

Remember that “**VenuePM**,” our new Sunday Evening Worship, will begin on September 13th @ 6:30. Spencer Smith and Todd Craig are the preachers, and the Worship leader is Ben Kilgore. More information @ [facebook.com/venue68](https://www.facebook.com/venue68) and venue68.com

Aug 30 “Your Heart is Not Right Before God” (**Unrighteousness**) Acts 8:9-25

The Background: the **Gospels** are about the **LIFE, DEATH, and RESURRECTION** of Jesus. Just before his **Ascension** to heaven, Jesus told the disciples to go to **Jerusalem** & wait. A gift would be given to them – the Holy Spirit, who would empower them to be witnesses of Jesus in: Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and to the ends of the earth. This promise is fulfilled in Acts 2 (the day of Pentecost).

Miracles begin to happen, too (Acts 3). But the church is not problem-free. Not everyone likes the Gospel. In Acts 4 they are harassed. In Acts 5, we see that not everyone who professes the Gospel, practices it (Ananias & Saphira). In Acts 6, it was more than just a pair who were having problems – they had a major breakdown with their food distribution program. Grumbling and complaining threatened to divide the movement. It was all put into perspective, however, in **Acts 7** when **Stephen** was martyred. Yet, every exit is also an entrance. Holding the coats of those throwing the rocks was **Saul** – who was God’s appointed messenger to take the Gospel to the Gentiles. After the persecution began in earnest, the church was “**scattered**.” And we meet our 2nd waiter, **Philip** (Stephen was the first) who was being “scattered” to **Samaria**.

Acts 8:5-8 Philip went down to a city in Samaria and proclaimed the Christ there. 6 When the crowds heard Philip and saw the miraculous signs he did, they all paid close attention to what he said. 7 With shrieks, evil spirits came out of many, and many paralytics and cripples were healed. 8 So there was great joy in that city.

The “scattered” preached the word (the message of the Gospel) wherever they went. The Apostles did NOT leave Jerusalem. **Philip** was chosen as a deacon (Acts 6:5) & like Stephen, he grew in his ministry and became an effective evangelist (see Acts 21:8). It seems ironic - so like God. These deacons were willing to take the assignment to take care of the widows (menial, but important tasks). They did NOT say: “I’ve got more talent & experience than to be given a job like that!” God honored their humility/service & the 2 waiters became the men that God lifted up. They were faithful in small things & were given greater matters. So now Philip goes to Samaria & preached there. They become Christians largely because of his preaching.

The **Samaritans** were a hybrid, "half-breed" people, a mixture of Jew and Gentile. The nation originated when the Assyrians captured the ten northern tribes in 732 B.C., deported many of the people, and then imported others who intermarried with the Jews. They had their own temple and priesthood and openly opposed fraternization with the Jews. God directed Philip to evangelize in Samaria, an area that had been prohibited to the Apostles (Matthew 10:5-6). Both John the Baptist and Jesus had ministered there.

Philip not only declared God's Word, but God's power was demonstrated by miracles. However, the emphasis remains on the Word of God: the people gave heed to the Word because they saw the miracles, and by believing the Word, they were saved.

Great persecution (Acts 8:1) + the preaching of the Gospel = great joy! Both in his Gospel and in the Book of Acts, Luke emphasizes the joy of salvation. The people of Samaria who heard the Gospel and believed were delivered from physical affliction, demonic control, and, most important, from their sins. No wonder there was great joy!

The Gospel had now moved from "Jewish territory" into Samaria where the people were part Jew and part Gentile. God in His grace had built a bridge between two estranged peoples and made the believers one in Christ and soon He would extend that bridge to the Gentiles and include them as well.

Once again, we note that the church encountered a **problem**. It seems this is always the story – life is a continual series of problems which must be solved. Some of those problems have come from the inside (Ananias and Saphira, the grumbling about the inequity in the distribution of food) while some are external problems (persecution). This is the story of **Simon**. It's interesting in that an English word has been coined after him, "simony," (the buying and selling of a church office).

