



## BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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### The Sermons of Dan Duncan

Acts 8: 1-25

Acts

“Salvation and Sorcery in Samaria”

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] We are in Acts 8, and if you were here last week, you know that a significant event happened in the church with the stoning of Stephen, who became the first Christian martyr. And as that happened, we are told the men who did it laid their garments at the feet of a young rabbi named Saul. And chapter 8 begins, “Saul was in hearty agreement with putting him to death, and on that day, a great persecution began against the Church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria except the apostles. Some devout men buried Stephen and made a loud lamentation over him. Saul began ravaging the church, entering house after house and dragging off men and women. He would put them in prison. Therefore, those who had been scattered went about preaching the word. Philip went down to the city of Samaria and began proclaiming Christ to them.”

“The crowds with one accord were giving attention to what was said by Philip as they heard and saw the signs which he was performing for, in the case of many who had unclean spirits, they were coming out of them, shouting with a loud voice, and many who had been paralyzed and lame were healed. So there was much rejoicing in that city. Now there was a man named Simon who formerly was practicing magic in the city and astonishing the people of Samaria, claiming to be someone great, and they all from smallest to greatest were giving attention to him saying, ‘This man is what is called the great power of God,’ and they were giving him attention because he had for a long time astonished them with his magic arts. When they believed Philip preaching the good news about the kingdom of God in the name of Jesus Christ, they were being baptized, men and women alike. Even Simon himself believed. And after being baptized, he continued on with Philip, and as he observed signs and great miracles taking place, he was constantly amazed.”

“Now when the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent them Peter and John, came down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit, for he had not yet fallen upon any of them. They had simply been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then they began laying their hands on them, and they were receiving the Holy Spirit. Now when Simon saw that the spirit was bestowed through the laying on of the apostles’ hands, he offered them money, saying, ‘Give this authority to me as well so that everyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit.’ But Peter said to him, ‘May your silver perish with you because you thought that you could obtain the gift of God with money. You have no part or portion in this matter, for your heart is not right before God. Therefore, repent of this wickedness of yours and pray the Lord that if possible, the intention of your heart may be forgiven you, for I see that you are in the gall of bitterness and in the bondage of iniquity.’”

“But Simon answered and said, ‘Pray to the Lord for me yourselves so that nothing of what you have said may come upon me.’ So when they had solemnly testified and spoken the word of the Lord, they started back to Jerusalem and were preaching the gospel to many villages of the Samaritans.” May the Lord bless this reading of his word. Let’s bow in prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we do thank you for the great privilege we have to be gathered together here this morning. It is a privilege. It is a blessing to be with the saints, with men and women, young and old alike who have put their faith in Jesus Christ and our children of God, members of your family. What a privilege that is, and not simply that we are members of your family, but we have possession of your word, we have the word of God that we can read as we have done. And more, we have the spirit of God within us. He has sealed our hearts, and he is our teacher, our interpreter, and we pray, Father, that as we take the time to seek to understand the meaning of this passage and how it applies to us personally that the spirit of God would guide us in that, and that he would teach us.

We are people totally dependent upon you. We are dependent upon you for spiritual life, and we have received that only by your grace. You opened our hearts to receive the gospel, the gospel that was given by those whom you sent to proclaim it to us. You sought us when we were not seeking you, and you have sealed our hearts with the third person of the trinity. What a blessed and privileged position we are in. We thank you for that, but we pray, Father, that he, the Spirit, would build us up in the faith, that He would strengthen us, that He would give us understanding and make the right applications and equip us for the week head and service in your ministry. Because all of us, Father, are in that ministry, whether we be individuals who stand in pulpits or we work in business offices or teach in school rooms or work in the household. Whatever the case may be.

Father, we are your people, your ministers, and we pray that you would equip us well for the tasks that you have given to us. Bless us spiritually, bless us physically. There are many physical needs, Father. We remember those who have brought their requests to us, and we pray that you bless them, bless those who are lacking physical health. We pray that you give them strength and healing. We pray for those who are discouraged by the circumstances of life, that you would encourage them and give them an understanding of your purpose for them, and the promises that you have given to us. They are all certain. They are all sure, Father. Regardless of how difficult life becomes, it only becomes difficult for our good, and so I pray that you would encourage individuals with that.

