

A Tale Of Two Conversions

Acts 8:5-9:1

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.

9 But 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.

12 But when they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women.

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.

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:

15 Who, when they were come down, prayed for them, 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.

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.

20 But Peter said unto him, 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.

23 For I perceive that thou art in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity.

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.

25 And they, when they had testified and preached the word of the Lord, returned to Jerusalem, and preached the gospel in many villages of the Samaritans.

26 And the angel of the Lord spake unto Philip, saying, Arise, and go toward the south unto the way that goeth down from Jerusalem unto Gaza, which is desert.

27 And he arose and went: and, behold, a man of Ethiopia, an eunuch of great authority under Candace queen of the Ethiopians, who had the charge of all her treasure, and had come to Jerusalem for to worship,

28 Was returning, and sitting in his chariot read Esaias the prophet.

29 Then the Spirit said unto Philip, Go near, and join thyself to this chariot.

30 And Philip ran thither to him, and heard him read the prophet Esaias, and said, Understandest thou what thou readest?

31 And he said, How can I, except some man should guide me? And he desired Philip that he would come up and sit with him.

32 The place of the scripture which he read was this, He was led as a sheep to the slaughter; and like a lamb dumb before his shearer, so opened he not his mouth:

33 In his humiliation his judgment was taken away: and who shall declare his generation? for his life is taken from the earth.

34 And the eunuch answered Philip, and said, I pray thee, of whom speaketh the prophet this? of himself, or of some other man?

35 Then Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same scripture, and preached unto him Jesus.

36 And as they went on their way, they came unto a certain water: and the eunuch said, See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized?

37 And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And

he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.
38 And he commanded the chariot to stand still: and they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him.
39 And when they were come up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip, that the eunuch saw him no more: and he went on his way rejoicing.
40 But Philip was found at Azotus: and passing through he preached in all the cities, till he came to Caesarea.

INTRO

The hero of Acts chapter 8 is Philip. Philip was one of the seven chosen to oversee the distribution of relief to the widows. Philip is the first person and the only person in the New Testament called an evangelist (Acts 21:8). It is interesting to consider that he was a layman not a preacher or pastor. When Philip went out he went out with a message, “Philip went down to the city of Samaria and began proclaiming Christ to them” (v.5). Philip preached, “The good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ” (v. 12). Philip was a man with a message and that is why things were happening. That is why people were being saved and why “there was great joy in the city” (v. 8).

Out of Philip’s ministry in Samaria, we are given two examples of religious decisions one false conversion and one true conversion. Sometimes telling the difference between professing Christians and a genuine believer is very difficult.

I. THE STORY OF SIMON THE SORCERER

8: 9-24

A. The Person That Simon Was vv. 9-11

“But there was a certain man called Simon, who previously practiced sorcery in the city and astonished the people of Samaria, claiming that he was someone great, (10) to whom they all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying, ‘This man is the great power of God.’ (11) And they heeded him because he had astonished them with his sorceries for a long time.”

Notice the contrast that is drawn in this passage. Verse 9 begins with the word “but” which always draws a strong contrast. The contrast is between

the marks of authentic salvation and those with a false or counterfeit faith. For sometime before Philip arrived in the city, it had been under influence of a man named Simon, a sorcerer. Some translations use the word “magic” but this is not simply about sleight of hand tricks done to entertain an audience. This word implies occult activity, which is involvement with demonic powers.

Simon billed himself as “The Great One,” the Latin word for great is magus, so Simon is sometimes called “Simon Magus.” This is the same as calling himself “Simon the Great” or “Simon the Magnificent.” The people were amazed at the things that Simon did therefore they believed the things Simon said. These were restless and unsettled times and people were searching for answers that would provide comfort and hope in their lives and like many today they were looking in all the wrong places. They turned to cults, astrology, and witchcraft, just as there is a resurgence of these things today, offering false answers and false hope to people who really need Christ.

However, now Simon found himself challenged by Philip. Simon started to lose his following among the Samaritans as they listened to Philip’s messages, believed on Christ and were born again and were baptized.

When Simon saw the miracles that occurred at Philip’s hand he who had amazed others was himself amazed. Simon could recognize the real thing when he saw it. For the first time in his life Simon saw a power that was as great as what he pretended to have. He had been tricking people and he knew that it was only trickery. It is not just that Philip’s miracles rivaled Simon’s trickery, it was that Simon boasted of himself, whereas Philip preached Jesus. Philip was not drawing attention to himself, but rather pointing people to Jesus.