*9 Now for some time a man named Simon had practiced sorcery in the city and amazed all the people of Samaria. He **boasted** that he was **someone great**, 10 and all the people, both high and low, gave him their attention and exclaimed, "This man is the divine power known as the Great Power." 11 They followed him because he had amazed them for a long time with his magic. 12 But when they believed Philip as he preached the good news of the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women. 13 Simon himself **believed** and was **baptized**. And he followed Philip everywhere, astonished by the great signs and miracles he saw.*

*14 When the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had accepted **the word of God**, they sent Peter and John to them. 15 When they arrived, they prayed for them that they might receive the **Holy Spirit**, 16 because the Holy Spirit had not yet come upon any of them; they had simply been baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus. 17 Then Peter and John placed their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit. 18 When Simon saw that the Spirit was given at the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money 19 and said, "Give me also this ability so that everyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit." 20 Peter answered: "May your money perish with you, because you thought you could buy the gift of God with money! 21 You have no part or share in this ministry, because **your heart is not right before God**. 22 **Repent** of this wickedness and pray to the Lord. Perhaps he will forgive you for having such a thought in your heart. 23 For I see that you are full **of bitterness and captive to sin**."*

24 Then Simon answered, "Pray to the Lord for me so that nothing you have said may happen to me." 25 When they had testified and proclaimed the word of the Lord, Peter and John returned to Jerusalem, preaching the gospel in many Samaritan villages.

Luke 9:51-56 *As the time approached for him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem. And he sent messengers on ahead, who went into a Samaritan village to get things ready for him; but the people there did not welcome him, because he was heading for Jerusalem. When the disciples James and John saw this, they asked,*

"Lord, do you want us to call fire down from heaven to destroy them?" But Jesus turned and rebuked them, and they went to another village.

Ironically, the disciples wanted to scorch the Samaritans. Now they are being sent there to reach them with the Gospel. (Thank God for some unanswered prayers!) More irony = that the Holy Spirit DID come upon them – and like fire from heaven.

*He **boasted** that he was someone great, 10 and all the people, both high and low, gave him their attention and exclaimed, "This man is the divine power known as the Great Power*

Why do people have to boast that they are great? Egotism? Narcissism?

He used **magic**. Simon supposedly became a Christian. He had been a big shot in Samaria until Philip showed up. "If you can't beat 'em, join 'em" would have been Simon's motto. He converted to Christianity, but it was very apparent that he was still in it for Simon. He wanted to have the power of the Holy Spirit in his life and was willing to buy that power. His request was met with the most abrupt admonition possible. His whole agenda was always about Simon. He was not about advancing the Kingdom of God, but about how he could retain power & control over people. It's also his means of financial gain. He had a vested interest in this.

2 Questions:

1.) *How could they believe in Jesus without having the Holy Spirit?*

My guess would be that this is the equivalent to Pentecost, only this is for the Samaritans.

1 Corinthians 12:3 *Therefore I tell you that no one who is speaking by the Spirit of God says, "Jesus be cursed," and no one can say, "Jesus is Lord," except by the Holy Spirit.*

The Holy Spirit brings us to Jesus. The gospel is going into uncharted waters in Samaria, so this was also an unprecedented event. (See Acts 19 for a similar story in Ephesus).

This is not the case today. When someone confesses Jesus as Lord, the Holy Spirit is given to them at that time. When we receive Jesus, we receive the HS. However, there are subsequent fillings of the Holy Spirit. This, as our study in Acts has shown, is to be an ongoing, continuous part of the Christian experience. This is far more than a one-time event.

2.) Was Simon truly a Christian? 3 answers:

a.) Yes, he was! *13 Simon himself **believed** and was **baptized**.*

b.) No, he wasn't!

James 2:18-19 *But someone will say, "You have faith; I have deeds." Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by what I do. You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that — and shudder.*

Our pastors disagreed among ourselves about this. Some felt he was just an immature, baby Christian, and this story is reflective of that. The whole engagement with Simon makes me doubt that he wasn't a Christian in the first place. He affirmed certain facts and did the proscribed behavior (baptism). It's quite possible to be brought up in a Christian home, to be baptized either as a child, teen or adult, to go to church, to join a church, to give money, to read the Bible, to pray, to serve, and to do all the things that Christians are supposed to do; yet still not be a Christian. This was Charles Colson's experience he relates in Born Again. (In fact, his mother became quite upset with him when he said he had become a Christian – she said he'd always been one.) Is it possible to believe we are Christians when in fact, we are not?

The Gospel is about knowing God's love and grace. It is a personal commitment to Jesus Christ. It happens in innumerable ways and places. There is not a specific formula that has to happen for each person. My experience is profoundly different from Dana's. But the important things are these:

1.) **God loves us!** Good News.

