

21—Acts 8.9-25—The Kingdom Advances into Samaria

I. Introduction

- a. As we travel on through Acts, there are some things to remember. Luke is describing what is actually happening as the Kingdom of God advances. Everything doesn't happen so precise as we might think. Today we encounter an unusual scene when the Holy Spirit is delayed in coming to those who have believed and been baptized. That doesn't mean it is the new prescribed way. We will need to think about that as we go.
- b. We also need to notice some things. While in the Gospels, the work of Satan and the demonic spirits or unclean spirits is explicitly stated. In Acts, those explicit statements begin to decrease. For example: two weeks ago we talked about those who ground their teeth when Stephen spoke. The only place we hear that happen in the Gospels is when someone has an unclean spirit.
- c. This morning's text leaves us wondering what to think of a man named Simon. We must be discerning his actions and concluding according to the evidence we see. The kingdom of darkness wishes to gain power while the Kingdom of Light...of God serves in weakness in the power of the Holy Spirit.
- d. Let's take note of the light shining in the darkness of Samaria.

II. Main Point

- a. The risen Lord Jesus advances the gospel of the Kingdom into Samaria through the witness of his suffering church but a new problem immeges.

III. Outline

- a. The power of god in Samaria—Simon the Magician
- b. The New God of Samaria—Jesus Christ
- c. The Apostles Confirm the One Church
- d. Simon the Magician—believer or unbeliever??

IV. Exposition

- a. When persecution came against the church in Jerusalem, the church scattered but they continued speaking the gospel. As we see, the gospel is needed in other places. Some of the first places the Kingdom advances is Samaria. Those in Jerusalem needed redemption and forgiveness of sins, so too the Samaritans. One reason is that Simon the magician is not much a savior but it is he that they were paying attention to as though he were a god called Great.
 - i. Luke introduces us to Simon.
 1. He is set up as a contrast between V. 8 "There came much joy in that city. But a certain man named Simon who had previously practiced magic in the city." The people of Samaria were amazed by Simon. He said that he himself was somebody great (good clue).
 - a. But was he great as he claimed?
 - i. The city he lived in had people who had unclean spirits, many who were paralyzed and lame. Obviously, Simon did nothing about this.
 1. Why do I say that? Because from the Gospels, who is the only person to have power over unclean spirits? Jesus.
 2. Who has the only power to heal? Jesus
 3. But what else can he not do? Forgive sins. But who can? Jesus.
 - a. How? Because he is the Son of God. But actually, that's not enough. The eternal Son came from heaven, took on flesh, was rejected by men, crucified on the cross and raised from the dead.
 - b. Only this man, the risen Lord Jesus, can rescue people from darkness.

- i. Simon defined it his own way. It must have had something to do with his magic.
 - 1. They all were paying attention to him. From the least to the greatest—he was greater still to them.
 - 2. Indeed, they would say that “This man is the power of God that is called Great.”
 - 3. Obviously, his magic was more than being a trickster or clown act at a birthday party using slight of hand.
 - 4. In fact, I would venture to say it was demonic. He demonstrated power. He held their attention for a long time. He amazed them with his magic—from the least to the greatest in Samaria.
 - 5. This is the sort of thing God forbids. (Deut. 18:10-12) ¹⁰ There shall not be found among you anyone who burns his son or his daughter as an offering, anyone who practices divination or tells fortunes or interprets omens, or a sorcerer ¹¹ or a charmer or a medium or a necromancer or one who inquires of the dead, ¹² for whoever does these things is an abomination to the LORD.
 - a. This is the kind of stuff the Egyptians did. They matched what God was doing through Moses on several of the plagues. We know the medium Saul used to call up Samuel. We will meet another magician in Acts later.
 - i. (Acts 13:7-8) Barnabas and Saul and sought to hear the word of God. ⁸ But Elymas the magician opposed them
 - ii. Or (Acts 19:13) some of the itinerant Jewish exorcists undertook to invoke the name of the Lord Jesus over those who had evil spirits
 - b. But this is the new exodus. The Kingdom of God and the kingdom of darkness often clash. They are not equal Kingdoms but the darkness is powerful but not all powerful. Yet it continually seeks more power.
 - c. Simon has a measure of power. The world they lived in was steeped in magic. They sought protection and attempted to manipulate the fate of the lining up of the stars. Simon must have had some success to garner this much attention in Samaria.
- ii. It’s hard for most of us to really understand the darkness Philip walked into when he arrived in Samaria. And I mean spiritual darkness. It’s hard to describe. I’ve been to several different countries but none like Algeria. It was a dark place.
 - 1. Everyone listened to Simon.
 - 2. He had been doing this for a long time.
 - 3. That is not easily overturned.
 - 4. It would be like trying to convince the world to give up their smart phone these days. As someone said, “The smartphone had become part of us, fully integrated into the daily patterns of our lives. Never offline, always within reach, we now wield in our hands a magic wand of technological power we have only begun to grasp.”
 - a. Alexa...lock the doors...turn down the lights...start my car. We have a taste for the same kinds of power that are dangerous and good.

