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Acts 8 "Simon"

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Let's have a word of prayer. "Father in heaven I am asking and I am praying for these dear people who are sitting in this auditorium. They have made decisions to be here today Lord. And I am asking that You would bless them beyond their wildest dreams and expectations. I am pleading Heavenly Father that You would speak to their hearts exactly what their hearts need to hear. That those who need courage would find courage, those who need wisdom would find wisdom, those who are beat down will be built up, and those who are too haughty will be brought down. Lord You can do this and I am pleading on behalf of your dear people here that you would speak to them. I pray Heavenly Father that every heart will be affected, every heart will be changed for eternity, and that miracles will take place. Lord please teach us Yourself about Your Word. We pray in Jesus' name, Amen."

You see them everywhere. People who think they are somebody. You can tell by the way they walk, by the way they dress, by the way they talk, by the way they drive. You can be driving the speed limit, just doing what is right, and they'll come up upon you, and because they are more important than you are, they'll nearly run you off the road. People who think they are somebody. When I was in High School, we had a kid, he thought he was somebody. His name was Jeff. He was a little taller than the rest of us. He was stronger than most of us. He was pretty bright and he had some musical ability, and he thought he was somebody. I don't know if he was handsome? I really don't know how to tell if a man is handsome or not? I wasn't attracted to him, so I don't know.

But Jeff really thought he was somebody. He had a way of walking you know. He'd stuff his chest out and look like muscle beach, you know and walk around. His brother was in the Navy so his brother kept him supplied with real Navy bell-bottoms which were popular in my day. Jeff was cool, just ask him. Now we lived in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan, and this one winter was a bad winter. We were getting snow every day; it just kept coming and coming and coming. And my brother and I; it was our task; we had to keep the sidewalk and the driveway shoveled. There is a special technique for shoveling snow where there is lots of snow. You start out in the sidewalk; you go down the center of the sidewalk and then you come back and you go to the edge and you throw it a distance away. Go to the edge, throw it a distance away. If you don't do that, overtime the edge will build up higher and higher and the path gets smaller and smaller. So you have to do it that way, at least that's what my Dad taught us.

And then the driveway, oh, it was just a tremendous chore. And the rule in the Arnold household was that if it snowed, before the boys could go anywhere, they had to clear the driveway, and the sidewalk. And it was a weekend, probably a Saturday morning, and I didn't know any of you folks and any of what I know now. And Saturday was a play-day for me. And there was something we all wanted to do, and we were all wanting to go to. And I can't remember what it was, but I knew the rule, we had to shovel snow first. So my brother and I were out there, and we had a little bit of an attitude, and we are shoveling the snow. Here comes Jeff. Jeff thought he was somebody. If you are wise, you can kind of turn that on an individual, and my brother is much more intelligent than I am, very quick. In fact, I am going to send him this tape just because I said that.

And Jeff came along, and Jeff thinks he is somebody. And my brother goaded him a little bit about his ability to shovel snow and if he was really as strong as he thought he was. And he worked it out so that a bet came up that Jeff could shovel more snow than my brother and me added together. And so, we gave him—it was a two dollar bet, and we gave him the driveway and we were going to work on the sidewalk. And when my brother said, “Go,” man I started, and my brother elbowed me and said, “You idiot, we are not supposed to win.” “Oh, aha” so we were just kind of picking away, and looked over, and it looked like a snow-blur was going over; he is just... By the time it was done, Jeff have proved he was somebody. Sweat pouring off of him, we gave him the two dollars, shook his hand and said, “Man, you are something else.”

Well today in the Word of God I want to study with you about a man who thought he was somebody. His name is Simon, and we find him in Acts chapter 8. Turn there please. We are looking at Acts chapter 8; we’ll begin reading at verse 9; just a little bit of background: Persecution came to the church in Jerusalem, Philip went to Samaria and he began to preach Jesus Christ to the people there. Miracles, signs and wonders were accompanied with his preaching, and many folks began to believe. Now this is where the story takes place, in Samaria. Verse 9 it says: “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,” he thought he was somebody, “...to whom they all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying, ”This man is the great power of God.”” And they heeded him because he had astonished them with his sorceries for a long time. But when they believed Philip as he preached the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, both men and women were baptized. Then Simon himself also believed; and when he was baptized he continued with Philip, and was amazed, seeing the miracles and signs which were done.”