Bless our time this evening as we gather again for the Lord’s Supper. You have told us through your Son to remember Him as often as we gather together. And so as we do that this evening, Father, bless us as we remember Him. Remember His death for us, and remember that we have been told to do that until He comes. And so we look forward every Sunday evening by the taking of the Lord’s Supper to that final day when He will come, and that day may be soon. We pray that it is, and we pray, Lord, that you would put within the hearts of each one of us a longing for that day.

Help us not to love the world. Help us to love your Son and look forward to seeing Him, look forward to His coming. My bless us to that end this morning, Lord, as we sing our final hymn, and may it prepare our hearts well for our study together, we pray in Christ’s name, amen.

[Message] On July 8th, 1741, Jonathan Edwards preached what has become the most famous sermon in America. Sinners in the hands of an angry God. It is filled with startling statements. He told his audience that there is nothing that keeps wicked men at any moment out of hell but the mere pleasure of God, and God is angry. He compared the peril of the unconverted to that of a spider held over a fire, and to a man walking over the pit on a rotten

covering. He said that the only thing between them and hell was the air, and that their sins made them heavy as lead.

Over the years, that sermon has received strong criticism, but when it was preached, it resulted in many conversions in the church where Edwards spoke. People in church got saved. And that fact is every bit as arresting as the sermon’s sensational metaphors because it means that a person can be a churchgoer and unconverted. Church attendance does not save. And baptism does not regenerate. It is possible to be baptized without being born again. That fact is made plain in Acts 8 where Peter, whose language was not outdone by Edwards, said to a man who had been baptized, “To hell with you and your money.” It happened in Samaria. Jesus had told his followers to be his witnesses in Jerusalem and all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth.

A church that had grown large in Jerusalem now begins that outward movement in Acts 8. What produced this evangelistic activity had not been anticipated by the church. It occurred as a result of the murder of Stephen and the persecution that followed. Luke describes it in verse 1 as a great persecution. It is what Rabbi Gamalial earlier had advised against. He urged patience when he said that the plan and action of the apostles would be overthrown if it was only of men. But nothing could overthrow it if in fact it was of God. But patience had run out. The church had only continued to grow, and it showed no signs of being overthrown, and so the authorities in Jerusalem, the Pharisees and the Sadducees together decided to overthrow it themselves.

And it was Gamalial’s star student who led the persecution. Verse 3. “Saul began ravaging the church, entering house after house, and dragging off men and women.” Later in chapter 26, Paul states that they were also being put to death, and in Galatians 1, he states that he persecuted the church beyond measure and tried to destroy it. He tried to destroy it in Jerusalem, he tried to destroy it throughout Judea, and in foreign cities as well until Christ finally stopped him on the road to Damascus. But until then, there was a terrible bloodletting in Jerusalem in an effort to crush the infant church. What happened instead was a dispersion of the church.

Verse 1 states that the Christians were scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, and as the people moved out into these regions, Luke says in verse 4, that they went about preaching the word. So instead of smothering the flame of the gospel, Satan actually fanned it and caused it to spread. All of the efforts of Satan and the Sanhedrin were ineffective because they were fighting against God, and as Gamalial had suspected, that would be futile. It’s always a losing battle when one fights against God. Now the church might not have understood that at first. The death of Stephen hit it hard. The brave men who claimed the body of Stephen and buried him did so with a loud lamentation, Luke tells us. And some must have wondered at that moment how the church could ever recover from a loss of such a man like Stephen.

Had a profound ministry in Jerusalem. He was a powerful preacher and defender of the faith. And so they must have wondered what would happen now without him, but God does not depend on men. He is independent. He is sovereign. He is free. He does not need us to do His work, and He shows that in circumstances like this one by turning a tragedy into a triumph. By persecuting the church, the seed of the gospel was scattered all over the region, and God raised up new churches. Not only did the church of Jerusalem not cease to exist, but other churches began to exist. He raised them up all over the region, and He raised up a man to replace Stephen. Philip, who went and evangelized the Samaritans. Man cannot stop the work of God.

