

International Sunday School Lesson
Study Notes
October 4, 2015

Lesson Text: Acts 8:9-24

Lesson Title: The Ministry of the Spirit

Introduction

The success of the early church in fulfilling the Great Commission was dependent upon the ministry and work of the Holy Spirit. Without His conviction and power the lost world would have never been convinced that the apostles were sent messengers of God. There were miracles, signs, healings, and wonders done by the apostles, convincing both Jew and Gentiles the gospel message of Christ's death, burial, and resurrection was real.

As with every authentic work of God, Satan attempts to produce a counterfeit. In Acts 8, the reality of the ministry of the Spirit is witnessed in the ministry of Philip. God used him to touch and change many lives in Samaria. The ministry of a man named Simon the sorcerer stands as a counterfeit to Philip's authentic ministry. Simon's influence and standing among the Samaritans was powered by Satan.

Early in our Lord's ministry, He told the twelve disciples "...Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not: But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matthew 10:5-6). From that point until now in the history of the church, the Christians were all Jewish people. In fact, the Jewish people thought, as Christians, only Jewish people could become Christians. Suddenly the walls are starting to break down as Philip carries the gospel to Samaria.

Jesus ministered in Samaria to the woman at the well (John 4). He also sent His disciples to be "*witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth*" (Acts 1:8). So Philip is obeying the command of the Lord Jesus as he goes "*...down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them*" (Acts 8:5). As he preaches Christ, he encounters people who need the Lord and he ministers to them through the power of the Holy Spirit. The miracles and healings which resulted through Philip's ministry authenticated him as a true messenger of God.

Note: This Philip in Acts 8 is not the Philip mentioned in the gospels. This Philip is Philip the deacon, Philip the evangelist (Acts 6).

The Samaritans were a mixed race people. When Israel was conquered in 722 B.C., by Sargon of Syria, he carried away most of the inhabitants of Samaria.

He left the poorest people behind then he brought foreign people in to intermarry with these Samaritans. As a result, the Samaritans became half Jewish and half mixed nationalities. To the pure Jews in Judea and Jerusalem, these Samaritans were not really Jews.

The primary task of the early church was not to feed the poor or heal the sick. It was to preach Jesus Christ. Although miracles and healings were a part of the ministry of the first apostles, the apostles did not go everywhere healing the sick or working miracles. They did go *“every where preaching the word”* (Acts 8:4). Preaching the word was their primary task and that could only be possible through the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

The Apostles’ Confrontation (Acts 8:9-13)

Confronting people with genuine spiritual needs and being able to help meet those needs was a blessing for Philip and the apostles. Luke said, *“And there was great joy in that city”* (Acts 8:8). Salvation always brings joy (1 Peter 1:8). What a wonderful testimony to the power of the gospel and the work of the Holy Spirit. Then there comes the “but” of verse 9. Philip will now confront the work of Satan.

Verse 9-11

“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: To whom they all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying, This man is the great power of God. And to him they had regard, because that of long time he had bewitched them with sorceries.”

When Philip arrived in Samaria, he encountered a man “called Simon,” who practiced “sorcery” in the city and “bewitched the people of Samaria.” “Sorcery” means Simon practiced magic through the power of Satan. It was nothing short of demonic trickery using science, math, agriculture, and astrology. The word “bewitched” means he astonished and astounded the people. People would literally act insane as they were influenced by his “sorcery.” They were deceived through his demonic actions.

“Giving out that himself was some great one” means Simon claimed himself to be God. When man has a distorted view of himself he gives Satan an avenue of entrance into his life. Through the power of Satan Simon was convinced he was some type of god. The people of Samaria said, “This man is the great power of God.” The word “power” indicates the people believed Simon’s actions and abilities came from a heavenly source.

Simon, like many “sorcerers” today “bewitched” people by claiming to have the power to heal, predict the future, cast out demons, and bless through their word of knowledge. Simon was nothing more than a demonic fraud!

Verse 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.”

The Bible tells us Simon the sorcerer “used sorcery and bewitched the people of Samaria” (v.11). The Bible tells us Philip “preached the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ.” There is a vast and eternal difference!

Why is Philip preaching about the “kingdom of God” and “the name of Jesus?” Jesus taught His disciples this during the forty days between His resurrection and His ascension (Acts 1:3). The “kingdom of God” Philip was preaching about is the rule of God within the heart of a man who repents of unbelief and trusts Christ for salvation. The “name of Jesus Christ” symbolizes all that He is. Philip preached to them the truths concerning God’s kingdom rule in a man’s heart and the truths about Jesus Christ.

“Preaching” is the Greek word *euaggelizo* {yoo-ang-ghel-id-zo} meaning “to announce good news.” The message of the gospel is “good news” (Proverbs 25:25). It was good news to “both men and women” in Samaria who heard Philip preach and “were baptized.” True saving faith is the only basis for Christian baptism. Many “men and women” in Samaria heard Philip’s preaching, repented of unbelief, and publicly demonstrated their belief by being immersed in water baptism.

