

“Even Simon Himself Believed”
(Acts 8:9-24)

Introduction: As we go out to bear witness of the Gospel and to seek to bring others to Christ, we need to be aware that people will respond in a number of different ways. Some people will not listen to us at all. Some of these will be indifferent, others will become angry, and still others may try to persecute us in some way. But there will also be those who do listen. Among these some will not believe what we are saying, while others will. Of those who do believe, some will be saved and some will not.

Now this last statement may cause some of you some difficulty unless I explain what I mean by this. The Bible, as well as our own experience, tells us that a person can hear the facts of the Gospel, that they can even believe that those facts are true, and yet still be unconverted. But now how can this be? Isn't it true that you must only believe in Christ in order to be saved? Yes. But merely believing the facts of the Gospel to be true is not all that is involved in biblical faith. A person may believe everything the Bible says to be true and still be void of saving faith. They may believe that Christ is the Son of the Triune God, that He became a man, that He died for sinners, that He is the only way of salvation which God has offered, and that they must trust in Him personally to be saved, and yet they may still be lost. The devils believe these things. The damned in hell believe these things. And yet they are unconverted. There may even be those who are convinced that they have believed on Christ and are saved, and yet still be unregenerate. What is it that they still lack? Obviously, the grace of God which gives a person a new heart, that takes away their heart of stone and gives to them a heart of flesh, in other words, the change which comes sovereignly from above, which opens one's eyes to the beauty of God, His Christ, and His holiness. The theologians of old called this knowledge, saving knowledge, a knowledge which is made mighty by God's Holy Spirit to save. It is important for us to understand that there are these different kinds of knowledge, and different kinds of faith, both for our own sakes, and for the sakes of those to whom we seek to minister the Gospel. Our text this morning contains a very good example of this very principle. What it teaches us is that

A person may believe the facts of the Gospel and yet be unconverted.

I. Let Us Take a Brief Look First at the Context of Our Passage.

- A. In verse one we see that a great persecution had arisen against the church in Jerusalem.
 - 1. You will recall that Stephen, a man full of the Holy Spirit, had boldly testified against the Jews and indicted them for their rebellion against God and for their killing the Righteous One, the Lord Jesus Christ.
 - 2. You will also recall that they didn't listen to him, but instead stoned him to death.
 - 3. But they didn't stop here. Their anger and hatred of Christ was such that they felt that they had to do what they could to destroy His church, for it stood as a witness against their evil deeds.
 - a. Here we already have a good example given to us in the Jews of those who say that they are believers in and followers of God, but yet show by their works that they are really followers of the devil.
 - b. They had the OT Scriptures, which Paul said were alone sufficient to equip a man

for the service of God, and they even claimed to believe them. But they were still unconverted men.

- c. It is possible to believe the facts, and yet have a heart untouched by the grace of God.

- 4. They persecuted the church of God, and as a result, the saints were scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria. The only ones who remained in Jerusalem, according to Luke, were the apostles.

B. But now look at what the Lord brings about because of that persecution. In verse four, we read, “Therefore, those who had been scattered went about preaching the word. And Philip went down to the city of Samaria and began proclaiming Christ to them.”

- 1. This persecution has a good result.

- a. The Bible tells us plainly that the Lord ordains whatsoever comes to pass, both the good things and the bad.
- b. But when He ordains that there will be evil, and allows the evil actions of men to take place, He always does so for a *good purpose*.
- c. The persecution of His church is not a good thing considered by itself.
- d. But the preaching of His Gospel throughout Judea and Samaria is, and that was God’s purpose in bringing the persecution. We know that it was because that is what it resulted in.
- e. This is just to remind you that the Lord has promised that He will work everything which comes into your life together for good, as well, including the bad things, if you love Him and are called according to His purpose (Rom. 8:28).
- f. Not everything which comes into your life is good, but it has a good purpose as it comes from the hand of God, and you must look to that good when He takes you through times of trial and difficulty.

- 2. God brought persecution, and the result was that it caused His people to go out and evangelize, including Philip, who went down to a city of Samaria.

- a. Remember that Philip was one of the six who were chosen by the disciples to oversee the daily distribution of food to the Hellenistic widows.
- b. He was a man “of good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom” (Acts 6:3). We know this because he was chosen on the basis of these qualifications to become one of the first deacons of the church.
- c. These characteristics mark each individual whom the Lord has used or will use in the extension of His kingdom. If you want to be useful to the Lord, you must have them as well.
 - (i) You must seek to live a life blameless before man, who sees only some of what you do, and God, who sees all.
 - (ii) You must strive to live a life under the control of God’s Spirit. You must read the Word and obey it, you must use the means of grace regularly and frequently, and you must not quench His work of making you holy by grieving Him through sin.
 - (iii) And you must gain the experience, which can only come through time, of applying God’s word to your life and to others.

