

“The Samaritans and Simon”

Acts 8:9-25 / Ryan Patty / Relentless Gospel / 3.21.21

Good morning CCC! Thankful to be here and to be gathered with you on this beautiful Sunday morning. For those of you visiting my name is Ryan and I am one of the pastors here. We are thankful that you chose to worship with us this morning. We have been steadily making our way through the book of Acts and find ourselves in chapter 8 today so I invite you to turn there now. In Acts 1:8 the risen Lord Jesus before His ascension tells his disciples that the Gospel is going to go forth to Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and to the ends of the Earth. And last week we saw how Philip goes north to Samaria and proclaims the Gospel. But what was the result? How do the people respond? That's the focus of today's passage.

So this morning I want to preach this text in light of how it instructs and how it convicts. Because the goal of preaching is to proclaim the reality that God's words are seeking to communicate. How does this text confront us? What does God through His Word want to say to us? And how should we as His people respond?

So let's read the first part of the passage. As a reminder the title of this series is “Relentless Gospel” and that is perfect for what we see throughout the book of Acts as the Gospel, despite hardships and persecution and sinful people, goes forth relentlessly. So Philip is preaching in verses 5-7 and unclean spirits are being cast out and the lame and paralyzed are being healed. Amazing things are happening. So let's start reading in verse 8.

8 So there was great joy in that city. (Notice the change here that Luke wants us to see - great things are happening but there is still something sinister that is taking place). **9 A man named Simon had previously practiced sorcery in that city and amazed the Samaritan people, while claiming to be somebody great.** **10 They all paid attention to him, from the least of them to the greatest, and they said, “This man is called the Great Power of God.”** **11 They were attentive to him because he had amazed them with his sorceries for a long time.** **12 But when they believed Philip, as he proclaimed the good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, both men and women were baptized.** **13 Even Simon himself believed. And after he was baptized, he followed Philip everywhere and was amazed as he observed the signs and great miracles that were being performed.** **14 When the apostles who were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them.** **15 After they went**

down there, they prayed for them so that the Samaritans might receive the Holy Spirit because he had not yet come down on any of them. 16 (They had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.) 17 Then Peter and John laid their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit.

Would you pray with me?

This morning I want us to compare and contrast what is happening with the Samaritans at large, and what is happening particularly with Simon. Two kinds of faith are to be seen here. One that saves and one that doesn't. So let's jump in and see the Samaritans saving faith.

1. Saving Faith

In verse 5 Luke tells us that the crowds were all paying attention to what Philip said. And then verse 12 says again, **12 But when they believed Philip, as he proclaimed the good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, both men and women were baptized. 13 Even Simon himself believed. And after he was baptized, he followed Philip everywhere and was amazed as he observed the signs and great miracles that were being performed.**

What is true and repeated throughout the book of Acts is that the

- **The Word of God applied by the Spirit of God creates the people of God.** This is what I preached on from Acts chapter 2 last month and it is true here and throughout the rest of the book (repeat). But here there is a delay in the Spirit being given. The Samaritans had believed in the message about Jesus and His Kingdom but they had not yet experienced the Holy Spirit. Now in the tradition I grew up in this passage was said to be evidence for a second work, or a second blessing, or a second filling of the Spirit. This is something that we should strive after and pray earnestly for.

But I don't think that everything that happens in Acts is to be understood as normative for the church today, and I think this is one of those scenarios. Why? Because think back to what is happening here culturally. Culturally, the Jews and Samaritans hated one another. They despised one another. The Jews thought the Samaritans were half-breed trash, and of course the Samaritans after being ridiculed with language like that will respond with their own. **They were racist toward one another.** But Philip is faithful in following the Spirit's leading and going to proclaim the message of salvation to the Samaritans and they believe! They have an interest in this message. And when word gets back to Jerusalem they send their two most famous apostles Peter and John, and they go and lay their hands on them to receive the Holy Spirit. You see God in his sovereignty directed this to happen so that it might be evident to the churches highest leadership in Jerusalem that the Samaritans were not second class citizens but actually full members of the church. God is approving of them coming into the covenant community and it is important that these Jewish apostles see this first hand.

