

The Face of Misplaced Faith

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[0 : 00] This was an excellent read, and I just encourage you, not right now, but later, to read it yourself and pray over it as well.

Pray for this church and our ministry in this community. Because it's not just about preaching the gospel, right? It's about meeting people where they're at with the love of God.

Teddy Roosevelt is one of several that I saw attributed to this quote, but I like Teddy, so I'm going to give it to him. He's made the statement, no one cares how much you know until they know how much you care.

You may have heard that attributed to someone else. I don't know where the origination comes from, but I love the statement nonetheless. No one cares how much you know until they know how much you care.

No one's going to listen to. Nobody really wants to listen to, you know, you share the gospel of their salvation and their need for salvation, how much of a sinner they are, you know, just out of the blue, right?

[1 : 06] Just kind of coming out. And some people receive that okay. But typically it's, you know, you have a relationship with somebody or you get to know somebody or you've, you know, earned the trust of an individual.

And unfortunately, there are many churches that have not really earned the trust of the community that they are in. We are a local church.

And as a local church, we have a local audience. We have local people who are in need of salvation. And maybe 200 years ago, everybody that was local attended this church.

But now I'm telling, I mean, how many people here would be considered local? How many people here live in Shapley? How many people that attend this church?

Some. I'm not saying there are none. No, but largely what we see with local churches, especially with the coming about of vehicles and transportation and such.

[2 : 05] You know, we don't have the horse and buggy that has to take us. Now we've got the, you know, 300 horsepower vehicle that takes us and as far and as fast as we want to go. So local churches don't look so much like their local communities typically.

But we have a local community to reach. And are we reaching them? Do they know that we care about them? Does Shapley, the community of Shapley know that we care about them?

How do they know? What do we do to show them that we care? Let me even back it up. I'm making an assumption here, right? You understand I'm making an assumption.

Do you care? Do you care about the community? Do you care about people who aren't sitting in these pews? That's something to think about.

And if you don't care, why don't you care? You know, for some people it's, well, I've had a bad experience or I, you know, I had a fight and it was ugly and it hurt or whatever.

[3 : 11] And so I don't care about that person or that person. Well, then you have a heart issue that you need to get right with God. Because we know that God loved the world.

God sent His Son into the world to be rejected by the world, to be hated by the world, to be killed by the world. But He did out of love. All right.

Bring it back in. I went way off there. So go ahead and read that article later today. So come back to Acts 8. The signs that Philip performed brought much joy to the city because he was loving the people and sharing about the greatest love of all, God's love shown through Jesus Christ.

And this was a very, this was very, this was very different from what the people were used to seeing and hearing. And that brings us to Acts 8, verse 9 through 25, our passage for today.

Let's go ahead and read, starting in verse 9. But there was a man named Simon who had previously practiced magic in the city and amazed the people of Samaria saying that he himself was somebody great.

[4 : 30] They all paid attention to him from the least to the greatest saying, this man is the power of God that is called great. And they paid attention to him because for a long time he had amazed them with his magic.

But when they believed, when they believed Philip as he preached good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women. Even Simon himself believed and after being baptized, he continued with Philip and seeing signs and great miracles performed, he was amazed.

Verse 14, now when the apostles at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent to them Peter and John who came down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit.

For he had not yet fallen on any of them, but they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then they laid their hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit.

Now when Simon saw that the Spirit was given through the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money, saying, give me this power also so that anyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit.

[5 : 50] But Peter said to him, may your silver perish with you, because you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money. You have neither part nor lot in this matter, for your heart is not right before God.

Repent, therefore, of this wickedness of yours, and pray to the Lord that if possible, the intent of your heart may be forgiven you. For I see that you are in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity.

And Simon answered, pray for me to the Lord that nothing of what you have said may come upon me. Verse 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.

Father, give us clarity of understanding of this passage, Lord, and what you want us to take from it. Help us to apply it and live it. In Jesus' name, amen. Amen. So, come to this guy, Simon. And we see in verses 9 through 13 that he's living a life of deception.

