

“Simon, the Magician”
(Acts 8:9-13)

I. Introduction.

A. Orientation.

1. Last week, we saw persecution escalating against the church.
 - a. Stephen had stood his ground and declared the Gospel to God’s enemies.
 - (i) But they had rejected that Gospel and put him to death.
 - (ii) That didn’t satisfy them; they wanted more:
 - (a) The death of Stephen opened the floodgates of persecution.
 - (b) Now they wanted to stamp out Christianity entirely.
 - b. Saul appears to be the one who spearheaded this persecution:
 - (i) He greedily desired Stephen’s death (was in hearty agreement).
 - (ii) He began entering the homes of Christians, sparing no one, dragging both men and woman off to prison to await trial and execution.
 - (iii) It looked as though the church was threatened with extinction.
 - (iv) But of course the Lord would never allow that to happen.
2. This persecution – like everything else – was a part of God’s plan. His enemies meant it for evil – and He would punish them accordingly – but God meant it for good – He overruled it for the good of His church. He brought at least two good effects through this persecution:
 - a. He used it to give the disciples greater boldness:
 - (i) Stephen’s boldness and death encouraged them: here was someone willing to lay down his life for Christ.
 - (ii) And so they were not afraid to own Christ publicly by gathering His servant Stephen, giving him a proper funeral and mourning over him.
 - b. But He also used it to direct His church into the next stage of missionary endeavor:
 - (i) The disciples were scattered throughout the regions of both Judea and Samaria.
 - (ii) They went everywhere, preaching salvation through faith in Christ and repentance from their sins.
 - (iii) Jerusalem – the center of OT Judaism, God’s Old Covenant people – had rejected the Gospel a second time, and now it was time to move on.
 - (iv) The fields had become white to harvest in other areas.
 - (a) They most likely returned to those places Christ and His disciples had been earlier.
 - (b) And now the seed planted before was bearing fruit.
 - c. We especially see this in Samaria.
 - (i) Philip went down to Samaria and began proclaiming Christ to them.

- (ii) They all listened and watched as the Lord added His testimony through signs and wonders – miracles that couldn't be explained or dismissed.
- (iii) Many were converted, and they rejoiced in the Lord's mercy and grace to them.

B. Preview.

1. This is where we pick up the account today as Luke continues to explain what the Lord did in Samaria:
 - a. Apparently, Satan had developed a stronghold in that city by empowering a man to deceive them with false miracles: Simon.
 - b. Simon was a magician, one who practiced sorcery/witchcraft, who with the devil's help had developed a great following, even among those who had been worshiping God (the Samaritans had embraced the Old Covenant religion).
 - c. But when Philip arrived, preaching the Gospel and performing genuine miracles, the people stopped following Simon and began listening to Philip.
 - d. More than that, Simon also believed and was baptized.
 - e. The Lord, through the Gospel, broke the enemy's grip on Samaria.
2. This morning, we're going to consider two things from our passage:
 - a. Samaria was dominated by the kingdom of darkness, through Simon the magician, before Philip came preaching the Gospel.
 - b. But the Lord Jesus, through the Gospel, broke Satan's hold on the Samaritans and plundered His house there.

II. Sermon.

- A. First, the kingdom of darkness had a hold on the Samaritans through a man named Simon: Simon, known also as Simon Magus (or Simon, the magician) had gathered a following among the Samaritans through false signs and lying wonders. "Now there was a man named Simon, who formerly was practicing magic in the city and astonishing the people of Samaria" (v. 9).
 1. He was practicing sorcery or witchcraft.
 - a. We have no reason to doubt that it was genuine. Satan does have the power to make things happen that look like miracles to us.
 - b. Satan may have had a particular reason for deceiving these Samaritans:
 - (i) We considered last week that Christ had earlier sown the seed of the Gospel in Samaria through His encounter with the woman at the well.
 - (ii) As a result, the whole city in which she lived believed in Him.
 - (iii) Word must certainly have spread from that city to the surrounding cities, especially since they, as well as the Jews, were waiting for the Messiah's appearance.
 - (iv) Perhaps Satan raised Simon up after Jesus had come to create a deception, so that the Gospel wouldn't advance very far.
 - (v) He generally tries to undo whatever God is doing; creating false revivals in the middle of true ones; trying to discredit the genuine work of God, or

to crush God's work while it's still in its infancy. This is what he was doing here.

