

Text: Acts 8:5-25, Title: The First False Believer, Date/Place: NRBC, 12/30/07, AM

- A. Opening illustration: Talk about Dr Bennett and tell of his estimation of the greatest heresy plaguing Southern Baptists today. Talk about the list of names that need to be removed from off of our church roll, and all the stories I get of family members “who are saved, but...”
- B. Background to passage: Immediately following the death of Stephen the disciples were scattered out from Jerusalem by persecution surrounding Stephen. And this scattering takes one of our newly appointed deacons to Samaria to preach the gospel. This was a bold move considering the history between the Jews and Samaritans. However, it yielded much fruit as well as the beginning of the ingathering of non-Jewish people into the kingdom of God. We see signs and wonders attesting to the gospel there and the direct link they exhibit toward evangelism. We have a lack of power, just as we have a lack of treasure. And just as Jesus said would happen, as the gospel seed was scattered there were some that never believed and some that believed for a while. And not counting Judas, we have the first false profession of the church era detailed in the NT. Let me preface my other remarks by saying that it is not completely our job to decide whether or not other are truly saved. However, the bible gives ample warning about the things that accompany salvation, not only so that we can have inner peace and security, but so that we can assure and warn others with truth.
- C. Main thought: the truth that false believers are fairly common in the church ministries needs to be taught as a necessary corollary to eternal security of genuine believers, and is necessary to understanding false gospels.

#### A. Unreliable Indicators of Saving Faith (v. 13)

1. Here we see a couple of things that sometimes we attribute to genuinely saved people that may not be good indicators of that salvation. First, we have a profession. It says that Simon believed too. Maybe he said he believed, maybe he prayed a prayer or walked an aisle, but in some way, he followed the crowd and professed faith. To believe in vain, means without the proper purpose or object. Second, we have ritual. Simon was baptized and began to follow Philip. He recognized true power having been a magician most of his life. Thirdly, we see amazement. Simon was enamored with the power and the signs and wonders.
2. 1 Cor 15:1-2, 2 Cor 6:1, James 2:14, Luke 8:13-14
3. Illustration: we seen many people get saved at 13, 14, 15, after having been baptized at 8 years old, millions of people in America go through religious motions periodically, and it eases their conscience, George Barna and his research about “born again” Christians, tell about the former youth group from Living Stone,
4. It is surely no surprise to you that everyone who says they are a Christian is really not a Christian. Many have believed in vain. Profession is not necessarily possession. This is why we should be careful in assuring someone of their salvation too quickly and without examination. Testimony is great, but it must be accompanied with other biblical realities within the life of the person professing. 2) Religious rituals like baptism, church membership, communion, church attendance, prayer, bible-reading, etc. are not conclusive evidence of saving faith. You can do these things and not be saved. In fact, Jesus says that there will be many that do. You have probably know several people who have been baptized in the wake of a revival or crusade, and then you never see them again. Or they could be the people that you sit beside on a weekly or monthly basis. Good, moral, church-going, red-blooded S. Georgians. They just don't know Jesus, but because they say that they believe and come to church, they feel fine, even though there is no living relationship with Christ. 3) And finally, there are those who put their faith in a lot of things besides Christ alone. They want the benefits, healing, miracles, relationship fixes, social standing, financial help, business contacts, the soothing of their conscience, without the relationship with Jesus, without repentance, without sacrifice, without realigned priorities, without cost. And of course, with the excesses of the charismatic movement there are many who are affixed upon the miracles and signs and wonders that can occur with a relationship with Jesus without faith in a Jesus who might not do any miracles at that time in their life. The bottom line is that we must stop fooling ourselves and falsely comforting others whose lives in no way reflect Christ, or His transforming grace. We must warn those who are lost and think they are saved. We must recommit to biblical view of salvation, rather than an American one. Trusting in anything but the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ is insufficient, however pervasive it is. It turns the gospel into a works “do more” or a moralistic “do better” gospel.

