

Baptism and the Holy Spirit – Acts 8:9-25

Let's turn in our Bibles to Acts 8, as we continue our journey tracking God's amazing work to start and spread the church.

This chapter begins with the believers being persecuted and scattered. First to Judea, the area immediately *surrounding* Jerusalem, and then Samaria, to the north.

And as they went, they preached the Gospel, the good news of Jesus. Including Philip the Evangelist. And the crowds, v6, *paid attention*.

A phrase we're going to see repeated. They *paid attention* to the Gospel.

[9] But [v9] *there was a man named Simon, who had previously practiced magic in the city and amazed the people of Samaria, saying that he himself was somebody great.* [10] *They all paid attention to him, from the least to the greatest, saying, "This man is the power of God that is called Great."* [They thought he was it. Of the Lord and awesome.] [11] *And they paid attention to him because for a long time he had amazed them with his magic.*

[12] *But when they believed Philip as he preached good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women.* [13] *Even Simon himself believed, and after being baptized he continued with Philip. And seeing signs and great miracles performed, he was amazed.*

Talk about impact. Talk about effect. It's God's way of saying . . .

Don't doubt the power of the Gospel. (v9-13)

That's the *purpose* of these verses. And the account they record.

We need not worry about whether the good news of Jesus can compete. With all the *other* "news" out there. The *other* philosophies. The other ideas. It can and does.

Nor do we need to worry about whether it can compete with the glitz and blitz of entertainment these days.

Because *magic* in that day was as captivating as *anything* in ours – movies, sports, concerts, you name it. It was something.

Practiced by both pagans *and* Jews, even though it was often fueled by demons.

They didn't care. As long as it healed, blessed, cursed, harmed, and protected them – no questions asked.

And to see someone like Simon invoke an incantation or apply a potion that brought visible results in the *moment*, would have wowed anyone.

So much so, that he was called *Great*. And thought to possess the power of God. V10. *They all paid attention to him, from the least to the greatest, saying, "This man is the power of God that is called Great."*

They thought he was the cat's meow. And we would have thought the same.

You think you're impressed *now* when somebody does a magic trick, just think how you'd feel if it was real. If somebody really *did* levitate. Really *was* under a spell.

And if it went on for a long *time*, it would be the greatest show on earth.

They paid attention to him [v11] because for a long time he had amazed them with his magic. As dramatic and captivating as *anything* in our day.

➤ And yet, they also paid attention to Philip. Why?

Because the Gospel was *more* powerful. Not only was it accompanied by healings, but demons weren't *responsible*. They *fled* at Philip's preaching.

Does that happen *all* the time when we preach the Gospel? No. Not even *most* of the time. But it did then, because God deemed it necessary.

Necessary to get their attention and *compete*.

And he'll do the same in our day.

It may not *look* the same, but it sure does have the same effect. Look around.

Don't doubt the power of the Gospel.

Especially so, because . . .

• **It's gripping for those who are open.**

Don't doubt the power of the Gospel, because it's gripping for those who are open to it.

Like the Samaritans. We talked about this in the *first* part of the chapter.

God had prepared them to hear and receive the Gospel because of their difficult circumstances and closely held beliefs. Just like people in our day.

Whether God brings people to the end of themselves through hard times, or shapes their worldview to allow for new ideas, he prepares them.

And when they hear, they're gripped. They too pay attention. Often times cut to the heart (Acts 2:37) and unable to shake it. Because the Gospel's that powerful.

And don't doubt that . . .

• **It changes those who believe.**

Truly believe. Look at V12 again. The people of Samaria paid attention to Simon . . .

[12] *But when they believed Philip as he preached good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized.*

When they believed the truth about God's authority and desire to rule and reign in their lives, providing and protecting them as part of his kingdom, they were changed.

When they trusted Jesus to forgive their sin and cleanse their soul, they were changed.

Not just amazed, only to go on with their day like before. But different. On the inside.

Causing them to *live* differently. And *think* differently. And *align* themselves differently.

No longer followers of Simon, but followers of Jesus.

No longer adherents of magic, but truth.

No longer enthralled by the world, but the church.

No longer inclined to sin, but righteousness.

No longer focused on themselves, but others.

No longer obsessed with entertainment, but worship.

No longer lovers of self, but God.

The Gospel has the power to *change* those who believe. And does.

➤ Starting with baptism.

When they believed Philip as he preached good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women.

Unthinkable in that day. Men, women, young, old, rich, poor – they changed their allegiance from the things of this world, to the things of God.

