

Not For Sale Acts 8:9-24

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Cool-Hunters

1. Ever heard of a “cool-hunter?”
 - a. They’re 20-somethings employed by marketing firms.
 - b. They hang out were teens & young adults flock, listening in on their conversations.
 - c. Over time they become a part of the group, but they have a *specific agenda*:
 - d. To find out what’s cool & fashionable with youth.
 - e. Their goal is to *discover*, then *sell* to industry, the *next trend*.
2. There are cool-hunters in the Church too.
 - a. Publishers, clothing manufacturers, & music companies know there’s a huge market to Christians.
 - b. They’re interested in the latest trends, so they can manufacture products to scratch the consumer itch.

B. Making Money off Religion

1. This may come as a surprise, but did you know there are people who see religion as a way to make money or grab a position of power?
 2. They have no real interest in spiritual things, except as a means to advance themselves.
 3. I have here soap; *Wash Your Sins Away Cleansing Bar & Bubble Bath*. [Read Labels]
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4. Making merchandise of the things of God is nothing new.
 5. We see a shocking example of it in our text today.

II. TEXT

A. Setting the Scene

1. Following Stephen’s martyrdom which we looked at last week, a severe wave of persecution broke out against the followers of Christ in Jerusalem.
2. Thousands of believers scattered to the surrounding cities & towns of Judea, leaving just the Apostles & a few hundred in Jerusalem.
4. One of those who fled was Philip, one of the deacons selected to take care of the widows.
5. He went north to the city of Samaria and preached the Gospel with such power many came to faith.
6. God verified the truth of his message by allowing him to work dramatic signs & wonders.
7. A revival broke out that swept the City.
8. But Satan had held the Samaritans in darkness for a long time & was not going to easily give in.
9. V. 9 introduces his counter attack . . .

B. Vs. 9-11

⁹But —

1. In contrast to the great joy of salvation sweeping the city in v. 8 — **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.**

1. The Samaritans were *half-Jews* who'd a long running feud with the Jews of Jerusalem to the South & Galilee to the North.
 - a. Some 700 years before the Assyrians had conquered this area & removed the Jews to another region of their empire,
 - b. *Into* this region they transplanted another one of their conquered people.
 - c. The new-comers intermarried with the Jewish residue left behind, producing an ethnic & religious mish-mash.
 - d. In previous generations, the Samaritans *tried* to gain acceptance by their neighbors,
 - e. But the Jews considered them despicable half-breeds.
2. So the Samaritans had *accepted* their identity as social & religious *hybrids* & were innovated with spiritual things.
3. They showed some of that innovation here with their acceptance of Simon, a *sorcerer* who'd become the premier religious figure in the capital city of Samaria.
4. That is, *until* Philip arrived.

5. There's some debate among Bible scholars about whether Simon performed genuine miracles or if he was purely a magician, an illusionist who performed tricks.
 - a. It's difficult to know for certain,
 - b. But based on the way Luke describes him here & the role he played as Satan's agent, it a good guess his power was more than illusory or slight of hand.
 - c. It seems he was in league with the demonic so that what he did was indeed supernatural.
6. He had everyone, even the intellectuals, convinced he was the real deal & exercised spiritual power.
7. For a long time before Philip arrived, Simon had enjoyed a reputation as the agent of God's power.
8. But Philip presented a challenge to his continued influence & prestige.

C. Vs. 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.

1. The day of Simon's dominance ended when the first Samaritans came to faith in Jesus.
2. What won them wasn't the miracles Philip performed.
 - a. The signs merely pointed to the truth of the *message* he preached.

