

INTRODUCTION

One of the most sobering realities in all the Scriptures is that there are some people who think that they are saved who will be eternally lost because the reality is that they were never saved. Some who think they are on the narrow road to eternal life are on the broad road of eternal destruction. We are now presented with a man who thought he had real faith but sadly his faith was a sham and his name is Simon.

Simon appeared to have genuine faith and was baptised so others must have thought that he was a true believer to baptise him (v 13). Sometimes we have to confess that we get it wrong with people, Satan is our enemy and he loves to disguise himself as an angel of light in order to disturb the church and one of the ways he seeks to do that is by deceiving the church into believing that someone is a genuine believer when in fact they are unbelievers.

But where did Simon go wrong? How can one who came so close miss out on true salvation? I think this passage presents to us some glaring faults in Simon's thinking and theology.

1. A WRONG VIEW OF SELF (vs. 9-11).

A faulty view of oneself keeps millions of people out of God's kingdom and this was true of Simon. His view seems to be that man is essentially good and such a view lulls people into a false sense of security it makes them think that God actually applauds their good deeds and efforts. But the reality is very different, God views even our best works as filthy rags (Isaiah 64:6).

Any view that claims that man is basically good and capable of earning acceptance with God deadens people to the reality of the wrath and judgement of God. People who do not view themselves, as sinners have no need of a Saviour.

Simon seemed to have had an arrogant view of himself he practiced sorcery in the city and amazed the people of Samaria this led him into thinking that he was great and boasted about that to others (v 9). He saw in Philip a means to gain even more greatness for himself. Sorcery combined astrology, foretelling and occult practises so at the heart of it was Satan and his cohorts encouraging this demonic practise.

Simon's hold on the people was very great, all the people from different social structures gave him their attention and considered him to be Divine with divine powers (v 10). The title the "Great Power" clearly shows that Simon claimed divinity for himself. This fact that Simon viewed himself as God betrays the most heretical view of self-imaginable. The early church Fathers reported that Simon was one of the founders of a religion known as Gnosticism and that he viewed himself as God incarnate.

Therefore Simon's perverted view of himself gave Satan an opening to use him to spread false teaching throughout the church. Like most of the fake magicians of his day Simon probably believed in his powers. The fact that he may not have been conscious of his fraud rendered him even more dangerous and believable.

It is not surprising then that the Samaritans were giving him the attention because he had for a long time astounded the people with his magic arts. After all, they believed in God and they had messianic expectations that made them especially vulnerable to someone like Simon. Sadly people in our supposedly sophisticated age are equally vulnerable to Impostors who claim to be miracle workers in the name of God.

As long as Simon believed he was God or a god or nearly god he could not come to a proper view of himself as a sinner before a Holy and just God. People will never come to know God unless they have a proper view of themselves as a weak and helpless sinner who needs to be saved by the grace of God. Simon is locked firmly in pride's grip and he could not see himself as a sinner. Pride is a universal and a deadly sin.

It is most characteristic and controlling sin in human fallen nature. Pride is actually a very easy sin to indulge in because it does not entail the loss of public reputation, prestige, health or wealth associated with other socially unacceptable sins. Pride in fact has been redefined as a virtue. Pride often masquerades under seemingly upright motives.

In Herod, it masked itself as integrity and beheaded John the Baptist and in the Jewish authorities it masked itself as zeal for God and executed Jesus as a result.

Therefore if anyone is going to be saved from their sin they must have a correct view of themselves as sinners, they must not let pride get in the way. What is true of everyone else is also true of us. We must always have a realistic view of who we are in God's eyes and even Christians are nothing more than sinners saved by grace.

2. A WRONG VIEW OF SALVATION (vs. 12-13)

Simon's magical powers were no match for Philip's Spirit given power. Through Philip's ministry a revival broke out in the city for people believed the message of the good news of the Kingdom that Philip preached. As a result both men and women were baptised on profession of their faith.

As more people believed the good news that Philip was preaching perhaps Simon's following dwindled certainty his influence over the people would have become less. Therefore he had a desire to be associated with God and his Messiah he had a desire to learn more about what he perceived to be Philip's power.