- So, They are to no longer be seen as outcasts, but now as included in the people of God. In essence this is the Samaritan version of Acts 2 and the day of Pentecost. It's a Samaritan Pentecost as God validates that these people belong and shows that the power of the H.S. and the blessings of the new covenant aren't just for the Jews but for all who enter in through the Gospel, through Jesus Christ. And this is what we see worked out through the rest of the NT and our experience today, that the Holy Spirit is given to us upon true conversion. It is as Paul says in Romans 8:
- 9 You, however, are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God lives in you. If anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to him. 10 Now if Christ is in you, the body is dead because of sin, but the Spirit gives life because of righteousness. Apart from the Holy Spirit in us, we are still dead in our trespasses and sins and do not belong to Christ. So a necessary part of saving faith is the Holy Spirit being given to us.

But in this particular city of Samaria there was a man named Simon. And Simon was a practitioner of the occult, of witchcraft or your translation might say sorcery. What Daniel preached concerning this a few months back is true, this type of spiritual activity is demonic and often what serious proponents of New Age teaching are seeking out today.

And so this city is mesmerized by what Simon is doing. Whether it is a form of parlor tricks or something even more astounding, it is clear from verses 9 and 11 that he had “amazed” the people with what he was doing and that from the poorest to the richest in the city they thought highly of him. Actually, they thought so highly of him that they called him “The Great Power of God.” If ever there was a perfect representation of idolatry here we see it. Esteeming the demonic as something to be praised. And yet they worshipped him as god himself or as his representative. Justin Martyr, the early historian who was also a Samaritan, recounts in his writings that his countrymen (Samaritans) “revered Simon as the highest god.” So this designation was to signify Simon’s deity, his status, his prestige, his standing among the people.

And so Simon has a hold on this town and on this region. He had most likely amassed some serious wealth from what he was able to do and he is comfortable with what is taking place. But then, Philip comes to town proclaiming

the Kingdom of God and the work of Christ and spirits are cast out and the lame are healed and there is a shift in allegiance. Simon, who is called “the Great power of God” now gets to truly “see the great power of God” and he recognizes that what He has simply doesn’t compare. What precipitated this change? They believed the message that Philip proclaimed. Look at verse 12, “they believed Philip” (what did they believe about Philip?) The next clause tells us, “they believed his proclamation about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ!” Yes God was attesting to this work with miraculous signs and wonders but it was the message applied by the Spirit of God that saved. This is a right picture of their saving faith. The Word of God applied by the Spirit of God creates the people of God.

But what are we talking about when we say *saving* faith? We are talking about a change. A change has taken place for the Samaritans here as they believe the message that Philip proclaimed. They go from idolaters to disciples, from heathens to saints. What has taken place? They were converted. Now conversion is the doctrine that the Gospel, in part, centers around. It tells us that there is something inherently wrong about us and that something needs to be done to change this wrongness. God made us to worship Him and find our deepest satisfaction in Him, but now in light of sin and our first parents, Adam and Eve’s sin, our natures have been corrupted. Created with a nature to love God, we are now born with a nature that is bent on loving ourselves. And so we must be changed.

The bible uses the language of regeneration, re-creation, and transformation. The idea is the same. Something in us needs to be re-created, re-done, really reborn. This is Jesus’ point to Nicodemus in John 3 when he tells him three times in that chapter about the necessity of rebirth:

- John 3:3 - 3 Jesus replied, “Truly I tell you, unless someone is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.”
- 3:5 - 5 Jesus answered, “Truly I tell you, unless someone is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.”
- 3:7b - “You must be born again.”

There is a necessity to this. It *must* happen. There has to be a changed heart, a new heart as Jeremiah prophesied. And this is the beautiful thing that we see happening here. They have believed the message. We are sure that in this message that Philip was proclaiming there was a call to repent as well. Faith and repentance are two sides of

the same coin throughout the NT. So they are called to place their faith in Christ and called to repent of their sins and the Holy Spirit changes their hearts and gives them a new one and now the Samaritans are a part of the people of God. They were changed.

