

“TWO MEN, TWO KINGDOMS.”

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First Christian Reformed Church

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Scripture Texts: Acts 8:9-25

Prayer: Holy Father, we would see Jesus. Lift up Jesus in our hearts, open our eyes to see Him in all His glory. To believe and know and love and see Jesus is eternal life. Give us more of your Holy Spirit that we might see Jesus more clearly than ever.

Introduction.

Last week we considered the persecution that followed in the wake of Stephen's death, the first martyr of the early church. This morning we come to consider the first missionary of the early church.

The ancient church father, Tertullian, once wrote, the more you kill us the more we will multiply, every drop of our blood will spring up, some thirty, some sixty, some a hundredfold (Apology, ch. 50).

Philip

Let me give just a brief introduction to this man Philip and then the contrast he presents to Simon.

There was an apostle Philip and a deacon Philip. This man is the deacon, since we were just told the apostles didn't leave Jerusalem. Philip is one of the seven, not one of the twelve. He was a deacon like Stephen. The deacons were honorable men, who served faithfully and well and were willing to give their lives for the sake of the Gospel.

He was a part of the Greek speaking church in Jerusalem, helping the widows and those in need. It may have been the Greek speaking Christians who suffered the most persecution and were driven out of Jerusalem.

As I mentioned last week, the Holy Spirit is breaking new ground here as the Gospel leaves Jerusalem and spreads to Judea and Samaria. The Gospel is no longer tied to the Jews and Jerusalem. It is no longer just a local or regional sect, limited by geography or culture.

The Samaritans listen and heard the Gospel Philip proclaimed and many came to faith. This is astonishing considering the racism and racial tension there was between Jews and Samaritans. Samaritans were considered half-breeds, half Jews and half Gentiles since they had intermarried with the peoples of the places they had been exiled to.

The Jews avoided them completely. Jews would not eat with them or speak to them and would travel hundreds of miles to avoid traveling through Samaritan territory. They didn't worship or sacrifice at the Temple. This is why Jesus speaking to the Samaritan woman at the well was such a big deal. And the story of the good Samaritan helping a Jew was stunning.

As a disposed Greek-background Jew Philip was a perfect candidate to be welcomed and listened to by the Samaritans. Add to that, Philip was preaching a new Gospel about Jesus who was replacing the temple and its sacrifices. God sends just the right person to just the right people.

Notice what Luke tells us about Philip, "Philip preached good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ."

Simon.

Simon, on the other hand, was an entirely different sort of man. He was a man full of himself. He told everyone he was someone great, he even had Great in his title. He believed his own press and he impressed everyone with his magic power.

His magic was not the sleight of hand kind of magic like the illusionists we see at the fair or on Penn and Teller. He used the dark arts, demonic powers to his personal advantage.

There are two kingdoms in this world, one of light and one of dark, one of God and one of Satan. Those are the only two sources of power in the world. "If you are not for me you are against me." Remember this when you watch shows about people with strange powers or supernatural abilities. There is no neutral ground. Their power is either from God or from Satan. And you can tell which by who is glorified, God or self.

As great as Simon's power was he was no match for the real spiritual power of Philip. And if you can't beat, them join them. So Simon made a public profession of faith and was baptized. But we are given reason to doubt the genuineness of his conversion. It didn't seem to make it all the way into his heart.

We are told he stayed close to Philip, like one magician trying to learn another magician's secrets. Simon was not drawn to Philip's Savior, but to Philip's power, his miracles that looked like magic to Simon. He didn't see the glory of the Gospel in the face of Jesus.

He saw the signs and was impressed, but he didn't see what the signs pointed to. He is like the little child when you point at something and they just look at your finger.

It was not a genuine conversion. There is no evidence given of him repenting of his associations with the demonic, of his rejecting his old ways.

He was a man addicted to power, whatever and wherever he could get it. Instead of asking for the Holy Spirit he asked for power and offered money for it, no doubt with the hope of making money off of it. Just another tool in his bag of tricks. He reduced the Holy Spirit to the level of his dark magic.

