything, we find some pretty strong leaders (apostles) in the book of Acts, early on, but most of the work is done by non-apostles. In fact, you find them mentioned more often

than not. So, if you're not an apostle, good for you. Look, you're still going to be used. And he is a Grecian Jew as well, who came to wait tables and now finds himself in the midst of a religion that is very mixed up and that the Jews in the south, in Jerusalem, despised. They saw them as half-breeds, and they didn't have any respect for them, and Samaritans only believed the first five books of the Bible, and they had their own worship place and a long history of setting aside pure Judaism. And it would have been great boldness, I think, for Philip to go there in the sense that he was a Jew. In the sense that he was a Hellenist, maybe he would have been more tolerant than maybe other people would have been. But this is where God sends him. So the move from Jews to Hellenists in town to Samaria, and then shortly to the Gentiles, you can watch the gospel go to all men, which is what God intended to do to begin with.

So, we looked at the first eight verses (last week) of Philip's arrival. We mentioned to you that he preached Jesus. He didn't preach against Samaritan religion. He didn't go to say, "Well, you're worshipping on the wrong mountain. This is obviously where we're supposed to worship." He just went and preached Jesus. Good advice. You want to see people get saved, just preach Jesus. We lost Billy Graham today. He was a guy that preached Jesus. Every time I met him, knew him, his son, they were devoted to one thing - let's just preach Jesus. And so I think that's what we need to learn from him as well. And we read that in the first couple of verses here, that he went to them, and he began to preach the Word of God to them; he preached Jesus to them.

So we're going to start in verse 9 tonight. We're going to continue with the story of Philip in Samaria (verse 5) preaching Christ to them. The people, seeing the miracles and all, and hearing the gospel, were coming to be saved and to be healed. There was (verse 8) "great joy in that city." Faithful in the little, Stephen had given his life. Philip, faithful in the little, would now be given a city. Who does God use? People with bold hearts who are convinced of His love. I think that Philip might have shown up there and went, "Man, can I just be cool and quiet? We're only ten or fifteen miles from Jerusalem. They could come find me, and I could die." But instead, he got away from the heat, and yet he kept preaching the gospel. So great joy as God began to work.

Verse 9, "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. 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." So, as the work of God began, we are introduced (in verse 9) to the opposition - the word "but" again. It keeps coming up. Wherever God is working, the enemy wants to work as well. His goal - to kill, to steal, to destroy (John 10:10), to get you away from God's promises. I wrote in my Bible years ago, "If you expect to fulfill Acts 1:8," (go into all the world) "then you should expect to find chapter 8:1," which is the persecution that's going to come against you. If you're going to get the Word out to the world, expect the enemy to not be happy; expect to pay a price. Things don't go easy. You don't find much ease in the book of Acts. You find the church, early on, having peace with all men; didn't last long. You find the church, for a little while - when Paul finally disappears from the scene in Jerusalem - having peace. That didn't last either. So, if you're going to be 1:8, you're going to get 8:1. I think we look at that. Right? Everyone in Samaria, by the way, was filled with joy. There was repentance and deliverance and hope. But there was at least one person in the crowd, an influential person, who wasn't on board. He had lots to lose. He was the religious guru of town. He wasn't going to go down without a fight. His life, his means, his self-esteem, his gain were all tied in to this place. He had made this his own. He wasn't interested in God or His people at all. He was interested in himself. If you go back and look at the history that God gives us in the book of Acts, you find that Satan had used money and glory to lure Ananias and his wife to their death. That was the appeal. He had used murder and hatred in the hearts of very religious people to dispose of Stephen. And now he had a willing tool by the name of Simon the Sorcerer, a fellow that had, through his phoniness, for a long time infiltrated the town and will, with phoniness, infiltrate, for a while, the church itself. And we'll watch as Philip kind of gets taken in by it as well. He steps into the church kind of sight unseen.

We are told a couple things about Simon. He had lived in Samaria for a long time. He had, through magic and trickery and sorcery and, no doubt, real demonic power, developed quite a name for himself, and he had capitalized on the reputation that he had bought. He had told everyone he was somebody great, that somehow he was the man of God. The people's opinion of him, all of them for the most part, was that they recognized him as the power of God at work in the life of this man. He was wealthy, he was prominent. And whether you were small or great or rich or poor or wise or not so wise, you were probably taken in by this guy who they said left them "astonished." There was an astonishment about this man's life. They

