

Buy Or Believe? God Is Not For Sale

Acts 8

Introduction: (8:1-8)

- a. Malang, **Indonesia** – Indonesia is largest population of Muslims per capita in world, many nominal – asked Muslim man about his observance of Ramadan and asked how much is enough?
- Religions working their way to heaven
 - Roman Catholics have a sacrament system of works and a place of purging called purgatory if you don't do enough works
 - "God doesn't care about religion or money 'cause money can't buy you love"
- b. The key in chapters 8 is that **the Gospel has now gone from Jerusalem to Samaria**
- **As the Church grew, the persecution grew (8:1-3)**

¹Now Saul was consenting to his death. At that time a great persecution arose against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. ²And devout men carried Stephen *to his burial*, and made great lamentation over him. ³As for Saul, he made havoc of the church, entering every house, and dragging off men and women, committing *them* to prison.

- "havoc" = destroy, used to describe a wild beast mangling its prey

- **As the Gospel spread, it traveled from Jerusalem to Samaria (8:4-8)**

⁴Therefore those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the word. ⁵Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria and preached Christ to them. ⁶And the multitudes with one accord heeded the things spoken by Philip, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did. ⁷For unclean spirits, crying with a loud voice, came out of many who were possessed; and many who were paralyzed and lame were healed. ⁸And there was great joy in that city.

- Philip was empowered by the Spirit of God to deliver demons, heal and share the Gospel

Proposition: We will contrast two individuals in Acts 8 – the popular sorcerer Simon who tried to buy the power of God and the Ethiopian Eunuch who simply understood the Scriptures and believed as we demonstrate the difference between "works religion" and "simple grace."

I. **God Is Not For Sale (Acts 8:9-25)**

A. **Salvation Is Not For Boosting Our Ego (9-11)**

⁹But 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**, ¹⁰to whom

they all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying, "This man is the great power of God." ¹¹And they heeded him because he had astonished them with his sorceries for a long time.

- "sorcery" = *magos* – where we get word "magic" from
- He was impressive and had the attention of the people
- He "astonished them with his sorceries for a long time" (v. 11)
- He claimed he was great and so did they
- He believed the "press clippings" about himself
- He has a massive ego
- He went along with the Gospel to protect his ego

- The greatest quality Jesus looks for in others is humility
- The Gospel doesn't make us proud or boost our ego
- The Gospel is approached through humility in recognizing our sinfulness and our inability to save ourselves
- This ego-maniac thought he could use the Gospel to stay popular

B. Salvation Is Not For Competitive Advantages (12-13)

¹²But 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. ¹³Then Simon himself also **believed**; and when he was **baptized** he continued with Philip, and was amazed, seeing the miracles and signs which were done.

- It says that Simon believed and was baptized
- But what later texts reveals is that he only pretended to believe to rejuvenate his sinking poll numbers

C. Salvation Is About Possession, Not Profession (13)

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

- Do you just say you believe but not have the reality of Christ in your life?
- You can say you believe and go through the motion of baptism but not really believe

D. Salvation Is Accompanied By The Holy Spirit Who Is Not For Sale (14-19)

¹⁴Now when the apostles who were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them, ¹⁵who, when they had come down, prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit. ¹⁶For as yet He had fallen upon none of them. They had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. ¹⁷Then they laid hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit.

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

- one Jewish evangelist (Philip) brought the Gospel to a national people despised by most Jews
 - Philip means "lover of horses"
- two Jewish Christian leaders (Peter & John) were used by God to give the Holy Spirit to the Samaritans

- “The best explanation of this delay in Samaria seems to lie in the schismatic nature of the Samaritan religion. Because the Samaritans had their own worship, which was a rival to the Jewish worship in Jerusalem, it was necessary to prove to them that their new faith was not to be set up as a rival to the new faith that had taken root in Jerusalem. And the best way for God to show the Samaritan believers that they belonged to the same faith and group as Jerusalem believers (and contrariwise, the best way to show the Jerusalem leaders that the Samaritans were genuinely saved) was to delay the giving of the Spirit until Peter and John came from Jerusalem to Samaria. There could be no doubt then that this was one and the same faith and that they all belonged together in the Body of Christ. This delay in the giving of the Spirit saved the early church from having two mother churches – one in Jerusalem and one in Samaria – early in her history. It preserved the unity of the church in this early stage.” (Charles Ryrie, *The Holy Spirit*, p. 71)
- “The delay in Acts 8, therefore, was necessary and multipurposed. First, it authenticated the experience and legitimacy of the Samaritan believers. Second, it confirmed Philip’s ministry among them to the Jerusalem apostles. Third, it confirmed Philip’s ministry to those Samaritans who would think connections with Jerusalem impossible. Fourth, it prevented schism in the critical infancy stage of the church.” (Couch, p. 137)