- b. It was that message that resulted in their salvation.
- 3. Note how Luke describes their conversion – v. 12 –
They believed Philip as he preached the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ.
- 4. The Samaritans had been *impressed by Simon's power*, but they were *convinced by Philip's preaching*.
 - a. Their faith was based on the message, not the miracles.
 - b. If people are won with sensationalism, then the sensational is needed to keep them.
 - 1) Since today's *sensation* is tomorrow's *normal* and the next day's *boredom*,
 - 2) A ministry based on the sensational is driven by *novelty*,
 - 3) And novelty always ends up in the *bizarre*.
 - c. What people are *won with* is what they are *won too*.
 - d. Those who come *for* loaves & fishes have to be kept *by* them.
 - e. But if the loaves & fishes merely provide *the strength* for them to stay to hear the Truth taught, and that Word takes root in their hearts, then bread & fish serve their purpose.
- 5. That's what the miracles Philip performed did. They set the stage for people to listen as he shared the reason *behind* the miracles – Jesus.

13 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.

- 6. Along with the large numbers of Samaritans being converted came Simon the sorcerer.
- 7. And while it says he believed and was baptized, his was *not* a genuine conversion.
 - a. Our English translations obscure Luke's more clear record –
 - b. But look closely & you can sort it out, even here.
 - c. V. 12 says the people believed & were baptized at Philip's preaching the Gospel.
 - d. V. 13 says "Then" Simon believed & was baptized.
 - 1) The "then" refers to the "when" of v. 12 –
 - 2) When the Samaritans became converts.
 - e. In other words, Simon's belief wasn't based on the Gospel – it was due to the conversion of the Samaritans.
 - f. He went along because *it was what everyone else was doing*; the direction the current wind was blowing.
- 8. As later events prove, Simon wasn't interested in truth, he was only interested in retaining his influence & popularity.
 - a. He was astute enough to realize the movement that had swept Jerusalem had come to Samaria and was not likely to blow over in a few days.
 - b. The Jesus Movement was destined to not only stay but grow. Opposing it would be fool-hardy.
 - c. The best thing for him to do was to go along.
 - d. When the number of Samaritans joining the new movement became a

- critical mass, he took action to pass himself off as one of them.
- e. But not because he really believed. It was simply a smart career move.
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9. Besides, he was curious about Philip's power & wanted to be in a position to find out where it came from. He didn't care about Philip's *message* – He was after the *miracles*.
10. Simon had always used supernatural power as a tool to advance *himself*. Philip used it to advance *Jesus*.
- b. Simon used power to *dominate*. Philip used it to *serve*.
- b. The contrast couldn't be clearer and Simon just couldn't figure it out.
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11. Revival had broken out in Samaria through Philip's faithful ministry there.
- a. But as usually happens with revival, the devil sent one of his agents to subvert the work of the Spirit.
- b. Satan knows when revival has come, a frontal assault doesn't work.
- c. So he shifts tactics & seeks to divert the pure flow of the river of revival into the polluted streams of the counterfeit.
- d. Or he seeks to discredit the revival by subverting its leaders.
12. Simon was the devil's agent who slipped into the revival in Samaria to divert the Work of God.

D. Vs. 14-17

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.

1. Word of the revival in Samaria reached the Apostles back in Jerusalem.
2. They realized they needed to go & check things out so they sent Peter & John.
3. As they interacted with these new believers they realized something was missing from their experience with Christ.
 - a. There was no doubt about their being genuine believers -
 - b. But there was a dynamic & power that was lacking from their lifestyle.
 - c. Peter & John learned the Samaritans had only been water baptized, not baptized by the Spirit.
 - d. They were born again but not Spirit-filled.
4. So Peter & John explained to them there was more in terms of spiritual power, laid hands on & prayed for them. When they did, the Spirit came & filled them.
5. It was important Peter & John were the ones to bring them into the fullness of the Spirit rather than Philip because the Samaritans needed to realize their faith was built on the ministry of the Apostles, not someone else.
 - a. Remember that the rift between Jews & Samaritans went back for many generations.
 - b. The Samaritans church would find it all too easy to base their faith in Philip or someone else,
 - c. *Anyone* else really, who they could claim as distinct from the Jewish

- church.
- d. Philip knew this would be wrong, so when Peter & John showed up, he humbly deferred to them, encouraging the Samaritans to look to the Apostles as the God ordained leaders of the church.
6. But this was also an important moment *for the Apostles*.
 - a. Jesus had said they were to be witnesses of Him in Jerusalem, then Judea.
 - b. That had happened a short time before when persecution scattered the disciples into the region of Judea.
 - c. But Jesus went on, “and to Samaria.” And now here they were.
 - d. The followers of Jesus needed to realize the church isn’t a Jewish, or Samaritan, or even Gentile thing. It’s a *people* thing!