Even today there are those who are not interested in a real understanding of the gospel, they want tricks, miracles and the spectacular. They reject the Gospel, but they will believe everything else. They follow every cult and false religion. They would rather believe in human trickery than in God. They prefer the counterfeit gospel to the real thing.

B. The Profession That Simon Made vv. 12-13

“But when they believed Philip as he preached the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, both men and women were baptized. (13) The Simon himself also believed; and when he was baptized he continued with Philip, and was amazed, seeing the miracles and signs which were done.”

The puzzling part of this story is verse 13, which says, “***Simon himself also believed and ...was baptized.***”

No doubt when Philip baptized Simon he believed that he was sincere. It is possible to fool the preacher. Jesus said that the Church field in which some tares will come up with the wheat. Tares are weeds that look a lot like wheat, but are not. But on the Day of Judgment, Jesus will sort out the true from the false. (Matt. 13:38-43)

Was Simon actually a believer? Was he truly saved? Was his baptism a true baptism? It would seem that Simon was exposed to strong preaching, was impressed with the miracles that were performed, and wanted to tap into the power of the Gospel but did not truly have a change of heart characterized by a repentant heart. Simon did not want to accept Jesus he wanted to use Jesus. He saw Christianity as something he could use and the power of the Holy Spirit as something he could buy. His was not a real commitment to Jesus but a false commitment to try to tap into the power that Jesus made available. Simon’s faith was a fake.

Verses 14-17

“Now when the apostles who were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them, (15) who, when they had come down, prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit. (16) For as yet He had fallen upon none of them. They had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. (17) Then they laid hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit.

While the apostle in Jerusalem did not initiate this revival in Samaria they did feel a sense of responsibility for it. So when they received reports of the success in Samaria they sent Peter and John to investigate. When they discovered that the Samaria had not yet received the filling of the Holy

Spirit they laid hands on them, and they did receive the Holy Spirit.

C. The Proposal That Simon Offered vv. 18-24

“Now when Simon saw that through the laying on of the apostles hands the Holy Spirit was given, he offered them money, (19) saying, ‘Give me the power also, that anyone on whom I lay hands may receive the Holy Spirit.’ (20) But Peter said to him, ‘Your money perish with you, because you thought to purchase the gift of God with money! (21) ‘You have neither part nor portion in this matter, for your heart is not right in the sight of God. (22) Repent therefore of this your wickedness and pray God if perhaps the thought of your heart may be forgiven you. (23) For I see that you are poisoned by bitterness and bound by iniquity.’ (24) Then Simon answered and said, ‘Pray to the Lord for me, that none of things which you have spoken may come upon me.’”

Our translation of Peter response to Simon’s proposal is rather mild. But Peter puts it much more forcefully and blunt, literally Peter said, “To Hell with you and your money.” That is the force of the original Greek. It is a serious issue when people say they believe in Christ.

The fact that Simon was “poisoned by bitterness and bound by iniquity,” seems to substantiate that Simon was never truly saved. When we say that we are saved, that we are Christians, we must be willing to ask ourselves, “Has there been a real change in who I am?” This story illustrates how close a person can come to being salvation, and still not be truly saved. Simon heard the Gospel, he made a profession of faith, he was baptized and yet he was never really born again.

Even today there is an attempt to turn the spiritual into the commercial, to make money from the things of God.

When Simon the sorcerer offered Peter money to get the gift of the Spirit, he revealed that his concept of the Holy Spirit not much different from many today. Many so called believers think of the Holy Spirit as a power, that they need to get more of . They are not thinking of buying this power, but they are thinking of ways to get this power. If we have IT, we can use IT to overcome our problems, to live victoriously. God will not allow himself to

be used or manipulated.

Even when confronted with his sin he refuses to act personally, he asked for Peter to pray for him. He does not seem to have any sense of his sin before God. What really concerned him was not that he might obtain God's forgiveness but that he might escape God's judgment. Simon was more concerned with avoiding consequences of his sin than he was getting right with God.