That's *baptism*. A public proclamation that Jesus is Lord of your life.

That you're his and he's yours. You're saved, and he did it.

That's the *first* way the Gospel changes people who believe.

It causes them to set aside their old ways, their old beliefs, their old allegiances; and publicly aligned themselves with *Jesus. The Way*.

It's that powerful. And anyone who truly believes, is that changed.

➤ But that's not it. The power of the Gospel also changes people's direction.

It changes their allegiance, and changes their direction. Like Simon.

Who also believed, v13, and after being baptized he continued with Philip.

Accompanied him.

He dropped what *he* was doing and joined what *God* was doing. He changed direction.

That's what people *do* who truly believe.

Does that mean you should quit *your* job? Or sell your *house*? Or go on the *road* when you embrace the Gospel? Not usually.

Usually it means you change your perspective right where you're at.

So that now, you work to *give* instead of get. And use your time, talent, and treasure for *God's* glory instead of your own.

Usually it means you try to *influence* others instead of ignoring them, like you used to.

And love them instead of hating them. Bless them instead of cursing them.

That's what people do who *truly* believe. They change because they're changed.

➤ And *keep* changing. The Gospel has the power to change your life and direction when you're *first* saved, and every day thereafter. Don't doubt it.

As you surrender to the Lordship of Christ more and more, he'll change you more and more. And as he changes you, you'll surrender more and more.

To the point of doing things and saying things you *never* would have done.

And if that sounds scary to you, think again.

Because like Simon, when you join *God's* work, it's amazing. V13b.

Seeing signs and great miracles performed, he was amazed. (Summary)

Don't doubt the power of the Gospel to grip those who are open, and change those who believe. Including their allegiance, their direction, and their reaction.

Second . . .

Don't be confused by a separate baptism of the Holy Spirit. (v14-17)

[14] Now when the apostles at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent to them Peter and John [two of the apostles], [15] who came down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit, [16] for he had not yet fallen on any of them, but they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. [They hadn't been baptized in the *Spirit*; brought under his influence.] [17] Then they laid their hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit.

Laying on of hands is simply a visual and symbolic way of conveying affirmation and transfer. They were demonstrating their affirmation of the Samaritans' salvation . . .

And visualizing the imparting of the Holy Spirit. As if the apostles were the conduits.

But the issue here, is the lag time. The separation of their baptism into *Christ*, their conversion, and their baptism in the Spirit. One of 3 passages where that's the case.

The others are Acts 2, at Pentecost, and Acts 19 at Ephesus.

3 instances, where people received the Holy Spirit, *after* they received Christ. *After* they were saved.

➤ Which begs the question, "Is that normative and prescriptive, or *informative* and *descriptive*?" And the answer is the latter – *informative* and *descriptive*.

This is not, *our* pattern. Nor something we should *try* to do.

When people receive Christ as their Lord and Savior, we don't need to gather around them at some later date to lay hands on them and pray for them to receive the Spirit.

We don't. The Bible is clear. We receive the Holy Spirit at conversion; the moment we're saved. The moment we hear and believe.

We're sealed with the Holy Spirit at that point (Eph 1), we're indwelt by the Holy Spirit (Rom 8), washed by the Holy Spirit, renewed by the Spirit (Titus 3) . . .

And born of the Spirit (Jn 3). All various aspects of being *baptized* in the Spirit – brought under his influence. And all, at the moment we're saved.

And there's nothing *partial* about it as some people say. As if the Holy Spirit can be *subdivided*. Part now, part later.

We receive *all* of him when we're saved. Because Rom 8:11 says – *Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him*. Isn't saved.

So salvation and Spirit baptism go hand in hand. At the same time.

When you were saved, you were baptized in the Spirit.

That's normative. *That's* prescriptive. That's the New Testament *pattern*.

Which makes *this* passage, and others like it, *descriptive*. And *informative*.

For 4 reasons.

• **It was meant to:**

1. Emphasize the Holy Spirit's New Covenant influence

A separate baptism of the Holy Spirit was meant to emphasize and demonstrate his new influence and power, under God's new way of salvation.

As opposed to his *less* pervasive and less *invasive* influence under the Old Covenant.

2. Emphasize the Gospel's effect on Gentiles

Non-Jews. People, who for the most part, were thought to be *outside* of God's plan.

Like the Samaritans. They too were included in this new way to God, and to make sure everybody realized it and accepted it, he separated the process of salvation.