Simon is the modern materialist, self-centered, greedy, selfish, what's in it for him. He is an opportunist.

Like the sales man who joins a church to gain prospects. Like the multi-level marketing couple that tried to get Phama and me to being on their team since I was a pastor and could easily get hundreds of people under me and make a lot of money. It was disgusting.

Simon thinks spiritual things can be gained by secular means. But even today we all can easily fall into the mindset that we can buy God's favor and acceptance. We all do this when we forget the freedom we have in Christ, that we are loved and accepted by grace.

Peter rebukes him in the boldest and clearest of terms. May you and your money perish in hell, that you would think or say such a thing. "To hell with you and your money!" (J.B. Philips, The Message).

Peter exposes Simon's deepest problem and deepest need, he has a heart problem. His heart is crooked. There is no evidence of humility, being convicted about his past.

He is full of the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity. Bitterness is more serious than cancer, it eats at you and kills you from the inside. It does more harm to you than the one you blame for it.

Bitterness is the devil's work and we must seek God's grace to fight it. Don't let a root of bitterness take root in your heart.

Hebrews 12:14-15 Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord. See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God; that no “root of bitterness” springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled.

Peter’s severity is love, it is trying to wake up a sinner to the disease in his heart otherwise it will destroy him. Peter speaks of this poison of ungodliness that has infected him and is holding him in bondage to Satan and Satan’s purposes.

Some will ask, what about once saved, always saved? That means you cannot fall from true and genuine faith, but you can fall from professed faith, faith that puts on the show of faith, a faith that can fool others.

That was Jesus’ whole point in the parable of the four soils, the seeds in some soils never take real root and bear the fruit of a changed life and a truly converted heart.

Whatever Simon had, it was not saving faith. He was amazed by the signs and miracles, but he completely missed the most amazing thing of all. The forgiveness of our sins, the salvation of our souls, the glory of God, the promise of eternal life, the power of the Spirit in our lives to transform and change. The amazing gift of grace, of deliverance from God’s just wrath, of reconciliation with our Father.

It would seem that Simon never repented, he didn’t ask for forgiveness. He wasn’t cut to the heart, but asked for Peter to do the spiritual work for him, so nothing bad would happen to him.

This reminds us of Pharaoh who numerous times asked Moses to pray for him, but he himself never repented.

The Samaritan Pentecost, Acts 8:14-17.

What are we to make of this strange two part conversion?

Some take this text and make it mean all of us must have a two stage conversion, one in which we come to faith and another when we receive a second blessing like a personal Pentecost, the sign of the Holy Spirit, especially through the evidence of speaking in tongues.

This is not to be taken as normative. This is descriptive, not prescriptive. It describes what happened in history, it is not laying down a pattern we are to follow. So what is going on?

When the apostles heard about the revival that broke out in Samaria through Philip's evangelism they sent two apostles to check it out. Two inspectors from headquarters.

They found the revival to be real, there was genuine belief and conversion, they had heard and believed the Word of God. But there was one thing missing. While they believed and were baptized, they had not yet received the Holy Spirit. This is a very strange situation.

So Peter and John laid hands on the people and they received the Holy Spirit. This is called the Samaritan Pentecost.

God gave a temporary delay so that the apostles could see and confirm that indeed the faith of the Samaritans was genuine and that there was no reason for the Spirit to be withheld. God was at work and on the move and the Samaritans were indeed full members of the Church of Jesus Christ. There is one body and one Spirit.

They were not second-class to the Jerusalem Pentecost. Clearly this was a movement of the Holy Spirit. God's blessing and favor and acceptance of them was real. The Gospel had crossed a new ethnic frontier, one that might not be believed by the Jewish believers unless the apostles saw it for themselves and could testify to the hand of the living God being at work.

Implication and application.

There are several lessons here.

