

Shallow Faith; A Kingdom Reality, Part I

Text: Acts 8:5-17

Introduction:

Following the death and martyrdom of Stephen, a great persecution drove the people of God outward, into all of Judea and Samaria. And in keeping with the Lord's commission, given in chapter one, they preached the Gospel everywhere they went.

Last week, we began to hone in on the ministry of Philip, one of the seven deacons chosen in Jerusalem, who was driven to preach Christ in Samaria. His Gospel proclamation was accompanied by miracles, and many in Samaria began to believe the Gospel, and there was great joy in that city.

This morning, we move on to a lengthy section, which especially details the events surrounding a man named, "Simon," who was a sorcerer, or a master of magic arts, whose deceptive hold on the people, began to loosen, as the power of Christ made its way through the city. So powerful was Philip's testimony in this regard, that the magician himself, makes a profession of faith, and is baptized. However, the shallow nature of his faith is ultimately exposed, when he attempts to purchase the ability to administer the gift of the Spirit, for his own personal gain. Clearly, the Lord would have us learn from these events, so as to draw out necessary applications for us, as we would seek to advance the Kingdom of God, in our own day.

I. "Simon the Sorcerer"

"But there was a certain man called Simon, who previously practiced sorcery in the city and astonished the people of Samaria, claiming that he was someone great, to whom they all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying, 'This man is the great power of God'" (9-10).

Here, we are introduced to this man, named, "Simon," and we are told that he previously practiced sorcery (or magic arts) in the city. The implication here is that, before his so-called conversion (which we will read about in a few moments), Simon was a magician, who impressed and fooled the people of Samaria, with his magic arts. He astonished people with his magic, so much so, that they thought that he was divine, as it were ("The great power of God"). In fact, while this man was not unlike some of the magicians of our own day, he actually claimed to be someone great; someone with divine power, and he deceived the people into believing that his

magic was true sorcery, as opposed to "smoke and mirror" deception. And all the people, we are told, "small and great" (in other words, not merely the unintelligent or gullible, but all the people) believed him to be a great man with divine powers. He was good at what he had done, but he was a deceiver and a phony in reality, who loved the praises of men and the money that came with his fame. But because of his deceptive abilities, he was a hindrance to the kingdom of God, and ultimately, he drew people to worship himself.

Now, the irony in all of this, is that Philip came to Samaria, preaching the Gospel and performing *authentic* miracles, truly having the power of God in him. The Spirit of God; the true Power of God, worked in and by Philip, but only as an accompaniment to the Gospel, which exalted Christ and not men. Simon, the phony magician, deceived many and brought about his own praise. Philip, the evangelist, truly exercised the power of God, bringing people to praise and exalt Christ. And here, we have a battle, as it were, between two worlds (the world of men and the world of Christ), but Christ of course wins, as the authentic "Power of God," such that Simon the magician himself, comes to profess faith in Christ, as well! Is it not the case, brethren, that since the fall of man, man, being full of pride, has sought to usurp God of His rightful glory, by seeking to exalt himself, as a gross imposter of the glory of God? [Reminds me of the Egyptian magicians contending with Moses, in the presence of Pharaoh---and their magic ran out, didn't it!]

"And they [the people of Samaria] heeded [Simon] because he had astonished them with his sorceries for a long time" (vs. 11).

Simon came, not only amazing the people with his magic arts, but also with a message of his own. We are not given that message, but we can assume that it was self serving, and to his own best interest, financially and politically. And the people heeded him. That is, they believed what he was saying and did whatever he told them to do. He deceptively gained their faith, because he had astonished/amazed them for a long time. This man held their awe and praise for a long time. They were swayed by him, and because of this, they were swayed away from offering that rightful praise, which belongs to God alone!

And so, Philip enters this scene, as a competitor to the magician, as it were, preaching a different Gospel, which not only did not exploit the people, but furthermore, offered them the hope of forgiveness of sins and salvation, freely given in Christ! And as demon possessed

people were freed from their bondage and the lame were made to walk, the power of Christ to liberate lost souls, was magnified and greatly authenticated! And so, we are told in verse 12:

"But when they believed Philip as he preached the things concerning the kingdom of God and the Name of Jesus Christ, both men and women were baptized."

