

## THE PICTURE OF A CHRISTIAN “PROFESSOR” (Text - Acts 8:9-25)

### Introduction

1. Last week, we had seen the church being scattered by persecution to places beyond Jerusalem. I said that religious persecution is one of God’s ways to purge the church in order to fulfill the Great Commission when it gets too comfortable and complacent.
2. Those Christians who were persecuted went as far as Phenice, Cyprus and Antioch preaching the Word of God. In this persecution, the spiritual spotlight focused on Philip’s ministry in Samaria. The Bible tells us that many Samaritans believed and rejoiced in their salvation.
3. Just like not everyone who attains spiritual high in revivals is genuinely converted, so not everyone who comes forward to the altar comes with the right purpose. This is also not exempted in the Samaritan revival. We are going to see a professing Christian rather than a possessing Christian in our text today.
4. Today’s sermon is entitled as ‘The Picture Of A Christian “Professor” ’.

### Main Points

#### **I. The Sin of Sorcery (8:9-11)**

**Act 8:9 But there was a certain man, called Simon, which beforetime in the same city used sorcery, and bewitched the people of Samaria, giving out that himself was some great one: 10 To whom they all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying, This man is the great power of God. 11 And to him they had regard, because that of long time he had bewitched them with sorceries.**

- a) I want you to notice the change of tone between verse 8 and 9. In verse 8, there was great joy in the city because many believed in Christ and were delivered from their sins as well as sickness. In order to contrast the joy of the people and what is about to be mentioned, verse 9 begins with “BUT”.
- b) In this instance, the Holy Spirit introduces a new character called Simon. I suppose that he was also a Samaritan BUT this Samaritan man had an unusual

trade - he was a sorcerer. He practiced sorcery<sup>1</sup> i.e. magical arts. In today's terms, we call that black magic. We must understand whether it is black magic or white magic, it is still sorcery and Christians should have nothing to do with it.<sup>2</sup>

- c) Simon used sorcery to bewitch the Samaritans. He threw them into amazement and wonderment with his crafts. He struck fear into the hearts of these poor souls – the young and old, the rich and poor, the powerful and the commoner - and impressed upon them that he was literally the very manifestation of God. He might not claim that he was God but his work of amazement led the people to look upon him as though he was God.
- d) Some may say, "Such things won't happen in our days. We are now living in the cyber age. We are more enlightened now and we are no longer as superstitious<sup>3</sup> as the people in the past." This is not true. The Bible foretells the days when the Antichrist reigns upon this earth and how the masses believe in him because of the miracles and wonders that are done.<sup>4</sup> **[Illus. Singapore Spring Home Exhibition's program highlights include speeches by commercialized geomancers who even transact online – Streets, May 14, 2004, p.34-35]**
- e) Deception is one of the Devil's most effective weapons. The father of lies deceived Eve in the Garden of Eden at the dawn of humanity. He has deceived millions in the course of his existence. He is deceiving people now. The Bible says that he comes to us disguised as an angel of light. He will deceive in the days of Tribulation through the Antichrist and the False Prophet. He will continue to deceive humanity all the way to hell<sup>5</sup>. He just can't stop lying. At the same time, gullible men and women also just can't stop being deceived by his lies. Why? Because they don't have the light of the gospel.

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<sup>1</sup> From μαγεύω where we get the word 'magic', 'Magi'.

<sup>2</sup> There is a difference between tricks and magic. Sometimes we use the two terms interchangeably. Magic is associated with the occults as it draws its power from the spiritual realm to do what natural means cannot.

<sup>3</sup> *s.v. Superstition* – "the belief that certain events cannot be explained by reason or science, or that they bring good or bad luck; fear of what is unknown or mysterious:..." – A.S. Hornby, *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, 5th Edition (ed. Jonathan Crowther), Oxford University Press, Special Price Edition, 1998 (3rd Impression 1999)*

<sup>4</sup> **Rev 13:11** And I beheld another beast coming up out of the earth; and he had two horns like a lamb, and he spake as a dragon. **12** And he exerciseth all the power of the first beast before him, and causeth the earth and them which dwell therein to worship the first beast, whose deadly wound was healed. **13** And he doeth great wonders, so that he maketh fire come down from heaven on the earth in the sight of men, **14** And deceiveth them that dwell on the earth by [the means of] those miracles which he had power to do in the sight of the beast; saying to them that dwell on the earth, that they should make an image to the beast, which had the wound by a sword, and did live. **15** And he had power to give life unto the image of the beast, that the image of the beast should both speak, and cause that as many as would not worship the image of the beast should be killed. **16** And he causeth all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and bond, to receive a mark in their right hand, or in their foreheads: **17** And that no man might buy or sell, save he that had the mark, or the name of the beast, or the number of his name.