“Now when the apostles who were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them, who, when they had come down, prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit. For as yet, He had fallen upon none of them. They had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then they laid hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit. And when Simon saw that through the laying on of the apostles’ hands the Holy Spirit was given, he offered them money saying, “Give me this power also, that anyone on whom I lay hands may receive the Holy Spirit.” But Peter said to him, “Your money perish with you, because you thought that the gift of God could be purchased with money! You have neither part nor portion in this matter, for your heart is not right in the sight of God. Repent therefore of this your wickedness, and pray God if perhaps the thought of your heart may be forgiven you. For I see that you are poisoned by bitterness and bound by iniquity. Then Simon answered and said, “Pray to the Lord for me, that none of the things which you have spoken may come upon me.”

Simon! We have quite a bit about Simon in church history. As early as 165 Justin Martyr was writing about Simon. He said, “Simon was a Samaritan from the village of Gita, and he practiced magic and was empowered by demons.” He also identified that not only did he live in Samaria, but eventually he would journey in the city of Rome. Simon, you may know about him, he is called Simon Magus. And the reason he is called Simon Magus is not because that name is found in scripture, but the name given to him by church people. Magus is taken from the Greek word, “magos” it means magician. This is Simon the Magician; Simon who could work magic and do special things.

There are number of legends about Simon. One is that he is the father of the heresy known as Gnosticism. If you have studied about Gnosticism, Simon is considered the father of Gnosticism. I am not going to tell you what Gnosticism is all about, we don't have time today, but it was a heresy that caused great trouble to the early church. There is another legend about him; I found this one kind of amusing actually. All of them are a little bit amusing. But Simon Magus told his followers that he had such unique powers that if they would bury him alive, in three days he would come out of his place of burial and he would be alive. So they did, and he didn't. And you know, you just imagine. At one point he's got to say, "Oh, oh this isn't working."

Well that's one legend about him. There is another legend about how he died. This one is even a little more fantastical in a way. There is an apocryphal book called, "The Gospel of Peter." Now as you know, the Bible is called "The Cannon." It comes from, "Canaan" which means measuring rod or reed. And there were lots people writing back in the days of the early church, but only some of it was included in the official "Canaan" and it had a very strict process it had to go through for it to be accepted as being the Word of God. So there is the Gospel of Thomas, there is the Gospel of Peter, and there are some of these other things. And you'll hear stuff like that quoted when they are talking about The Davinci Code and things like this. Well, those writings were fantastical writings that weren't accepted by the early church. They were rejected as being false and foolish.

Well there is the Gospel of Peter. And in the Gospel of Peter the story goes that Peter was instructed in a dream by God to go to Rome. Peter was told to go there because Paul had left and gone to Spain which is interesting because Paul never does make it to Spain, but anyways, this is a Gospel of Peter. And Peter goes. And the reason he goes is because Simon Magus is in Rome. And using his curious arts as it's called; he is creating a lot of havoc in the church there. And people are confused, there is lots of doubt and there are problems. So Peter goes to confront Simon. And of course why not Peter? He is the one in the story originally. So Peter goes and apparently a tremendous debate took place. There is a heated exchange, and apparently Simon said, "Well let's prove who is right by who has the most power."

And so I don't know where it took place, but there was going to be a showdown of power. And Simon Magus went first. If there is ever going to be a showdown of power, have the other person go first. Simon Magus went first. And according to the Gospel of Peter, he flew. Now I don't know if that just meant he levitated to a certain height or he swooped around? But I'd say if you are going to have a legend, let's have a legend right? So this guy is swooping around Rome, he is flying around and everybody is just tantalized by this, this is an amazing thing. It's not often you see a person doing that. And, that's he is demonstrating his power. But Peter demonstrated his. According to the story, he offered a word of prayer. Simon lost his power, crash-landed and died from the injuries. That's Simon.

You also have a word in your dictionary. In the Webster's Dictionary you have a word, "simony." Now I thought it was semony, but I looked it up. It's simony. And simony is a process of seeking to purchase either influence or position into the church by money. You buy your position. Obviously it would come from this story because that's what he sought to do. He sought to buy the power to lay hands on people and give them the Holy Spirit.

Well let's look at this more carefully here in the word of God and see what we can learn about this passage. Chapter 8 verse 9: "But there was a certain man called Simon, who previously practiced sorcery in the city." Now this word, "sorcery" is magic arts. The magic arts were rights and formulas used in order to avail a person of supernatural forces either to do good for people or to do harm. There was some sleight of hand, there was some chemistry involved where they could make you a poof you know, with colored smoke and different things that they knew how to do, but there was also some demonization involved as well. The Emperor Tiberius even had a whole assembly of magicians that followed him wherever he went. In fact, in the scriptures you will find that magicians or sorcerers are mentioned number of times.