[7 : 05] Not much is known about him. He doesn't make another appearance in the New Testament. These are the only 16 verses that we have of knowing who this Simon is and what he did.

We do know that he practiced magic and he amazed the people while claiming to be somebody great. Now, he was clearly making a name for himself.

He wanted to be accepted by the people. The word magic means specifically witchcraft or dark magic. It's the practice of invoking supernatural powers for evil and selfish purposes.

This isn't just, no, this isn't a magician at the fair, which we enjoyed very much the other day. No, that's not what we're talking about. We're not talking about an illusionist.

We're talking about somebody who is dealing in the spiritual realm in areas that they ought not to be dealing with. And he liked the attention he received from the people and the power he had over them with his magic.

[8 : 10] It's not like he was forcing, like, I don't know that he was spiritually forcing people to like him, but they liked what he could do. And they were impressed with what he did. They were taken, they were taken captive by this guy who could do some pretty amazing things.

And unfortunately, there are people even today who were taken captive by the workers of Satan. There are men and women of the world who convince people that God is not enough or that he is not real and that they need something else, some deeper experience, some greater experience. And you can see that through Eastern mysticism, how rampant it is in our culture today and how it just is integrating into everything.

Now, the experience of your mind and body and, you know, the freeness of it and blah, blah, blah. And people are hooked into that and they're brought in.

Even the magician the other day, as much as we enjoyed his show, he was all about, you know, spreading the vibes of positivity and peace. And he had to, you know, show up the peace sign.

[9 : 20] And he had to, you know, he was a nice guy. But that's just one of those things that he was, that that's what his hope was. That's where he was. And, you know, he's trying to, you know, this experience.

Not talking about, right, God, talking about righteousness, love of God, anything like that. It's about peace and positivity and being kind to each other. All things that are great and important, but what's his authority?

Right? Many people, they're pulled off. They're enslaved to what is offered in this world. Even in the Christian community, faith healers like Benny Hinn and word of faith teachers like Kenneth Copeland take people captive through their false teaching.

You know, I found it interesting. Like, for years I've, like, seen videos on YouTube or seen them on TV, and I've kind of laughed at, like, the ridiculousness of what they're doing.

And then there's one time, you know, years ago it dawned on me. Look how many people are there to see them. To see what they're going to do or can do.

[10 : 32] Who they're going to heal next. What promise they're going to make that we can cling on to. What revelation they've been given by God to give to them.

So, I don't know if you're like me, you know, just kind of get a chuckle at some of, you know, the things that they do, they say, and just, it's like absolute ridiculousness.

But many, many people are deceived. And many people are taken captive by what these charlatans are offering.

The hope for people who are taken into these traps of deception lies in the gospel message. In Luke 4, 18 and 19, Jesus spoke, saying, The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor.

He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind. To set at liberty those who are oppressed. To proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.

[11 : 44] Jesus is saying that why he came, one of the things he's here for is to set people free from their bonds.

To set people free from the things of this world that they are enslaved to. And to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor. He's to proclaim good news.

And though the people were blind and followed Simon for a while, many came to faith after hearing Philip preach the gospel. We're even told that Simon himself believed and was baptized.

But what did he believe? And what is the evidence that he believed? That's, you know, a question mark. Did he believe? Really? What is the belief?

We're going to see more about that in the passage. We've already read it. But we're going to break it down a little bit more. But the bottom line is the only hope for people to come out of the enslavement and the entrapment of this world is the gospel.

[12 : 47] So in verses 14 through 25, Simon believed he was the sorcerer. He was the one misleading everybody. Now apparently he believes. He's baptized. Now in verses 14 through 25, his faith comes under scrutiny.

See, Peter and John are sent from Jerusalem. That's the birthplace of the church. That's where the apostles are at. And they come to confirm the faith of the Samaritans. If anyone's not going to back down, it's Peter and John.

