

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH, 3-20-16 AM NOTES  
"THE PERSECUTER, THE PREACHER, AND THE PHONY"  
ACTS 8:1-24  
#11 in Series, "Acts: The Spirit, the Church, and the World"

"As we weigh the future and seek the will of God, does it seem right that we should hazard our lives for just a few savages? As we ask ourselves this question, we realize that it is not the call of the needy thousands; rather it is the simple intimation of the prophetic word that there shall be some from every tribe in His presence in the last day, and in our hearts we feel that it is pleasing to Him that we should interest ourselves in making an opening into the Auca prison for Christ." – Nate Saint

I. The Persecutor (V1-3)

**Acts 26:11 (NASB)** "And as I punished them often in all the synagogues, I tried to force them to blaspheme; and being furiously enraged at them, I kept pursuing them even to foreign cities."

**Acts 22:4-5 (NASB)** "4 I persecuted this Way to the death, binding and putting both men and women into prisons, 5 as also the high priest and all the Council of the elders can testify. From them I also received letters to the brethren, and started off for Damascus in order to bring even those who were there to Jerusalem as prisoners to be punished."

**Acts 22:19 (NASB)** "And I said, 'Lord, they themselves understand that in one synagogue after another I used to imprison and beat those who believed in You.'"

**Acts 26:9-11 (NASB)** "9 So then, I thought to myself that I had to do many things hostile to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. 10 And this is just what I did in Jerusalem; not only did I lock up many of the saints in prisons, having received authority from the chief priests, but also when they were being put to death I cast my vote against them. 11 And as I punished them often in all the synagogues, I tried to force them to blaspheme; and being furiously enraged at them, I kept pursuing them even to foreign cities."

II. The Preacher (V4-8)

**Acts 1:8 (NASB)** "but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth."

**Genesis 12:1-2 (NASB)** "1 Now the Lord said to Abram, 'Go forth from your country, and from your relatives and from your father's house, to the land which I will show you; 2 and I will make you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great; and so you shall be a blessing'".

**John 4:9 (NASB)** "Therefore the Samaritan woman said to Him, 'How is it that You, being a Jew, ask me for a drink since I am a Samaritan woman?' (For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.)"

### III. The Phony (V9-24)

#### A. A False Motive (V9-11)

**Acts 8:10b (NIV)** "This man is the divine power known as the Great Power."

**Romans 3:19-20 (NASB)** "19 Now we know that whatever the Law says, it speaks to those who are under the Law, so that every mouth may be closed and all the world may become accountable to God; 20 because by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight; for through the Law *comes* the knowledge of sin."

**Matthew 5:3 (NASB)** "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

**James 4:6b (NASB)** "GOD IS OPPOSED TO THE PROUD, BUT GIVES GRACE TO THE HUMBLE."

#### B. A False Profession (V12-13)

"Simon's faith was spurious from the start. He was not won by Philip's message but by Philip's miracles. He 'believed', it says. But what did he believe? Whatever it was that he believed, it did not generate his soul. He was as lost after he 'believed' as he was before he 'believed', as the sequel of the story makes clear." - John Phillips

#### C. A False View of the Holy Spirit (V14-19)

#### D. A False View of Sin (V20-24)

**First Baptist Church Powell, TN 3 20 2016 AM**  
**Sermon 11: The Persecutor, The Preacher, And The Phony**  
**Series: The Spirit, the Church, and the World**  
**Acts 8:1-24**

A few years ago Kathy and I had the privilege of traveling to Ecuador where I was asked to speak to a group of Ecuadorian Pastors. While in the capital city of Quito saw many interesting things, but the main place in Ecuador that I wanted to visit we couldn't because of time constraints. I wanted to see the place where the five young American missionaries were martyred in 1956. My life, as well as thousands of others, was impacted by the story of these five men and their lives, and eventual deaths, on a sandy river beach in the jungle of Ecuador. The account of these men's lives and deaths was recorded by Elizabeth Elliot, the widow of one of the martyrs, Jim Elliot. The book is entitled *Through Gates of Splendor*.