This all motivated Simon to believe. His belief must have been convincing because he was baptised no doubt on profession of what Philip and others believed to be genuine faith. Simon was keen to learn more about this power so he followed Philip everywhere and was simply astonished at the many signs and miracles he witnessed (v 13). He no doubt longed to find out the source of Philip's power and he wanted that power for himself he was even prepared to buy such power from Philip. It was very common for Sorcerers to sell each other their tricks and spells for money. It soon becomes clear that Simon was not saved even though he was baptised as a professing believer.

That does not mean that professing believers should not be baptised because the Bible makes it clear that Baptism is important, it is a command, all believers should be baptised on profession of their faith in Jesus Christ.

But Philip viewed salvation as purely ritualistic an external matter an additional act in his life instead of a total transformation of his whole person. Faith that does not transform us from the inside out is not real faith; a faith that does not produce a life of fruitful deeds is dead faith (James 2:14-19). It is possible to believe and in that sense have faith but yet not be a true believer.

Demons believe in God but they are not saved (James 2:19), having a belief in God is not the same as having saving faith in Jesus Christ. Having head knowledge is not the same as having heart knowledge. I have no doubt that you have come to church today because you believe in God. But that is not saving faith. Most people believe in God but the reality is that faith trusts totally in whom God is and what God says and what God does for us through His Son Jesus Christ. Faith is God given a gift that we must plead to God to give to us by his grace (Ephesians 2:8-9).

It is also sad but true that there are people who attend some churches because of what they perceive to be churches of power, churches where miracles seem to occur and where dramatic things happen. It is possible to be attracted to what appears to be wonderful signs of power rather than being drawn to Jesus Christ. Only those who are drawn to Jesus Christ have true faith and are therefore saved.

So make sure that you have real faith, saving faith in Jesus Christ and not just some form of religious faith. Think correctly about salvation, it cannot be bought as we will see it is not received by being associated with people who are saved. Salvation is solely by grace alone through faith alone.

3. A WRONG VIEW OF THE SPIRIT (vs. 14-19).

Word of the amazing success of Philip's ministry reached the apostles in Jerusalem. When they heard the good news that the Samaritans had accepted God's word they sent Peter and John to them. No doubt they were sent to check it out to see if this was really true to verify the stories.

The reason why it was important to check the story out is because the fact that Samaritans had entered in God's kingdom would have been shocking to any self-respecting Jew because they were despised by the Jewish community, they were seen as half-bred Jews. But Peter and John would also have been sent to help Philip with such a great spiritual harvest it would be too much for one man to handle.

They also were sent no doubt to give apostolic sanction and blessing to the work among the Samaritans. After all the Apostles were the leaders of the church and remained leaders even after the church spread beyond Jerusalem.

Peter and John also came to pray for the Samaritans that they might receive the Holy Spirit, although they had clearly believed and even been baptised the Holy Spirit had not yet come upon them for they were only baptised in the name of the Lord Jesus (v 16). Now these verses are very difficult for us to understand and many who teach that Christians receive the Spirit subsequent to salvation appeal to these verses and other similar ones to support their claims. They argue that here is a clear example of people being saved yet they did not have the Holy Spirit. Such teaching ignores the transitional nature of the book of Acts and it also flies in the face of plain teaching of the Scriptures (Romans 8:9).

There is no such thing as a Christian who does not yet have the Holy Spirit since at conversion we are baptised into one body and all receive the same Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:13).

But why did the Samaritans have to wait then for the apostles to arrive before they received the Holy Spirit? Why is this such a unique case? For centuries the Samaritans and the Jews had been bitter rivals. If the Samaritans had received the Spirit independent of the Jerusalem church that rift would have been continued.

There could well have been two separate churches a Jewish Church and a Samaritan church and then later even a Gentile church. But God has designed only one church, which welcomes all types of people, male and female, slave or free, Jew or Gentile or Samaritan (Galatians 3:28).

Therefore by delaying the Spirit's coming until the apostles arrived God was preserving the unity of the church. The apostles needed to see for themselves and give the first-hand testimony to the Jerusalem church that the Spirit had come upon the Samaritans. The Samaritans also needed to learn that they were subject to apostolic authority.

