

Acts 8:1-25 NIV

“What money can’t buy”

Folks seem entranced by those who claim familiarity with the *secret arts*, foretell the future, communicate with the dead, or claim extra sensory perception.

Magicians, wizards, soothsayers, mystics, and fortunetellers gain prominence in many societies.

Egyptian Pharaohs kept magicians.

Ancient kings retained prophets.

Millions check their astrological forecasts.

Many modern think-tanks are merely educated, disguised crystal-ball gazers.



The Magic Castle, Hollywood. Bob and Norma went there for a few social events.



Harry Houdini (1874-1926) was a Hungarian-American escape artist, illusionist, and stunt performer, noted for his escape acts. He also exposed many fraudulent mediums. **“I’m tired of fighting: Houdini’s last words.**

In the 1920s, Harry Houdini’s so-called *magic* captivated many.

Today’s lesson tells of a magician who gained fame in the first century area of Israel known as Samaria.

Simon Magus, aka Simon the Sorcerer:

“He boasted that he was someone great, and all the people, both high and low, gave him their attention and exclaimed, ‘This man is rightly called the Great Power of God.’ They followed him because he had amazed them for a long time with his sorcery,” **Acts 8: 9b, 10 NIV.**

Sorcery put Simon in the fame lane.

We tend to focus on *greatness, fame, and power.* How many *likes* for my *Tweets*?

How many *Facebook* or *Instagram* followers?

The world measures success by those standards.

Simon achieved sorcery success.

Imagine people of varying backgrounds thinking you possess God’s power.

For a long time, Simon succeeded in his ruses.

He was the *Merlin*, the *Houdini* of his day.

Note the word attention in the text.

Other details need consideration.

Acts chapters 6 and 7 tell us of the angry, religious mob that stoned Stephen to death.

- **Persecution of all Jerusalem’s Christians followed Stephen’s killing.**

- Saul probably went “house to house” because Christians observed their first day services (the Lord’s Table-Communion) in private homes. “⁴ Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went.”
- As they left Jerusalem, believers told others about Jesus’ life, crucifixion, resurrection, and his return to judge all people.
- Only the Apostles stayed in Jerusalem.

“⁵ Philip went down to a city in Samaria and proclaimed the Messiah there. When the crowds heard Philip and saw the signs he performed, they all paid close attention to what he said. For with shrieks, impure spirits came out of many, and many who were paralyzed or lame were healed.⁸ So there was great joy in that city.”

- The Apostles had laid their hands on Philip, Stephen (see 6:8), and the others thus empowering them to perform miracles.
- Jesus told his disciples to witness “in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” Jerusalem was Israel’s worship center so one always “**went down**” to other places.
- In Samaria, Philip performed significant signs which gave credibility to his preaching message.

“¹² But when they (the Samaritans) believed Philip as he proclaimed 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.”

To benefit from His good news, we change (repent), put ourselves under God’s rule, praise Him and follow His Son.

Philip spoke boldly of God’s control (His Kingdom) and Jesus, God’s son’s sacrifice, his victory over death, and his return to judge us.

Philip accompanied this message with signs and wonders.

Simon saw real miracles occur through Philip and he stayed close to him.

The word translated “**paid close attention**” in verses 6 & 10 is the very same Greek word.

Philip began getting all the attention Simon the Sorcerer once enjoyed; Simon evidently felt threatened and envious.

“¹⁴ When the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had accepted the word of God, they sent Peter and John to Samaria. ¹⁵ When they arrived, they prayed for the new believers there that they might receive the Holy Spirit, ¹⁶ because the Holy Spirit had not yet

come on any of them; they had simply been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.

¹⁷ Then Peter and John placed their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit.”