E. Salvation Can Not Be Negotiated By Sinners, But Repented For (20-23)

²⁰But Peter said to him, “Your money **perish with you, because you thought that the gift of God could be purchased with money!** ²¹You have neither part nor portion in this matter, for **your heart is not right in the sight of God.** ²²**Repent** therefore of this your **wickedness**, and pray God if perhaps the thought of your heart may be **forgiven** you. ²³For I see that you are poisoned by **bitterness** and bound by **iniquity.**”

- Peter judged that Simon’s money will perish in judgment along with him
- He thought the HS could be bought
- His heart is not right
- Repent of wickedness – forgiveness
- But Simon was poisoned by bitterness and wrapped in sin
- Simon didn’t have a good future
- According to Irenaeus, Simon was an early proponent of the heresy Gnosticism (*Against Heresies*, i., 23)

F. Salvation Is More Than An Aversion To Bad Things In Life (24-25)

²⁴Then Simon answered and said, “Pray to the Lord for me, that none of the things which you have spoken may come upon me.” ²⁵So when they had testified and preached the word of the Lord, they returned to Jerusalem, preaching the gospel in many villages of the Samaritans.

- Simon didn’t respond with repentance to sin, but a request for prayer that no bad thing would happen to him
- Sometimes we get superstitious about our Christianity thinking the cross is a good luck charm to ward off evil or good works should reverse bad things in our lives
- Then we’re too far off from Simon’s attitude

II. God Is Accessible Through Faith (Acts 8:26-40)

A. Salvation Comes Through Understanding What Christ Accomplished (26-35)

²⁶ Now an angel of the Lord spoke to Philip, saying, "Arise and go toward the south along the road which goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza." This is desert. ²⁷ So he arose and went. And behold, a man of Ethiopia, a eunuch of great authority under Candace the queen of the Ethiopians, who had charge of all her treasury, and had come to Jerusalem to worship, ²⁸ was returning. And sitting in his chariot, he was reading Isaiah the prophet. ²⁹ Then the Spirit said to Philip, "Go near and overtake this chariot."

³⁰ So Philip ran to him, and heard him reading the prophet Isaiah, and said, "**Do you understand what you are reading?**"

³¹ And he said, "How can I, unless someone guides me?" And he asked Philip to come up and sit with him. ³² The place in the Scripture which he read was this: "*He was led as a sheep to the slaughter; And as a lamb before its shearer is silent, So He opened not His mouth.*

³³ *In His humiliation His justice was taken away, And who will declare His generation? For His life is taken from the earth.*"

³⁴ So the eunuch answered Philip and said, "I ask you, of whom does the prophet say this, of himself or of some other man?" ³⁵ Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning at this Scripture, preached Jesus to him.

Philip:

- Reputable appointed leader – **Acts 6:3** "good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom"
- **Acts 8:5** "Philip went down to the city of Samaria and preached Christ to them"

Eunuch from Ethiopia:

- From Ethiopia (Nubia) along the upper Nile, in Africa
- He was a eunuch
 - Eunuchs were frequently governmental officials in the Near East
- He worked for the Queen
 - The king of Ethiopia was worshipped a child of the sun and was too sacred to perform secular government and politics, that was left to the queen-mother who bore the title *Kandakee* (we would call her Candace)
 - The fathers of the kings were not revealed by Ethiopians, but speak of them as the child of the sun
- He was in charge of the treasury
 - If the Queen ruled the nation, this man was the highest level treasurer
- He was in Jerusalem to worship
 - There were pilgrimage festivals for Gentile (non-Jewish) worshippers of Yahweh and he was probably out there for one of those and was ready to return home
- He was reading a scroll of Isaiah
- Philip was sent to him to bring understanding
 - In ancient times, people usually read aloud (as opposed to reading silently to themselves)
 - While reading ancient documents, it would be easier to read aloud to sound out the words, especially if it wasn't in your normal tongue
 - Isaiah 53:7-8 in the Septuagint version was being read

