

SIMON'S FALSE PROFESSION

Acts 8:1-24

The Bible is full of real down-to-earth characters ... people who you can really *see* with your own eyes. There are the encouragers, the discouragers, the busy, the lazy, the amicable, the aloof, the helpful, the hindering, the positive, the depressing ... We find all kinds of people in the Bible.

Imagine, then, when thousands and thousands of people, - a *tsunami* of believers ... all within a relatively short period of time, - come to faith in Jesus Christ, as they did on the Day of Pentecost, and the days and weeks following ... all kinds of people! In addition, the 'flood' began to overwhelm outside regions, as was prophesied in Acts 1:8, *ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.* Souls were saved. The work for Christ, initiated in Jerusalem, spread out across Judea and even into Samaria ... by ordinary men witnessing to God's saving power.

It is important, too, to understand *how* the Church achieved this growth, - they were *preaching the Word*, Acts 8:4 *Therefore they that were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the word.* There were no gimmicks. There was no costly crusades or campaigns ... just simply *preaching the Word*.

... And on to the scene comes Philip. This wasn't Philip the disciple ... this was a different Philip, Philip the evangelist. Whereas Philip the disciple/apostle remained in Jerusalem (Acts 8:1), Philip the evangelist was one of the seven 'deacons' chosen in Acts 6, ³ *Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business.* ⁴ *But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word.* ⁵ *And the saying pleased the whole multitude: and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Ghost, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolas a proselyte of Antioch: ⁶ Whom they set before the apostles: and when they had prayed, they laid their hands on them.*

So, Acts 8:4 *Therefore they that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word.* ⁵ *Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them.* ... After the Gospel was preached in Jerusalem, and then throughout Judea, it was brought to Samaria. Samaria, of course, was a region which did not have a good relationship with the rest of the Jewish people. Away back in 721 BC, the Assyrians captured the area, married the local girls, and their children were brought up in a 'watered-down' version of Judaism. Hence the Jews from everywhere else had no time for the Samaritans ... and the Samaritans responded in kind.

Nevertheless, under the leading of the Holy Spirit, ⁵ Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and *preached Christ* unto them. ⁶ And the people with one accord gave heed unto those things which Philip spake, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did. ⁷ For unclean spirits, crying with loud voice, came out of many that were possessed with them: and many taken with palsies, and that were lame, were healed. ⁸ And there was great joy in that city. These were great times in Samaria. God's Spirit was moving. Those who were blind were made to see through the power of God. Those who were crippled God healed. The lepers came and the restoring power of God made their skin new again. ... And there were also those there who were freed from possession of demonic spirits. They cried out when Philip preached about the blood of Jesus being shed on the cross of Calvary. They cried, - not with a whimper, - but with a **loud voice** because the Name of Christ shook the foundations of hell. ... The demons *quaked* when they heard His Name. ... And God was doing great things in Samaria, **there was great joy**. The Church was growing in 'leaps and bounds' ... and actually, souls were being saved *not* because the Gospel was attractive and appealing, - because it wasn't ... Christians were being persecuted, - but the Church was growing through this period of affliction and oppression

... And that is often the case ... When the Gospel is being faithfully presented, it is met with opposition, - and often, opposition of different kinds. Sometimes it is an outward confrontational opposition, and sometimes it is a more subtle form of opposition which is presented as friendship and harmony. And that is the type it was on this occasion in Samaria, when Philip was preaching the Word, and preaching Christ, and calling on men and women to believe for salvation.

One of the people who responded to Philip's preaching was Simon from Samaria, who 'believed' (v.13), was baptized, and from the outset joined in with the work of evangelism along with Philip ... Fantastic! ... Philip was convinced Simon was a believer, - there was no reason for him not to be convinced ... At the start, there was no cause for him to be suspicious. ... And if we had been there, we would have accepted him too.

With the benefit of hindsight, though, let's take a closer look at him ... ⁹ But, - the 'but' indicates something is not right, - there was a certain man, called Simon, which beforetime in the same city used sorcery, and bewitched the people of Samaria, giving out that himself was some great one: ¹⁰ To whom they all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying, This man is the great power of God. ¹¹ And to him they had regard, because that of long time he had bewitched them with sorceries.