- Until Philip, no one kept Jesus’ order to witness to Samaria. This passage shows that Peter was not the Pope. The Twelve acted as a body and sent Peter and John to Samaria. (1:8). Their action accords with *Acts* 2:14, which indicates that the Apostles assigned Peter the task of speaking on Pentecost. The NASB footnote rightly expresses the aorist (past) passive participle (statheis - Σταθείς): “*being put forward as spokesman.*” Peter became a spokesperson, not the chief Apostle.
- The Apostles evidently sent Peter and John to *lay hands on the Samaritans* to dispel any doubts that the Samaritans shared the full fellowship of the Jerusalem church.¹
- *Matthew* 10:1 informs us that when Jesus chose the Twelve, he “gave them authority over unclean spirits to cast them out, and to heal every kind of disease and every kind of sickness, (NASB).”

It seems the Apostles could transmit this power to other godly men as Stephen and Philip, through the laying on of hands, but recipients could not transfer that gift to anyone else. Philip could heal but could not pass on that power. That ability seems to be what Simon coveted so strongly.

As other Scripture indicates, every believer who repents and is baptized receives God’s indwelling Holy Spirit.

“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. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call.” **Peter; Acts 2:38, 39 NIV.**

“And you also were included in Christ when you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation. When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God’s possession—to the praise of his glory,” **Ephesians 1:13,14 NIV.**

¹ During Jesus’ ministry, James and John wanted heaven’s wrath to come down on a Samaritan village (Luke 9:51-56).

Simon evidently saw in Peter and John the ability to pass on the gift of performing miracles.

“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 in the hope that he may forgive you for having such a thought in your heart. ²³ For I see that you are full of bitterness and captive to sin.’”

In his 1958 translation, J.B Phillips, had Peter respond to Simon:

“To hell with you and your money. How dare you think you could buy the gift of God? You can have no share or place in this ministry, for your heart is not honest with God. All you can do now is repent of this wickedness of yours and pray earnestly to God that the evil intention of your heart may be forgiven. For I can see inside you, and I see a man bitter with jealousy and bound with his own sin.”

Why the reference to bitterness?

Think how bitterness is ripping our society apart,

A primary reason is that churches have failed to emphasize the Good News Christ brought; instead they’ve focused on *equity* and *social justice*.

Those causes dwell on the imperfections of others, not on God’s glory and grace.

God’s people praise Him and honor His son and his teachings.

God expects all people to repent because:

“No one is righteous, not even one,” **(Romans 3:10).**

Too often, God’s churches join forces with human organizations filled with power-driven, ambitious, greedy folks, who don’t emphasize righteousness, joy, and peace in Christ.

The news media promote bitterness, division, rioting, and anger.

Many media people are simply high paid gossips who get their money from rich, greedy advertisers.

As now, uncertainty and turmoil embroiled the first century world.

Do you recall how Jesus taught us to deal with violence, savagery, and carnage?

Luke 13:1-9 NIV:

“Now there were some present at that time who told Jesus about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices. Jesus answered, ‘Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans because they suffered this way? I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish. Or those eighteen who died when the tower in Siloam fell on them—do you think they were more guilty than all the others living in Jerusalem? I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish.’

“Then he told this parable: ‘A man had a fig tree growing in his vineyard, and he went to look for fruit on it but did not find any. So he said to the man who took care of the vineyard, “For three years now I’ve been coming to look for fruit on this fig tree and haven’t found any. Cut it down! Why should it use up the soil?” “Sir,” the man replied, “leave it alone for one more year, and I’ll dig around it and fertilize it. If it bears fruit next year, fine! If not, then cut it down.”’”

This Luke text tells of people reporting to Jesus the bad news of political corruption, death, and destruction.

Jesus answered simply and directly.

Instead of fretting about the tumult, I need to make sure my heart is right with God.

We must ask ourselves: “Have I repented of my own wrong-doing? Am I in a good relationship with my Creator?”

Jesus’ parable should also make us sit up and take notice.

Anyone growing crops looks for production.

That fig tree bore no figs. It was in jeopardy if it did not bear fruit soon.

Jesus expects us to bear fruit for him.

If Christians don’t get serious about praising God and telling Jesus’ good news, our society might not last.

It won’t matter whom we think is more right politically.

The Lord willing, next week we shall see:

- How Philip continued producing a “good crop;”
How folks should respond to the Good news;
And what God expects of you and me.

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