were beside themselves in wonder. His claims captivated everyone. Which is an interesting picture that Satan somehow can get hold of a city. Right? He can move in and just blind hearts. And we pray, "God, give us the city." It's not such a bad prayer because the enemy is really good at geography in that regard, and he really does want to get a foothold wherever he can - whether it's lives or populations. He was able to, through lying wonders, blind people to the deceptions that he had brought. I was thinking about that today. You know, in the Bible, whenever you find Satan using his power, he only makes things worse. You won't find a place where Satan comes in to use his power and anything good comes from it. It always makes it worse. Even early on, in Exodus, when the LORD began to bring those ten plagues upon Egypt for hanging on to His people - when the snakes came - Satan was somehow able to make more snakes. "That wasn't any good. We got 10,000. Well I can make 'em 20,000." Really? Thanks for that. That was very helpful. Or when the water was turned to blood. Somehow he could do it in the cup. Now you couldn't get fresh water, and whatever fresh water you had, he could take from you. Or the frogs. They didn't have enough frogs. Satan brought more frogs. He always added to the problem. He never brought deliverance to anybody. But the people had, at least in Samaria, for long periods of time been exposed to a guy that wasn't getting them off the hook, wasn't helping them, wasn't delivering them. There's a lot of stuff that passes in the name of religion out in the world, but only Jesus can change a heart. Right? You and I have a message that can actually work. Jesus works, doesn't He? He saved you. He saved me. He saved us. That message works. Even when the enemy has so possessed the people that they're pretty sure that, "Oh, there can't be a greater guy than Simon! Look what he's been able to pull off." And so I watch Philip pull into town, and I would think to myself if it was me, I would think you would feel very challenged going into a city where everybody had an, "I'm for Simon the Sorcerer" bumper sticker on their chariot, or, "I got the shirt at the last convention. Simon opened the eyes of a donkey, and it was great, man. You should've been there." And everyone's charmed by this guy. They've got Simon the Sorcerer keychains, and he's got his own TV show on cable. And now you're coming in with a message that has just driven you out of town and that the whole government has gathered itself against, especially the Jews, and you're on your own. And here you come, with hopes of ministering God's Word, and people are caught up in these very grave sins, and there's witchcraft, and there's a powerful leader with years of influence. But here's a guy that God uses - Philip came knowing who he served. He was confident in the Bible. He was sure of God's power. He knew that the battle belonged to the Lord. So if you read the account,

all you find is Philip preached, and he prayed, and he watched God work, and he overcame this huge mountain of opposition.

We read, in verse 12, that "when they believed Philip as he preached the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, both men and women from the city began to come to him to be baptized." It seems like Philip was neither impressed nor intimidated by what he saw. And I say that to you because sometimes, as a Christian, you can go out and feel like you're in a tough place. I went to a final roll call of a fellow today that was retiring from the Santa Ana Police Department after thirty years, and they asked if I'd come up and lead in prayer over this man's life. There were four hundred officers, they were all getting ready to go on duty. What a great opportunity to pray the gospel. Right? "Thank You, Lord, for sending Your Son to die for our sins." I get to pray. I can pray whatever I want. What a great opportunity! Use the opportunity. You can be intimidated, or you can just be impressed with the Lord that you serve. And here's a guy, Philip, who was impressed with the God that he served. He was running for his life, mind you, so you might have called him a chicken. "Why don't you stay in town?" He wasn't chicken. He was just smart! Get away from the trouble, but don't stop preachin'. And he wouldn't, and he didn't stop preaching. And so he just begins to share because the genuine work of God will always reveal the counterfeit. And by preaching God's Word, and by the working of the Holy Spirit, it wasn't long before Philip - little Philip, small Philip, one-guy Philip with a Bible in his hand - was able to bring hope and deliverance to an entire countryside, if you will, Samaria. Not long before the people sitting in darkness were responding with great joy and their open hearts, and God begins to save by the name of His Son Jesus. Don't separate yourself from the story. You can be Philip. If it's the Lord working in the heart of a person through the Spirit, then you can be Philip. You can be Philip at your job, where everyone's against you. Or at your school, where no one wants to pray. Or at the market or in your neighborhood or with your family. You can be Philip. "God, use me, send me." It's His work. He saves. And this was a pretty intimidating, I would think, confrontation. But we have the words of eternal life (John 6:65), and like Philip, we're called to preach concerning the kingdom of God or, if you will, the rule of God in the heart (which is where He rules now). One day He will come to rule upon the earth. We, too, have to invite people to come to Jesus. We have to take the time to explain to them what He has come to do. We can be Philip. We can be Philip. And I think that we should be Philip if the Lord would just fill us to tell them about the name of Jesus (by the way, the only name by which you can be saved, Acts 4:12) to tell them about His love, to tell them

about faith, to tell them about the salvation that He had purchased. And we aren't told over what amount of time this took place, but we are told that, as Philip began to minister in the streets of a town possessed by one guy, Philip began to see the town change before his eyes, and the gospel began to take hold, and God began to confirm the Word with signs and wonders.