What we are about to see here is a man who had a defective faith ... a defective faith is one which does not meet the requirements the Bible presents for true salvation. Not all faith saves. You can *believe*, but if the source of where your faith comes from is flawed, it is not the faith which results in true salvation. ... And that is where we start when we come to examine Simon ... The quest for his salvation lay outside any desire to truly know God. Instead, his quest for salvation began with his pride, his egotism. Basically, he was used to being the centre of people's attention, and all things revolved around him. ... He had a great authority and influence throughout the region of Samaria and beyond. He enjoyed being highly regarded, and being a sorcerer, *μαγεία*, a magician. People feared him because he had special powers, - he had 'a hold' over them, he **bewitched the people of Samaria**, - they held him in awe ... and he enjoyed it! ... But he was always on the lookout for *extra* powers, and he thought he could capture what Philip and the other Christians had for his own selfish and egotistical purposes.

... Previously, as a magician and sorcerer, whatever he said the people in Samaria believed. They all listened to him from the lowest strata of society to the highest. They ascribed to him, **This man is the great power of God [... the gods]**. ... And he wasn't a pretender, ... he actually had the power of witchcraft. He wasn't tricking people with false claims, - he genuinely performed miraculous works, but he did them through the power of the devil, and, **to him they had regard, because that of long time he had bewitched them with sorceries**. ... These people of Samaria were under his spell. ... But then, when he heard Philip preaching, he made the conscious decision to believe! ... And when someone believes, you take them at face-value, and you try to encourage them, and that is what Philip did.

Now, Simon had so much to give up, - *he really had!* He had to give up his living, which he made out of practising magic. To follow Christ, he had to give all that up. He also had to give up the influence and regard which he had accrued over the years (v.10). He could not be a Christian *and* a sorcerer, - the old things had to pass away, and all things had to become new in his life (II Cor. 5:17) ... Jesus had to increase, and he had to decrease (Jn. 3:30) Is that what happened though?! ...

Well, after he believed, **Acts 8:13** **Then Simon himself believed also: and when he was baptized, he continued with Philip, and wondered, beholding the miracles and signs which were done**. ... He was amazed! These miracles and signs were far greater than he had ever been able to do ... and he wanted to harness the power to be able to do them.

By now, the 'warning lights are blinking'. ... Yes, he believed, and yes, he was baptised, and yes, he was involved ... but something was beginning to surface which was not right! ... For whose sake, - and for what reason, - had he become involved with these Christians? ... It was not for the sake of Christ

but instead, Simon was pursuing a new means by which he could enhance his own selfish prospects. ... He was wanting to use Christianity to further his own agenda. ... To suit his own purposes, he was willing to give Jesus a *place* in his life, but he was not willing to give Jesus *pre-eminence* in his life! ... And unless Jesus has pre-eminence, He is not prepared to enter a life which is only half-prepared to give Him a *place*! ... To give Jesus merely a *place* is not sufficient grounds to give Him *all*

This man Simon had no sense of the holiness of God, or the majesty of the Lord Jesus ... He had no sense of his own sin, and no fear of judgment, and no desire to be freed from his sin, - he wasn't receiving Philip's message of the Gospel. He had no true comprehension of what believing in Jesus actually meant. As far as he was concerned, believing in Jesus was an 'add-on' to facilitate his own purposes, rather than Christ coming into his life and taking over. ... In Simon's heart, - in the very depth of his being, - he was too proud, too self-elevated, too egotistical to receive Jesus as Saviour and Lord.

... And one follows from the other because when you have a wrong view of self, you inevitably have a wrong view of salvation. If you don't see yourself as God sees you, - a Hell-deserving sinner, - you will not see any need to cry out to Him for salvation. Therefore, this man was in total contradiction to what Philip was preaching, for he was too-taken up with the messenger, rather than, - more importantly, - the message.

So, it all starts to unravel. On the outside, Simon is talking like a Christian, he is acting like a Christian, he is where the Christians are, he has 'believed', he is baptized ... and yet he is not saved! ... And here in Samaria we find the kingdom of Satan pitting itself against the Kingdom of God, in the guise of religion ... *inside the church!*

Well, if he is not saved, why is he continuing to profess he is a Christian? He is continuing because he wants to be able to do the signs and wonders Philip was doing! ... It wasn't Christ he wanted, it was the 'trimmings' that went with belonging to the Christians! ... He was not spiritual. He had no interest in Christ or the Gospel ... he was in it for what he could get out of it! There was nothing had happened to him on the inside for no change had taken place.