So what is saving faith then? Is it a decision for Christ? Is it coming to church? Is it liking worship music? Is it thinking highly of Jesus? Is it being nice to people? What is saving faith? Well at the very least from our passage we gather that it is belief in something. Belief in this proclamation or message about someone and what he did. When God by His Spirit applies His Word and regenerates the heart He gives us faith. So what is saving faith? It is having faith in Christ. But I would like to offer you a definition of faith.

- **Faith is complete and wholehearted trust that God will keep his promises in the Gospel.** The H.S. initiates this faith and secures this faith in our hearts. But what is the faith - It is a complete trust that God will hold to the promises outlined in the Gospel. What promises are those? That in Christ we are new creations. That the old sinful self is done away with and that our sins have been placed on Him as our substitutionary sacrifice and because that sacrifice was pleasing in God the Father's sight that his righteousness, Christ's righteousness is now ours. It is as Peter says in **1 Peter 2:10 - 10 Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.** This is the real, tangible experience and the confession of the Christian here today. We have faith in what God has done through His Son Jesus Christ. We believe in Him and we trust in Him. Not ourselves, not what we can do, but in Him.

So faith is not something that you influence by how much emotion you put in it. God doesn't evaluate our faith by the intensity of our emotion. Faith is trust, and it's only as good as the person whom that trust is placed in.

Illustration: Each of us knows this to be true. It's why we don't let strangers watch our kids, we have no foundation to trust them. It's why trust is a foundational part of marriage and without it they crumble. We have to be able to trust one another. And it's why the betrayal of our trust tends to hurt the most, because our trust in another is a vulnerable thing. In a sinful world we can be jaded and almost become used to being let down, become used to our trust being broken. But it is not so with our Lord.

The beautiful thing about Christianity is that our faith is placed in the one thing that cannot be done away with, the one thing that cannot fail us, the one thing that is truly and completely worthy of our trust: the person and work of Jesus Christ. It is his blood that was shed that is the grounding of our faith. How can you trust God? How can you know that he loves you? Because he sent His Son to die for you. Look to the cross. So Yes, our faith waxes and wanes and yes our faith is fickle based on our emotions and if we are having a good day or a bad day or a good month or a bad month, or we are suffering or we are on the mountain top. But praise God that the fickleness of our faith or the intensity of our faith does nothing to change our standing before him! The sacrifice of Jesus Christ is the grounding and foundation of our faith, not how much we do or do not have. It's not up to you, it's up to him! It's what *He did, not what you did*. We have to *pull* our eyes off of ourselves and our circumstances and behold the slain and risen lamb! Behold him in his glory, for he is the foundation, the grounding, and the cornerstone of our faith. The old hymn line is true, "I have no other argument, I have no other plea, it is enough that Jesus died, and that he died for me."

It's not up to us. What we feel or what we don't feel. Saving faith is grounded in the assurance that all the promises of God are yes and amen in Jesus Christ and that because of what he did we are secure in the love of God. That's. saving. faith.

But sadly, there is another faith. And it's evidenced here by Simon. The second point we need to look at this morning is superficial faith.

2. Superficial Faith

18 When Simon saw that the Spirit was given through the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money, 19 saying, "Give me this power also so that anyone I lay hands on may receive the Holy Spirit."
20 But Peter told him, "May your silver be destroyed with you, because you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money! 21 You have no part or share in this matter, because your heart is not right before God. 22 Therefore repent of this wickedness of yours, and pray to the Lord that, if possible, your heart's intent may be forgiven. 23 For I see you are poisoned by bitterness and bound by wickedness."
24 "Pray to the Lord for me," Simon replied, "so that nothing you have said may happen to me." 25 So, after they had testified and spoken the word of the Lord, they traveled back to Jerusalem, preaching the gospel in many villages of the Samaritans.