First, God delights to use laymen in the spread of the Gospel. The power of the Gospel and of preaching and sharing and witnessing and teaching is not given only to ordained clergy. If you have the Holy Spirit, you have gifts from the Holy Spirit to use for God's glory and the good of others. You have divine power in you to do good works that will glorify God.

God used a layman to influence an entire culture. Through Philip God brought truth to light, and healing, and confronted sin. Through this layman God brought joy to the hearts of a people in bondage to sin.

There is the promise in Acts 1:8 that when the Spirit comes upon us, we will receive power; and in this power we will be able to be witnesses in the whole world. That promise is made to everybody on whom the Holy Spirit comes, not just a few.

I know what you are thinking, you're not useful, not smart enough, not good enough. But that's the point, you don't need more of you or a better you, to be more full of yourself.

If God has saved you and called you out of the world into His kingdom, if God has put His Spirit in you, His life, His love, His power, if God has done this **then** it is for a God-glorifying purpose. It isn't just so you can be a nicer person and have a better life and live for yourself, it is to make a difference for His kingdom. He wants you to touch and influence your world, your community, your culture in the name of Jesus.

This is true even when life is hard, even when things aren't turning out the way you planned, even when life seems all consuming, like it must have felt for Philip on the run. Rather than turn your focus on yourself, focus on Jesus, and that will lead you to your joy.

What are you doing with what He has given you? What need is there you can meet? What purpose is there you can fulfill? What joy can you create or spread? Where is there a crooked heart that God wants to use you to help straighten?

Second, spiritual life and power are not for sale, it can't be bought or acquired by any other means than pure grace. It is the gift of God. God is not a mercenary God. All His gifts are free. Ask and you will receive.

The qualification for spiritual life and power from God is repentance and faith, a heart that loves Jesus and trust in Him rather than in itself. Let us humble ourselves before the living God and come empty, for His filling.

What do we seek from God? What do we want God to give us? Do we want what He gives or do we want Him? Is God a vending machine or a person with whom we seek a real relationship?

Let us not be distracted by the signs and miss what they point to. We can do that with anything. We notice the sermon and miss the One it points to.

John 17:3 This is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.

Philippians 3:8, 10 I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.— 10 that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death,

Third, Let's not pass too quickly over the subjective, experiential side to our faith. In Acts with every coming of the Holy Spirit with power there is evidence,

manifestations. Sometimes its tongues, sometimes great joy and worship, sometime obedience, sometimes great gifts exercised.

Paul asks an interesting question in Acts 19, “Did you received the Holy Spirit when you believed?” Not did you believe and receive the Spirit? Did you notice that the Holy Spirit came upon you and came into you when you believed?

Do you see the evidence, do you see the fruit, do you see the gifts, do you desire more than anything to grow in grace and faith and love? Ask for the release and outpouring of the Holy Spirit in your life; don’t be content, ask for more and ask for the ability to discern His work.

Let us all examine our hearts for genuine faith. Is there the fruit of continued repentance, is there a continued trusting in Jesus alone, is there a growing faith, an abiding faith, a pursuing of holiness and righteousness?

I Corinthians 15:1-2 Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, 2 and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you—*unless you believed in vain*.

There is such a thing as believing in vain. Don’t be one of those. Don’t be Simon

Finally, we don’t want the Simon story to blind us to the truth of what happened in Samaria. A true revival broke out. Many people came to a genuine believing faith in Jesus. Their lives and world were turned upside down. True spiritual blessings fell on them. They were full of real joy, their perspectives about everything changed dramatically, their priorities and views about money, jobs, family, possessions.

There was a powerful working of the Holy Spirit that lifted their lives out of the trivial and temporal and mundane.

Do we dare pray for a fresh and reviving work of the Holy Spirit in our lives and in our church? Would we dare pray with earnest Paul’s prayer for the church in Ephesus:

Ephesians 1:17-19 that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, 18 having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, 19 and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might.