## B. **More Reliable Indicators of Saving Faith (v. 17-21)**

1. These are things that we don't see in Simon's experience here. The first biblical indicator of saving faith is the experiential presence of the Holy Spirit. Do a little side-note explanation about the charismatic doctrine of subsequence, and give the biblical understanding, esp. related to the present text. Secondly, motivation is a good indicator. Simon wanted the power and the self-glory, and the money that the apostles had as they apparently had called down the Spirit. By the way, God sends the Spirit on His time in His way. Thirdly, and probably most importantly, the heart is the deepest indicator of genuine salvation. Peter says, "to hell with you and your money...your heart is not right (or straight) with God." The bible speaks of a heart of stone being removed, and a heart of flesh being replaced. This is at the core of the gospel, not always fully discernable, but crucial. Hearts of stone can't thirst for the God of the bible. They don't understand spiritual things. The fact is that genuine salvation changes the heart, transforms you on the inside. The Spirit revealed this to Peter, but in reality, this is only something that you can know about yourself.
2. Rom 8:16, 7:22-24, Luke 6:44-46, 1 John 2:3,
3. **Illustration:** God the Spirit cannot take up residence in the heart of man without revealing himself. "For the Christian, heaven isn't simply a destination, but a motivation." –Wiersbe, Al Johnson was a Kansas man who made headlines after being saved confessed to a bank robbery that he got away with when he was 19 years old, and even though the statute of limitations had run out, he voluntarily paid back the money he had taken, one writer said, "that's a radical reconstruction of the heart—repentance,"
4. We are so scared of the charismatic movement and so committed to orthodoxy that we forget that the biblical testimony is that the Spirit will produce some sort of experiential aspect in the life of the believer. You should be able to feel and sense and give witness to the working of the Holy Spirit in your life and the lives of those around you that claim Christ. Does He lead them, speak through them, minister to others through them, produce fruit in them, and manifest the gifts in them? Does the Spirit in them bear witness to the Spirit in you? This is a hard thing to analyze in others, and hard to analyze objectively in ourselves. 2) But we must ask the questions of why do we come to church, why do we live for Jesus, why do we exist? The motivations of a genuine believer will be that of glory to Christ, the honor of God, and the advancement of the kingdom. Are we believing the gospel, and putting our only hope in him. 3) So, how do I know if my heart is changed? The longings and desires at the inner most part of a person are an indicator that we can kinda see. Do you desire Him, long for Him, seek after Him, and order your life around Him? Of course, consistent Christian behavior will flow from a heart that is really transformed. For you shall know them by their fruit, but moralism doesn't not equal Christianity. There are plenty of good, moral people who are not Christians, nor do they profess to be. Sometimes here in the south, casual Christianity is preached with only a moral qualification, and false security, false theology, and eternal damnation may follow.

### C. Gospel requirements for Saving Faith (v. 24)

1. Peter told Simon what he really needed to do to be saved was to repent and truly believe. He needed his heart to be changed from the inside. But what we see Simon do is exactly what false believers do: pray and try to get out of what they believe are the consequences to their actions. Simon desires to avoid punishment, avert pain. He shows no true remorse for the sin that he has committed against God. There is no sorrow, only fear of consequences. Genuine repentance expresses heartfelt sorrow for the sin against God and others, as well as a change of mind about such behavior, and this results in a change of behavior from that point on, even if it is a struggle.
  2. Luke 13:3, 18:13-14, Matt 3:12, Acts 2:38, 3:19, 2 Cor 7:10-11
  3. **Illustration:** tell about Les and all his false repentance during that summer at camp, Francis Fuller very wisely said, "To repent is to accuse and condemn ourselves; to charge upon ourselves the desert of hell; to take part with God against ourselves, and to justify Him in all that He does against us; to be ashamed and confounded for our sins; to have them ever in our eyes and at all times upon our hearts that we may be in daily sorrow for them; to part with our right hands and eyes, that is, with those pleasurable sins which have been as dear to us as our lives, so as never to have more to do with them, and to hate them, so as to destroy them as things which by nature we are wholly disinclined to. For we naturally love and think well of ourselves, hide our deformities, lessen and excuse our faults, indulge ourselves in the things that please us, are mad upon our lusts, and follow them, though to our own destruction." Jonah's example—never got it through the whole thing, even though he repented enough to be religious, and even be used,
  4. In some ways, Simon is like everyone—nobody wants to go to hell or experience pain. And they will get all religious to avoid it. But the changes are not long-term. People that truly repent acknowledge their sin and their inability to earn or gain salvation on their own and their willingness to turn from that sin and allow Christ to reign as King and Treasure in their life. They also expressly put their faith in Christ and his sacrifice for their only hope to enter heaven, and ask God for his mercy. They are amazed at the mercy of the gospel. Then they continue in His word, live a life obedient to His commands, and transformation becomes clear in their life. Those who truly get it are new creatures, and they count the cost, take up their cross, don't look back, bear much fruit, hold fast to the faith, endure to the end, cut off the hands, gouge out the eyes, sell all that they have, let the dead bury their dead, cannot help but speak of this Jesus, forsake their worldly desires, worldly possessions, and treasure their Savior! Remember, these are indicators and mindsets, not means to merit salvation. And we must not cling to false hope for those individuals that claim Christ, but never repent, never change, and return to a life that does not honor Christ as treasure. We must warn them that they are in a perilous position. The gospel is not easy, the path is not broad, the cross is not the American dream without immorality; it is death to self, and life in Christ! I just do not want you to go to heaven and not see people that you thought would be there because of some profession, and you never warned them. Worse yet, I would hate that you missed heaven because your hollow profession and religious ritual that comforts your conscience. We have made salvation far too easy in our minds. We make far too many converts, and far too few disciples.
- A. **Closing illustration:** Church tradition about Simon the father of all heretics, talk about Mr. Bass pleading with his granddaughter to get right with God after a hollow profession and a return to the world.

Got a stack of books  
So I could learn how to live  
Many are left half read,  
Covered by the cobwebs  
On my shelf  
And I got a list of laws  
Growing longer everyday  
And if I keep plugin away  
Maybe one day  
I will perfect myself  
Oh but all of my labor  
Seems to be in vain  
And all of my laws

Just cause me more pain  
So I fall before you  
With all of my shame  
Ready and willing to be changed  
Own me  
Take all that I am  
And heal me  
With the blood of the lamb  
Mold me  
With your gracious hand  
Break me until I'm only yours  
Own me

