

Message Date: 10-04-20

To the Ends of the Earth- ACTS Part 4: Courage!

Message Title: Week 4, Suffering and Joy

✠ **Can't buy me love!**

- ***In March 1964 the Beatles released their hit, "Can't buy me love." It's a catchy tune capturing an ancient truism.***

*Say you don't need no diamond rings- And I'll be satisfied  
Tell me that you want the kind of things- That money just can't buy  
I don't care too much for money- Money can't buy me love!*

- ***I heard a comedian comment "money can't buy love, but with enough, you can rent it." Great line, but go talk to your local counselor and ask them how that works out. If we are trying to rent our deepest needs, well, those payments get really steep.***
- ***Reality is that we can't achieve our deepest needs. We can't, and any honest study of the human condition will bear this out. MORE IMPORTANTLY, God doesn't intend for us to be our own resource, or the people around us, or the things we can surround ourselves with. That was never his plan. All the way back in Genesis chapter two, we see that God's plan is for us to know HIM AS OUR SOURCE OF LIFE.***
- ***The entire history that is the OT is the story of people, principally Israel, going back and forth between trusting God for a time, and then trusting themselves again.***
- ***In the NT, NC, we come to see the miracle that has been God's plan from day one... that our true and deepest needs... not just salvation, but our core human needs of identity, value, peace, and contentment... that they can only be RECEIVED, through an abiding and yielded faith in Him. Even more, God's just doesn't intend to be our source, but to be our source of life RICHLY.***
- ***But to receive God's gift of eternal life, and to experience him as our ongoing SOURCE of life... this happens through FAITH. And by definition, faith takes us out of control, out of the center, and puts God in control, and puts him at the center. THIS is what our flesh rebels against, and so our great temptation is to instead look to ourselves and try to meet these needs through our own efforts, resources, and the approval of others.***
- ***Some people are better than others at pulling this off for a while, but eventually- if that's our strategy- we all wear out.***
- ***In our story from Acts today, we are presented with the strange case of Simon the Sorcerer, or the man who thought he could buy the Holy Spirit, which is another way of saying he thought he could buy the love and power of God.***
- ***Simon's story is a cautionary tale, but it points us to the great truth that there is a resource – a deep well of that which we most desperately seek- and that resource is our creator, God Himself, through the life and presence of Christ in us, by the Holy Spirit, who we know and EXPERIENCE by FAITH.***
- ***AND SO, WE GO TO ACTS 8:9-25. Today is SUNDAY, OCTOBER 11<sup>th</sup>, I'm Pastor Ethan, and this is TRINITY ONLINE. Once again, thanks for joining us. SCRIPTURE READING***

- **Before we get started... this passage is an example of how Acts is such a unique book to study. There's the story itself, but the stories detail brings up multiple topics that each could be discussed in depth.**
- **For example, in these 16 verses we see the topics, and questions about...**
  - **The reality of magical arts and demonic activity**
  - **The reality of miracles and signs that are of God**
  - **The purpose and meaning of Baptism**
  - **The question of how, and when, a believer receives the Holy Spirit**
  - **The power of the gospel to overcome generations of hatred and racism**
  - **THEN, the story of Simon, his heart, and the lesson we can learn**
- **Obviously can't cover everything! I'm going to just touch on a few of these, but really make our focus the very important- and very real- dynamic we see in the heart of Simon, and how this speaks to us today.**
- **SO, let's jump in!**
- **CONTEXT. Been 7 years- honeymoon is over. Stephen is martyred, and SAUL initiates a broad persecution against the church in Jerusalem. As a result, virtually all of the church flees from Jerusalem, into Judea (southern Israel), and Samaria (central Israel). The SAMARITANS are not Jews, but are closely related to the Jews, sharing a common history. But the nature of this history has led generations of Jews to look down upon the Samaritans as half-breeds, inferior. One scholar noted that for a first century Jew, to even be in the presence of a Samaritan was seen as equivalent to eating unclean food- something any observant Jew would avoid at all costs.**
- **Nonetheless, these Christ believing refugees fled into Samaria, and along with Philip, shared the Gospel and the work of God everywhere they went. As a result, Luke says there was great JOY in Samaria.**

#### † **Simon the sorcerer**

- **AND SO, we pick up the story with Philip in one of Samaria's major cities, proclaiming the Gospel, until one day it was heard by a man by the name of SIMON MAGUS... or Simon the magician, Simon the Sorcerer.**

<sup>9</sup> Now for some time a man named Simon had practiced sorcery in the city and amazed all the people of Samaria. He boasted that he was someone great, <sup>10</sup> and all the people, both high and low, gave him their attention and exclaimed, "This man is rightly called the Great Power of God." <sup>11</sup> They followed him because he had amazed them for a long time with his sorcery.