- b. That leads me to our next point. The only hope these Samaritans had, is the same hope we now have. The Kingdom of God comes through the message of the gospel—Jesus Christ!
 - i. So, notice what Luke did to set us up for this. “They all were paying attention” v. 10. “They were paying attention to him because...” v. 11.
 - 1. But...v.12...they paid attention to the good news from Philip!
 - a. This is a miracle! They believe the gospel message that God sent his Son into the world to save sinners.
 - i. Repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus and you will be saved!
 - b. It says both men and women believed...even Simon believed.
 - i. They have seen great signs. Indeed, greater signs of power than Simon performed.
 - ii. They had been amazed at Simon’s magic but now Simon is amazed at the great miracles performed by Philip.
 - iii. The one who amazed the people of Samaria is now amazed at something greater.
 - c. So, how did they pay attention to Philip? Were they just gullible? It seems they might believe just about anything.
 - i. I don’t think they are gullible. These people aren’t stupid. From the least to the greatest...rich to the poor...educated or uneducated...had witnessed signs and miracles performed by Philip. They saw people with unclean spirits changed. Paralyzed and lame walking. Things Simon did not do.
 - 1. It would have been strange not to have paid attention to Philip.
 - ii. The light of the world had come! (2 Cor. 4:6) ⁶ For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.”
 - iii. Simon had not dispelled the darkness. He had made it darker. The Light of World overcomes the darkness.
- c. An important question needs to be asked as we move to our third point. We assume this but the light of the gospel spreading to Samaria was not on the minds of most Jews. As I mentioned last week, Samaritans were hated. They were thought to be half Gentile and half Jew. When news comes to the apostles, Peter and John are sent to them.
 - i. John had once asked Jesus if he should call down fire from heaven upon these wicked Samaritans and consume them? Guess what? Jesus turned and rebuked him.
 - ii. I set this point up because this is a difficult passage to understand. We need to know the animosity they had towards the Samaritans. Without what follows, there may have been a divided church from the start. Jewish Christians...Samaritan Christians...and Gentile Christians which comes later.
 - iii. So, the apostles heard that the Samaritans had received the word. We also know they had been baptized. But they had not received the Holy Spirit.
 - 1. If we back up to Peter’s sermon on the day of Pentecost, when he was asked “Brothers, what shall we do?” (Acts 2:38) ³⁸ And Peter said to them, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.
 - a. A few verses later it says: (Acts 2:41) ⁴¹ So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls.
 - b. It is understood that they also received the Holy Spirit as promised.

2. The apostles were sent for this reason: (Acts 8:14-16) they sent to them Peter and John,¹⁵ who came down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit,¹⁶ for he had not yet fallen on any of them, but they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.
 - a. Luke seems to indicate this was unusual by saying, “they had only been baptized.”
 - b. People have taken this scene to prescribe how the Spirit is supposed to come as a sort of second experience of grace.
 - i. The Catholic Church finds their understanding of the priest’s authority to confirm and give salvation to someone. They see this as almost the church saves you. They take the keys to the kingdom further than it was meant to be taken.
 - ii. Another place we see this show up is in the Pentecostal church. They see this differently that some time after conversion, a Pentecostal leader will lay hands on the convert to receive the Holy Spirit which makes that known by speaking in tongues.
 1. I’ve known people to sort of go through this and intentionally speak some gibberish and they declare them full of the Spirit.
 2. I’ve known people who were very troubled because they could not speak in tongues and doubted whether God saved them.
 - iii. To take these verses as a prescription when this never happens like this again is dangerous. The problem is, the Spirit seems to come differently.
 1. At baptism in Acts 2.
 2. After baptism here in Acts 8 with confirmation of the apostles by praying and laying on of hands.
 3. Later in ch. 8 no confirmation for Ethiopian Eunuch.
 4. The Spirit fell while Peter preaches in Cornelius’s house which was before baptism.
 5. One thing you can say from John 3...the Spirit blows where it wishes.
 - c. So, what is this? Why did it happen this way?
 - i. Philip wasn’t deficient in some way. The apostles do not show up after he baptizes the Ethiopian Eunuch in this same chapter. The apostles didn’t need to further explain the gospel as though Philip had it wrong.
 - ii. The Kingdom of God expanding out of Jerusalem seems to be set off here in such a way to say this is truly the Kingdom of God saving whoever believes. No matter what your background. Your past does not keep you from salvation. It doesn’t matter that you are half Jew and half Gentile. In only matters that you repent and believe in Jesus!
 - iii. The church is not divided but one. The Samaritans are admitted into the body of Christ without distinction. There are no second-class Christians. There’s one Lord. One faith. One baptism. One gospel. The same Jesus saves Jews and Samaritans. All are sinners in need of salvation. The only hope for any and all people is Jesus Christ.
- iv. So what does this mean for us?
 1. We receive those who make a profession of faith and baptize them as we are instructed. However, if someone persistently walks in sin intentionally and refuses to repent of obvious things. Then we obey Christ’s instruction concerning church discipline.