- the Eunuch was reading Isa 53 – though vs. 7-8 is recorded by Luke, there was probably more being read
- so Philip uses this passage to unveil the Christ who just recently fulfilled this prophecy that's around half a millennium old

1. **The Sinfulness Of Man** (Isaiah 53:4-6)

Isaiah 53:4-6 ⁴Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. ⁵But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed. ⁶All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way; and the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.

2. **The Suffering Of Christ** (Isaiah 53:7-8)

Isaiah 53:7-8 "He was oppressed and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth; He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so He opened not His mouth. He was taken from prison and from judgment, and who will declare His generation? For He was cut off from the land of the living; for the transgressions of My people He was stricken."

3. **The Sinlessness Of Christ** (Isaiah 53:9)

Isaiah 53:9 "And they made His grave with the wicked—but with the rich at His death, because He had done no violence, nor was any deceit in His mouth.

4. **The Sacrifice Of Christ** – Christ Died To Pay For Our Penalty Of Sin (Isaiah 53:10-12)

Isaiah 53:10-12 "Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise Him; He has put Him to grief. When You make His soul an offering for sin... By His knowledge My righteous Servant shall justify many, for He shall bear their iniquities.... Because He poured out His soul unto death, and He was numbered with the transgressors, and He bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors."

B. **Salvation Comes Through Believing In What Christ Accomplished (35-37)**

³⁶Now as they went down the road, they came to some water. And the eunuch said, "See, *here is* water. **What hinders me from being baptized?"**

³⁷⁶Then Philip said, "If you **believe** with all your heart, you may."

And he answered and said, "I **believe** that Jesus Christ is the Son of God."

- The Ethiopian desired to be baptized as he was watching others being baptized
- The only prerequisite is faith
- And he believed – no religious sacrament, no donation, no purchase, no

C. **Salvation Is Testified Through Baptism (38-40)**

³⁸So he commanded the chariot to stand still. And both Philip and the eunuch went down **into the water, and he baptized him.** ³⁹Now when they came up out of the water, the Spirit

of the Lord caught Philip away, so that the eunuch saw him no more; and he went on his way rejoicing. ⁴⁰But Philip was found at Azotus. And passing through, he preached in all the cities till he came to Caesarea.

- **Immersion** best depicts the literal meaning of the word.
 - *Baptizo* literally means "to dip". There are other specific Greek words for "pouring" (*ekcheo*) and "sprinkling" (*rhantizo*), but they are never used in the New Testament to refer to the practice of believer's baptism.
- **Immersion** best symbolizes the death, burial and resurrection of Christ (Romans 6:3-8).
- **Immersion** best represents the examples of baptism in the Scriptures.
 - Immersion was done by John the Baptist (John 3:23), Jesus Christ (Matthew 3:16; Mark 1:9-10) and Philip the Evangelist (Acts 8:38-39).
- **Immersion** best represents the practice in the early church.
 - In early Christian writings, *The Shepherd of Hermas* (100 AD) says "So they go down into the water dead, and they come up alive." *The Letter of Barnabas* (130 AD) describes baptism as "the water bath." The earliest reference to any other mode of baptism is 150 AD (*The Didache*).
- The Ethiopian Eunuch, according to the ancient historian, Irenaeus, became a missionary.
- F.F. Bruce: "The Ethiopians were regarded by the Greeks and their neighbors, from Homer's time onward, as living on the edge of the world....So soon after the risen Lord's commission to his disciples had their witness reached 'the end of the earth' (Acts 1:8)."

Conclusion:

- Religion seeks to earn what Christ gives for free – eternal life.
- Religion seeks to negotiate in a sinful deficit.
- Salvation is free – only believe.

Discussion:

- How could Simon have "believed" but was condemned?
- What is the main motivation for religion?
- What is the main motivation for grace?