

Acts 8:9-40

“The Gospel Goes Forth” (John Ch 4)

As we break into Ch 8 Philip finds himself in Samaria in the center of a radical revival. and Once again its worth noting that this particular Philip wasn't in the “Who's who” of the spiritual elite, he wasn't an apostle, or even a professional preacher/pastor. As far as that goes he wasn't even one of those Jews who held to the traditional Hebrew culture but rather was one who spoke Greek, was a Hellenist, just an everyday common guy who was in love with Jesus Christ and He serves to illustrate to us much like Stephen that if we're faithful in the days of small things, God will raise us up that He might be *magnified* in us and that His Kingdom might be *multiplied* through us.

Like Stephen, Philip was one whom the people selected to serve the tables making sure that the widows of the Hellenists weren't being neglected in the daily distribution. But as he faithfully and diligently served the Lord with his whole heart, not vying for position, not envying those who were in the spiritual places of power and authority, God was preparing him for a radical work. Just like God is using the circumstances that surround your life presently to prepare you for a further work that He has for you in the future. Philip was a man who was filled with the Holy Spirit and wisdom, he was open/available to the Lord that he might be used by the Lord in whatever capacity that He saw fit to use his life. and He went from serving tables *for* God to sharing the Word *of* God, but one thing that I've discovered about the man that God will use is that generally speaking he will be just as content serving tables as he is sharing the Word in that whatever it is he does he will do it heartily *as unto the Lord* and not unto men. Or to understand that another way, regardless of what God would have him to do he's going to do it with all of his heart that he might be pleasing to God and bring glory to God in his service. and This is the kinda guy Philip was, serving tables, or sharing the Word, he served the Lord with his whole heart.

Now finding himself forced to flee Jerusalem due to the outbreak of persecution through Saul, he scatters to Samaria where as he preaches Christ to *them* a revival breaks loose. Which should really be no surprise to us because the pump had been primed spiritually speaking and the foundation for revival had been set a couple of years or so before Philip got there. The fallow ground had been busted up, the seed had been sown, and now God is using Philip to bring in the harvest. You recall the situation, John Ch 4, Jesus was leaving Judea, departing again to Galilee, but vs 4 tells us that He *needed* to go through Samaria. Why did He need to go through Samaria? Because a divine appointment had been made for a certain woman who would meet Him at Jacob's well. and Having sent His disciples to get some food here this Samaritan woman comes, in the heat of the day to draw water from the well. and You know the deal, Jesus asked her to give *Him* a drink, but in the end it was He who gave *her* a drink, oh not of the waters of that well, but of the fountain of living waters quenching the thirst of her soul by which she would never thirst again. (Look at vs 25-42)

The fields of Samaria were white for the harvest, and here we find Philip, laboring in the field just bringing it in. God had just given him a real gift of evangelism, as a matter of fact he'll become known as "Philip the evangelist," it just seemed like anywhere he went, someone was going to get saved. and Such is the story here in Samaria; people who were demon possessed were being released, the lame and paralyzed were being restored, and the people were rejoicing just receiving the Lord.

Vs 9 begins with that word of contrast (generally speaking) "but." There were some definite awesome things happening, but there was also this peculiar kind of an incident that was a bit ambiguous regarding a man named Simon who was a sorcerer there in Samaria, notice.

Vs9-13

So these vs sort of set up a contrast for us between these 2 men of influence, Simon and Philip, Simon practiced sorcery and drew men unto himself, Philip was gifted of God in the miraculous and pointed people to Jesus. Philip simply served the Lord in humility; Simon served himself claiming that he was someone great. The people were confounded by Simon, but converted through Philip.

There are a few things that we want to see here, 1st of all we want to notice the power of persuasion that he had through the practicing of sorcery which tells us that signs and wonders isn't an automatic verification that an individual is of the Lord. Paul tells us regarding the A.C. that "*The coming of the lawless one is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders, and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish,*" 2 Thess 2:9-10

Of course we're reminded of the magicians in the Pharaoh's court when Moses was confronting him in order to free the nation of Israel. and When Moses' staff became a serpent, their staffs became serpents, when Moses turned the water to blood, they turned water to blood. Now as you study that passage it becomes evident that their powers were with out a doubt limited and in reality all they could do was add to the problem but that they could do nothing to remedy it. Which is always the net effect of Satan's influence in your life, he can ultimately only add to your problems, he can't do anything to remedy them.