- a. Jesus can save anyone but not everyone will receive the gift of salvation. Indeed, not everyone who professes to be a Christian is in fact a believer.
 - d. That gets us to our next point. Was Simon a true believer?
 - i. Beginning in V. 17 it says (Acts 8:17-19) ¹⁷ Then they laid their hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit. ¹⁸ Now when Simon saw that the Spirit was given through the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money, ¹⁹ saying, "Give me this power also, so that anyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit."
 - 1. Obviously, Simon had not received the Holy Spirit but the others had.
 - 2. How might we evaluate Simon's profession of faith? Well, let's be sure to understand this. (Rom. 8:5-9) ⁵ For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit...Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him.
 - a. (Gal. 5:19-21) ¹⁹ Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, ²⁰ idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, ²¹ envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.
 - b. (Gal. 5:22-24) ²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. ²⁴ And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.
 - 3. Our text tells us he had not been given the Holy Spirit. Since we do not have a text to read about each person, how do we discern whether Simon is a disciple of Jesus?
 - a. First, he offered them money. Is this greed?
 - i. No one else did that. We are not told why the apostles did not lay hands on Simon but they did not.
 - ii. Money can't buy everything. We are tempted to think it will open any door we want it to.
 - iii. Thankfully, even for those who would have taken Simon up on this offer, the Spirit cannot be bought or manipulated like the spirits Simon has invoked in his magic business.
 - b. Second, he wants power not forgiveness. Power not self-control.
 - i. He thinks that he can wield the Holy Spirit that is obviously more powerful and more amazing than the demonic he has controlled. He wants to do something only God can do.
 - 1. The apostles did not give the Spirit. God did that through them.
 - 2. It seems Simon wants to continue to be the power of God.
 - 3. The gospel bids you to come and stop being God and bow the knee to King Jesus.
 - c. Next, we hear Peter's response which strong and clear.
 - i. (Acts 8:20-21) ²⁰ But Peter said to him, "May your silver perish with you, because you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money! ²¹ You have neither part nor lot in this [word logos], for your heart is not right before God.
 - 1. Peter warns him kind of like Jesus warned Peter when he refused Jesus washing his feet.

- 2. This is a strong warning. This is judgment on Simon and his money for thinking he could buy the gift of God.
- 3. He has no part or lot in this word...i.e., gospel of the Kingdom.
- ii. Peter commands: (Acts 8:22-23) ²² Repent, therefore, of this wickedness of yours, and pray to the Lord that, if possible, the intent of your heart may be forgiven you. ²³ For I see that you are in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity."
- d. Simon's response is telling: (Acts 8:24) "Pray for me to the Lord, that nothing of what you have said may come upon me."
 - i. As it says in Romans, (Rom. 8:7) ⁷ For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot.
 - ii. When Jesus warned Peter, he said wash all of me! That's not what Simon did.

V. Response

- a. Part of our response is (Acts 8:25) ²⁵ Now when they had testified and spoken the word of the Lord, they returned to Jerusalem, preaching the gospel to many villages of the Samaritans.
 - i. We continue to speak the gospel to everyone who will listen.
- b. The other part of preaching the gospel is holding it up as true together. In light of what we saw with Simon, this should instruct us to be aware of false professions or those who we can no longer affirm as believers. When our members continually walk in unrepentant sin we must act. We must pursue. We must plead with them to repent. But if not, they must be removed.
 - i. This is important too.