Men try, but you read through the Bible, Old Testament and New, and you see that same fact. God is unfrustratable. Men end up, regardless of what they do, carrying out the decree and the plan of God. If they comply with the word of God, they carry it out in obedience. If they resist it, they carry it out through their disobedience. That happened with the cross. Satan

exerted all of his effort, all of his energy in the enemies of God, the gentiles and the Jews alike collaborated to put to death that man who they would not have to rule over them. And in the process, they only carried out God's will. Crucified the son of God, which means salvation for the world. Well that's what we see all through the word of God. Isaiah puts it well in chapter 14, verse 27.

“For the Lord of hosts is planted, and who can frustrate it? As for his stretched out hand, who can turn it back? No one can turn back the hand of God.” Now that's been seen all through church history. We've seen it in modern times on Sunday, January 8, 1956. Five young missionaries were murdered by **Acca** tribesmen on the banks of a river in the jungle of Ecuador. The news shocked the world. It seemed a pointless waste, but it wasn't. Elizabeth Elliott, whose husband, Jim Elliott, was one of the five martyrs, wrote about it in her book, *Through Gates of Splendor*, and she told how people all over the world were affected for the good by that tragedy, how missionary activity increased as a result of it, and the gospel actually penetrated the tribe of the Acca Indians.

Those who murdered those men came to faith. God makes the wrath of man to praise him. The first verses of Acts 8 demonstrate that and explain how the great mission in Samaria began. As persecution increased and people fled Jerusalem, we read in verse 5 that Philip went down to the city of Samaria and began proclaiming Christ to them. Philip first appeared in chapter 6. He was one of the seven deacons in the church of Jerusalem along with Stephen, and Luke now focuses attention on him. Like Stephen, he was a man of bold faith, and it took bold faith to do what he did because there was a longstanding feud between the Jews and the Samaritans that was centuries old.

When the Assyrians conquered the northern kingdom of Israel in 722 BC, they took many people off into captivity, and they resettled alien people in the land. The outcome of that was the Hebrews who had been left behind intermarried with the foreigners, which made the Samaritans half-breeds, both ethnically and religiously. They built a temple on Mount **Garazeem** and Samaria that became a rival to the temple in Jerusalem. And they rejected all of the Old Testament, which revealed Jerusalem and the temple as the center of religious activity and edited the Bible so that what they had for their Bible was the first five books of the Bible. So there it was, Assyria's **sism** between these two groups. John mentioned it in John 4:9 where he says, “Jews do not associate with Samaritans.” But Jesus did.

You'll remember that great ministry he had in Samaria where he talks to the woman at the well of **Siddecar**, and she comes to faith, and many others do. Jesus loved the Samaritans, and He revealed himself to them as the Messiah and sent His disciples to them with the gospel, and Philip went. He preached Christ to them. Strange things were happening, though, when he arrived. Sorcery was being practiced by a man named Simon. Verse 9 says that he was astonishing the people or bewitched them as the King James version puts it. A further away from the light of the gospel that people are, the more superstitious they become, the more superstition and the more selfishness begins to dominate people, and superstition certainly dominated Samaria.

Simon was skilled in magic tricks, skilled in sleight of hand, and he was so skilled that he was able to convince the people that he was a miracle worker. He was effective. He claimed to be someone great. Verse 10 states that the people called him the great power of God, which may have been the way that he advertised himself. Come and see the great power of God do wonders and miracles, and people were fascinated by it and gathered around it. He'd since become known to us as Simon Magus, and the people small and great were giving him attention because of his magic arts. But when Philip came, things changed. He was proclaiming Christ, and in

verses 6 and 7, we read the crowds with one accord were giving attention to what was said by Philip, and they heard and saw the signs which he was performing, for in the case of many who had unclean spirits, they were coming out of them shouting with a loud voice, and many who had been paralyzed and lame were healed.

So in contrast to Simon who drew people to himself, Philip drew people to Christ. That's the difference between true preaching and false preaching, and the truth of what Philip said was affirmed by the miracles that he did. That was the reason for them. Miracles authenticated the message. 2 Corinthians 12:12, Paul explains that. He speaks of the signs of a true apostle, the miracles of a true apostle. Philip was not an apostle. Neither was Stephen who also did great wonders, but both were representatives of the apostles, and the miracles they did occurred in order to establish the apostles' message, which is the gospel of Jesus Christ. Salvation is only in Him, perceived only through faith.