The definition of superficial according to the Oxford dictionary is "existing or occurring only on the surface." Another definition that they provide is "appearing to be true or real until examined more closely." Existing or occurring only on the surface, appearing to be true or real until examined more closely. For us the label of superficial is an insult, a derogatory term that undermines who we are. But in terms of this story, this seems to be the case for Simon. This is what his faith is showing itself to be. Superficial. It appeared to be real until it was examined more closely.

When he saw that the Spirit was given through the laying on of hands, the text tells us, he offered them money (he had most likely amassed a good bit) and said "give me this power also so that anyone I lay my hands on may receive the Holy Spirit." Many of you know that this is where the term "simony" came from, which is the practice of buying and selling positions or authority within the church. When someone seeks to elevate their own position or authority in the church, even offering money to do so, that is a grave thing indeed. Simon's superficial faith can be characterized by two things.

1) A Misunderstanding of the Holy Spirit

- a) Simon thought he could buy the power of the Holy Spirit. What he saw when the apostles laid their hands on the Samaritans were probably various signs and gifts like tongues and prophecy. When Simon saw this, he didn't want the Holy Spirit, he wanted the *power to wield or bestow the Holy Spirit*. He wanted control over it and this is a serious misunderstanding of the role and work of the Spirit. It is not

something to be controlled by us. Not something to be called upon by us when we desire or will it. No the H.S. is purely a gift from God, our helper, the third person of the Trinity. The power of the H.S. is not for sale nor can it be franchised out. **Simon's sin (here) is a desire to possess spiritual power for personal ends.** Think on that. We love to control things and it's no different for Simon here. He sees the Spirit as another thing to add to his magic performance, the occult practices he was known for, but he had no idea the spiritual issues at stake. Philip was proclaiming another but Simon was proclaiming himself. And Peter's rebuke shows this misunderstanding. May your money perish with you because you thought you could get the GIFT of God with money! The Spirit is a gift and it aids in our sanctification, conforming us into the image of Christ, it fills us and empowers us to speak God's Gospel with boldness, it produces the fruit of the spirit within us, love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, gentleness and self-control, and it equips us with gifts for the work of ministry within local churches, the body of Christ. All of those things are gifts from God given by His Spirit, not to be controlled by us or used for personal ends or goals. The Holy Spirit is a helper, an advocate, a gift, not ours to wield and bestow as we see fit. But secondly, and even more serious, Simon's superficial faith is characterized by false belief.

2) False Belief

- a) As we mature in our Christian lives, one of the hardest things to work through is when those close to us, that we would consider brothers or sisters in Christ, fall away from the faith. They no longer call themselves a disciple of Christ, a follower of Jesus, they turn to something else. I've been working through this myself with one of the guys who discipled me in college. It is agonizing to see and you simply wonder "how?" How did they seem to be so sincere and genuine in their faith and have such a complete change? Many of you have seen this yourselves. False belief is rampant in the church today but the stories of a brother or sister falling away never get easier to experience or hear of.

Now my goal this morning is not to explain a rationale of if they were ever a believer or not in the first place, my goal is to exposit this text and I think it has some serious implications for false believers. Simon's response here to the presence of God's Spirit and the evidences of God's power is one of those tragic stories that accompany every advance of the Gospel. Whenever and wherever God is at work amongst his people, there are not only genuine responses (saving faith as we have already looked at), but there are also counterfeit ones (what we are calling

superficial faith). Just as not all Israel is truly a part of Israel, so not all in the church are truly a part of the church. Now before I go down this road I want to genuinely say that if you are questioning your faith and struggling with it, but you have persistent devotion to Christ and His church and you are praying and seeking to fight day by day to have faith, then the warning in this passage about superficial faith isn't directed toward you and I trust that the Spirit of God is at work in you. But, often pride comes before the fall and this passage is directed at those who see their faith, their Christianity, as a means to an end, as a boost to their own righteousness, as only a feather in the cap of **this** life, and if that is true of you then that reveals that you will miss out on the **next** life. Eternal life that is, because your faith, like Simon's, is a false one. It's superficial. You think you are saved and yet, like Simon, you are "bound by wickedness." And in 2,000 years false belief has gone nowhere. It's been evident throughout church history, it is evident in the church today and dare I say it could be evident in this room today.