Those who formerly gave heed to the "self serving," deceptive magician, were now giving heed to Philip, and indeed, to Christ, through Philip. For Philip preached Christ, and the kingdom of God to the people, and they believed. And while the miracles certainly supported, authenticated and complimented the Gospel message, ultimately, it was the message itself, which God used to convert and save these lost souls. And they were baptized...by Philip; clearly a right, able to be performed by an "Evangelist" (like missions?). Again, seeing the word, "but" at the beginning of the sentence, shows the contrast between the magician and Philip. Those, who had formerly heeded the magician, were now heeding Christ, through Philip! Christ's kingdom is expanding and strongholds are being torn down, by the Gospel! Indeed brethren, it is the Gospel alone, which is able to cut through the traditions, superstitions and idol worship, found in every culture, throughout the world! But again, who will go?!

"Then Simon himself also believed; and when he was baptized he continued with Philip, and was amazed, seeing the miracles and signs which were done" (vs. 13).

Simon, having watched Philip closely, realized that Philip was not "smoke and mirrors," and if he was, he had fooled the great and experienced magician himself. Needless to say, he makes a profession of faith in Christ, and is also baptized. Following this, he sticks close to Philip, and is especially fascinated by the miracles which Philip was performing. The one, who once deceptively astonished everyone else by his sorceries, found himself utterly amazed by the true "Power of God," exhibited in and by Philip. And of course, Philip attributed all of this power to the Name of Christ!

Following this, Luke transitions, for a moment, back to Jerusalem, as a means of showing how the Apostles, Peter and John, wind up in Samaria, so as to confirm the work of God there.

"Now when the Apostles who were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the Word of God, they sent Peter and John to them..." (vs. 14).

During the great persecution, which had arisen (immediately following the martyrdom of Stephen), many in the church spread outward into all of Judea and Samaria. However, in verse one, we were told that the Apostles remained in Jerusalem. Well, now they hear of the great

work that God is doing in Samaria, and so, they send Peter and John there, as a means of confirming this work, and administering the gift of the Spirit upon those who were saved.

Notice, verses 15-17, continues:

"...[Peter and John] who, when they had come down, prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit. For as yet He had fallen upon none of them. They had only been baptized in the Name of The Lord Jesus. Then they laid hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit."

Now brethren, what exactly is going on here? Here, we are told that the Apostles sent Peter and John to Samaria, so that they might pray for those who believed, enabling them to receive the Holy Spirit. Why had they not received the Holy Spirit yet? Were they not regenerated, while yet having saving faith? They were baptized already, but none of them had received the Holy Spirit, as of yet. And they would not, until the Apostles arrived. Well, brethren, let me note several key things about this passage:

1) First, note that when it says that they were "baptized in the Name of the Lord Jesus," by Philip, this was not a distinct baptism from the one in which Jesus ordered, in the Great Commission (Matt. 28). It is the same baptism. Being baptized in the Name of Jesus is the same thing as being baptized in the Name of the Triune God (One Name- Three Persons).

2) When we are told that the Holy Spirit had not yet fallen upon any of the Samaritans here, this has nothing to do with the *regenerative* work of the Holy Spirit. Rather, it has to do with the particular gifting of the Spirit, as He administers gifts to every individual believer, in accordance with the will of God in Christ. Clearly, the Samaritans were converted. They were regenerated by the Holy Spirit or they would never have believed the Gospel (Jn. 3).

However, they had not yet obtained the gift of the Spirit, which would be manifested in revelatory ways (such as speaking in tongues), as a means of confirming God's work among them. For this revelatory confirmation, they had to wait for the Apostles to administer it to them.

3) It was important for the Apostle's to administer the gift of the Spirit, by prayer and the laying on of hands, so that the work in Samaria would receive Apostolic affirmation. The barrier between Jew and Samaritan (and later Jew and Gentile) was so thick, that God would break open His mystery and confirm His work among the heathen, by enabling them to exhibit the same revelatory signs, performed by the Holy Spirit, in Jerusalem (at Pentecost). [Remember, how hard Peter had to fight to affirm Cornelius ("Peter, kill and eat..."), later on, as a welcomed gentile among the Jews, in the Kingdom of God?---The revelatory sign of the Spirit compelled

him to baptize them]. Needless to say, then, it was vital that the Apostles be there, to both administer and witness the gift of the Spirit, present in the Samaritans.

[Question to be posed: Is there any evidence of the revelatory gifts of the Spirit being administered, apart from the presence of any of the Apostles? If not, could we see how the revelatory, miraculous gifts, would have ceased, following the death of the Apostles and any upon whom they laid their hands?--see verse 18 as well]

Next week, Lord willing, we will continue on with our consideration of "Simon the Sorcerer," followed by a few key applications.

AMEN!!!