Let's look at just one story real quick, in the Book of Acts, chapter 13. You will see that the Apostle Paul is not very patient with magicians, in particular this one. Acts 13 verse 6: "Now when they had gone through the island to Paphos, they found a certain sorcerer, a false prophet, a Jew whose name was Bar-Jesus, who was with the proconsul, Sergius Paulus, and intelligent man. This man called for Barnabas and Saul and sought to hear the word of God. But Elymas the sorcerer (for so his name is translated) withstood them, seeking to turn the proconsul away from the faith. Then Saul, who also is called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked intently at him and said, "O full of all deceit and all fraud, you son of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness, will you not cease perverting the straight ways of the Lord? And now, indeed, the hand of the Lord is upon you, and you shall be blind, not seeing the sun for a time. And immediately a dark mist fell on him, and he went around seeking someone to lead him by the hand. Then the proconsul believed, when he saw what had been done, being astonished at the teaching of the Lord."

Paul didn't have much patience for magicians. Peter didn't have much patience for magicians. In fact, the Word of God does not have a lot of good to say about them. We will not turn there, but for your own interest, if you would like to read Galatians 5 verses 19 and 20, sorcery is listed as one of the works of the flesh. In Revelation 21 verses 7 and 8, sorcery is listed as one of the sins or practices that will cause a person to be lost for eternity. The practitioners of magic arts will be destroyed.

Well let's go back to chapter 8 verse 9. It says, "But there was a certain man called Simon, who previously practiced sorcery in the city and astonished the people in Samaria, claiming that he was someone great." He claimed he was somebody. In the Amplified Version of the Bible, this is what it says, quote: "Claiming that he himself was an extraordinary and distinguished person," end of quote. Sounds like a humble guy, doesn't it? "Claiming that he himself was an extraordinary and distinguished person," he claimed to be somebody, and the people believed he was somebody. It goes on to say in the next verse, verse 10: "To whom they all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying, "This man is the great power of God.'" Now this is an amazing thing that they are saying when it says, "This man is the great power of God," it has messianic connotations.

Hold your hand there and turn to Acts chapter 5 and you'll discover that in the counsel that Gamaliel gives to the council regarding what to do with the apostles, he tells them not to fight against them. But he tells some history, verse 35 it says: "He said to them: 'Men of Israel, take

heed to yourselves what you intend to do regarding these men. For some time ago Theudas rose up, claiming to be somebody. A number of men, about four hundred, joined him. He was slain, and all who obeyed him were scattered and came to nothing. After this man, Judas of Galilee rose up in the days of the census, and drew away many people after him. He also perished, and all who obeyed him were dispersed.”

So around Jerusalem, those people had their people who thought they were somebody, and here in the region in Samaria, they had their person who thought he was somebody. In fact, they all thought he was somebody as well. Let’s go back to chapter 8. Chapter 8 verse 10 where it says, “This man is the great power of God.” They are likening him to being the Messiah. Verse 11: “And they heeded him because he had astonished them with his sorceries for a long time.” So this guy was the king in that area. For a long time, he’d been that. And imagine Phillip, you know, he goes down to Samaria where this guy is, and really, in a way you could picture this. He is walking into the mouth of the dragon and plucks the teeth right out of the mouth of dragon. I mean this is an amazing courage on Philip’s part. But Philip goes there and as we said last week, he told stories about Jesus and it changed everything. It changed everything!

Now we come to verse 12: “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. Then Simon himself also believed;” wow! You know if this was all that was said about him, all that we knew about him in fact it even goes on and says: “...and when he was baptized, he continued with Philip and was amazed seeing the miracles and signs which were done.” Simon became a believer. Simon was baptized. But yet, as we shall see at the end of the story, it is obvious, something didn’t take with him. You see it’s possible to be a believer and yet not really be a believer, to not really have Christ as our Savior. The devil believes, and he trembles, which is more than many people do. But Simon believed, and he was baptized, but something doesn’t happen in his heart.