You see, the insidious thing about a false believer is that they are often veiled as a true believer. That's why the surprise and the hurt of a close friend or family member denouncing their faith cuts so deep. Superficial faith can look like saving faith. Simon, himself, the text tells us professed faith! Luke says in v. 13 that even Simon believed. He evidenced this belief through baptism as well. The apostles most likely laid their hands on him. He appeared for all intents and purposes to be a part of the true Samaritan converts. But Jesus' words in Matt.7 are just as applicable here, "you will know them by their fruit." Simon makes his grab for the power of the Spirit and Peter sees the truth of what's happening and says, "for I see you are poisoned by bitterness and bound by wickedness." Being bound by wickedness is characteristic of an unregenerate heart, not a child of God. Simon is showing his faith to be a false one.

"But he believed! He was baptized!" you might say to me. And you are right. But the interesting thing about how the NT uses the word for believe (pisteuo) is that it covers a broad range of responses to God's word. It's used in this interesting scene with Jesus in **John 2:23-24**

- **23 While he was in Jerusalem during the Passover Festival, many believed in his name when they saw the signs he was doing. 24 Jesus, however, would not entrust himself to them, since he knew them all 25 and because he did not need anyone to testify about man; for he himself knew what was in man.** Notice the connection with signs, the faith is delighted in what's being done, not delighting in Christ himself.

- Notice as well the same word in **James 2:19 - 19 You believe that God is one. Good! Even the demons believe—and they shudder.**
- There is a saving faith, a true faith, and there is such a thing as superficial faith. It is a belief that is grounded in something else other than Christ and His work. But perhaps the most sobering text on this issue is found in Matthew 7 when Christ prophesies about religious people and says **21 “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven. 22 On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, didn’t we prophesy in your name, drive out demons in your name, and do many miracles in your name?’ 23 Then I will announce to them, ‘I never knew you. Depart from me, you lawbreakers!’”**

Our souls should at the very least heed this warning should they not? Notice the threefold repetition of “in your name’ there. Well intentions, moral living, and being a nice person all in the name of Jesus never saved a soul from Hell. Superficial faith, superficial Christianity or discipleship proclaims to do a lot of things in the name of Christ or for the name of Christ, but it is not a faith that our God recognizes.

In Luke 8, from where we did our Scripture reading, Jesus tells the parable of the sower and he says that some fell on rocky ground and then when it grew up it withered away because of lack of moisture. Other seeds fell among the thorns and when it grew, the thorns grew with it and choked it. Later in the chapter he gives the interpretation that the rocky ground stands for those who “hear the word, receive it with joy” (very similar to the belief here with Simon) but having no roots they fall away after a time of testing. And the seed that fell among the thorns are those who, when they have heard, go on their way and are choked with worries, riches, and pleasures of life, and produce no mature fruit.

Is this not so descriptive of superficial faith? Is this not the description of those who will cry out “Lord, Lord look at all we did!” Is this not true of those who profane the name of Christ because while claiming to be a Christian they lean on their own righteousness instead of His. They show themselves to have no root in Christ, of loving the idols of today more than Christ, of simply giving lip-service to Christ. My friends, as I was saying in point number one, we need new hearts! We must be converted! We can’t give ourselves new hearts God must do it! It is not an issue of us

liking Jesus. We don't need just a nice heart, we need a new one. We don't need just sincere faith, we need saving faith. We don't need a 20 year old decision for Christ with no visible change, we need a life marked by discipleship and a love For God and His people and all people. He *must* be your Lord and Savior, or you too could be crying out "Lord, Lord!" on that day.

In closing, allow me to give us a few points of application to respond rightly to God's Word today.