And I want you to notice from verse 12 (again in verse 5 back a few verses) that the faith of the people did not lie in the signs and in the wonders; that the faith of the people of Samaria lay in the preaching or the words that Philip was sharing. If you draw men to Jesus through sensationalism, you'll have to keep them there with that. If they come hungry only for loaves and fishes, then they'll be back for more loaves and fishes, but they'll be empty immediately. Jesus (in John 6:26-27), in speaking to those who had run around to catch up with Him while He had disappeared during the night, they said, "Rabbi, where did You go?" And Jesus said, "You're not seeking Me because you saw the signs and have come to the conclusion I'm the Messiah. You're seeking Me because I fed you lunch, and it was free, and you're here for more food." And then He said to them, "You shouldn't labor so hard for the food that is perishing. Put that kind of effort into the food that will endure unto everlasting life, which the Son of Man will give you because His Father has set His seal upon Him. Come and follow Me because of who I am, not what I give you." And Philip preached Jesus. He told them who the Lord was. In their coming, he didn't have to keep them around. He brought them around. Right? They were drawn by the good news, the forgiveness that was available, the love of God. They'd been kept in the dark by this Simon the Sorcerer for years. But now the light was on. And I'll tell you what. You go start preachin' the gospel to people, the light'll go on. You don't have to lose this battle. You can win this war because the fields are white (John 4:35). It is foolish to think, "Oh, I don't know. Nobody likes us Christians." Well, they will when you get to heaven. They'll all like you. Until then you can just follow Jesus' footsteps.

It interests me that, in the midst of all of this stuff, Philip called on this young burgeoning work of God to water baptism; that in the message of the gospel, he said to them, "All right, you believe, now let's get baptized" because that's what Jesus wanted as this outward testimony to them lining up with the Lord. We had our winter baptism this last Saturday. It's always one of my favorite days of the year. I think I told you Sunday - it sticks with me, though - this little 11-year-old kid who told me he was coming out there to get closer to Jesus. And I'm thinkin' an 11-year-old kid wants to get closer to Jesus. And I said, "Will this help you? Will

this work?" And he said, "Yes!!!" Pretty confident. I'd be nervous with a bunch of guys standing around me, you know? And I said, "How do you know?" and he said, "The Bible said so." Man, bring us some more of those 11-year-old kids! So excited about their commitment to the Lord. So, this work of God caused Simon to lose his popularity. The influence of evil, of the enemy, had begun to deteriorate. So had his income. And yet he was far from giving up. So he has a cunning mind, and he determines he's going to bide his time, and he's going to follow the approach, "If you can't beat 'em, then join them." "Let me just get in there with them." And Satan, I think he rarely retreats for long.

Well, here's what we're told in verses 13 through 17. What follows, though, will make Simon's heart and intentions clear. So, you always want to read the whole passage. But verse 13 says, "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." Though he professes a true belief in Jesus here, that will be far from the truth in just a couple of verses from now. There is something about believing in the Bible. The Bible says, for example, in James 2:19, "You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe - and tremble!" It's one thing to believe the truth. It's another thing to act upon the belief. Right? You can mentally agree to anything or, for that matter, you could just say, "I believe that" and yet ignore it. And here's a fellow that kind of fits into that second category. Jesus had run into this kind of believing before. If you go back and read in John 8:40-44, for example, His discussion with the Jews and the leadership, Jesus called them out on the carpet, and He said, "You're out to kill Me, a man that has just told you the truth from God, which Abraham didn't do. I'm telling you this. I'm telling you what God had to say. You are doing the deeds of your father." And then they said this to Jesus, "We weren't born out of wedlock like You." Or literally, "We weren't born out of fornication. We only have one Father, and it is God." And Jesus said, "If God was your Father, you would love Me for I came from Him, and I don't come of Myself. And He sent Me, and I'm speaking His words, but you're not able to hear them. Look, you are of your father the devil, and you will do the desires of your father. He's a murderer from the beginning, he's a liar from the beginning, he speaks a lie of himself. He's a liar and the father of it." And, as Jesus confronted these guys, it says of them, "Then they believed on Him." They believed on him, and then they came to Him and said, "Well, we weren't born out of wedlock like You." So there was an assent to the truth, but there certainly wasn't a change of heart in their lives, if you will. They didn't believe enough to have their souls converted. They were as lost after they

believed as before they believed. That's the truth of Simon here. He goes to get baptized, he comes to the winter baptism. Everyone, "Brother, you're saved! Simon got saved! Lookit, I got your shirt, man." And Simon, "Yeah, thank you, brother. Bless you." Loadin' his car up with stuff he's gonna sell to you later.