<sup>5</sup> Even after Satan was released for a season at the end of the Millennium, he is still using deception on humanity. **Rev 20:7** And when the thousand years are expired, Satan shall be loosed out of his prison, **8** And shall go out to deceive the nations which are in the four quarters of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle: the number of whom [is] as the sand of the sea.

- f) And so it was with the Samaritans. For a long time, they did not have the light of God, and that is why, in verse 11, it is said: “And to him [*Simon*] they had regard, because that of long time he had bewitched them with sorceries.”

## II. The Seeker of Signs (8:12-13)

**Act 8:12 But when they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women. 13 Then Simon himself believed also: and when he was baptized, he continued with Philip, and wondered, beholding the miracles and signs which were done.**

- a) As Philip preached the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, many believed. It was the same old gospel which touched the hearts of these heathens. Many were baptized – both men and women.
- b) As we read of the baptism here, some of you may ask this question: “Since the 3,000 who professed Christ on the Day of Pentecost and these Samaritans here were baptized right after they heard the gospel, should not this also be the pattern in our days?” Now, hear this. Those who were baptized right after they trusted in Christ in those days actually made a very hard decision because it means they were willing to bear the stigma of associating with and committing to Jesus Christ who was branded as a murderer and crucified not too long ago. Furthermore, at least the 3,000 who believed on Pentecost were once staunch followers of Judaism, the religion of their forefathers, which they were going to forsake and turn to a newly arisen sect that was dissimilar in its teachings. This was also the stance and sacrifice which the Samaritans had to take when they got baptized. It took great courage and commitment for them to be baptized.
- c) What about today? I will only say this – “Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance” (c.f. Mt 3:8) I have come to a point where I tell myself that I do not want to rush people into baptism even if they professed faith in Christ. I want them to be baptized because they know they are God’s converts and not my converts. If a person is God’s convert, then I believe the Holy Spirit will move him to obey in the ordinance of baptism without pressure from the believers around him. I will still preach Scriptural baptism but I will leave it to the Spirit to convict the hearts.
- d) Next, we see that Simon also believed. Then we see that he was also baptized. He even continued with Philip. Unfortunately, Simon’s purpose for coming to Philip was not just Christ per se. The miracles and signs were added incentives for him. He was more of a sign-seeker than a Christ-seeker. Basically, he believed for the wrong reason. His sole purpose for coming to Christ was not because he wanted a Savior to save him from his sins. He wanted something else. He was not beholding Christ. What was he beholding? The answer is in verse 13. He was beholding the miracles and signs which God wrought through Philip.

- e) Let us beware of this thing. Miracles can leave an impression upon an unbeliever and lead him to God but miracles are not a part of the gospel. Many can believe in miracles and yet remain as a child of the Devil. There is no reconciliation between the sinner and God. There is no relationship between the sinner and God. The sin issue is still unresolved. Notice this in John 2:23-25
- **Joh 2:23** Now when he was in Jerusalem at the passover, in the feast [*day*], many believed in his name, when they saw the miracles which he did. **24** But Jesus did not commit himself unto them, because he knew all [*men*], **25** And needed not that any should testify of man: for he knew what was in man.
- f) Have you asked yourself why Jesus did not commit himself to these people?
- g) Why do you want to be a Christian? Why do you join the church? I know of people who want to be Christians because their boyfriends or girlfriends are Christians. I know of people who joined the church because they want to have a church wedding. I know of a man who came to this church during the Shalom Series because he thought the church also doubles up as a job placement agency. He thought that the church can provide some “social welfare” to help him tide over the period of unemployment. There is nothing inherently evil about all these motives but these are all the wrong reasons for coming to Christ and the church. It is spiritually dangerous and damning. A person who becomes a believer for the wrong reason will deprive himself of the prayers of others concerning his salvation since they would have thought that he is already saved.

### III. The Seal of Salvation (8:14-17)

**Act 8:14** Now when the apostles which were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent unto them Peter and John:  
**15** Who, when they were come down, prayed for them, that they might receive the Holy Ghost: **16** (For as yet he was fallen upon none of them: only they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.) **17** Then laid they [their] hands on them, and they received the Holy Ghost.