II. THE ETHIOPIAN EUNUCH 8:26-40

God had been using Philip to head a revival campaign in Samaria, that was having tremendous results. When suddenly, God stepped in and called the evangelist to leave town in the middle of the meeting. "Now an angel of the Lord spoke to Philip, saying, "Arise and go toward the south along the road which goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza." This is desert." (verse 26). Philip was immediately obedient to the command of God. Philip's experience when he arrived should encourage each of us in our personal witness, that God will direct us to the right person at the right time. If we will be obedient to the leading of the LORD we can expect that He will go before us and open the way for our witness.

Paul's directive to the Romans should challenge every Christian, "How shall they call upon Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach unless they are sent?" (Romans 10:14-15). The lost world needs a witness. Philip provided that witness to the Ethiopian which was based on the word of God and which focused on the person of Jesus Christ.

A. The Disappointed Seeker vv.27-28

"So he arose and went. And behold, a man of Ethiopia, a eunuch of great authority under Candace the queen of the Ethiopians, who had charge of all her treasury, and had come to Jerusalem to worship, (28) was returning. And sitting in his chariot, he was reading Isaiah the prophet."

Here was a man of great influence and wealth, a man of great authority and power, a man of great status and prestige.

This man was the secretary of the Treasury of Ethiopia serving under Candace the queen. The Ethiopian queens were called Candace just as the Egyptian rulers were called Pharaoh, it was a title not a personal name. Here was a man who was concerned enough about his spiritual life to travel over 200 miles to Jerusalem to worship God, but still he was not satisfied. He is much like many people today who read the Bible and seek for truth but who do not yet have a saving faith in Jesus Christ. They are sincere, they are seeking, but they are lost! They need someone to show them the way. Many people of that day were drawn to Judaism because of its believe in one God and because of its high ethical standards. This man came searching but when away empty, not having found fulfillment for his spiritual need.

B. The Disturbing Reading vv. 29-35

“Then the Spirit said to Philip, "Go near and overtake this chariot." (30) So Philip ran to him, and heard him reading the prophet Isaiah, and said, "Do you understand what you are reading?" (31) And he said, "How can I, unless someone guides me?" And he asked Philip to come up and sit with him. (32) The place in the Scripture which he read was this: "He was led as a sheep to the slaughter; And as a lamb before its shearer is silent, So He opened not His mouth. (33) In His humiliation His justice was taken away, And who will declare His generation? For His life is taken from the earth." (34) So the eunuch answered Philip and said, "I ask you, of whom does the prophet say this, of himself or of some other man?"(35) Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning at this Scripture, preached Jesus to him.”

Urged by the Holy Spirit Philip ran alongside the chariot and heard him reading from Isaiah the prophet. Philip asked the Eunuch do you understand what you are reading. The Eunuch response gave Philip the wonderful opportunity to explain to him how Jesus fulfilled this prophecy and was the Messiah.

C. The Decisive Believer vv. 36-38

“Now as they went down the road, they came to some water. And the eunuch said, "See, here is water. What hinders me from being baptized?" (37) Then 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." (38) So he commanded the chariot to stand still. And both Philip and the eunuch went

down into the water, and he baptized him.

The only way a person can be converted is to deliberately and personally believe in Jesus Christ. The Ethiopian believed on Jesus Christ and was born again. So real was his experience that he insisted on stopping the caravan and being baptized immediately.

Verse 39-40

“Now when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught Philip away, so that the eunuch saw him no more; and he went on his way rejoicing. (40) But Philip was found at Azotus. And passing through, he preached in all the cities till he came to Caesarea.”

Conclusion:

“What is the difference between the conversion of Simon the magician and that of the Ethiopian treasurer? The difference between them is the difference between any person who is only superficially ‘converted’ and one who is genuinely born again.

Simon believed Philip’s miracles were genuine. He believed that the message Philip proclaimed was true. He gave mental assent to the Gospel. He was like people today who think that if they believe that Jesus is the Son of God and that He died for sinners and rose again, they are Christians. But though New Testament faith includes intellectual acceptance of a set of doctrines, it is much more. It is a matter of a person’s committing himself to the One at the center of these doctrines. It involves admitting one’s personal need and personally trusting Christ for forgiveness and a new life. It includes giving oneself over to Him so that His Spirit may possess one and control one’s life.

Paul suggests that it is well to check whether or not one is in the faith (2 Cor. 13:5). It is not at all necessary to wonder whether we are regenerate. It is possible for us to know for certain that we are the children of God (1 John 5:13).” (Henry Jacobsen. *The Acts: Then and Now*. (Wheaton, ILL: Victor Books, 1973.) p. 75