E. Vs. 18-19

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.”

1. Here’s *proof* Simon was no true believer.
 2. *If* he was saved & filled with the Spirit, he never would have asked Peter & John if he could buy the secret for how to do it.
 3. He’d have known it was the grace of God and no trick at all.
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4. Magic is big business. Magicians are much sought after performers.
 - a. And there’s quite a market in developing new illusions, then selling them to stage performers.
 - b. Some of the big names in the illusion business have spent hundreds of thousands of dollars to learn one new trick.
 5. Though Simon moved in the realm of spiritual power, he considered the ministry of the Apostles as *business*.
 - a. He was sure they looked at their calling as a career, & a lucrative one at that.
 - b. In his estimation, the Baptism of the Holy Spirit was a skill he could learn, then use to reclaim his position of popularity in Samaria.
 - c. Religion wasn’t about truth for Simon, it was *business*.
 6. And being able to confer spiritual power upon others, as he’d seen Peter & John do, seemed to him the best way to return to the spotlight.
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7. There are lots of “Simons” today. There always has been & always will be.
 - a. They’re men & women who crave attention or power.
 - b. They’re greedy for financial profit or ambitious for fame.
 - c. And they see religion as an easy means to attain what their heart is hungry for.
 8. In fact, there’s a practice & sin that’s been named *after this passage*.
 - a. “Simony” is the selling of church positions like priest, bishop, cardinal, pope.
 - b. It refers to offering special spiritual favors or indulgences to someone for a price.
 - c. At one period of church history, people could buy a cardinal’s seat.

- d. At another time you could go to a special priest and offer a certain amount of money and actually get a pass to commit a sin without fear of punishment.
- 9. How dark the heart of man to take the grace of God & turn it into an item to be brokered.

F. Vs. 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!

- 1. Peter’s response wasn’t gently or polite. It was heated & intense.
 - 2. He was shocked, stunned, *outraged* at the crassness of Simon’s offer.
 - 3. How could someone see the amazing work of love & blessing that was happening as people were being filled with the Spirit & be moved to even THINK, let alone *ask*, if this could be bottled & sold.
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- 4. I have to tell you that I’m quite distressed at the large number of Bible versions there are today.
 - a. A few of the English translations have been done with pure motive – to give an accurate rendering of the original text, using the best of modern scholarship & new discoveries in textual studies.
 - b. But some of the new Bibles are nothing more than an attempt on the part of publishers to cash in on the growing market of Bible readers.
 - 5. At a pastors conference several years ago, I was talking to a pastor whose son was in a popular Christian band;
 - a. Not a worship band, just a regular quartet, playing contemporary rock with spiritual & God honoring content.
 - b. They were with a major Christian label.
 - c. And they’d been TOLD their next CD needed to be in the worship & praise genre – because that’s where the market was.
 - d. Did you notice how a couple years ago many of the regular Christian groups came out with “Worship projects”? That was all *market-driven*.
 - 6. You know why *Purpose Driven Life* was such a huge success?
 - a. It was driven by clever marketing & financial enticements from the publisher.
 - b. Don’t get me wrong, Rick Warren’s a wonderful servant of God and there’s some good stuff in *PDL*.
 - c. But if you strip away the hype, *PDL* is nothing but a modest attempt at basic discipleship.
 - d. It was slick merchandising that turned it into a mega-seller. And the publisher made MILLIONS!
 - 7. Seriously – it’s time the Body of Christ woke up & realized Simon is alive & well in the church today.
 - 8. We need some Apostles like Peter to stand up & tell Simon to take a hike.
- 21**You have neither part nor portion in this matter, for your heart is not right in the sight of God.
- 9. Peter excommunicated Simon on the spot.
 - 10. But notice what he then immediately said & did -