- **What do we know about Simon?**
- **He was a SORCERER. A magician, and evidently a good one! Powerful. We aren't told what he did, but it was sufficient to cause all the people around him to say he possessed the 'Great Power of God'.**
- **QUESTION! Was Simon just a good con man, a talented trickster, or did he actually possess the ability to harness magical spiritual forces? If he DID, and the spiritual forces he accessed were not from GOD, then where were they from? They were demonic.**

#### † **The reality of spiritual warfare**

- Reality we see multiple times in ACTS- the reality of spiritual warfare between the forces of Good and Evil. As we progress, we will see other examples of people who access demonic spiritual forces, and what happens when they come into contact with believers and the presence of Christ at work in these believers.
- Simon used his power to build himself up. His identity, his sense of significance and self, was bound up in his ability to impress/amaze people. Luke says that people followed him, and this led him to become wealthy. If this was today, Simon would have lots of Instagram/youtube followers, and monetized his social medial presence.

For Simon, his life, his source, was his PERFORMANCE.

- Things are going along fine for Simon, until one day he is met by another man also wielding spiritual power, and his name is PHILIP.

<sup>12</sup> But when they (the people of Samaria) believed Philip as he proclaimed the good news of the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women. <sup>13</sup> Simon himself believed and was baptized. And he followed Philip everywhere, astonished by the great signs and miracles he saw.

- **BAPTISM-** will focus on this as a standalone message

#### ✠ The Good News of the Kingdom of God

- Philip is proclaiming the GOSPEL (good news) of Kingdom of God, name of Jesus Christ. From what we've learned in Acts so far, this message focused on repentance, believing that Jesus was the Messiah and forgiveness of sin. Also likely that to his point, the Gospel was seen by the Jews, as being TO THE JEWS, and focused on their expectation for Christ to return SOON and restore the Kingdom of God to ISRAEL.
- BUT HERE this begins to change. This isn't yet the open door to the gentiles, but by bringing the gospel of the KINGDOM OF GOD to the Samaritans, for the first time, the gospel is going beyond Jerusalem, to people who would not have identified themselves as being Jewish- and the JEWS definitely would not have regarded them as being Jewish.
- Thus is it nothing short of miraculous that the Gospel is heard, and received, widely. Many people, in fact a majority of the people, are believing the message of Christ, and Luke tells us that even SIMON believes and is baptized.
- But what's really going on in Simon's heart? Is his conversion genuine? We're told that he follows Philip everywhere, but the sense is that he does so not so much out of devotion to Christ, but because he has finally met someone who is displaying greater power than himself. Bock observes that Simon is like a groupie following a rock star- his primary interest seems to be his amazement at the miracles rather than a new devotion to Christ.

#### ✠ Peter, John, Samaria, and the Holy Spirit

- As story continues, Philip steps aside, and focus turns back to the Apostles in Jerusalem, specifically to Peter and John

<sup>14</sup> When the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had accepted the word of God, they sent Peter and John to Samaria.

- **Check out what is happening. The SAMARITANS are believing? All of them? Really? We have to go see this! And here we have a really interesting scenario involving the Holy Spirit.**

<sup>15</sup> When they arrived, they prayed for the new believers there that they might receive the Holy Spirit, <sup>16</sup> because the Holy Spirit had not yet come on any of them; they had simply been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.

<sup>17</sup> Then Peter and John placed their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit.

- **Huh? What do you do with that?**
- **The clear teaching of Paul's writing- rest of NT- is that the Holy Spirit is given to the believer through their personal faith in Christ, when they believe.**

Ephesians 1:13 ..and you also were included in Christ when you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation. When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit

- **In the full message of the NC, there is no delay between belief and Christ coming into our lives, and no prior requirement for a ritual performed by a priest, pastor, or anyone- neither laying on of hands, or baptism for that matter (more on baptism later).**
- **SO, if that's the case, what's happening here in Samaria?**
- **This takes us back to key point we learned when we launched into Acts. Acts is a history of HOW GOD WORKED through this first generation of believers, by the Holy Spirit, in specific places, at a specific time, for specific purposes. ACTS is a story of TRANSITION as the gospel moves from the original 72 Jewish believers before Pentecost, to the large church of Jewish believers in Jerusalem, then to Samaria, and ultimately to the Gentile world through Paul. Given this unique time, there are events described in Acts that while TRUE, are not NORMATIVE for believers since then. Put another way, much of what we see in Acts is DESCRIPTIVE- it describes how God worked in that time, but not PRESCRIPTIVE- doesn't prescribe what the church should look like now, or how God must work now.**
- **With that in mind, simply put, what we see here in Samaria is God working in a unique way to VALIDATE the unexpected acceptance of the Gospel by the Samaritans. This is the first time the Gospel has spread outside of Jerusalem, and it was important for the Jewish church – for the apostles- to see first hand the authenticity of what God was doing. Likewise, it was important for the Samaritan believers to know their faith was not disputed by the Jerusalem leaders of the church.**
- **This is important! As we go throughout the rest of Acts, we will see the Holy Spirit- the indwelling presence of Christ- to come upon believers both through the apostles and completely apart from the apostles. To look at this passage, and conclude that NOW there is the requirement of a priest or ordained clergy to lay hands upon a person so that they receive salvation and the Holy Spirit (as some believe), is to Take this passage WHOLLY out of context and IGNORE the overwhelming preponderance of the New Testament.**
- **Likewise, the purpose of Peter and John laying on hands was to demonstrate fellowship and identification between the apostles and the Samaritan believers, to build up unity among the growing church.**