But we see here that Satan doesn't care who you give the credit to as long as you're deceived from truly believing in Jesus Christ They accredited the power of Simon to God, saying that he even *was* the great power of God. The bible teaches that Satan transforms himself into an angel of light (2nd Cor 11), (you hear of all these near death experiences with people who have no relationship with God whatsoever claiming to see this glorious light, that's no surprise) so why should it be any surprise that his servants would masquerade as servants of God? His agenda is to deceive you regardless of the cost, to lead you away from a relationship with Jesus Christ that he might rob, kill, and destroy your life.

So then what's the practical point we glean from this situation? That the test of the man of God isn't in his miracles, it's in His message. Jesus would often call people to believe in Him because of His works, but ultimately it was a rebuke because they *wouldn't* believe in Him because of His message. But with Him even His miracles were messianic, they could be found in the message of God's Word, in that He bore our infirmities, the eyes of the blind being opened and all. Simon's end was to draw men after himself, that he might wield power and influence in their lives, he exalted himself. and When people are seeking to exalt themselves, or to draw people after themselves they're not operating in a manner that's ordained of God. Philip's message was what? The things concerning the Kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ and when the people heard that the messiah had come, had died for them, and was living to save them, how that was crucified for our transgressions and raised for our justification and that by believing in Him we could receive the forgiveness of sin and be made righteous in the sight of God, they were responding in droves. Yeah they were confounded by Simon and his message, but they were *converted* through Philip and the message of Jesus Christ it's not the miraculous, it's the message

The people were eager to identify with the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ through baptism and in vs 13 (read). Now this particular situation is loaded down with ambiguity and the debate rages on regarding the legitimacy of Simon's conversion, was he really saved?

There are a couple of things that point to its probability, for example we read that Simon "believed." There's nothing about that word that is in question, its used over and over again to substantiate legitimate belief and saving type faith. 2^{ndly} By the very fact that Philip baptized him we can be certain that at least Philip was open to the idea of a genuine conversion, because there's no way he would've baptized him if he didn't think that he was at least legitimate in his desire.

However there are quite a few more things that point to the fact that all Simon did was become religious with out ever being reborn, or regenerated in the 1st place. For instance the connotation seems to be in vs 12 and 13 that when Simon seen how the popular pulse of the people was persuaded to fall in line with what Philip was doing, it says in vs 13 "Then" Simon himself followed suit (he was sort of like a formal presidential candidate, whatever I need to do to maintain the popular vote of the people count me in). 2^{ndly} the word "Believed" though it doesn't insinuate anything fishy, and is used in the context of saving faith with regularity, at the same time that's not *always* case.

When James said, "You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe -- and tremble!" James 2:19 That's the same word that's translated "Believed" here as well. So that there is such a thing as an intellectual consent of the facts with out an actual genuine conversion of the heart. How many times we've heard that no small # of people will miss heaven by 18", the distance from their brain to their heart. So that they know and consent to the facts, that Jesus came, died on the cross for our sin and rose again to save us, but the transition from their head to their heart is never made, yet God is after your heart.

Thirdly it seems to be for Simon that the draw that he had toward the ministry of Philip outside of staying popular with the people wasn't so much his message as it was his miracles. He continued with him and was amazed, "...seeing the miracles and the signs which were done." Simon's commitment seems to be contingent not upon *who* Jesus is *to* him, but rather *what* Jesus can do *for* him. Like those of whom we read in John Ch 2 where we read, "*Now when He was in Jerusalem at the Passover, during the feast, many believed in His name when they saw the signs which He did. But Jesus did not commit Himself to them, because He knew all men,*" John 2:23-24 Which is to say that Jesus knew what was going on in their hearts, they weren't committed to Him for who He was, but for what He could do, how He could be of personal benefit to them. You might say they saw godliness as a means of gain, so the Lord just divorced Himself from that situation, and such seems to be the case with Simon. and As the text unfolds we'll see even more shades of gray that develop over the conversion of Simon.

But what a good heart check, why have you committed to Jesus Christ? There are all kinds of reasons people commit to Jesus, perhaps to get them out of a bind, or in hopes of never being sick, they want a favor of some kind then they split. But Jesus doesn't really honor those commitments that are contingent upon what He can do for you, but He wants a love relationship with you that's based upon who He is *to* you. A loving God, your Savior friend, He wants you to know Him, to fall in love with Him, to understand that He's always there for you and will never leave nor forsake you. and How important it is that you make certain that you've done more than consent to the facts intellectually, but that you've surrendered your heart and your life to Christ personally, from the heart. Peter said, "...*brethren, be even more diligent to make your call and election sure,*" 2 Peter 1:10 Paul said, "*Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves.*" 2 Cor 13:5 Ask yourself how your love for Christ has spilled over into your everyday life, see if the fruit of Christ in you is evident in your life, if you're in fact in the world but not *of* the world having been called out *from* the world.