There were many who thought that the death of these five young men was a tragic waste. The parents, widows and the children of these men were left without their sons, husbands and fathers. However, those who saw this seeming “tragedy” from an eternal heavenly perspective didn’t see it as a tragic waste at all. Before he died, one of the missionaries (Nate Saint) had written the following:

As we weigh the future and seek the will of God, does it seem right that we should hazard our lives for just a few savages? As we ask ourselves this question, we realize that it is not the call of the needy thousands; rather it is the simple intimation of the prophetic word that there shall be some from every tribe in His presence in the last day, and in our hearts we feel that it is pleasing to Him that we should interest ourselves in making an opening into the Auca prison for Christ.

[Elizabeth Elliot, *Through Gates of Splendor*, page 176]

In other words, they were not primarily motivated by the need of the unreached people called the Aucas but that God would receive the glory of having people from this unreached people group around the throne giving worship to the Lamb of God – which He so richly deserves. Oh, so many lives (including mine) have been so remarkably impacted by these five martyrs.

Let me tell you about another martyr’s death that must have seemed like such a waste to some. We looked at his life and death in the last message. The man’s name was Stephen. Not only did his life on the surface seem wasted, there was also a firestorm of persecution released on the young church after Stephen’s life was taken. Ah, but first glances can often be deceiving. Stephen’s death, that seemed so wasted to some, resulted in the Gospel going to those in Judea, Samaria, and the remotest part of the earth.

Unless you are of Jewish background, the fact that you have heard the Gospel can be traced to the death of Stephen and the Gospel subsequently going to the Samaritans and the Gentiles. We can directly tie the Gospel leaving Jerusalem and going into the world to Stephen’s martyrdom. The persecution was turned back on the head of the persecutors. That is the way God works. The early church leader, Tertullian said it well, “The blood of the martyrs became the seed of the church.”

### **I. The Persecutor (v 1-3)**

It was Stephen’s death that was the spark that started the persecution of the infant church. I want us to focus in on the lead persecutor, Saul of Tarsus. Saul was born in Tarsus in Cilicia (Acts 22:3). Saul was a son of a Pharisee, the strictest Jewish sect. This man was “Captain Israel.” Likely from a wealthy family, Saul (Paul) had Roman citizenship which is something few Jews had. He was educated in Jerusalem under the tutelage of the most famous living Rabbi – Gamaliel. Saul became a Pharisee like his father before him, and saw Christianity as a cancer that needed to be removed.

We read in verse 3 that Saul began “ravaging” the church. That term “ravaging” is translated “destroy” and “make havoc” in other translations. The Greek word was the term used to describe the mauling of a wild animal. Saul literally was tearing the church apart. This was an act that, after he was converted to Christ, grieved Saul (Paul) for the rest of his life. In later years, Saul (Paul) described himself in Acts 26:11 (NASB) “And as I punished them often in all the synagogues, I tried to force them to blaspheme; and being furiously enraged at them, I kept pursuing them even to foreign cities.” He was a man obsessed to wipe out all reference to this so called “Messiah.” He described this persecution he led in Acts 22:4-5:

I persecuted this Way to the death, binding and putting both men and women into prisons, as also the high priest and all the Council of the elders can testify. From them I also received letters to the brethren, and started off for Damascus in order to bring even those who were there to Jerusalem as prisoners to be punished.

He said in Acts 22:19: “And I said, 'Lord, they themselves understand that in one synagogue after another I used to imprison and beat those who believed in You.’”

Acts 26:9-11:

So then, I thought to myself that I had to do many things hostile to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. And this is just what I did in Jerusalem; not only did I lock up many of the saints in prisons, having received authority from the chief priests, but also when they were being put to death I cast my vote against them. And as I punished them often in all the synagogues, I tried to force them to blaspheme; and being furiously enraged at them, I kept pursuing them even to foreign cities.

Saul of Tarsus was a man obsessed concerning stopping Christianity's spread.

## **II. The Preacher (v 4-8)**

Do you remember Jesus' command to His disciples shortly before ascending back to heaven to be seated at the Father's side? Acts 1:8: "but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth." Up until Acts 8, the church was made up of converted Jews. However, it was God's plan to also reach the Gentiles. This was not something new. Even in the Old Testament, God had told His chosen people that they were not a bucket to collect His blessings and selfishly hoard them; they were a channel through which God's blessings could flow to the whole world – Jew and Gentile. Even when God spoke to Abraham, He said in Genesis 12:1-2: "Now the Lord said to Abram, 'Go forth from your country, and from your relatives and from your father's house, to the land which I will show you; and I will make you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great; and so you shall be a blessing.'"