The Jewish believers and the Samaritans were thus linked together into one church. Today believers receive the Spirit at salvation (1 Corinthians 12:13). There was no need for delay after the Jews Gentiles and Samaritans were initially added to the church.

So when Peter and John arrived they began to lay their hands on the Samaritan believers and they received the Holy Spirit. That was just too much for Simon. When he saw that the Spirit was being given through the laying on of hands he offered them money for this gift.

I don't know how Philip or anyone else knew that they had received the Spirit perhaps like the day of Pentecost they were able to speak in unlearned languages and this drew the attention of Simon. Philip had impressed Simon but this is something else. This is overwhelming and so Simon asks for this ability to be given to him and he was even prepared to pay for it (v 19). Simon treated the two apostles as though they were fellow practitioners of sorcery and as if they were ready to negotiate the price to buy the secret of their power.

By this act Simon gave his name to the term "simony" which through history has referred to the buying and selling of Ecclesiastical Offices.

But nothing that God has is for sale or can be bought. There is nothing that sinful men and women can do to make God give them the Holy Spirit and salvation. Salvation is God's free gift to sinful men and women it comes to us by grace alone.

He gives it freely to whomever he chooses we are called upon to ask for mercy but we cannot influence God or buy him by our good works or religious observance or any other work that we might consider to be of worth.

Peter acts with his characteristic bluntness (v 20-21). Most translations tone down what Peter actually says but I like J. B. Philip's rendering which for me captures the meaning of what Peter says. "To hell with you and your money", Simon's view of the Spirit as a product to be bought and added to his collection of magical powers was utterly wrong. It demonstrates to us that he was never a true believer and was in a lost condition, which is why he is told to repent (v 22).

4. A WRONG VIEW OF SIN (vs. 22-24)

Peter follows his condemnation of Simon with a call for his repentance. He commands Simon to repent of his wickedness. What Peter is doing is challenging Simon to have a correct view of his sin a view that will see it for what it is, heinous and so that he will turn from it in repentance. The word repentance just does not mean turning from sin but it involves turning to someone else instead.

In other words true biblical repentance involves fleeing from our sin and turning to Jesus Christ as the only one who can save repentant sinners. If Simon did that then his sin would be forgiven. However Peter warns Simon about sin for he sees by his words and actions that Simon is full of bitterness and is captive to sin. He is a slave to sin.

We cannot ever overestimate sin, no matter how bad you think sin is I can guarantee it is even more evil than you and I can imagine. Does Simon repent? Not at all; it is true that he seems to have been shaken and is afraid of the consequences of his sin but he is certainly not repentant. Simon asks Peter to pray that the judgement predicted by Peter (v 20) may actually not happen.

His only concern was to escape the temporal consequences of his sin. True repentance however consists of more than mere sorrow for sin. It involves an action. Many people can be sorry because they got caught in the act of sin and some regret the circumstances and consequences of

their sin but repentance involves hating our sin and fleeing from our sin and turning to Jesus Christ as our Saviour (2 Corinthians 7:9-10).

Therefore because Simon had a wrong view of himself, of salvation and of the Spirit and sin he ended up with a faith that did not save which of course is no faith at all. He did not see himself as a sinner but instead thought of himself as powerful like a god. He didn't see salvation and the receiving of the Spirit as a gift but thought it was something he could earn or buy. He was not concerned about sin but just its consequences.

There are many in our world even perhaps in our building today who are just like Simon who think wrongly about the most important matters in life and therefore they have an outward belief in God perhaps even fooling others into thinking that they are true Christians but they have no inward faith. They continue to think that their religious observance or their generous giving or their good living will save them.

But sadly like Simon such people will go to hell because they thought wrong about themselves, sin, salvation and the work of the Spirit. So, what you think matters. But you must do more than think the right things, or believe the right things you must act on what is right, you must act on right belief. To do that you must repent and perhaps the Lord will have mercy on you and save you from your sin.

Will you do that? Then call out to God to have mercy upon you.

Amen