So Simon comes along, mystified with others. Notice that the comment in verse 13 is that he follows Philip around, just enamored by, amazed with, mystified, if you will, with a genuine work of God that he was seeing through Philip's life. And he played his role well. I see Philip taken in by him. I see Philip baptizing him. I see the whole town applauding him. "All right, Simon's in! Whooooo!" And then you know. His act kept him in the limelight, but the only thing that was accomplished at his baptism was he got wet.

I know that things aren't always what they seem. I've been in ministry pastoring since 1980, so that's almost ten years. (Laughing) And I'm amazed how often, even in the church, people lie to your face. We've had baby dedications. We sit down with people that do baby dedications. We tell them that we only dedicate parents that are walking with the Lord, not that the other parents don't need the help, but someone who's not walking with the Lord can't make a vow to God. We don't want to bring a dad up here, "Yeah, just pray for the baby," and then somebody runs into them at the bar next week, where he's doin' something wrong. So, your promises to raise your kids in the ways of the Lord can only come from Christian parents, and we tell people that up front. They'll say, "Oh, yeah, I'm saved," and then they'll come, and you'll go, "This guy's not saved. He doesn't even know what saved means!" And you're kind of put in that position. We don't do weddings for people that aren't saved because I just think it's disaster waiting to happen. There's not a missionary dating issue. We'd rather stop it before it starts or not be a part of it. We tell people very clearly up front what we believe the Bible teaches us. We take them through premarital counseling. But yet we can be fooled, and we have been. We've been worked and used and hustled. And you want to just get very cynical about people and how they treat you, but yet it's the Lord's work. And I'm always encouraged when I look at Philip and go, "Philip missed this guy." He was happy, things were going fine, the Lord was obviously anointing him, there were miracles taking place. But the discernment wasn't there, for this guy, and so he slips through the cracks. We've seen that happen, certainly, to us. But, at the same time, love believes all things (1 Corinthians 13:7). It is discouraging but necessary to know that things aren't always what they appear to be. People are deceitful. We've seen it. We'll probably see it again. I think you have to just be the best you

can be in the place where God has put you. But I watch Philip dealing with this, and I think until he realizes - Peter actually comes and sees through this and Philip doesn't - that doesn't mean Philip's ministry is done. He goes on to really great things. He's good at listening to the Lord's voice, and yet it shows you that we're fallible, and this guy was a tool of the enemy, that the enemy was certainly trying to use.

Well, we get to verse 14, and we read this, "Now when the apostles who were at Jerusalem" (they're the only ones that didn't leave town, you remember) "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." It had been some time since the church had begun, if you believe Bible commentators. And I read a lot of them, but if there's no substantiation, it's a guess. Most of the guesses are that the church was five or six years old now. I don't know if that's true - I just know it's been a while - and I do know that when the Lord ascended (in the Great Commission), He had told everyone that they would start here but end up out there somewhere away. And it seems like until the death of Stephen, not even any of the apostles had an inkling to go, "Hey, we should spread out. Maybe you can go to Samaria, and I could go over here. I'll go down this way, and you go that way." They were just so glad to be together, and so you don't find any thought of evangelizing even Judea, let alone going north, until the diaspora, the dispersion that came because the pressure was too great. And the news that comes back to Jerusalem, where the apostles' headquarters are still at (they're still coordinating from a central location), was that there was a work of God continuing outside of Jerusalem, and God was reaching Samaria. And so they sent out two of their best known, best qualified, boys to check it out. "Why don't you go north and go check it out?" And they sent Peter and John north. The ever-growing church - this centralization of power in Jerusalem - would become oblivious to the whole thing, would go to oblivion, if you will, in the next couple of six months to a year because the church is an organism more than it's an organization. And though there is structure, it has to be driven by the Spirit of God. And so it's good to have structure. The Bible's very structured. But, at the same time, this centralized power is really a hard thing to make a case for in the Scriptures.