When we get to Acts 8:4, we see that it is God's timing for the church to launch out to the Gentiles. God accomplishes this plan by allowing the persecution. As the early disciples left the persecution in Jerusalem, they simply proclaimed the Gospel as they traveled (v 4). Persecution did to the church what the wind does to seed – it scattered the disciples and the seed of the Gospel was planted wherever these disciples went. In verse 5, Luke centers in on a man named Philip. Philip did something amazingly bold. He took the Gospel to the Samaritans. You won't really get this unless you understand some biblical history. The Samaritans were generally hated by the Jews because of their impure bloodlines and their perversions of Judaism. Under Solomon's son Rehoboam, Israel went through a civil war and split into the Northern Kingdom (called Israel or Ephraim) and the Southern Kingdom (called Judah). In 722 BC, the northern kingdom was defeated by the Assyrians.

After most of the Israelites were taken captive to Assyria, the Assyrians brought in colonists from other lands to populate Israel. Eventually these colonists intermarried with the Jews who had remained in Israel. The colonists who were brought in combined their pagan religions with the Judaism of the Jews who remained. These people of mixed heritage with a watered down form of Judaism became known as Samaritans (from the name of the capital city – Samaria). They eventually built their own rival temple to the temple in Jerusalem and practiced their deviant religion. The Samaritans were totally rejected by the Jews, and there was perpetual conflict between the Jews and the Samaritans. John 4:9 describes the situation. "Therefore the Samaritan woman said to Him, 'How is it that You, being a Jew, ask me for a drink since I am a Samaritan woman?' (For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.)"

Philip, who was one of the original Deacons along with Stephen, escaped the persecution in Jerusalem and went to Samaria which was about forty miles north of Jerusalem. There he began doing what he did as a pattern of life – "proclaiming Christ to them" (v 5b). Notice that he did not proclaim an alternative system of religion or a program to them – he proclaimed Christ to them. The Samaritans were like soil prepared for the seed to be sown. Perhaps the woman at the well in John 4, who Jesus had shared with, had been used by the Holy Spirit to get the people prepared to hear the Gospel after the cross and resurrection. Like Stephen, Philip was given the ability by God to call forth miraculous signs that

evidenced his authority from God. The response of the Samaritans was “much rejoicing.” The Gospel had crossed over the first barrier. Salvation wasn’t just for the Jews; it was also for the Samaritans.

### **III. The Phony (v 9-24)**

One of the things that Jesus warned us about in the church age is that there will be phonies among the faithful. In Matthew 13:24-30, Jesus gave us the parable of the wheat and the tares. The wheat represents true conversions and the tares (a weed that looks a lot like wheat) represent phonies. Jesus said that they would grow together and at the harvest the phonies would be revealed. Let’s meet this phony in the early church. His name was Simon. He was a magician and was held in great respect by the people.

At first, Simon seems to have experienced a real conversion. He made a public profession of Christ and was even baptized. Acts 8:13 says, “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.” In spite of the seeming genuineness of Simon’s “conversion,” his *belief* was not saving *belief* and his baptism was just an empty ritual that only resulted in his getting wet! Learn this; the tares that are sown and grow up along with the wheat are difficult to spot. Only God knows for certain who they are. While we cannot make an authoritative judgment of who is truly saved and who is not, we can observe some signs that indicate when a person is a phony. Here are a few of those signs or indicators that a person may be a phony.

#### **A. A False Motive (v 9-11)**

Simon lived to impress others and to receive acclaim from others. The Greek word translated “magic” in verse 9 is translated “sorcery” in the NIV. Probably “sorcery” in the best translation. It wasn’t magic in the sense of sleight of hand. It involved satanic power. Make no mistake that Satan has the power to accomplish the supernatural. His power is miniscule compared to the omnipotence of God, but it is great compared to our human abilities. Simon was using his sorcery to “astonish” the people of Samaria (v 9). Simon’s motive that was beneath all that he did was to hold the influence he had with the people. Notice what the people called him in Acts 8:10b: “This man is what is called the Great Power of God.” Is there any doubt as to the influence and prestige that Simon had over the people? The title in verse 10 at least implies that he claimed deity for himself. The NIV puts it this way: Acts 8:10b: “This man is the divine power known as the Great Power.” Whereas Philip proclaimed Christ, Simon proclaimed himself.