Well that's why Philip did his miracles in Samaria. The sick were healed, demons were cast out, and people were giving attention to the gospel. As a result, we read in verse 8 there was much rejoicing in that city, and many were brought to faith. Verse 12 says they believed Philip preaching the good news. It was the preaching of the gospel that produced that, that produced faith. That's Romans 10:7 where Paul writes, "Faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ." And that's where the real power to change lives is. It's in the word of God. In fact, Paul begins the book of Romans in chapter 1, verse 17 by saying that it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the gentile.

Problem is many people today, even Christians, evangelical Christians don't believe that. If the church is weak today, it is weak at this very point. It doesn't trust the Bible. Now I don't mean by that that Bible-believing Christians don't believe that the Bible is the word of God. They do, and I suspect most if not all would defend it as the inherent word of God, but they don't believe that it is sufficient for our needs. Many in the church today don't trust it. Many churches don't seem to trust it. I say that because they preach other things. They seem to rely on other methods than the mere preaching of the word of God. I'm not alone in that assessment. James Boyce put it this way in the book *Power Religion*. "I do not hesitate to say that the weakness of today's church for all its numerical and financial strength can be traced precisely to its failure to trust and consequently its failure also to preach and teach the scriptures."

"The apostles preached the scriptures. They were sufficient for the needs of the people of their day, and Paul preached the whole council of God, the hard things as well as the easy things, the things that disturbed people as much as the things that comfort people." We need it all, and they preached it all, and that's what was done in Samaria. The gospel was proclaimed there, and that was the real power in Samaria. The miracles were used to authenticate the message, but the word of God is what changed lives. They believed Philip preaching, the text says.

It was that preaching, it was the word of God that broke the power that had bewitched the Samaritans. It brought the light of truth to Samaria, dispelled superstition, and gave life. It does the same today. It's what Peter calls in 1 Peter 1:23, "The imperishable seed that the Holy Spirit uses to produce faith and new life," and it continues to do that. It continues to change us as we read it and study it. It's God's revelation that he uses to transform us, and daily renew our minds so that we have wisdom, so that we have order in our lives, and we are able to walk in a way that pleases God. That's what gives us joy. In fact, that's one of the fruit of the Spirit. Love, joy, peace, and on it goes. We experience that in joy that as we've studied the word of God. Well that's what God did in Samaria many believe, and verse 12 says, "We're being baptized, men and women alike, and there was lots of joy in the city. All of this caught the attention of Simon Magus, who was particularly impressed with the miracles. As a good magician, he knew magic.

He knew sleight of hand. He could see what Philip was doing was not sleight of hand, it was not magic tricks, but real miracles. Even the magicians of Egypt were able to see that. They performed all kinds of phenomenal things themselves, but when their secret arts couldn't keep pace with the power of Moses, they confessed to Pharaoh, 'This is the finger of God.'"

"And Simon could see that in the things that Philip was doing, the real power of God was, and that was the finger of God. It was divine," and we read in verse 13 that even Simon himself believed, and after being baptized, he continued on with Philip. On the face of things, it seems to have been a genuine conversion. He believed, he was baptized, he continued on. He seemed to be persevering in the faith, but notice what Luke says. He continued on with Philip, observing great miracles taking place, and verse 13 concludes he was constantly amazed, and that seems to be the clue to his faith. It was not grounded in a conviction of sin, not faith in Christ for salvation, faith which is produced by grace, but faith in miracles and power.

Later in verse 21, Peter gives us some insight into all this. He says to Simon, "Your heart is not right before God." So all looks fine on the surface, but underneath what Peter could see with spiritual perception was that all was not right where it counted in the heart. Saving faith is usually defined in three aspects, that of knowledge, ascent, and trust. Now some see little or no difference between the last two, ascent and trust, but usually it is understood in those three ways. Knowledge of the content of the gospel. First of all, a person must know what is being said. They must know and understand the gospel that man, woman alike are sinners in need of a savior. Christ is that savior, he's the son of God who became a man and died in our place and bore the wrath of God so that all who believe in him would escape that judgment and have life everlasting.