Vs14-17

There's a couple of things here, but the main thing I want you to see is the fact that there is a secondary experience that we can partake of regarding the person and work of the Holy Spirit that is subsequent to salvation. Commentators wrestle over this like trying to figure out if the Samaritans were saved until the apostles came and laid hands on them. But they seem to overlook the preposition that we seen established in the 1st and 2nd ch of Acts regarding the coming "upon" experience of the Holy Spirit. You don't have to wrestle with their salvation, of course they were saved. Remember the question that the Philippian jailor asked Paul and Silas after thinking he was going to be executed? He said, "'*Sirs, what must I do to be saved?*'" *So they said, 'Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved,'*" Acts 16:30-31 Jesus told us that God so loved the word that He gave His only begotten Son so that whosoever would *believe* on Him would never perish. These people *believed*, therefore they were saved. Jesus said that the Holy Spirit was with us and would be *in* us, and in the 1st ch of the book of Acts we read where the power to be the witness He's called us to be is imparted with the Holy Spirit has come *upon* us which is what we have in view here.

Now why didn't Philip do this? I'm personally of the persuasion that because there was such animosity between the Jews and the Samaritans that in order to keep there from being 2 separate movements taking place, that God was wanting to do away with the personal prejudices between them and bring them together as one in Christ. Because the Jews pretty much hated the Samaritans, they were the result of the northern tribes of Israel being carried off into captivity and the Assyrians and Babylonians moving into the area of Samaria and intermarrying with the lower class Israelis that were left. So they considered them compromising half breeds, but God was seeking to show them that in His eyes that, "...as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus" Gal 3:27-28 God doesn't see this race and that race, He sees one race the human race and He's not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance. So in reality this was probably more for the apostles sake than it was the Samaritans, so that they could see how that the love of God made no exceptions that in Christ we're all one.

At one time John wanted to call fire down upon them there in Luke Ch 9, now he finally gets to. But of course this is the holy fire of the Spirit of God coming upon them to endow them with power to be the witnesses God has called them to be. Interestingly this is the last time we see John in the book of Acts.

Vs18-25

So we see all these check marks regarding the genuine nature of Simon's salvation, and what it boiled down to is that his heart was not right in the sight of God in that it was poisoned by bitterness and bound by iniquity. You see Philip evidently didn't have the gift of discerning of spirits, he took what Simon said, and acted upon it. But Peter had that gift therefore he was able to discern the spirit or the nature of Simons heart, and generally speaking you don't warn someone who's headed for Heaven that they're on the highway hell. and That's what Peter did when he said, "Your money perish with you." In other words the path that you're on leads to perishing, it's not about what you give, its about what God's already given. The Holy Spirit is God's gift to those who will inherit salvation, you can't buy the Holy Spirit, the price was paid at the cross. Remember Peter said, "...you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot." 1 Peter 1:18-19 In essence Simon perceived the Holy Spirit as a "power" that he wanted control of for personal gain rather that understanding that the Holy Spirit is a person who would rule his life.

Rather than being free from sin he was still bound by iniquity, poisoned by bitterness. Bitter over the fact that he used to be the man in Samaria and now Philip is stealing his thunder, and in this he saw a way to get it back. Be careful to guard against bitterness from taking root in your heart, the only one that it'll hurt is you. It causes resentment and unforgiveness to build up in your heart against people which is unhealthy for *you*. The bible says, "*Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord: looking carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled;*" Heb 12:14-15

What do we do when we've subjected ourselves to such ends? Peter says here we're to repent and pray to God that He might forgive us, the bible says that if we'll confess our sin, come to that place where we see it like God sees it, and turn from it that God will forgive us of our sin and cleanse us of all unrighteousness. That word "thought" in vs 22 speaks of "purpose" the purpose of his heart in this whole thing seemed to be set by self centered ends, Peter said you have neither part nor portion in this matter, the message of who Jesus is and what He did to save us.

Did Simon ever repent? We don't know and its pointless to speculate.

Vs26-28

Couple things quickly, here we have a situation that is in radical contrast to Simons, what was happening in Samaria was in public, this situation is predominantly private, in Samaria God was reaching out to the multitudes, here God takes time for the one. Simon's conversion is highly questionable, this man's is concrete, but once again what we want to see is Philips faithfulness and willingness to do whatever God called him to with all his heart. From the natural perspective it was foolishness to leave the hot spot of revival to head out into the desert, God didn't even tell him why he was going, simply to go.