But notice it says in verse 13, he follows Philip everywhere he goes, he is amazed seeing the miracles and signs that were done. That’s what this guy’s life has been, and that’s exciting to him, and that’s where he spends his time looking at. Now verses 14-17 are one of the greatest controversies in the Christian church today. You may not be aware of it? But I’ll run you through real quick, just so you know I am well studied. All right, verse 14: “Now when the apostles who were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them who when they had come down prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit, for as yet, He...” that’s the Holy Spirit, “...had fallen upon none of them. They had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then they laid hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit.”

There are two camps regarding this passage. One camp and it’s a very large camp, in fact a camp that includes the fastest growing section of Christianity around the world. Belief that when you accept Jesus as your Savior and you get baptized, that’s okay, but you need a second touch. You need a second touch. Somebody from the church needs to lay hands on you, then you receive the Holy Spirit. And there is another group of people, many, many people, generally most of those churches that belong to what we call, the Evangelicals. They are not fundamentalists they are evangelicals and they believe that it’s kind of a one step process. You accept Christ and receive

the Holy Spirit all in the same experience. Now the question is what is right? I will help you to see and identify who is on this side over here.

The largest single group of Christians in the world is those who belong to the Roman Catholic Faith. And they believe from this passage it's quite clear that in order to receive the Holy Spirit, you must be touched by, and sanctioned by the church. You have Peter and John there, they are apostles. They believe that the Pope and the Priest and all those working with them are descendants of the apostles. And so yes, you can accept Christ but before you really have the Holy Spirit, the church must acknowledge that and lay hands on you.

Then there is another group who theologically are, you wouldn't necessarily associate these two groups together, but they are called Pentecostals or Charismatics. And they believe, yes you accept Christ and it's Christ only for salvation, you get baptized, but then the church has to lay hands on you, when they lay hands on you, you have that second touch, and the Holy Spirit comes upon you and it's manifested in many of their beliefs by the demonstration to speaking in tongues. Well I can tell you theologically that part of it is wrong because only God can determine which Spiritual Gift you will have? And so that's wrong theologically. The question is where are we? We are confused, it's true. We believe that you accept Jesus as your Savior, and you are baptized, you receive the Holy Spirit and it's all part of one singular process. Yet, at the same time, we will have all kinds of meetings where we will lay hands on people, and set them apart for ministry, and ask the Holy Spirit to come upon them, and so forth and so on.

Here is what the situation is brothers and sisters. I don't believe it offends God one bit to lay hands on people and ask that they would be filled with the Holy Spirit. I do think it's offensive to say that's the only way. And also, just for your information and enlightenment, in the word of God in the Book of Acts this story that we are reading today, that's the only place that this ever happens. Where people accept Christ and are baptized, and don't receive the Holy Spirit. Now granted, Paul will come across couple of folks who are baptized in Christ, but they hadn't heard of the Holy Spirit.

And what you have when you begin to understand the dynamics of what has taken place; you see a beautiful picture of God, a beautiful picture of God. And here is what is happening. The Samaritans and the Hebrews hated each other. This is the Old Testament "Hat-field and McCoy's," and it bubbled over into the New Testament where Jesus would use illustrations of love, how each would care for the other. They hated each other. They hated each other for so long, and so violently, they forgot what the issue was. Now I know what the issue was historically, I am not going to tell you. But they forgot what the issue was. They just hated each other.

Now because of persecution, Philip leaves Jerusalem, carries the Gospel to the Samaritans, they accept Jesus Christ as their Savior. They are baptized, and the church back home says, "You know what? We need to send couple of fellows down there and let everybody know we really are in this with them." And when they come there, and Peter and John pray for the people, they receive the Holy Spirit. They can carry back to all the converts from Judaism, "Hey, we were there, it's real, they are just like us, God loves them just as much as He loves us." That's a beautiful picture of God. Bringing all people into His kingdom, all of us are important to Him.

Well let's go on with our story. So we come to verse 18. "Now when Simon saw that through the laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Spirit was given, he offered them money! "Yes, I'd like to be able to do that. That seems like a good and noble thing" He just wants to fill people with the Holy Spirit. And you get the impression when you read here that that's what's happening. He says in verse 19: "Give me this power also, that anyone on whom I lay hands may receive the Holy Spirit." Peter is not impressed, verse 20. "But Peter said to him, 'Your money perish with you...'" Now I want you to know that when that was translated, the translators translated it so you could read this to your children. Peter didn't say, "Your money perish with you!" He says, "You and your money can go to hell." He went back to his fisherman days. He made it clear how he felt about it.