That's simply put the gospel. So the first step in saving faith, the first aspect of it is knowledge. It's understanding that, and secondly, it is ascent. It is intellectually acknowledging that to be, in fact, true, and then thirdly, trust. Putting one's faith in that, appropriating that truth, savingly, for one's self. Simon had the knowledge of the gospel, he seems to. At least he had some knowledge of it. How well he knew it becomes suspect as we will see later, but he seems to have had the knowledge and seemed to have ascended to it. But in reality, he had not trusted what he had heard. He had not believed in Christ, but that was not clear at first. He professed faith, had been baptized, and was following Philip along with many other people in Samaria. It was a great revival that was taking place, and he seemed to be a part of that.

It wasn't long before reports of the revival got back to Jerusalem, and the apostles decided that they should investigate. So they sent Peter and John, and went down from Jerusalem to Samaria. When they arrived, they immediately discovered that not everything was quite right. It was a true revival. People had actually come to faith in Jesus Christ and were saved, but the people had not yet received the Holy Spirit, and so they prayed for them, they laid their hands on them, and verse 17 states, "They were receiving the Holy Spirit." Now that's a very unusual experience, and it calls for some comment because those who believe in the second blessing of the Holy Spirit – that is they believe that a person can be saved without actually receiving the Holy Spirit, and one must pray and seek that second blessing, that gift of the Spirit, they often look to this text as proof of their doctrine.

But this incident is unique in the New Testament. There is no other record of persons who believed received Christian baptism and did not receive the Holy Spirit, and there are other passages that clearly teach that the Holy Spirit is received at the moment of faith. There is no second blessing. It's all at once the moment we believe, Ephesians 1:13. Having believed, you were sealed in him with the Holy Spirit. The moment of faith, the sealing occurred. 1 Corinthians 12:13, Romans 8:9 indicate the same. The reason the Holy Spirit was withheld in

Samaria until the apostles arrived lies in the bitter rivalry that existed between the Jews and the Samaritans. To prevent a permanent division between the two groups, God withheld the giving of the Spirit until the apostles could come and witness that with their own eyes. When the Spirit was given after they prayed, after the apostles laid their hands on the Samaritans, then they saw the giving of the Spirit. And that showed to them – that showed the leaders of the church of Jerusalem, the apostles, that Samaritans were saved and placed in the body of Christ in the same way on the same terms as Jewish believers through faith alone.

And it also was a testimony to the Samaritans because this happened to them after these Jewish apostles laid their hands upon them, which indicated very clearly that the Samaritans, who had the same antipathy toward the Jews as the Jews had toward them, they were subject to these Jewish apostles. They were under their authority. So this withholding of the Spirit, which is unique in the New Testament, occurred in order to preserve the unity of the church. That’s always in jeopardy for various reasons, and the apostles contended earnestly for it. Paul did. He contended earnestly for that unity of the body in the book of Ephesians. He did so in the book of Galatians. In fact, in Galatians 3:28, he makes this definitive statement. He says, “There is neither Jew nor Greek. There is neither slave nor free man. There is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”

And the events in Samaria, withholding of the Spirit until the right time was for the purpose of preserving that at all, Jew and Samaritan alike would be one in Christ Jesus. Now as this was happening, verse 18 states that Simon saw that the Spirit was bestowed through the laying on of hands. What he saw, what phenomenon occurred is not stated, but probably what occurred was the gift of tongues, which was the sign of the Spirit’s coming at Pentecost and will again be the sign of his coming in Cornelius’ household in chapter 10 when the gentiles come to faith. Now that’s not stated, but that’s likely what it was that Simon saw, and so if so, we can be sure it was not ecstatic speech that he witnessed, but the speaking of known languages.

Simon would not have been impressed with Samaritans uttering gibberish. Gentiles did that. There’s nothing miraculous in that at all, and so this would have been the speaking of known languages, but whatever signs he saw, Simon was so impressed by them that he craved the authority to reproduce them at will by the laying on of his own hands. He was not interested in repentance. Simon was not interested in a right relationship with God. He was fascinated with signs and wonders. He was interested in carrying on his magic practice. One of the authority that the apostles had that would give him power and prestige beyond anything his knowledge of magic had ever given him – and so thinking that John and Peter were extraordinary magicians, he went to them and offered them money for a share in their secret powers.