Now therein lies an application for you and me regarding the will of God for our lives. Because I want God to lay out in advance for me what He wants me to do, why He wants me to do it, and what the end result will be before I commit. But it doesn't work that way, God gave him a single instruction, "Arise and go towards the south down the road that leads from Jerusalem to Gaza." That was it, and until Philip obeyed, he didn't hear from the Lord again, but he obeyed immediately, it may not have made much sense from his perspective but he trusted the Lord. Now when he got there he saw this caravan heading home from Jerusalem that was headed up by this high ranking official in Ethiopia and he was in his chariot reading from the prophet Isaiah.

This tells us a couple of things, #1 He was very wealthy being one who rode in a chariot, and that he was able to purchase a copy of the scroll of Isaiah, and that #2 his wealth didn't satisfy him, he's looking for something more. Went to Jerusalem to worship God, yet left still not fulfilled, but rather frustrated with his religious experience, he wanted to be right with God, but hadn't received direction as to how that could happen.

Vs29-35

Philip obeyed the Lord in going, and when he got there God spoke to him regarding this guy reading the scriptures, gave him the 2nd step, “Go overtake the chariot” once again Philip obeyed, and when he got up there hearing the guy read he said, “Do you understand what you’re reading” the guy says, “How can I understand with out someone to teach me.” Listen, that’s the heart cry of those in need of Jesus Christ today, those who desperately desire to be right with God but don’t know what it is that they’re to do. and It’s true with all of us, there’s very few things that we know innately, generally speaking we need to be taught. Whether it be social skills, academic skills or whatever, the same holds true spiritually, that’s why God gifts teachers in the body of Christ. But He also wants to use us all to share His love, there’s not a single Christian who is unable to share with people what it takes to get right with God. Repent of your sin, believe on Jesus Christ and you will be saved.

This guy was a guy of power and wealth, yet he still needed Jesus and Philip wasn’t intimidated to share that with him, we often back away from sharing with people of social importance or power, but they need Jesus to just like you.

No doubt as soon as Philip heard what he was reading he knew that this was an open door, Isaiah 53 speaking of how One would be wounded for our transgressions, and bruised for our iniquities, being led like a lamb to the slaughter not seeking to defend Himself, but being humiliated unjustly, His life being taken from the earth. and This guys says, “Who is this speaking about?” and Beginning right there Philip began to illustrate Jesus Christ who He was as God’s Lamb, what He’d done for us in being slaughtered for our sins and Philip just ministered to him right where he was at. God will always meet us right where we’re at, and what an example that we all should long to follow, to be able to from any point in the scriptures take people to Jesus Christ knowing that in the volume of the book it’s written of and pointing towards Him.

Vs36-40

Simons heart wasn’t right in the sight of God, this eunuch believed with all his heart that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, and that’s the key, “*For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.*” Rom 10:10

In vs 39 we see how God was way ahead of Star Trek as he “beamed” Philip away, that word there “Caught” is the Greek Word “Harpazo” which is the same word used in 1st Thess 4 in regards to the rapture, Philip experienced a “mini-rapture” sort of a thing. and Now that this eunuch had been introduced to the Master, he no longer had need of the messenger, he went on his way rejoicing. and Anywhere the gospel is going forth and people are being saved, there will be an overflow of joy, just like the people of Samaria, so to with this Ethiopian eunuch. As for Philip he simply fell into and followed the flow of the Spirits work in his life just sharing the reality of a risen Saviour wherever life took him. The gospel was going forth. God help us to be those who are able to follow the flow of what the Spirit desires to do in *our* lives that we might be effective witnesses for His glory, God wants to reach the masses, but He also takes the time to meet with one.

The story of this eunuch just reminded me of a that scripture there in Jer 29:13, “*And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart.*” This guy just wanted to be right with God, and God saw that, so many people are worried about people who’ve never heard the gospel, but God is able to find, and make Himself real to those who are seeking after Him in truth, and He wants to use people like you and me to do it.

Prayer points: That we would stay true to the message of Your Word, that we would make our calling and election sure, not being committed to Christ contingent upon what He *does* for us, but who He is to us, what He’s already *done* for us. That we wouldn’t see godliness as a means of gain, but be blessed in the great gain of godliness with contentment, that we would be obedient to Your will for us to the degree You make it known. That we would walk in the Light that we’ve been given.

If you’re here and you’ve never truly given your heart to Christ but God is dealing with you on that level now than I would encourage you not to resist His Spirit but to receive His Son. Jesus was led as a lamb to the slaughter for your sin, and if you’ll repent of your sin, and surrender your life to Him, He’ll forgive you of your sin and cleanse you of all unrighteousness.