- (iv) The more you grow in these things, the more you will glorify God, and the more useful your life will be to Him.
- d. These things were true of Philip, and that is why the Lord chose him to go to this city of Samaria to preach the Gospel, after the disciples were scattered by the persecution.

II. And Here Is Where We See the Instructive Results of His Preaching.

A. First, notice the environment into which Philip preached.

1. This apparently was not the city where Christ met the woman at the well, for in that city there were many who believed in Christ.
2. Here, there was a high level of superstition and an apparent ignorance about the Gospel.
 - a. Here, we are told there was a man named Simon, who was practicing magic and all the people of the city were astounded by him. Luke says, "And they all, from smallest to greatest, were giving attention to him . . . they were giving him attention because he had for a long time astonished them with his magic arts" (vv. 10 -11).
 - b. The people looked to him for direction in spiritual things. They called him, "The Great Power of God."
 - c. But now consider who it was they were looking to. Simon was a magician. He practiced magic. What Luke has in mind here is not that Simon was skilled at sleight of hand, but that he was a sorcerer, a man who practiced witchcraft, who invoked the power of the evil one for wicked purposes.
 - d. And he apparently was successful in doing this -- if we can call this success -- for the things he did were so miraculous that he had captured the attention of the people of Samaria, and they all seemed to believe him when he claimed that he was someone great.
 - e. Philip seems to have come to a people who were held fast bound by the devil, a people very similar to the culture in which we live. We also live among a people who have turned from God to the things of the devil. The fact that our societal vices are a little different from theirs doesn't change matters at all.
 - f. Philip came to them armed only with the Gospel which is a mighty spiritual weapon, able to destroy the stronghold of the enemy.
 - g. We must come to our people with the same weapon, refined and honed through the power of prayer.

B. But now notice the results of Philip's preaching.

1. When Philip began to preach, demonstrating to them that his message was from the Lord by his miracles, they began listening to him, instead of Simon.
 - a. Luke says, "and the multitudes with one accord were giving attention to what was said by Philip, as they heard and saw the signs which he was performing. For in the case of many who had unclean spirits, they were coming out of them shouting with a loud voice; and many who had been paralyzed and lame were healed."
 - b. When these things happened, they left off following Simon and began listening to Philip.

2. The result was that many of them began to believe.
 - a. Luke records, "But when they believed Philip preaching the good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were being baptized, men and women alike."
 - b. They heard the good news of the forgiveness of sins through repentance and faith in Christ, they believed that it was true, and they received the covenant sign of baptism to show their reception into the visible church.
 - c. God is able to overcome the lies of the wicked one and the bondage that he brings, but the way He does it is through the Gospel.
 3. But what is even more remarkable about this event is that Simon also believed.
 - a. Luke writes, "And even Simon himself believed; and after being baptized, he continued on with Philip; and as he observed signs and great miracles taking place, he was constantly amazed."
 - b. Here is one who formerly practiced witchcraft, which indicated that he was further away from God than most, who believed the truth, was baptized, and was seemingly following Christ.
 - c. But we shall see that what appears on the surface of things is not always the way they are.
- C. Now comes the occasion which revealed that this so-called "conversion" of Simon was merely a flush of affection, a following of Christ motivated by something other than love for Him and a desire for His honor.
1. Luke records, "Now when the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent them Peter and John, who came down and prayed for them, that they might receive the Holy Spirit. For He had not yet fallen upon any of them; they had simply been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then they began laying their hands on them, and they were receiving the Holy Spirit."
 - a. I want us to pause here for a moment to see the significance of this event.
 - b. The apostles in Jerusalem had heard that Samaria had received the word of God, and that many of them showed hopeful indications of conversion.
 - c. However, Luke tells us that they had not yet received the Holy Spirit; He had not yet fallen upon any of them.
 - d. Now Luke does not mean by this that they didn't possess the Spirit at all. If they didn't, none of them could have possibly been saved.
 - e. Paul writes in Romans 8:9, "But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him." If these people belonged to Christ, which we can assume they did, then they must have been indwelt by the Spirit.
 - f. I believe that many here were converted, but that they had not yet received the extraordinary manifestations of the Spirit of God.
 - g. We see a similar example of this at Pentecost. Before that day, before the Spirit had been poured out upon the disciples, they too were already converted. Jesus had told them earlier to rejoice, because their names were written in heaven. How could the disciples have loved Jesus and followed Him, if they were still dead in their trespasses and sins? Was it merely for the sake of knowing that they would be converted? No. They were converted.