22 Repent therefore of this your wickedness, and pray God if perhaps the thought of your heart may be forgiven you.

11. Having excommunicated Simon, Peter called him to repent and come to genuine faith in the Lord.
 12. He didn't consign him to hell then turn away.
 13. Peter was moved with compassion and pleaded with Simon to make things right.
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14. But Peter realized there was a deep-seated root to Simon's spiritual blindness that required some heart-searching reflection to overcome.
 - a. That's why he called him to earnest, on-going prayer.
 - b. Forgiveness was a goal Simon would need to press for by patiently seeking God.
 15. We get a clue to the root cause of Simon's spiritual problem in v. 23

23 For I see that you are poisoned by bitterness and bound by iniquity."

16. For all Simon's grand public persona, he was in fact a bitter little man.
17. The root of his bitterness isn't given.
 - a. Maybe as a young boy his father told him he was a good for nothing waste who would amount to nothing.
 - 1) And that wound had driven him in all he'd done over the years to make something of himself,
 - 2) Even to the point of making an alliance with the power of hell,
 - 3) Selling his soul to the devil if only it would buy him fame.
 - b. Or maybe his bitterness was envy of Philip who'd stolen his spotlight.
18. The point is, as long as Simon held tight to his bitterness, he'd never be free.
19. Peter pointed him in the right direction but it was up to Simon to follow through. Did he?

G. V. 24

24 Then Simon answered and said, "Pray to the Lord for me, that none of the things which you have spoken may come upon me."

1. Simon didn't follow the course Peter prescribed. Instead he asked for Peter to pray for him.
2. And he didn't ask for a changed heart, only to get out of judgment.
3. That sounds like the wish of most sinners who want to avoid hell but aren't willing to give up the sin dragging them there.

III. CONCLUSION

A. Prescriptive Vs. Preventative

1. Have you noticed the huge upsurge of interest in antioxidants?
 - a. Over the last couple years, antioxidants and immune-boosters have become much sought after.
 - b. We love to hear that foods we like have high levels of antioxidants; like tea, coffee & chocolate.
2. People take immune system boosters to help ward off colds & the flu.
3. But if they come down with something, they'll go to the doctor & get a

- prescription for an antibiotic.
4. Antioxidants are *preventative*. Antibiotics are *prescriptive*; they fight a current infection or help correct a current problem.
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5. Sometimes the Word we hear on Sunday mornings is *prescriptive*, it confronts & corrects *current* need.
 6. Today's message isn't so much prescriptive as *preventative*.
 - a. It's a vaccine, an inoculation against a spiritual infection we're all likely to eventually face.
 - b. The devil's tactics aren't new; he just keeps recycling the old ones by re-packaging them in new clothes.

B. Market Value

1. So as we end today, look again at v. 20 –
But Peter said to him, “Your money perish with you, because you thought that the gift of God could be purchased with money!”
2. Peter's rebuke was *intense* because for someone who'd followed Jesus for 3 years & seen Him crucified for the sins of the world, nothing was so precious as the grace of God!
3. Yet here was Simon willing to reduce that precious gift down to some market value.
4. We're probably in no danger of the sin of Simony as it's been manifest throughout the centuries.
5. I haven't had anyone offer me cash to be put on staff.
6. But there's a far more subtle way we can apply this; one that gets at the real heart of Simon's error.
7. You see, the core of Simon's sin was *self*. It wasn't God's glory he lived for, it was his *own*.
8. He evaluated things in terms of how they *affected him*.
9. So, here's the question → How do *we* evaluate things?
 - a. Do we consider obedience to God on the basis of what it will *cost us*?
 - 1) Do we condition our faithfulness to the Lord on the basis of what *we're going to get out of it*?
 - 2) Do we, like Simon, place *ourselves* at the center & demand God orbit us?
 - b. Or do we bow in humble submission saying, “God, You know what's best. Here's my life. Do with me as You will”?