“Give this authority to me as well,” he said, “so that everyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit.” This is where we get the term simony. It’s a term you may not be familiar with. It comes out of church history, but it was the practice of buying and selling church offices. It was common before the reformation. The reformation put an end to it, and we don’t really see that any longer, but what we do see today is the Spirit of Simon in churches or the Holy Spirit is regarded chiefly as a power. That was Simon’s concept of the Holy Spirit. He was a power. Simon wanted to have control of that power for his own personal use and advantage. Had no appreciation for the inward character of the gospel and the work of the Holy Spirit, and that same attitude is present in anyone who considers the Lord to be chiefly a source of power that serves us and overcomes problems for us so that we can have a happy life.

There’s nothing wrong with a happy life. Nothing wrong with joy. That’s what happened in Samaria. That’s the great evidence of the gospel. It’s the fruit of the spirit. It’s what is to be present in our lives. We’re to be joyful people. We have every reason to be joyful, but there is

something wrong with that attitude that sees the Holy Spirit and the work of God as merely something for our personal use and advantage. That does not exist for man's convenience. Man was made for God's glory. That understanding may be rare today, but it is the clear teaching of the Bible. What is the chief end of man? Man's chief end is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever. Man cannot control the living God, and the Holy Spirit is that, the third person of the trinity. He is the almighty, and He is Holy.

Every believer has been sovereignly conquered by Him. He gives faith and He brings us into God's family so that we may serve Him and become like Him in holiness. Now our concern is not to be that we might have more of the Holy Spirit. We're not going to receive more of the Holy Spirit, and that's not to be our concern. Our concern is to be that the Holy Spirit has more of us. We might die daily to self, and we might live daily to God. Simon had no understanding of that. He wanted to buy the Holy Spirit in order to enhance his own prestige and profits. He saw this as a good investment, and so he came to the very men, Peter and John, who were unable to give silver and gold to that lame man in chapter 3, but who freely without request of any money, without charge, healed that man. These are the men to whom Simon comes and offers money.

They were shocked. The idea that someone would try to buy what is free showed that he had no understanding of grace, no appreciation of the majesty of God. He treated the Holy Spirit like a commodity, something to buy and sell. That's not changed altogether. There are many today who merchandise the gospel. I don't want to seem to be hard, I don't want to seem to be too critical, but it seems to me that in many places, in churches and in seminaries, on radio and television, ministries and ministers are market-driven so that the bottom line is not the truth of God, but the dollar. That was certainly true here, and that appalled Peter. And he responded with a stern review. May your silver perish with you because you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money.

That word, perish, is from the word that's used in John 3:16 and denied of those who believe in Christ. They shall not perish, meaning they shall not go to hell, but have eternal life. Now that's the meaning of perish here. It is perdition. So Peter's response was serious. He said, "Your money go to perdition with you." Or as JB Philips translated it, to hell with you and your money. That's the meaning of this statement. Perish. Perish eternally. The apostles could be blunt and severe when the honor of God and the grace of the gospel was at stake. You see that in Paul in the book of Galatians in chapter 1 and verse 8.

He says that anyone who compromises grace with works – and if you read through the book, you find out that what he's referring to, what is the issue that has provoked him to pick up his pen and write this letter, perhaps hastily, to this church in Galatia, was circumcision. One work, one small addition to the gospel. That's all. But he said that if anyone preaches that kind of gospel, they're preaching a different gospel, and he says in verse 8 that if that person be an apostle or even an angel, he is to be accursed, an **athema**, damned. Simon fell into that category. He thought he could buy grace. And he could pay for the ability to give the Holy Spirit, he could commercialize Christianity.

And so in verse 21, Peter says, "You have no portion in this matter, for your heart is not right before God." Literally, his heart was not straight. He was a man with a crooked heart because he was, as Peter says in verse 23, in the gall of bitterness and in the bondage of inequity. That was his condition. He professed faith. He had been baptized, but his heart was crooked, and he was enslaved to sin. Peter could see that, but Simon couldn't. That's how guilty and that's how helpless he was, how helpless the natural man is. His will is enslaved to sin, but he

cannot see it. We sang about that this morning in that first hymn, which compares the natural man with Christ. Guilty, vile, and helpless we, spotless lamb of God was he.