And from the Church's perspective, there is nothing that throws God's people as much as someone claiming to make a profession of faith but whose life doesn't live up to the change. It is disappointing, but that's what was about to happen here. Again, the substance of Philip's preaching was perfect, ...

preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ ... and having seen how Philip could work great wonders Simon was *infatuated*, "I've got to have this!" ... And we are told [Simon himself believed also](#).

What does it mean though, [Simon himself believed also](#)? We can answer that question best by asking another one, "What was it Simon believed?" ... Of course, nowadays you could be told off for questioning a person's faith. If they say they are saved ... believe them! Who are you to question it?! Well, the Bible says to prove all things, and what is more important to prove than someone's faith! ... If someone is believing the wrong thing about Jesus and the Gospel, and they go out into eternity ... it is too late for them to be corrected ... and so it needs to be lovingly explained to them what believing in Jesus Christ truly means ... that He died on the cross of Calvary to take away our sins. ... And also, if someone believes, but they believe the wrong doctrines, and they gain positions of leadership within the church ... they can spread their errors! ... It is why Paul prescribed, [II Cor. 13:5 Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates.](#)

But Simon's faith was evidently not in Christ, but in the miracles he saw Philip perform. He was a reprobate (ἄδόκιμος), - he did not pass the test, he failed to meet the criteria of the true Christian. ... He 'believed', but a transformation of his heart had *not* taken place. Whatever he believed in, it was not in Christ's saving grace!

Yes, of course, [he continued with Philip](#) ... in other words, when Philip went to the villages and towns, stood in the markets and in the streets preaching Christ, *Simon was there*. When the crowds came to Philip to be saved, *Simon was there*. When the lepers and the blind and the lame and the dumb were healed ... *Simon was there*. Simon was standing with Philip, putting up to have had his sins washed away by the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ, ... when no work of salvation had actually been done in his life.

Simon is a warning to us ... I'm very conscious of how I could do harm in what I say about Simon because I remember passing through a period when I wondered if I was truly saved. And the more I thought about it, the more I was concerned in case I wasn't. I was afraid my profession was false ... But here is Simon, and he had no such fear. It caused him no concern.

Sometimes Satan says to you, "You are not saved. If you were a true Christian, you wouldn't do some of the things you do, and you wouldn't say

some of the things you say”. ... But here is something else ... if you were *not* a Christian, the devil would not trouble you with such thoughts. The fact he is out to undermine your faith in Christ means that you *have* a faith in Christ ... but here is Simon, and he is not being troubled because the faith he has is false ... and when you have a false faith, the devil leaves you alone.

... Simon put up to believe, but what he believed in was not the Christ that Philip preached ... And then, the apostles came, - Peter and John. ... Just by way of encouragement ... Peter and John. Previously it had been James and John, the two inseparable brothers who went everywhere together. Here, though, it is *Peter* and John because James had been imprisoned ... John could have said, “I don’t have my brother with me, so I’m not doing this anymore”. He did not think like that though. Even though his brother was unavailable (cf. Acts 12:1), he kept working for the Lord, along with Peter, **Acts 8:14** *Now when the apostles which were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent unto them Peter and John.* As apostles, they had the authority to examine the work so as to report back to the other apostles in Jerusalem, and when they recognised the work of salvation as genuine among the Samaritans, **15** *[they] prayed for them [the Samaritans], that they might receive the Holy Ghost: 16* *(For as yet he was fallen upon none of them: only they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.) 17* *Then laid they their hands on them, and they received the Holy Ghost.* ... What does that mean?

Today, when you become a Christian, you are born again ... and to be born, a new life begins in Christ ... and for this new life to begin something has to enter. Just as in the earthly life, you don’t be born through anything you do ... so it is in the spiritual, - ... John, in his epistle, describes it as being ‘born of God’ (I Jn. 3:9) ... Being ‘born again’ is when God the Holy Spirit comes and lives inside you, **I Cor. 6:19** *your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own.*

At the commencement of the Church though, there was a period of transition ... that is, first of all, the Christians believed in Christ for salvation, and they were saved ... and secondly, they were baptised in water as an open witness to their salvation. Those were the two things that happened to every believer. The third work did not occur until sometime afterwards, and it was known as being baptised by the Holy Spirit. Initially, it happened to those in the upper room on the Day of Pentecost, but did not immediately spread out until sometime afterwards ... It was another separate work, - shortly afterwards, - which happened when the apostles prayed over the people, and laid their hands on them, and the people received the Holy Spirit.