Verse 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.”

“Simon himself believed also,” but what did he believe? “He was baptized,” but why was he baptized? If these were the only facts we knew about Simon we might conclude that he genuinely trusted Christ for salvation and followed with believer’s baptism. But the words, “and wondered, beholding the miracles and signs which were done” raise a red flag as to what is actually happening in Simon’s life.

“He continued with Philip, and wondered, beholding the miracles and signs which were done” indicate Simon had a professional interest in finding out the source of Philip’s powers. The word “wondered” means “astounded, insane, and bewitched.” It is the same word translated “bewitched” in Acts 8:11. Like many

people today, Simon is more interested in “the miracles and signs which were done” than in the gospel message of the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ.

What Philip was doing was similar to what Simon was doing. It involved people and power and that was Simon’s interest. There is nothing spiritual about Simon’s actions or decisions in this situation. Simon decided to make a profession of belief, follow with baptism, and hang close to Philip to learn the tricks of the trade and hopefully find the secret to Philip’s magic. With Philip it was not magic, it was the power of God!

The Apostles’ Confirmation (Acts 8:14-17)

Verse 14-17

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

When you consider the hatred between the Jews and the Samaritans, it must have been an exciting time when news of the power of the gospel reached Jerusalem. Upon hearing the Samaritans “had received the word of God, they sent unto them Peter and John.” Souls had been saved and added to the church and it was important that this work of God be confirmed and a local church established. This is the work of the Holy Spirit!

When “Peter and John” arrived in Samaria, they confirm several things. First, they find these Samaritans had truly been saved by grace. Second, they find these Samaritans had followed the Lord’s command and received believer’s baptism. Third, Peter and John confirmed these new believer’s had been saved and baptized, but had not yet received the Spirit of God. Now, before we explain what is happening here in the text, please remember what you see in Acts is not *normative* for the entire church age. Today, when you trust Christ for salvation, the Holy Spirit baptizes (places you) into the body of Christ instantly (1 Corinthians 12:12-13). There is no scriptural basis today for trusting Christ for salvation and then later receiving the Holy Spirit with evidence of speaking in tongues.

What is happening here in Acts 8:14-17 is a transition period in church history from a life without the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit to a life with the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit. That transition occurred in four groups of people. First, all Jews were baptized with the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, and they spoke with “other tongues” so every man present could hear the Gospel in his

own language (Acts 2). Second, in our lesson text in Acts 8, Samaritans were saved and baptized and when Peter and John prayed for them and laid their hands on them, they received the Holy Spirit. Notice there is no mention of speaking in tongues among these Samaritans. Third, there were Gentile believers in the house of Cornelius who received the Holy Spirit. There was no prayer or laying on of hands among this group. Actually, Peter was still preaching when the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they, like the first group, spoke with “other tongues” (Acts 10). Fourth, some disciples of John the Baptist in Ephesus received the Holy Spirit when Paul laid his hands on them, and they spoke “with tongues, and prophesied” (Acts 19). There is no further record in the New Testament where anyone received the gift of the Spirit by laying on of hands except in Samaria and Ephesus.

The baptism of the Holy Spirit, as it occurred in each of these different groups, was never repeated, nor does the New Testament record any instance where an individual was baptized with the Holy Spirit. What happened in this transition period of Church history was marvelous and miraculous, but it does not happen today (Hebrews 2:3-4). Furthermore, is it more thrilling and exciting to be saved and wait for someone to come and tell you there is a Holy Spirit, or, be instantly placed in the body of Christ and indwelt by the Third Person of the God-head, the Holy Spirit at the moment of salvation?

Please do not miss the beauty and work of the Holy Spirit in these verses by trying to defend some denominational doctrine or experience created by man. What is happened here is amazing. The Samaritan believers were children of God, saved by grace. The beauty in these verses is not the “laying on of the hands” or even the “prayer,” but rather the sending of “Peter and John” by the Holy Spirit to these young believers to help them “receive” the Holy Spirit. “Peter and John” were able to help these new believers because they were there at Pentecost and they knew the power of the Holy Spirit.

What happened to these Samaritans was unique and beautiful. What happens today when sinners are saved and placed into the body of Christ instantly and filled with the indwelling Holy Spirit is also unique and beautiful.

The Apostles’ Condemnation (Acts 8:18-24)

Verse 18-19

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

Simon witnessed the receiving of the “Holy Ghost” by the “laying on of the apostles’ hands.” In response to what he witnessed, “he offered them money, Saying, Give me also this power, that on whomsoever I lay hands, he may

receive the Holy Ghost.” Perhaps Simon had given money to someone to teach him his magic tricks and he thought he could do the same with the apostles.