I suspect when Peter and John showed up in Samaria that Philip was totally glad to see them. He was part of the original group, and now they were there, and things

were getting bigger. And so I think he was as glad to see them as the Samaritans were glad to hear that God didn't have prejudice, that He would just take them the way that they were. All the prejudice they'd suffered in the culture wasn't with Jesus. I'm interested in looking at who the Lord sent though, because Peter and John could not have been more opposite as far as people. If Peter had been the head of the church, as the Catholic Church would teach, he'd have never gone himself. It just doesn't fit into Peter's M.O. at all. He would have sent somebody else. And, by the way, just for you Bible students, this is the last mention of John in the book of Acts. In other words, he comes here to do this ministry, and then he disappears from early church records until about 90 A.D. when he begins to churn out these books - the gospel of John, the three epistles that he writes, the book of Revelation as well. That comes out, and he's in his 90's towards the end of the 1st century. John seems to have done most of his work at the end of his life, which ought to encourage some of you that are older thinkin', "Man, am I done?" No. You may just be beginning. God may have lots for you to do. Be ready for that. Be open for that. So John disappears here, early on, but he will come back around. Although John outlived everybody else. Everyone is dead by the time John is writing all those epistles. There are third-generation Christians around when John is writing the book of Revelation. People have come and gone for decades, and he's still here.

So Peter and John arrive in Samaria in support of Philip, and we read that, "when they came down, they prayed that they might receive (verse 15) the Holy Spirit. For as yet He had fallen on none of them. They'd only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus." Important that you look at that. It's an important insight, I think. And the insight is - why were the believers not given the Holy Spirit when they got saved? And the answer was that they were given the Holy Spirit when they got saved and when they were baptized. You will find lots of commentators struggling to explain these verses away because they have preconceived ideas, a prejudice against a separate experience with God known as the baptism of the Holy Spirit. I think if you let the Bible teach the Bible you won't have any trouble with it at all. But because there are churches that just want to relegate the outpouring of God's Holy Spirit to the 1st century or to the work of the apostles, they have a difficult time putting these teachings away. The clue is in verse 16. They'd been baptized in the name of Jesus. They'd been baptized in the name of Jesus. It will be Philip (in this same chapter) who will talk to a eunuch in the middle of nowhere (before this chapter's over), and the eunuch will say, "Well, what would keep me from being baptized?" And he would say, "You can be baptized if you believe in

Jesus." Reinforcing the idea that baptism follows salvation, it follows a believing. So, when you read verse 16, and you read the words, "They'd been baptized and they believed in the name of Jesus," what you can read there is they were saved and baptized.

It's just verse 16 says "the Holy Spirit had not yet fallen upon any of them," and that's the clue, if you will, that's the insight. "He had fallen upon none of them." We mentioned to you, when we went through "The Person and Work of the Holy Spirit" studies (and, by the way, if you want to get into it fully, we have a 15-week study on "The Person and Work of the Holy Spirit" in the bookstore; it's everything I know in the Bible about that), there are basically three prepositional phrases or words that identify the Holy Spirit's relationship with man. There is the Holy Spirit is with man. We read that the word is "**para**." That means that He is in the world. He convicts the world of sin and of righteousness and of judgment (John 16:8). He is drawing all men to the cross. He is convicting them of their sin. He is telling them that there's a place of repentance and there's a salvation that can be gotten. It's the work of the Holy Spirit in the world. It's what you and I depend upon when we go share - that God is speaking to hearts. With man. Jesus said (in John 14:16-17) to His disciples, "I'm going to send you the Spirit of truth who the world can't receive. It doesn't know Him, it doesn't see Him. But you know Him. He is with you, '**para**', and He shall be '**en**' you." "**Para**," with you. He's with you now, convicting you of your sin. He's coming when you get born again to live in you. And so, if you read through the gospels, and you arrive at Easter Sunday evening, and Jesus gathers the disciples together, and He breathes on them, He said (John 20:22), "Now receive the Holy Spirit," and He gives them authority to preach a message based on the death and the resurrection of Jesus. The Hebrew word is "**ruach**" which literally means wind. The Greek word is "**pneuma**" which means to breathe. And that's really the description of the Spirit of God.

So here the Samaritans listening to Philip were born again. The Holy Spirit had been with them. He had now, because they were saved, moved in them. And, as a result of Him moving into them, they were given new life in Christ, they were delivered from their sins, their eyes were opened, their joy was full, and they were baptized. They were obedient to the work of God's Spirit. The thing is God had, even beginning in the book of Acts, one further experience for them. It is this outpouring of the Holy Spirit. And then a different word is used. Jesus said, "You will be My witnesses when the Holy Spirit comes '**epi**.'" The "**epi**" word in Greek means upon you. With you, in you, and ultimately upon your life for the sake of

empowering you to be His witness, to bring the gifts of the Spirit and the power of God's Spirit upon your life. Remember we started by saying you can be Philip, you can be Stephen, you can get the Word out by the Holy Spirit.