They're not going to, you know, mince words. They're not going to just say, oh, yeah, you know, you signed a profession of faith. Or you walked forward, you know, on this aisle. Yeah, you're good and whatnot.

No, no, no, they came and I don't think it was just as simple as they showed up and prayed and the Holy Spirit. And then, no, I think they did some, they probably came down kind of like the Inquisition.

They were probably talking to them. They were, you know, they were probably, you know, learning about them. What is their testimony? What is it that they believed? What is the message that Philip preached to them? Stanley Toussaint, in the Bible Knowledge Commentary, says, because of the natural propensity of division between Jews and Samaritans, it was essential for Peter and John to welcome the Samaritan believers officially into the church.

[14 : 02] Remember, for the first seven chapters in Acts, they're in Jerusalem. And they're all Jerusalemites. And now with the persecution, the gospel's spreading. And now we've got, you know, the Samaritans.

The Samaritans? Really, God? Couldn't you just kind of skip over them? Well, that was the first ones we'd come to, the Samaritans. And they've got to go down and affirm that it has actually happened.

And so the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the Samaritans was proof to both the Jerusalem apostles as well as the Samaritans of their equality with the Jerusalem believers. And it's fun to see that John, who once wanted to call down fire on a Samaritan village in Luke 9, 54, is here calling down the Holy Spirit to indwell the believers.

Back to Simon, whose faith does not appear to be anchored in the Word of God, but in the miracles that he saw Philip perform. Now, we're told in verse 13 that after being baptized, he continued with Philip.

And seeing signs and great miracles performed, he was amazed. No, I mean, that in itself is not a statement worthy of saying, oh, well, see, this guy's just believing in miracles.

[15:19] I mean, if, you know, as believers, we were with Jesus, we'd be amazed, too, at what we'd see, right, and what he was doing. Or if we were in the early church meetings and we saw Ananias and Sapphira just drop dead, that would be pretty amazing, too.

Scary. Amazing. People being healed. The lame being able to walk. The blind seeing. The deaf hearing. The mute speaking.

That would be pretty amazing stuff. But it's the way he desires it.

It's the way he wants it. It's what was his past life. He performed the miracles. He was the one getting all the attention. Now you've got Philip and these two guys from Jerusalem, Peter and John, whoever they are, right?

And they're down there. They're preaching and they're doing things. And he's amazed. He's like, wow, look at what's going on here. This is pretty cool stuff. And it's different from what he did. Now this is done out of love and concern for others.

[16:24] Not out of selfishness. And if indeed Simon is, and I'm led to believe that he is a, not really a believer or definitely one that is, you know, somebody who felt the seed that fell on like the stony ground, you know, kind of pops up for a second and then strangled out and goes away.

Which, of course, not a believer. It's not different. It's not a new precedent that we've seen. In John chapter 6.

So those of you who stuck it out in the Wednesday Bible study through the gospel of John, we talked about this for a couple weeks, that Jesus had disciples. He had followers who followed him because of the signs that he did.

And in John 6, 22 to the end of the chapter, you see that when they didn't get what they wanted and he was, and his teaching got hard for them to take, they left. They left him.

And Jesus, that's when Jesus asked the disciples, are you going to leave too? Peter, you gone? So question whether or not there's genuine faith there.

[17:40] And I think we have right to question Simon as well. Luke leaves out the detail whether or not he received the Holy Spirit. His actions seem to indicate that he did not.

He was envious to have the power that the apostles had to bestow the Holy Spirit on people. He wanted that. He's like, that is something pretty cool. I can't do that. He's no longer the center of people's attention.

He offered money to be granted the ability to do something that would put them back in the spotlight. He's focused on himself again. Give me this power that I may lay my hands on people and they receive the Holy Spirit.

He's thinking about himself. It's all about himself. It's not about others. It's not about the gospel. It's not about Jesus. It's not about seeing souls saved. It's about what can I do that's going to get people's attention and do something cool.