- a) If there were newspapers in those days, the news headlines of the day for Jerusalem Post would be: “Half-bred and despised Samaritans believed in Jesus Christ as Savior!” When this news reached the Apostles, Peter and John were delegated to go down to Samaria to appraise the situation.
- b) The Samaritans believed and they got baptized but they had not received the Holy Spirit yet – “for as yet he was fallen upon none of them: only they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.” (8:16) This, of course, is not the normal process in salvation. In the church epistles, we are told that believers are sealed

with the Holy Spirit at the moment they believed. (Eph 1:13-14)<sup>6</sup> Paul also tells us that those who have not the Holy Spirit cannot be a saved person. (Rom 8:9)<sup>7</sup> The indwelling of the Holy Spirit in a man is the seal of his salvation. The Holy Spirit is the earnest i.e. down-payment; deposit of our redemption. (2 Cor 1:21-22; 5:5; Eph 1:14; Eph 4:30)

- **2Co 1:21** Now he which stablisheth us with you in Christ, and hath anointed us, [is] God; **22** Who hath also sealed us, and given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts.
  - **2Co 5:5** Now he that hath wrought us for the selfsame thing [is] God, who also hath given unto us the earnest of the Spirit.
  - **Eph 4:30** And grieve not the holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption.
- c) What happened on this occasion is not the norm but an exception. You do not find this order being repeated in the New Testament i.e. believe, baptize and then receive the Holy Spirit. Several significant points surface when we analyse this event:
1. The indwelling of the Holy Spirit upon the Samaritans was delayed until the Apostles came down because God wanted to show to the Jews as well as the Samaritans that the Apostles were entrusted with divine authority from above.
  2. This event served as a notice to the Jews, especially those who believed, that God had also offered the gospel of grace to the Samaritans.
  3. Last but not least, this incident fulfilled Christ's promise to Peter:
    - **Mat 16:18** And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. **19** And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.
  - i So far, Peter had the privilege to be the first person to officially and publicly offer the gospel of Christ to the Jews on the Day of Pentecost. Similarly, he had the privilege of doing so to the Samaritans by authenticating the work and words of Philip. Later on in Acts 10, he would be responsible for reaching the Gentiles in the house of Cornelius.

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<sup>6</sup> **Eph 1:13** In whom ye also [trusted], after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise, **14** Which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory.

<sup>7</sup> **Rom 8:9** But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his.

- ii Just two special notes of interest here. Firstly, have you realized that so far Peter was always the one doing all the talking while his constant companion, John, did not have any utterance being recorded in Acts?<sup>8</sup> However, the Spirit of God would later use John to write the Gospel of John, the 3 general epistles and the Book of Revelation – a total of five books compared to Peter's two general epistles. Secondly, if you remember the incident in Luke 9, John was one of those who bid Jesus to send down fire from heaven to destroy the Samaritans because he was disgusted by them.<sup>9</sup> But here, we see him going down to Samaria to encourage these people whom he once hated. This is certainly the transforming power of God's salvation.

#### IV. The Scandal of Simony (8:18-19)

Act 8:18 **And when Simon saw that through laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Ghost was given, he offered them money, 19 Saying, Give me also this power, that on whomsoever I lay hands, he may receive the Holy Ghost.**

- a) Something miraculous probably had happened that caused Simon to realize that the Holy Ghost was given to the Samaritans. We are not told what it was but it could have been the speaking of tongues by the Samaritans since the sign that showed the Jews were given the Spirit on Pentecost was tongue-speaking. Later, in Acts 10, the same sign was also given to the Gentiles who trusted in Christ.
- b) As you read verse 18: "And when Simon saw that through laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Ghost was given,..", have you asked yourself whether Simon had received the Holy Spirit himself? I suppose that this professing Christian only saw the Holy Spirit fall upon the believers but he experienced none of the Spirit's indwelling at all.
- c) Instead he offered money to Peter and John to purchase the power to control the Holy Spirit. At this juncture of time, he showed his true color. Simon believed but it was driven by a different motive. His belief did not put him on a right relationship with Christ. His belief did not turn him from his old way; he still yearned for the power to practice his old crafts. This is certainly not turning "to God from idols to serve the living and true God" (1 Thess 1:9) There was no true repentance at all. ***[Sorcerers on Nias Islands who still practice black magic***

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<sup>8</sup> Peter was certainly the leader between the two. This is not to say that John has no spiritual leadership.

<sup>9</sup> **Luk 9:52** And sent messengers before his face: and they went, and entered into a village of the Samaritans, to make ready for him. **53** And they did not receive him, because his face was as though he would go to Jerusalem. **54** And when his disciples James and John saw [this], they said, Lord, wilt thou that we command fire to come down from heaven, and consume them, even as Elias did? **55** But he turned, and rebuked them, and said, Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of. **56** For the Son of man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save [them]. And they went to another village.