2. This was Satan's purpose, but Simon may have been completely unaware of it.
 - a. So many today who are involved in false religions – such as Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons, Muslims, even atheists – don't necessarily realize that they're serving Satan or are being deceived by him.
 - b. Simon may have just wanted recognition: He claimed to be someone great.
 - (i) And the people believed him: they thought he was someone great, calling him "the Great Power of God" (v. 10).
 - (ii) He convinced them that they should respect him, perhaps that he was even a divine person. "Justin Martyr says that he would be worshipped as . . . the chief god" (Henry).
 - (iii) Some believe he claimed to be the Son of God, or the Messiah:
 - (a) Perhaps the Samaritans had a more accurate view of who the Messiah would be: that He would be God in human flesh, that this was the time of His coming, that this man was He, after all, they hadn't seen Jesus.
 - (b) Or they may have looked to him as an angel or a prophet.
 - (c) But certainly, they saw him as more than a mere man because of the miracles.
 - (1) Notice how easily they were deceived into thinking this work of Satan was really the work of God.
 - (2) People believe that if something is supernatural, or beyond their ability, that it must come from God.
 - (3) In most cases, it comes from the devil.
 - (iv) Certainly, whatever Simon was doing, he was doing for his own ends and purposes – not for God's glory and honor.
 - c. And Luke tells us that all the people listened to him, from the least to the greatest – the young and old, the poor and rich, the governed as well as the governors.
 - (i) They listened for a long time.
 - (ii) Think about the damage this did:
 - (a) While he tried to get people to look to him, he drew their attention away from Christ.
 - (b) And as long as he did, not only were they in danger of perishing forever in hell, he was as well, with an even greater punishment for his deception.
 - (c) Consider the parallels that exist between this situation and what we see happening on so-called "Christian Television." How many are there that claim to perform miracles and draw so many to follow them, while they proclaim a false Gospel of peace, health and prosperity?
 - (d) Pride and ambition will always end up injuring not only ourselves, but it will lead others away from the truth as well.

- B. But thankfully, by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, God sent the Gospel into Samaria, to brake his hold on them and plunder his house: “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” (v. 12).
1. First, God broke Satan’s hold on the Samaritans.
 - a. When Philip did genuine miracles, the Samaritans stopped looking to Simon and began paying attention to Philip and his message.
 - (i) God showed them His power – in contrast to Satan’s – and they were converted.
 - (ii) It wasn’t just the miracles that converted them:
 - (a) The Pharisees saw them, couldn’t deny them, didn’t submit to them, but only thought about how to do away with Jesus.
 - (b) But the Samaritans, both men and women – by God’s grace – accepted them, listened to the Word and believed.
 - (c) They were help captive by Satan, but someone stronger than Satan came and set them free.
 - b. Notice too Philip’s confidence in the Lord’s working.
 - (i) He wasn’t intimidated by Simon: he knew that he was a false prophet.
 - (ii) He boldly did God’s work without worrying about him.
 - (iii) One of the ways this principle of bold confrontation of the enemy worked itself out in the history of the church through missionary work was that the missionaries would show the people they were evangelizing that God had greater mana (spiritual power) than their gods.
 - (a) If they were animists, the missionaries would cut down their sacred trees and totems, and break down their sacred stones and altars.
 - (b) When their gods didn’t retaliate, they knew that God’s mana was greater.
 - (c) We need to have this kind of confidence in the truth we hold over against what the world believes to be true.
 - (d) We don’t have to prove what we believe is true, we simply need to know it is and use it.
 - (e) Philip preached the truth and Satan’s kingdom fell in Samaria.
 2. God also broke Satan’s hold on Simon, at least partly. “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” (v. 13).
 - a. God not only converts, He also does a work short of conversion called awakening.
 - (i) The miracles amazed him: they were different than those he performed.
 - (ii) His amazement was mixed with fear, as he paid closer attention to what Philip had to say.
 - (iii) Here was a more powerful mana than his: and this caused him to believe, to turn to Christ, even as in the past whole tribes or nations would turn to Him, even though not all were converted.

- (iv) Even though Simon wasn't converted, this was still God's work:
 - (a) Remember many of the Pharisees saw the miracles and heard the Gospel and were incensed by them.
 - (b) They tried to find ways to disprove them; wished Jesus would stop doing them.
 - (c) But Simon feared, repented of his magic arts and believed in Christ.
 - (d) The psalmist writes, "How awesome are Your works! Because of the greatness of Your power Your enemies will give feigned obedience to You" (Psalm 66:3).

- b. Simon was so convinced and convincing that he was admitted into the church through baptism.
 - (i) The doors of God's kingdom are open to the most hardened of sinners who will repent and believe.
 - (ii) The doors of the church are open to all who do so, even though their confession and repentance may not be genuine: we call this the judgment of charity.
 - (a) Only God knows the heart: men and women aren't admitted to the visible church because they have regenerate hearts.
 - (b) They are admitted because they believe they do and live consistent with that profession: we call this a credible profession of faith; which we are to believe as long as the evidence allows us to.
 - (c) This should remind us not to base our assurance of heaven on the fact that we're members of a church – being a member of the visible church, if it is a biblical church, can strengthen our assurance, but it can't replace genuine faith in Christ.
 - (d) We must make sure that we truly believe in Christ, that we are repenting of all our sins, and that we are following Jesus as best we are able from the heart.
 - (iii) Simon eventually apostatized, as we'll see this evening, but not right away.
 - (a) He followed Philip:
 - (i) Before he wanted others to follow him, but now he followed Philip.
 - (ii) Perhaps he wanted to know the secret of his ability, since he was constantly amazed at the signs and miracles Philip was doing.
 - (b) Simon tasted of the heavenly gift and of the power of the age to come, but he never was a partaker of it. We'll explore this further this evening.
 - (c) But for now, let's examine our hearts to make sure we are trusting in Christ and repenting of all our sins, and if we are, let's thank the Lord that He had plundered us from Satan's kingdom by His almighty power. Amen.