In and of ourselves, we are guilty, vile, and helpless. Now that was Simon. He was enslaved to iniquity, and he was so blind he couldn't see it. Can you imagine a man or a woman being a slave and not knowing that they are slaves? Being enslaved and thinking that very enslavement was freedom. That's the world in which we live. People glorifying their sin, not realizing that sin has enslaved them and is destroying them. That was Simon. He was in desperate need. He couldn't see it, but Peter could see it, and Peter didn't leave Simon with a dreadful diagnosis and a curse on his head. He urged him to repent. Verse 22. “Therefore, repent of this wickedness of yours and pray the Lord that if possible, the intention of your heart may be forgiven you.” The very fact that Peter called Simon to repent is clear evidence that his faith was not genuine.

Simon's response was ambiguous at best. “Pray to the Lord for me yourselves,” he said, “so that nothing of what you have said may come upon me.” Peter said, “Repent and pray.” He didn't do it. He didn't obey Peter. Instead, Simon told Peter to pray for him. Made no confession of his sin, showed no contrition for the condition of his crooked heart. His concern was not for his sin. His concern was for the consequences of it. Pray that nothing of what you have said may come upon me. That's very much like Judas, who had deep remorse for what he did, but he never repented. Remorse is feeling sorry for what one has done, but not acting upon it.

Repentance believes. The repentant person turns in faith to Jesus Christ. This is what he sees, simply that someone, the apostle Peter or John would pray that the consequences not befall him, but he doesn't repent and turn. That's very much like Judas. According to some of the early church fathers, Simon became the first heretic and the father of Gnosticism. Other stories were told about him. One, that he went onto Rome and was worshipped as a God, and there he met his demise. Many stories have been written about Simon the sorcerer. What is surely true of him is that he is an example of how close a person may come to the truth without believing it. How a person can hear the gospel, show signs of faith, associate with God's people, and not be saved.

That was true of Judas. He lived in the light of Christ for some three years. He sat next to him at the last Passover meal in the upper room, and then he turned away in order to betray him. The last picture John gives of Judas, the last site that he had of him, which must have been indelibly impressed on John's mind, was of Judas leaving Christ, the light of the world going out of the upper room and into the night. Simon's case was similar. From this point, he disappears from the pages of scripture. From all appearances, he left the apostles and went into his own spiritual night where to use Edward's – the only thing between him and hell was the air, and his sin made him heavy as lead. Simon is a warning to the nominal Christian, to the churchgoer who trusts in his or her baptism or in church membership, but has not trusted in Christ.

That will not do. You must be born again. You must experience the grace of God and believe in Jesus Christ. So have you done that. Have you seen yourself as a sinner in the bonds of iniquity, a person with a crooked heart? Have you confessed that to God and asked for forgiveness and the life that is in his son and in Christ alone? May God help you to do that. Others can pray for you, but no one can believe for you. You must do that yourself just as Peter told Simon to do. So you must repent, you must cast yourself on the mercy of God, you must personally trust in Jesus Christ for forgiveness in life. All who do that receive life from God. So look to Christ, trust in him, and receive life everlasting.

And if you have done that, and I hope every one of you have, I hope every one of you is a believer in Jesus Christ. If so, rejoice in what you have. You're a child of God. You have the life of God within you. You have the Spirit of God within you. It can never be removed. He can never be taken from you. You're sealed with him, and regardless of what happens in this life, whatever tragedy befalls you, that tragedy will become a victory, a triumph. He works everything for your good, and will never forsake you and will bring you ultimately into his very presence forever and ever. So that's reason for the greatest joy, Samaritans rejoice before they receive the Spirit, how much more afterwards and how much more should we. May God help us to do that, and help us to be faithful witnesses with him just as Philip and others were. Let's pray.

[Prayer] Father, we do thank you for your goodness and your grace. Thank you for the fact that when we were not seeking you, you sought us. Saved us by the blood of your son. We pray that if there be anyone attending this morning who has false confidence in their baptism or their attendance in this place or whatever the case may be but they've not yet trusted in Christ, help them to see that. Make them to see that and bring them to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ, and may those of us who have trusted in Christ rejoice in the life that we have in him and serve you –

*[End of Audio]*