- h. And Jesus told them, as His regenerate followers, to go into the city and wait until they received the promise of the Father, which was the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.
 - i. The same was true with many of these in Samaria. They had received union with Christ through the power of the Spirit, but they had not yet received the *visible manifestation* of the Spirit, which came with His filling and empowering.
 - j. I believe that the Lord made it visible, so that He could demonstrate beyond doubt to His disciples that He had included them in His kingdom. This certainly seemed to be the effect it had on Peter when he saw the Spirit poured out on Cornelius and his household. It also testified of the same thing to the apostles and brethren in Jerusalem when Peter reported it.
 - k. And the fact that there needed to be an apostle present there in Samaria, as there was in the case of Cornelius, shows that God takes seriously the unity of His church. If a church had developed in Samaria apart from this *authoritative* contact, the rift which existed for centuries might have continued. But this was done to show that there is only one church, one which includes not only Jews, but also Greeks and Samaritans. As Paul stated it, “*There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all*” (Eph. 4:4-6). This is a principle expressed again and again in Scripture. There is only one church. And the fact that we now are all torn apart by false doctrine and practice is only the result of sin, something which will only be rectified when Christ comes again.
2. Now lastly, let us look at how this event revealed the truth about Simon’s heart. We read, “Now when Simon saw that the Spirit was bestowed through the laying on of the apostles’ hands, he offered them money, saying, ‘Give this authority to me as well, so that everyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit.’ But Peter said to him, ‘May your silver perish with you, because you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money! You have no part or portion in this matter, for your heart is not right before God. Therefore repent of this wickedness of yours, and pray the Lord that if possible, the intention of your heart may be forgiven you. For I see that you are in the gall of bitterness and in the bondage of iniquity.’ But Simon answered and said, ‘Pray to the Lord for me yourselves, so that nothing of what you have said may come upon me’” (vv. 18-24).
- a. Here is a man who was deep into witchcraft, but yet had turned away from it.
 - b. Here is a man who also had believed what Philip was preaching and had even been baptized in the name of Christ.
 - c. And yet when he saw that the Spirit was bestowed through the laying on of hands, he thought that it was an authority which could be bought with money. This, by the way, is where the term “simony” comes from, which refers to the selling of ecclesiastical office for money.
 - d. In this one act, Simon revealed the true intention of his heart, as well as what he actually understood of Christianity.
 - e. He thought that Peter and John were merely doing another kind of magic and that this power could be bought with money. And he wanted it so that others might think highly of him too; he wanted to be an apostle with this authority, although he did not really want the heart of an apostle.

- f. And Peter, recognizing this blasphemous conception Simon had of the Holy Spirit, pronounced a curse on him, “May your silver perish with you, because you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money!” “Simon, you are on your way to the fiery hell and your worthless money is going to be cast into it with you!”
- g. He also said, “You have no part or portion in this matter, for your heart is not right before God.” “You have nothing to do with eternal life or with God, for your heart is not humbled before Him, but is full of sin.”
- h. “Therefore,” Peter said, “repent of this wickedness of yours, and pray the Lord that if possible, the intention of your heart may be forgiven you. For I see that you are in the gall of bitterness and in the bondage of iniquity.” “Turn away, Simon, repent of this great wickedness. Pray that the Lord will forgive you, if forgiveness can be had for such a crime as this. For you are full of bitter envy and jealousy and still in bondage to your sins.”
- i. It may be that Simon was guilty of blaspheming the Holy Spirit, the sin which never has forgiveness. This may be why Peter expressed some doubt as to whether or not Simon could be forgiven. If this was the case, the Spirit of God would leave him entirely alone, and he would never repent. And if he did not repent, he could never be forgiven.
- j. Whatever the case was, Simon seemed to be concerned about it, for he replied to Peter, “Pray to the Lord for me yourselves, so that nothing of what you have said may come upon me.” This was not the prayer of a man who was genuinely concerned that He had offended the infinitely holy God, but one that was afraid for his own skin, which is typical of those who seek God only for what they can get out of Him.
- k. But the point to see here is that Simon was a man who apparently *believed* the Gospel and was *baptized*, and yet was so far from being a true Christian that he may even have been guilty of the unpardonable sin! How deceiving appearances can be! How deceived we are when we think that everyone who professes Christ is actually a true Christian.
- l. It is true that Christ calls us to embrace as a Christian all who call on His name and show forth the fruits of a godly life, but it is not true that all who do are actually converted.
- m. In closing, I would ask you to search your own hearts to see what it is that motivates you to follow Christ. Are you truly motivated to serve and follow Him out of an ardent love for Him and desire for His glory? You are thankful for His mercies, and properly so; but is there also a true sense of His beauty and glory which draws you irresistibly to give yourself wholly to Him? If so, then praise God for His marvelous work of grace in your heart.
- n. But if your motivation should fall in line with Simon’s, beware! If you follow Christ only for what you might personally gain, you will find that even what you think you have will escape your grasp, and that your end will be the same as Simon’s, unless you repent.
- o. If this is the case with you, won’t you turn to Christ this morning? Won’t you accept His offer of free grace and mercy, by turning from your sins and coming to Him? If you find that your heart will not let you, won’t you call on Him today and ask Him for His grace and mercy to overcome your hardened heart?

- p. Christ calls to you this morning. If you hear His voice, answer His call and you shall be saved. And then you, like the Samaritans of old, will truly have cause for rejoicing. Amen.