3. Overcome prejudice and hatred between Jews and Samaritans

They were arch enemies, and a separate baptism in the *same* Spirit, visibly proved that they were part of the same work. God's work of redemption.

4. Accentuate the transition between the covenants

The transition between the *Old* Covenant – the *old* way of salvation through faith and obedience to God's *spoken* word . . .

And the New Covenant – where salvation is found through faith in God's *living* Word, Jesus. After 2000 years, that transition was epic.

And God wanted to make sure they didn't miss it. (**Summary**)
So he highlighted it on occasion, by separating their baptism in Christ, from their baptism in the Spirit.

But . . .

- **It doesn't apply to us.**

Don't be confused by a separate baptism of the Spirit, because it's not for us.

We're not *living* in the middle of that transition.

There's no confusion between the Old and New Covenants.

And coming full circle, the apostles made it clear in their subsequent writings, that we receive the Holy Spirit at conversion.

That's significant. Having received him separately themselves, at Pentecost, and having experienced the same with others . . .

The apostles tell us that *we* receive the Holy Spirit when we believe. (Eph 1) (**Summ**)

Don't be confused. A separate baptism doesn't apply to us.

And last . . .

Don't be deceived by bitterness and sin (v18-25)

In *others*, for sure, but also in yourself. *Especially* in yourself.

[18] Now when Simon saw that the Spirit was given through the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money, [19] saying, "Give me this power also, so that anyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit."

[20] But Peter said to him, "May your silver perish with you, because you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money! [A scathing rebuke. May the influence of your wealth go the way of your life – all for naught.] [21] You have neither part nor lot in this matter [this privilege of laying on hands], for your heart is not right before God. [Your heart.]

[22] Repent, therefore, of this wickedness of yours, and pray to the Lord that, if possible, the intent of your heart may be forgiven you. [23] For I see that you are in the gall of bitterness [the turmoil of resentment; the misery of animosity] and in the bond of iniquity." [Common expressions of that day, to say, "You're so bitter you just as well have a sign around your neck, and so sinful you're in chains."]

[24] And Simon answered, "Pray for me to the Lord, that nothing of what you have said may come upon me."

And then Luke ends the account by saying . . .

[25] Now when they had testified and spoken the word of the Lord [Peter and John], they returned to Jerusalem, preaching the gospel to many villages of the Samaritans.

➤ Simon was so bitter he didn't have the ability of the *apostles*, and the *influence* of the apostles, and the *position* of the apostles . . .

He became sinful to the point of trying to buy it. Sinful to the point of *wickedness* in his heart. V22.

Repent, therefore, of this wickedness of yours [Peter says], *and pray to the Lord that, if possible, the intent of your heart may be forgiven you.*

The hidden deceit of your heart may be pardoned.

Simon was so poisoned by bitterness and ill-motives, bitterness and jealousy, he probably didn't even know it. He was self-deceived.

Creating a false reality that fit his desire for attention.

Because Peter says in v22, "Pray *if possible* that the intent of your heart may be forgiven."

It's not like God couldn't or *wouldn't* forgive his ill-motives and bitterness. That's *entirely* possible. It's that Simon might not see them to even ask.

➤ Don't go there. Don't be deceived by your own bitterness and sin. Don't be clouded by your hatred and resentment of someone.

Rather, as it says in **Heb 3:13** – *Exhort one another every day, as long as it is called "today"* [as long as there's daylight left and Christ hasn't returned], *that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.*

That none of you get to the point of being unable and even *un-willing* to see it.

Encourage one another. That's the preventative. Urge one another, press one another, ask one another. Every day.

So that your soul isn't cynical and your heart calloused by the deception, and pretense, and treachery of sin.

Especially the sin of *bitterness* (23). Deceitful above all *other* sins, because it blinds us.

And makes our life one great big Bird Box Challenge that we don't even know we're in.

Made worse by our tendency to surround ourselves with *others* who are in it. Others who are bitter.

So that our lives become one great big *echo* chamber in that Bird Box.*****

Don't go there. And if you are, or even *think* you might be, repent. Repent and *pray* like Peter said. Asking God for eyes to *see* your deceit. And ears to *hear* your bitterness.

And people to tell you about it.

People who think for themselves, instead of thinking like you.

People who say it like it is, instead of saying what you want.

People who are *soft* of heart instead of hard.

Repent and pray.

So that *your* life and *your* influence don't go the way of Simon's. (**Summary**)

Pray – Lord, we say with David, "Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!" (Ps 139:23-24) Open our eyes and reveal our hearts. And increase our faith in the power of your Gospel, to change even us.