This is also explained in Acts 18, ²⁴ And a certain Jew named Apollos, born at Alexandria, an eloquent man, and mighty in the scriptures, came to Ephesus. ²⁵ This man was instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in the spirit, he spake and taught diligently the things of the Lord, *knowing only the baptism of John*. ²⁶ And he began to speak boldly in the synagogue: whom when Aquila and Priscilla had heard, they took him unto them, and expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly. ... Immediately, - for that period following Pentecost, - it was the process ... salvation, water baptism, and baptism in the Holy Spirit ...

Another example of this is in Acts 19, ¹ And it came to pass, that, while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul having passed through the upper coasts came to Ephesus: and finding certain disciples, ² He said unto them, Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed? And they said unto him, We have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost. ³ And he said unto them, Unto what then were ye baptized? And they said, Unto John's baptism. ⁴ Then said Paul, John verily baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying unto the people, that they should believe on him which should come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus. ⁵ When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. ⁶ And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Ghost came on them; and they spake with tongues, and prophesied.

... And that is what Simon was seeing, **Acts 8:18** And when Simon saw that through laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Ghost was given, he offered them money, ¹⁹ Saying, Give me also this power, that on whomsoever I lay hands, he may receive the Holy Ghost. ... "Give me", as if it was man's to give ... Such a low view of God Simon had for he thought God could be *bought* at a price! ... The truth is that everything God offers is free, - free salvation, free grace, freedom from sin ... but Simon had no understanding of what it meant to follow Jesus. Simon had at last exposed himself, ²⁰ But Peter said unto him, [*... one Simon to another ...*] Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money. ²¹ Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter: for thy heart is not right in the sight of God. ²² Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee. ... You cannot buy salvation. You cannot earn salvation. You must repent and call out to God to be saved, but Simon, you haven't done either.

Peter 'hit him hard'. He did not soften the blow. He did not try to make salvation easy for it wasn't his to tamper with, - it was his to preach. And he told it as he saw it, ²³ For I perceive that thou art in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity. ... You have 'believed', you have been baptised, but no change has taken place inside for you remain a slave to sin. ... That is hard talking, but this is a subject which has eternal consequences, - get it wrong, and Hell is forever!

... And notice Simon's response, ²⁴ Then answered Simon, and said, Pray ye to the Lord for me, that none of these things which ye have spoken come upon me. ... Do you hear what he is not saying? ... He himself is not praying to the Lord, - there's no confession of sin. He has been found out, - there is no concept of God's judgment upon his sin, no repentance, no crying out to God for forgiveness. Instead, he said to Peter, "why don't you pray for me that none of these things come my way?" ... There was no urgency, and no burden regarding his own sinful condition.

Here is a man who starts out and looks so good, but he ended up being so horribly wrong because of his false view of salvation. ... How do we finish our study? ... Simon was one of Satan's counterfeits ... He claimed to be a Christian, and he put up to be a follower of Christ for the benefits he hoped to gain, but no work of grace had taken place in his life. ... The Gospel is something we dare not play with, - it is too important! Salvation has eternal consequences, and that is why it has to be understood correctly, and we need to know for sure we have it ... as Peter later wrote, **II Peter 1:10** give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall.

Trust in Christ, and keep trusting in Him for your salvation for Jesus alone saves. He died for you on the cross, He shed His precious blood to wash away your sins, and you are His. He has His mark indelibly written upon your heart. ... When the devil comes and tries to get you to fear you are not saved, here is what you are to do, **James 4:7** Submit yourselves therefore to God, - trust in His tender care and keeping, - and then you will have the power to Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.

You see, that is what Simon did not have for he was not truly saved. ... And that is the lesson from God's Word ... Believe in Christ alone for your salvation. There is nothing of you in it, because it is all of Him. He loves you, He chose you, He died for you, He has saved you, and He is keeping you because you have, - through His grace, - put your faith and trust in Him ... Your salvation is all of Jesus. ... Keep on believing until that day when He calls you to enter His glorious presence forever. Amen.