"Your money perish with you because you thought that the gift of God could be purchased with money!" Do you think God can be bought? Do you think He can be purchased with the money? And he goes on to say, "Repent therefore of this your wickedness, and pray God if perhaps the thought of your heart may be forgiven you. For I see that you are poisoned by bitterness and bound by iniquity," and Simon answered and said: "Pray to the Lord for me, that none of the things which you have spoken may come upon me." When I read this story, I said, "Oh man, he got it," you know. There he is humbling himself before Peter and John. He is saying, "Oh please, pray for me." And it just reminds you of James where it talks about you know, coming to the Elders and other places in there where it talks about "The prayers of a righteous man avail much."

And so I just entered into this thing, "Oh good, Simon, he got it" until I did some studying. Do you know what it's saying in the Greek? In the context what Simon is saying, "Hey look! If anybody is going to have to beg God, you do it for me. I don't have time." That's basically what he is saying. He never changes. He doesn't accept Christ. He doesn't understand it, and he goes away and becomes a constant nuisance to the New Church.

It's a fascinating thing to contemplate this story. Especially as regards to, well how does it apply to us? You know, there are some days that I am so wrought up that I wish I had a magician to curse. You know Peter got to, and Paul got to, and then they were sanctified; I'd like to do that sometimes. Do you ever get so wrought up you wish somebody would try to rob you? So you could, you had an excuse... Well, I don't think that's what the story is about. So I began contemplating this thing. In verse 20, it just is amazing: "Your money perish with you because you thought that the gift of God could be purchased with money."

Look at Ephesians chapter 2 real quickly. We've got just two more verses here today. Paul is writing to the church in Ephesus and he says in verses 8 and 9, a text so familiar to us. He says, "For by grace you have been saved through faith and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God. It's not of works, lest anyone should boast." If you go to Romans chapter 6, we'll read verse 23. These passages you probably know by heart. Romans 6 verse 23 simply says, "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." "Your money perish with you because you thought that the gift of God could be purchased with money."

Simon claimed to be somebody! Simon demonstrated that by power. He fooled many people, but he did not fool God. Simon liked what he saw in Philip. Simon liked what he saw in Peter and in John, and he was willing to pay for it. But I am telling you brothers and sisters. No money, no works, no lifestyle, no sacrifice can purchase what they had. It is a gift of God. And that gift is found in the person of Jesus Christ.

You know, we all want to be somebody. It's interesting when you preach; you can be preaching the same phrase different directions. You can tell people that they are somebody because of Christ dying for them and the value that God has placed on them. Or you can say, "It's wrong to think that you are somebody because that's too haughty." It just depending on which point you are trying to make. But here this man thought he was somebody. Others thought he was somebody, and he sought to buy from God that which can only be received as a gift. And you know what Peter identified was the problem? He was poisoned by bitterness and bound by sin.

I'll tell you brothers and sisters, anyone of us, who had been caught up in trying to please God and get God's favor by what we do or what we don't do, is ultimately going to find ourselves poisoned by bitterness and bound by iniquity. Salvation and everything associated with it is a gift from God that can not be purchased by anything we do or not do. It can only be received, it can only be received! And do you want to know if you are somebody? I'll tell you what the Bible says we are. You are somebody! You are nothing but an old-fashioned sinner. That's who you are and that's who I am. But the good news is, Christ came to die for sinners. He came to die for us. And in Him we are somebody.

And I don't know what your religious experience has been? I don't know if you have been trying and trying and trying, and just finding bitterness growing in your heart? But I do know this: You can't buy salvation. It is a gift from God, but you can receive salvation anytime. And I am going to ask you right now, if you would like to receive salvation? If you would like to say, "Yes, I want Jesus in my heart, I want to receive the gift of eternal life and I want to quit trying to think I can buy it by something I do or say, or don't do or don't say, or don't eat or don't wear, or don't think, or you know all the don'ts. But if you just want to say, "Oh Lord, I am going to accept Jesus as my Savior, the gift that He is, and I am going to ask Him to come into my heart, if you would like to say that I am going to ask you to stand right where you are at.

"Father in Heaven thank you Lord for Jesus, thank you that salvation is a gift and we don't have to seek to earn it, to pay for it; we can't buy it by anything we do or don't do. But we stand before You today because Lord we are receiving the gift of Your Son. And in so doing, we know we are receiving the gift of eternal life. Please Lord; come into our hearts, we ask in Jesus' name, Amen."