So these two boys show up now, and they begin to pray for one thing - the baptism of the Holy Spirit upon the lives of these saints in Samaria, that they needed just as much as the apostles and the disciples needed it back at the beginning of Acts 1 and 2. They were sent out into Jerusalem, and thousands of people got saved, and then they were all pushed out of town. And now the message doesn't change - the gospel is still Jesus, the power is still His Spirit, salvation is still His work through the lives of His people. So here come Peter and John. And I'm always really critical reading the Bible (I write a lot of questions), and my question immediately becomes - why didn't Philip do this? Why didn't Philip see a need to do this himself? I don't have an answer for you except that the Bible describes Philip as the evangelist. And, if that is so (in chapter 21:8 he's called "Philip the evangelist"), then I think that Philip's focus was very narrow. The crucial thing was people needed to get saved. And so I think he was all about preaching the gospel. There are churches around that spend more time preaching than teaching, and so a lot of people get born there - something like a birthing room - but they don't necessarily stay there to grow because that's not what they're getting there. And God seems to use all different parts of the church to make sure that we grow up in the things of the Lord. So they were saved now, but as Peter and John came, what they saw was, "Boy, they need God's overflowing power upon their lives." And the lesson, at least here, was that didn't happen at the same time they got saved. It does happen at the same time in some places in the Bible. Paul was just three days out. The believers in Ephesus, later on, will be almost instantaneous. So at the preaching at Cornelius' house - it was like they were saved and filled with the Spirit and then got baptized later. But those are all components. Right? You believe first. You can be baptized once you believe. And the baptism of the Holy Spirit is for believers so that they could be the tools in God's hands. So, I want to point this out to you because look how valuable the early church viewed the baptism of the Holy Spirit. It was so valuable that two guys, two of the big names in the church, their only interest when they got to Samaria, was, "Let's make sure these people are all baptized in the Spirit. If this work's going to continue, we need the Holy Spirit to fall upon them." And I would say to you - don't fall short of all that God has made available to you by His Spirit. Make sure that you've invited Him to just come and fill your life.

And so we read in verse 17, "Then they laid their hands on them," (the believers) "and they received the Holy Spirit." This practice of laying on of hands to impart or to pray for or to recognize or to set apart, Jesus, one of the last things He said in Mark 16:18 was, "You will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover." It was a practice, early on, found in the gospels just to, "Let the Lord reach down and touch you, but let me lay my hands you and encourage you." It wasn't your hands that did anything. It was an agreement of obedience to the Lord. In Acts 9 (we'll get there in a little while), Ananias (poor guy) was sent to pray for Saul the murderer. Can you imagine getting a word from the Lord, "Go pray for this guy who likes to kill Christians"? And don't you sympathize when Ananias says to the Lord, "Yeah, maybe You haven't heard of him, Lord, he kills people"? And the Lord just says this, "Just go. Quit arguing with Me." But he sends Ananias to lay his hands upon Saul to recover from his blindness and so that he might be filled with the Holy Spirit. We are told that the elders should lay hands on those who come to ask for prayer when they're sick (James 5:14-15) so that the prayer of faith will heal the sick. The Lord will raise them up. If there are any sins, they will be forgiven him. We lay hands on people to pray for the baptism in the Holy Spirit because we find it in the Bible. We lay hands on people to commission them, to send them out as pastors or send them forth as missionaries or to dedicate their kids. It was all that point of contact. It's like that representative of the Lord laying hands upon you. So, look. Let me say this to you. If you're not baptized in the Holy Spirit, before you go home tonight, come and talk to one of the pastors. Ask them to lay their hands on you and pray for you - that you might be empowered to live a godly life, to be a witness. If they need it, we need it. If the Samaritans couldn't get along without it in the first five or ten years of the church, we can't survive two thousand years later. We need His anointing help, don't we? So, that was the aside.

Now we go back to our little phony friend, Simon. Verse 18, "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.' " Now remember he was following things around. He was with Philip for a while, and now it seems like he switched over to the apostles when they got to town. And he quickly calculates the potential benefit to him - if he had the power to pray for the power of the Holy Spirit to fall upon the lives of those that he had laid his hands upon. The question becomes, if you're reading with any care, what did he see? What made him think that there was something to this, rather than there was a statement made, and, "I feel

better"? What happened when the Holy Spirit fell upon the lives of the people? And again, you go back to the Bible, and as you go through the Scriptures and you watch for every place that the Holy Spirit was being prayed for to fall upon people's lives, they either spoke with tongues, glorifying God; they began to prophesy, which is really more than foretelling the truth (prophecy, by definition in the Bible, is speaking words of encouragement and exhortation and edification to one other). Whatever he saw, the outward manifestation of God's power, he offers Peter money because he'd like to have this trick. To him, this wasn't a work of God. This is a guy that just had a better mousetrap. Right? "This guy is much slicker than I am. He's a much better magician." And Simon always had a price, and he's got a price now. It's kind of like I thought about Judas when he explained Mary's sacrifice (in Mark 14:4-5) only in financial terms. She comes out of love and gives the most expensive things she has, anointing the Lord for His death, and he can only say, "You know, we could have fed a lot of people with that." He just identifies what he sees in financial terms. This was a trick that was not in his bag.