I am convinced that most people who profess Christ, but do not possess Christ, have never really seen themselves as they are apart from Christ. Most come to Christ for “life enhancement.” It is almost as if people are saying, “I’m already a pretty good person, but Jesus can make me better.” This is why in our basic evangelism training (TELL) we use the law initially with lost people to let the Word of God convince them that they are lost, without hope and separated from God and the eternal life that only He can give.

Adrian Rogers used to say it accurately – “Most Americans are strutting their way to hell thinking they are too good to be [condemned].” He is right. God’s tool for dealing with this false motive of “life enhancement” is the law. Romans 3:19-20: Now we know that whatever the Law says, it speaks to those who are under the Law, so that every mouth may be closed and all the world may become accountable to God; because by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight; for through the Law *comes* the knowledge of sin.”

Be very careful that you don’t present the gospel to others as a way to have a better life with fewer troubles. Simon simply wanted to add Jesus to his bags of tricks. He was a phony. Salvation comes to those who, in Jesus’ words in Matthew 5:3: “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” Those who are saved, come to Jesus realizing that they are in abject spiritual poverty in need of a birth from above. The phonies come with spiritual pride looking for a boost from below to enhance their already “pretty good life.” No one can be saved while clinging to their pride. James 4:6b: “God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble.”

## **B. A False Profession (v 12-13)**

Philip proclaimed the kingdom of God. That means the rule and kingship of God. Philip also proclaimed the name of Jesus. Used in this way, the name of Jesus speaks of His authority. Salvation involves being under the rule of God as our King and the authority of Jesus Christ. Simon only desired to enhance his own power to get a greater hold on the people. That made his profession a false one. John Phillips gives a good summary:

Simon's faith was spurious from the start. He was not won by Philip's message but by Philip's miracles. He 'believed', it says. But what did he believe? Whatever it was that he believed, it did not generate his soul. He was as lost after he "believed" as he was before he "believed", as the sequel of the story makes clear.

[John Phillips, *Exploring Acts, Volume 1*, pages 152-153]

## **C. A False View of the Holy Spirit (v 14-19)**

Acts is a transitional book – it details the transition from the Old Covenant to the New Covenant. What we find in the book of Acts is that when the Gospel first crossed over a barrier, God evidenced it to those witnessing it. In our text, we see the Gospel crossing over the barrier to the Samaritans. In other words, the Gospel was not just for the Jews; Jesus is also the savior of the Samaritans. The norm is that the Holy Spirit is received at the moment of salvation. But because this was a transition, the apostles were summonsed and came to Samaria. When they laid their hand on the Samaritan converts, they received the Holy Spirit. Though the text doesn't say it, it is likely that they evidenced the coming of the Spirit by speaking in languages they did not naturally know. At least there was some sort of sign that let the apostles and the other believers know that the Samaritans were a part of the body of Christ.

Simon was observing all of this. He begins to covet this power even more. He says in Acts 8:19: "Give this authority to me as well, so that everyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit." Simon's request betrayed his heart. It was from this incident that the word "simony" comes. It refers to the sale and purchase of spiritual office and benefits. This practice became common before the Protestant Reformation and was one of the evil practices that called for reformation.

Learn this: The Holy Spirit and His power cannot be used for our own purposes.

## **D. A False View of Sin (v 20-24)**

Nothing that God has is for sale. Peter is outraged! Verse 20 is saying, "Let your money accompany you to Hell." In verse 21 we see clearly that Simon was not saved. In verses 22-24, Peter issues a call for repentance, but it doesn't come. Simon has no repentance; he only seeks to escape the consequences of his sin, not to be made right with God.

## **Conclusion**

Don't be fooled by the phonies. There are a lot of them that profess Christ but do not possess true salvation. But we are also reminded that no one is beyond salvation – after all, Saul of Tarsus became the apostle Paul after genuine salvation.

## **NASB (New American Standard Bible)**

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