***to harm others even though they profess Christ, believe the Bible and attend church. As related to me by Pastor Tatu of Lifegate Baptist Church.]***

- d) If you come across the term 'simony', it originates with Simon. It is "[t]he buying or selling of ecclesiastical offices, pardons, or spiritual powers. A widespread practice in Western Europe during the Middle Ages under the Church of Rome, where men bought jobs ranging from parish priest to Pope."<sup>10</sup> It is the sin of using money to transact things which are spiritual.
- e) Can a believer commit 'spiritual simony'? I think he can; just that he attempts to transact with something else instead of money. Maybe some have prayed, "God, I will obey your call to go to the mission field if you save my parents." or "God, make me a deacon and I will go all out for you." or "God, save my boyfriend and I will attend church faithfully." That's right! We bribe God with our works and vain promises as though God can do nothing without us. Do you know all our righteousness is like filthy rags before an Almighty and All-Sufficient God? God will look down from heaven on this little, puny mud-ball and says, "Who do you think you are? What is that to me? You're not indispensable. You're just a creature."

#### **V. The Spiritual State of Simon (8:20-24)**

**Act 8:20 But Peter said unto him, Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money. 21 Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter: for thy heart is not right in the sight of God. 22 Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee. 23 For I perceive that thou art in the gall of bitterness, and [in] the bond of iniquity. 24 Then answered Simon, and said, Pray ye to the Lord for me, that none of these things which ye have spoken come upon me.**

- a) The rebuke which Peter heaped upon Simon revealed the spiritual bankruptcy of Simon the "professor". Notice what Peter said:
1. "thy money perish with thee" (v20)
  2. "thy heart is not right in the sight of God" (v21 c.f. Ps 78:32-38)
  3. "repent therefore of this thy wickedness" (v22)
  4. "thou art in the gall of bitterness" (v23 c.f. Deut 29:18-20; Jer 4:18)
  5. "[thou art] in the bond of iniquity" (v23)

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<sup>10</sup> Definition is taken from [www.datarat.net/DR/Lex-S.html](http://www.datarat.net/DR/Lex-S.html)

- b) From what Peter said in verse 22, it seems that even the Apostle was uncertain whether Simon could be forgiven.
- c) Instead of heeding Peter's advice to pray to God for forgiveness, what did Simon do? He submitted a prayer request to Peter saying, "Apostle, please pray for me." Even Christians are sometimes guilty of this. We 'cop out' and try to pass the buck of our sins and burdens to others, when in fact, it is our responsibility to pray. Did Simon feel that an Apostle's prayer was more effective than his? Well, it is true that the Bible says that "*The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much*" (Jas 5:16d) but it does not cancel out the sinner's responsibility to make right with God. If the pastors were requested to pray the sinner's prayer for each man and woman who wants to believe in Christ, then there will be no such thing as the Sinner's Prayer. It will be called the Pastor's Prayer.
- d) We do not know what happened to Simon in the end. The Bible is silent on this. However, we see here the picture of a Christian "professor". All he did was put on a Christian garb over his witchdoctor robe. However, the old nature inside him was not crucified (Rom 6:6)<sup>11</sup> In fact; he was a *BAPTISED UNBELIEVER* like Judas Iscariot<sup>12</sup>. Do not put your assurance on your baptism. I have no confidence and assurance in my baptism as far as my salvation is concerned. When sins and the Devil cast doubt over my salvation, I did not fall back to my baptism and glory in it. I did not say, "Hey, I'm already baptized, therefore I must be saved!" Instead, I look to Christ and His promises. I know that baptism cannot save me just as it cannot save you. Men are saved by their faith in Jesus Christ alone.

## Conclusions

1. God's plan of salvation is offered to all humanity – Jews, Samaritans and Gentiles alike.<sup>13</sup> Have you accepted this offer? The offer is still opened.
2. Is there a Simon in our church this morning? Are you a possessor or professor of Christ? One who possesses Christ also professes Christ but one who professes Christ may not possess Christ.

➤ **Rom 10:9** That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. **10** For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. **(Also c.f. 1 John 5:11-12)**

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<sup>11</sup> **Rom 6:6** Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with [him], that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin.

<sup>12</sup> I do not mean to judge Simon Magus. Only God knows his heart. Only God can judge his salvation. For us, we can only depend on the external fruits of repentance for judgment.

<sup>13</sup> **Gal 3:28** There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.