By the way, this is where we get the word "simony" from. Maybe you've heard of that word before. It was coined after this fellow Simon. "Simony" was the practice, especially in the 14-16-1800's, of buying and selling positions or offices in the church, even of putting wealthy guys on boards, of keeping donor lists. It's still repeated today, certainly. But in church history, it is an often-repeated scandal. But it's called "simony," and it refers to, "What kind of money can I give you to have influence?" like this.

Simon's sin was one of seeking the power of God in his life for personal gain. He's much like Balaam (Numbers 22-24). He wants to curse so he can get a check. He wants to do what the people are asking so that somehow he might profit by it. In some ways, we're all kind of having to fight that. And I mention that because you might say, "Lord, just save my neighbor. I just want him to get saved." And in your mind, you're thinking, "So he'd clean up his yard." (Laughing) Or, "Lord, save that rich guy, and bring him to our church so he'll tithe." Or, "Lord, save my husband so he'll quit bein' such a jerk." So, we do pray for God to work, but it's kind of deceptive. So subtle, but it's the same sin. Or even if we're serving. "I serve so that I can get a free meal and easy access and favor with somebody" rather than, "I just want to please the Lord." So here's "simony," if you will. And I wrote in my Bible, "If you serve the Lord, He will be your reward. If you serve yourself, you have your reward." There's nothing left waiting for you. It's the request of Simon's words here that kind of reveal his heart. Jesus said (Luke 6:45), "Out of

the good treasure of a man's heart, he will bring forth good things. But an evil man, out of the evil treasures of his heart, will have an abundance that his mouth will speak evil." And that's exactly what he did. Well this, at least, cleared the way for Stephen to go, "Aha!" And maybe this hadn't happened with Philip, so maybe Peter would have missed it as well. But these words made it clear where his heart was.

And so we read in verse 20 that "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.'" Now that's a mouthful to say to a new believer in the church! Philip's going, "Hey, dude. I just baptized him last week. What're you doin'? He'll never come back now!" Well Peter puts an end to the phoniness with a couple things. He says to him, "The gift of the Holy Spirit is a gift. You can't purchase the Holy Spirit. You can't earn Him. God gives Him to you anymore than you can earn eternal life. Your heart's not right in God's sight. You're driven by self and ambition. God knows you, and what you should do before you're in big trouble is turn around. You've got to correct this." Verse 22, "Repent. Maybe God will still forgive your heart. Maybe it's not too late. What is driving your desires is your flesh. The way back is to repent. The way to get this right is to say, 'Lord, I'm wrong.'" Unfortunately, even as we read further, you don't hear that coming out of Simon's mouth. You will hear him say, "Why don't you pray for me that that doesn't happen." What you won't find Simon doing is falling on his face and saying, "Oh, God, forgive me." He takes the warning but not very seriously, and he's caught, basically. But you have to repent. The Ephesians were still doing the right thing with the wrong heart when Jesus said to them (Revelation 2:4-5), "Repent. You've left your first love. You've fallen from where you started." And though he had fooled many (verse 23), Simon could not fool God. Neither can you and I. He was driven by covetousness. He was bound by sinfulness. He was angry that he'd lost his following. He was jealous of Philip's success. He had a carnal heart that could find no rest. Peter's description of him is he was being "poisoned by bitterness." Poisoned by bitterness. What a verse. There's a verse in Hebrews 12:15, as Paul is writing to the Hebrew Christians, and he says, "Be careful never to fall short of the grace of God, and in so doing lest a root of bitterness spring up to trouble you; and when it troubles you, it will defile many others." There is a bitterness that can just ruin your life. And certainly that's Simon - he would do

whatever and say whatever to have things his way. I've learned over the years that bitterness can wear you out. The word "poisoned" is a pretty good description. I wrote in my Bible, "I can't afford to be bitter." It's a price you just can't pay. Because once you get bitter, it just gets worse. Doesn't it? If you can't forgive, you can't move on, you can't get your eyes on something else. It'll just kill you. It'll just eat you up from the inside. It's like cancer to your spiritual well-being. I know people that have left here in bitterness who, ten years later, have nothing but bitter things to say about us and the church. And it bounces off me. I don't care. I don't want God to judge me. That's the only thing I'm really interested in. But if that's your life - year after year, bitter - oh, my gosh. What a way to live. What a horrible way to live!