2.) **We confess our Sin.** Undoubtedly, this is our big problem. I heard one person say, "I used to think that confessing sin was a great idea – until it came to my turn." Simon was a man caught in sin. I don't see that he is truly a Christian because, even though he was baptized, he had not turned from his own way. He was outrageous in his request. Can you imagine doing that? How can that be? It's in the very nature of sin – it's deceives us. Peter told him, in no uncertain terms: *23 For I see that you are full of bitterness and captive to sin."*

Not only does sin distort who we are, but sin distorts our understanding of God. God hates sin. It destroys life. It warps our lives. It causes us to be dysfunctional. It is visited from one generation to the next.

3.) **Repent.** This word means to turn and go in the opposite direction. Simon showed no signs of going about life any differently after vs. 13 than before it.

How would I describe conversion, or a true believer? It's a change in one's heart. That's what was wrong with Simon according to Peter. **Acts 8:20** *Peter answered: "May your money perish with you, because you thought you could buy the gift of God with money! 21 You have no part or share in this ministry, because **your heart is not right before God.** Repent of this wickedness..."*

I was shocked to read this Psalm, as it seemed so descriptive of Simon: *An oracle is within my **heart** concerning the sinfulness of the wicked: There is no fear of God before his eyes. 2 For in his own eyes he flatters himself too much to detect or hate his sin. 3 The words of his mouth are wicked and deceitful; he has ceased to be wise and to do good. 4 Even on his bed he plots evil; he commits himself to a sinful course and does not reject what is wrong.*

(Psalm 36:1-4)

Judas Iscariot, Ananias & Saphira, and now Simon – it sounds like Simon is in way over his head. The common thread = money. Remember who it is that had happened told Ananias & Saphira what was going to happen to them? It was Peter. This was a very fresh memory. No wonder Simon was scared! I think Peter was anticipating Simon being struck down, too.

The “preaching point” becomes a matter of “The **Heart.**” I hope you have access to a Bible software program because it will enable you to do so much more, so much faster, than by using the traditional text. As I prepared for this message, I looked to see what the Bible had to say about “the heart.” I think the key application point is Peter’s line to Simon - *“because your heart is not right before God”*

The word “heart” (“cardia” in Greek) is used 570 times. It’s a major word! In looking at the texts, I found six categories (I’m sure there are more – but this is just what I came up with).

The 6 Types of Hearts:

#1.) “Their hearts were filled with **Evil** all the time” (Gen 6:5 – shortly before the flood): These are descriptions of evil hearts in the Bible: “grudging, wicked, despising, slanderous, envious, cunning, deceitful, perverse, hateful, lustful, adulterous, idolatrous, and a spirit of prostitution is in their heart.”

Matt 15:16-20 "Are you still so dull?" Jesus asked them. "Don't you see that whatever enters the mouth goes into the stomach and then out of the body? But the things that come out of the mouth **come from the heart**, and these make a man 'unclean.' For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander. These are what make a man 'unclean'; but eating with unwashed hands does not make him 'unclean.'"

#2.) Pharaoh **Hardened** his towards God (Exodus). This is a proud, foolish, deluded, uncircumcised in heart, or calloused heart.

3.) **Hurt**: This isn’t an “evil” or “hard” heart, but a person who has been: “wounded, anguished, fearful heart, sorrowful, despairing, ‘Our brothers have made us lose heart (cowardly), dismayed, broken & contrite.’”

4.) **Divided**: This is a heart that is “Not fully devoted to the Lord, as the heart of David;” and one who “Turned his heart after other gods.” This was often used to describe the kings of Israel and Judah.

5.) **Committed**: This is a man “after God’s own heart; upright, undivided; faithful, steadfast, with integrity, “I have set my heart on your laws,” trusting (Trust in the Lord with all your heart), responsive, courageous (heart of a lion).”

6.) **Loving**: This is a joyful, peaceful, cheerful, rejoicing, obedient, praying, pure, discerning, wise, and forgiving heart. Here’s a great quote: “You have set my heart free!”

Other texts about the heart include:

Luke 12:34 *For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.*

Prov 4:23 *Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life.*

Ezek 36:26 *I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.*

Acts: *“My heart is glad; cut to the heart (convicted), one in heart (unity), Satan has filled your heart; and the Lord opened her heart.”*

When I asked the question, was Simon a Christian. Some say “Yes, he was!” and other say, “No, he wasn’t.” There’s evidence for both sides. But the correct answer is: (c.) Only God knows!

We are not called to be the judge over people’s salvation. That’s between them and God. What we are supposed to do is to make sure our hearts are right before God.