Application:

1. Praise

- a. Friends, even in light of the warning of superficial faith, there is still immense praise to be given to God by any Christian in here! Why? Because in his infinite love and providence He chose to redeem us, a sinful and wayward people. You know the condition of your heart, I know the vileness of mine. For those with regenerate hearts, new hearts, may they overflow once more in praise to God for the astounding grace and mercy He has shown us in the Gospel! "Oh what is man that you are mindful of Him, the son of man that you would consider him?" **Romans 11:33-36** "33 Oh, the depth of the riches and the wisdom and the knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments and untraceable his ways! 34 For who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor? 35 And who has ever given to God, that he should be repaid? 36 For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever. Amen." A regenerate heart, a person who has experienced saving faith, cannot but be astounded and floored that they would be a recipient of such grace. May our hearts praise God for who He is and what He has done.

2. Examine

- a. **2 Corinthians 13:5** instructs us to "5 Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith. Examine yourselves. Or do you yourselves not recognize that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless you fail the test." Other possible renderings of that last phrase are "unless you are disqualified, or unless you are counterfeit." We could even say, unless you are superficial. Now I offer no judgment on if you are superficial or not, that is God's role and His alone. But the purity of God's people and the holiness of His church is not taken lightly in the Scriptures. So I pray that you would recognize the conviction of the Holy Spirit in this matter and my next application point will be more applicable for you. But for those with new hearts, let us be

aware of the subtle pulls of a superficial faith. A laziness that can creep into our discipleship. A love of other things that can always tempt our hearts. For Simon it was power and prestige and his desire for authority, but maybe for us it's the desire for more money and what it can provide us. Or a desire for more recognition at work and if that happens then everything in life will be better. Or, Maybe that creeping idol into our hearts is our own family. I have had to wrestle with this. I know I love and treasure mine, but the scariest prayer I pray over my kids each night is that God would use them for His glory. Even if that means they go to the ends of the Earth proclaiming his name and I see them once every 5 years, as hard as that would be, do I consider it worth it? Do I consider the saving faith of others worth it? Or does a superficial faith creep in here for me? I pray not. I pray that I won't subtly think, "God I'll love you all my days just please grant me a happy and easy life with my kids close by," but instead God you are good, and your name needs to be proclaimed, use me, use my wife, use my family, in any way possible to further your glory. That's where I am tempted for a superficial faith, Where is it for you? We have to examine ourselves and be on guard against this.

3. Repent

- a. The beauty of the Gospel and the amazing thing about God is that He always extends an open invitation to turn from our sinful ways and to Him instead. Repentance is always an option, no matter the sin. Don't get me wrong. It will be costly, it always is. It can often hurt too because sin hurts. But repentance is always an option. Even in Peter's rebuke to Simon he offers out the hope of repentance, v. 22 "Therefore repent of this wickedness of yours, and pray to the Lord that, if possible, your heart's intent may be forgiven." Now Simon's repentance I would argue didn't amount to much of anything, and church history would seem to support that from what the early church fathers wrote about him, but that doesn't have to be the case for yours. Repentance, real repentance, is always an option. Turn now to God who beckons you to come to Him. Respond with faith in what Jesus Christ has done for you. "But I'm too bad," you'll tell me, "or I'm too sinful," you'll say, "there is no way God could love me after what I have done." Well praise God that his love isn't dependent on what you have or have not done. Why is God willing to save you? Because he loves you. He truly does. Ephesians 2:4-5 - 4 But God, who is rich in mercy, because of his great love that he had for us, 5 made us alive with Christ even though we were dead in trespasses. You are saved by grace!

b. So then it doesn't depend on you but God in his grace who loves you. Yes your sins before a Holy God are heinous and deserve every ounce of His wrath, but in His love for YOU He poured that wrath out on His Son. That old saying that "God has done all he could do, the rest is up to you" is so far from the truth presented in these Scriptures that it deserves no consideration. If the rest was up to you, up to us, we would fail and still be like Simon in our story and "bound by wickedness." No, The death of Christ was not an attempt to redeem sinners it was an accomplishment. Jesus paid it all, we sing. And last I checked all means all. So turn now to the God who paid it all for you through His Son Jesus Christ, and repent. Oh that we would be a people, a church, marked by real repentance.

Would you pray with me?