Well here's a guy that was embittered, and he was poisoned, and there was no spiritual value left in his life. It's a sad picture. But even verse 24, "Simon answered and said, 'Pray to the Lord for me,' " (you pray, Peter) " 'that none of the things which you have spoken may come upon me.' " What you don't find is Peter says, in the first person, "You have to repent of your wickedness. You have to ask the Lord to forgive you and to forgive what's in your heart and get loose of that sin and lay down your bitterness." And all he can say is, "You pray for me." Which isn't very hopeful. Simon shows some fear of the wrath of God, but he shows no desire to go himself. He wants to avoid the judgment. He doesn't want to turn from the reality of his lifestyle. My question (because I'm forever - I think one of the ways you grow is you ask questions) is - what happened to Simon? What do we know about him? And the answer is - we have nothing left to go on. We can hope that he stayed with Philip in Samaria for a time, and he comes to his senses, he sees the Lord for being who He is. I hope so for his sake.

We'll end with verse 25. It's an interesting verse. It says, "So when they" (talking about Peter and John) "had testified and preached the word of the Lord, they returned to Jerusalem, preaching the gospel in many villages of the Samaritans." After a time of ministry with Philip, who was there by himself, these apostles come from Jerusalem. They had never really gone out. They see what God is doing. They pray for God's Spirit to fall. And when they're finished, or they feel like their work is finished here, they had back home. But now they do what Philip's doing - now they stop in all of these little Samaritan towns, going, "Let's stop here and preach. And let's see what God will do, if He will do what He did in Samaria and with Philip, with us." And I don't doubt that Philip becomes a very encouraging word to the apostles themselves. Now Peter and John had been here before. You

might remember in Luke 9:51-53 that, as Jesus was heading to Jerusalem, He had sent some of the boys ahead and said, "See if we can find lodging." The problem is Samaria, if they knew that you were going to Jerusalem (because they hated the Jews), would say every hotel room was full. If you wanted to eat, they wouldn't really feed you. You know, that you'd go around. "You just go around." Leaving Jerusalem, you could stay in any hotel you want. "Oh, you're leaving? Good. That's what we would want you to do." But goin' back, you'd have to go around to a place called Perea. They'd actually have to cross the Jordan River and make a really circuitous route to come to Jerusalem. Well Jesus was just going through town because that's not what He's about. So He says to these guys, "Why don't we just go and set up shop?" And when Jesus finally gets there, and they entered into the city, and Jesus looked to see what had been prepared for Him, they didn't receive Him because they said (it says in Luke 9:53), "They set their face to Jerusalem." And so they told Him to take a hike. And John and James, his brother, said, "Lord, you know what we could do? If you'll let us, we could call fire down from heaven like Elijah. We could fry these guys." Now the Lord's saving guys which is why the John experience in chapter 4 was so unique to them. They came back, and they were confused as to what the Lord was up to and what He was doing. And Jesus, in that encounter in Luke 9:55, said to them, "You don't know what spirit you're being driven by. The Son of Man didn't come to destroy men's lives. He came to save them. Let's just go to another village." So this was pretty unique for John and for Peter himself.

But I love the picture, right? Here's what God can do to lives when we surrender them to Him. He can take us to places that we have failed in the past and find ourselves succeeding. You just can't really discover what God wants to do with you until you're fully surrendered to Him.

Well, next week we'd like to finish this chapter, and we have one more place to stop with Philip. We're going to go with Philip to the desert, out away from all of the limelight and the success, and be able to discover one thing. And I think it's one of my favorite lessons in the book - how do you know when God is speaking when what God is calling you to is far less attractive than what you're doing currently? How do you say, "Well, that's the Lord" when the Lord says, "Leave that \$100-an-hour job, and go work at McDonalds for \$10 an hour"? And you go, "Thank You, Lord." How do you determine that that's the Lord? We usually go like this, "Well, I'm makin' more money and gettin' more time off. That's the Lord! I'm gettin' promoted. That's the Lord! I'm gettin' something. That's the Lord!" And Philip

has to go, "I want to go from this revival" (that even had the apostles come down to check it out) "to the middle of nowhere. That's the Lord." That's what we're going to talk about next week.

Submitted by Maureen Dickson
February 26, 2018