Simon’s actions reveal that he was not a true believer in Jesus Christ. His profession of faith and his water baptism was based on his decisions alone. He had watched others respond to the gospel and just repeated what he had witnessed. Simon’s problem was that he was used to dealing in trickery and deception. He did what he did for personal and financial profit. He healed people through the power of Satan and was paid well for what he did. Demonic and deceptive healings have always been associated with financial gain. Take the money out of the modern day healing ministries and they would disappear quickly.

“Power” is what Simon was all about. The word means “privilege, authority, and mastery.” What an insult to Almighty God to think that the power Philip and Peter and John possessed could be “bought”! Simon wanted the “power” of the Holy Spirit in order to exalt himself and get rich. The Bible tells us about men like Simon who are alive today. Peter writes, *“But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction. And many shall follow their pernicious ways; by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of. And through covetousness shall they with feigned words make merchandise of you: whose judgment now of a long time lingereth not, and their damnation slumbereth not”* (2 Peter 2:1-3).

Verse 20-21

“But Peter said unto him, Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money. Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter: for thy heart is not right in the sight of God.”

Peter was appalled by Simon’s suggestion that the power of God could be purchased with money. There is a tone of indignation and horror in Peter’s answer. Peter said, “Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money. Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter: for thy heart is not right in the sight of God.” Peter’s use of the words “perish...neither part nor lot...and thy heart is not right in the sight of God” is evidence Simon was not a true believer.

Sadly, Simon and his mindset is still alive in churches today. Too many ministries are rooted in prestige, power, and financial gain. It is not uncommon for some individuals to give large amounts of money to churches and ministries in order to receive positions or recognition. God’s grace and the power of the Holy Spirit cannot be bought. His salvation and His Holy Spirit is free, because Jesus paid for both when He died and rose again.

While Simon's problem revealed itself *outwardly*, Peter boldly told him his problem was *inward*. "Thy heart is not right in the sight of God." The Bible says, "*Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life*" (Proverbs 4:23). The "heart" is the seat of affections, and therefore governs our motives and principles of conduct. Simon loved money and power and it came from a "heart" that was not "right with God." The Apostle John said, "*Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him*" (1 John 2:15).

Verse 22

"Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee."

Peter was bold when he confronted Simon with his true condition. He was also bold when he describes to Simon what he needs to do in order to be right with God. "Repent therefore of this wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee." "Repentance" is the first step Simon need to take. Peter is a "repentance" preacher (Acts 2:38). There is no such thing as a genuine salvation experience apart from repentance, and there is no repentance apart from godly sorrow for sin (2 Corinthians 7:10).

Verse 23

"For I perceive that thou art in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity."

Peter "perceived" that Simon's heart was filled with "the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity." Powerful words! "Gall" is usually described as "bitter green fluid secreted by the liver." Peter is using the word "gall" to describe the awfulness inside Simon's heart. This is much different from the preaching and teaching today that says, "I am all right, you are all right, none of us are as bad as you think!"

Sin is bitter, poisonous, unpleasant, disgusting, horrifying, and deadly, and without forgiveness through the blood of Jesus Christ it will result in eternal death and separation from God for eternity (James 1:15). Simon was in "the bond of iniquity." Sin was his task master that held him in unbreakable chains. A vivid picture of the sinful heart of man indeed!

Verse 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."

As powerful and pointed as Peter's message to Simon was, he was still a man looking out for himself. There is no change of heart for Simon. When he thinks God might punish him for his bitterness, he asked Peter to "pray" for him because he does not want God to punish him.

Commenting on this verse, Doctor Woodrow Kroll said, "If at this point Peter would have said, 'Give me twenty dollars and I'll make sure God does not punish you, Simon would have immediately handed Peter twenty bucks.'" That is not going to happen because Peter is God's man filled with the power of the Holy Spirit. He is finished with Simon and Simon is still a sorcerer. He is not mentioned again in the New Testament.

Conclusion

Simon's false profession did not stop the spread of the gospel or the commitment of the apostles to keep preaching. Luke continues, "*And they, when they had testified and preached the Word of the Lord, returned to Jerusalem, and preached the gospel in many villages of the Samaritans*" (Acts 8:25).

As Christians, we must not allow the false professions and those who misunderstand the ministry and work of the Holy Spirit to hinder us from fulfilling the Great Commission. If you have trusted Christ as your Savior you have been baptized in the body of Christ that was baptized on the Day of Pentecost. Nowhere in Scripture are you told to seek or pray for the baptism of the Holy Spirit with the evidence of speaking in tongues. No one must lay hands on you and pray for you to receive the Holy Spirit. Scripture contains no command, suggestion, or method for believers to seek or receive the baptism of the Spirit. You do not seek or ask for that which you already possess (1 Corinthians 12:12-13; Galatians 3:26-27; Ephesians 4:4-6).

There was "*great joy*" (Acts 8:8) in Samaria because the preaching of the word resulting in salvation. There should be "great joy" in your heart today if you are a believer in Jesus Christ. You have been saved and placed into the body of Christ. The Holy Spirit indwells you and empowers you to minister in your Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and unto the uttermost parts of the world!

Amen.