- **IMPORANT-** there are only three instances in Acts where the Spirit is received through laying on of hands, and all of these, including here, are unique and exceptional circumstances, where there may have been doubt about a person's experience of faith. One of these will be when Ananias will lay his hands upon Paul when he receives the Holy Spirit.
- **Now-** there was evidently something observable that happened when these Samaritan believers received the Holy Spirit. Some scholars think they spoke in tongues or some similar ecstatic expression. Others think it was the clear presence of JOY and PEACE. We don't know, but it's clear that with the Spirit came an undeniable transformation in these believers' lives. But this didn't happen because of some 'magic' associate with Peter and John placing their hands on peoples heads.

#### ✠ What Simon missed

- **BUT THIS IS WHAT SIMON MISSED. HERE** was something his power couldn't do, that he didn't understand.. but maybe it was something he could BUY.

<sup>18</sup> When Simon saw that the Spirit was given at the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money <sup>19</sup> and said, "Give me also this ability so that everyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit."

- **We don't know Simon's motivation. It's possible he sincerely wanted to help other people come to faith and receive the Holy Spirit. It's more likely, however, that he desired the acclaim he thought would come by being able to perform this miracle. Either way, Simon missed the point of what was happening, as Peter makes abundantly clear.**

<sup>20</sup> Peter answered: "May your money perish with you, because you thought you could buy the gift of God with money! <sup>21</sup> You have no part or share in this ministry, because your heart is not right before God. <sup>22</sup> Repent of this wickedness and pray to the Lord in the hope that he may forgive you for having such a thought in your heart. <sup>23</sup> For I see that you are full of bitterness and captive to sin." <sup>24</sup> Then Simon answered, "Pray to the Lord for me so that nothing you have said may happen to me."

- **WHOA! Strong words! The J.B. Phillips translations has Peter saying "To hell with you and your money!"**
- **But Peter isn't seeking to condemn Simon. Rather, he sees that Simon- like SO MANY PEOPLE- is captive to the core issue of the human condition where we think WE have to attain our own value and meet our own needs of identity, value, purpose, and ultimately rightness with God. THIS is SO tempting because if WE CAN MEET THESE NEEDS ON OUR OWN... IF WE CAN BE OUR OWN SOURCE OF LIFE... then we can give OURSELVES the credit and Glory, and we will have no need – we think- to be dependent on God.**
- **But as we said earlier, this strategy of life always fails at some point! It is only as strong as our greatest weakness... and it was failing for Simon right then, as Peter diagnosed the state of his heart. He was powerful, he had lots of acclaim, influence, and money, but on the inside he was bitter and captive to his sin.**
- **And then Peter extended to Simon the great hope the Gospel extends to us all.**

#### ✠ The Hope of the Gospel

- **REPENT! TURN from this strategy of trying to attain and achieve your own value and be your own source of life. Pray to God, for Simon, EVEN YOU have the GREAT HOPE that if you believe and place your faith in him, He will forgive you, and HE WILL BE THERE AS YOUR SOURCE OF LIFE. SIMON! You DON'T HAVE TO BE BITTER AND CAPTIVE TO YOUR SIN, YOUR OWN WEAKNESS.**
- **CHURCH! Like Simon, we may have believed. We may have even been baptized. But right now, you may be striving as hard as you can to achieve- on your own- what only God can give you. PEACE. IDENTITY. VALUE. CONTENTMENT. FREEDOM. HOPE. JOY.**
- **What, or who, do you look to as your source of life? The miracle is that even if we think we have lots of our own strength and resources, the only true source of abundant life is Christ, through our relationship with Him. Listen to how Paul put this when he wrote his young friend Timothy.... 1 Timothy 6:17**

*Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment.*

- **Let me paraphrase that just a bit...**

*If you want to rely upon yourself in this present world, listen to this command! Don't be arrogant and put your hope in your own abilities and resources, which are so uncertain, but put your hope in God, because HE will richly provide you with everything you need to bring true and lasting Joy.*

- **Simon's response is uncertain. Rather than praying to God himself- signifying a humble heart, he asks Peter to pray for him, to protect him from God's judgment.**

✠ For us, the question isn't about Simon's story. It's about MY story

- **But for us, the question isn't about Simon's story. It's about ours. About yours.**
- **Through your faith IN CHRIST, you have received eternal life, but also a new and ongoing SOURCE OF LIFE. Who is your source? Is it things, other people, yourself?... Or is it Christ, the one who loves you, who gave himself for you, and who dwells within you, right now?**
- **If you are wrestling with this, or if you have never taken that first step of faith to receive Christ as your life, I would love to talk with you.**