And Peter rightly rebukes him. He reiterates the fact that this was a gift given by God. Verse.

[18:42] I lost my verse here. Verse 20. May your silver perish with you because you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money.

He rebukes him. It's not for sale. The miracles and the signs that God did is not for sale. And the fact of doing those miracles and signs was not something that you paid money to have done for you.

Again, another difference between the charlatans I mentioned earlier and true disciples and true faith healers as in the names of John and Philip and Peter and the other apostles.

Peter gives words. Peter's words to Simon, he's cutting straight to the point. He said, It's not for sale. You do not have neither part nor lot in this matter for your heart is not right before God. It took me a second to digest a little bit. Is he saying that he doesn't have lot in part in the giving of the Holy Spirit and performing of miracles and signs because his heart's not right before God? [20 : 04] And if that's what he's saying, then the assumption would be anyone whose heart's right before God can perform signs and wonders.

I don't think he's talking about the ability to do miracles. I think he's talking about salvation and being in Christ.

You have neither part nor lot in this matter for your heart is not right before God. And he tells them to repent of the wickedness of yours and pray to the Lord that the intent of your heart may be forgiving you.

Now, it's not out of place for believers to be told to repent. We see that in Revelation 3, 4, somewhere around there, where Jesus is telling people, repent, the church, repent and return. And ultimately, we need to be repenting. 1 John 1, 9, if we sin, confess our sins, he's faithful and just to forgive us our sins. We're told to confess. In our confession, we're repenting.

[21 : 06] We're recognizing, God, we've fallen short. We've done wrong and we've done this and we don't want to do that anymore. We want to walk in righteousness. That's what repenting is all about. But the command to repent is usually given to unbelievers in Scripture, not believers.

The fact that Simon was in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity would indicate that he had never truly been born again. The bond of iniquity? He's still bound up by sin?

So close to having supposedly made a profession of faith and being baptized? Second century Christian writer Justin Martyr, who does get his last name there because of the way in which he died.

Justin Martyr, who himself was a Samaritan, represents Simon as empowered by demons to perform magic and is later honored in Rome as a god. Oh, well, we do know a little bit more about Simon, just not from Scripture, extra-biblical writers.

So, Irenaeus describes him as the founder of the sect of the Simonians and as one from whom all sorts of Gnostic heresies derived their origin.

[22 : 28] Ah. We're learning a little bit more about this Simon guy. So, was he a believer? Probably not. Warren Wiersbe in his Bible exposition commentary says, This episode only shows how close a person can come to salvation and still not be converted.

Simon heard the gospel, saw the miracles, gave a profession of faith in Christ, and was baptized. And yet, he was never born again. He was one of Satan's clever counterfeits.

And had Peter not exposed the wickedness of his heart, Simon would have been accepted as a member of the Samaritan congregation. That's not unfounded.

Even today, many churches have unconverted people as members in their church. There are churches who have pastors who are unconverted and not saved leading their churches.

It's so sad to see someone so close yet end up so far away. I think of when Herod spoke to Paul and he tells him, You almost convinced me to become a Christian.

[23 : 45] It's that the argument is convincing. The argument is sound and logical and true. But it's the heart of the individual that is resistant to the truth of Scripture.

And personally, our hearts break and yearn for our friends and loved ones who turn from the truth and follow wickedness. Friends and loved ones who were like Simon, believed and baptized and... ..with the apostles, but yet their heart is not converted. There is no conversion there. Now the hope that we cling to is that, well, they made a profession of faith.

And ultimately, no, it's not our job to judge whether someone is saved or not. And perhaps, you know, they were genuinely saved and fallen away, but...

I don't know. I mean, that's...God's the judge, right? And we leave it in His hands. And like the apostles, we can only share the truth of the Word with them and remind them of their responsibility to respond to God in faith.

[24 : 54] It's our job to warn them. If we see somebody, if we know somebody, a friend, family member, whomever, neighbor, that, you know, once upon a time were involved in the church or seemed to, you know, love Jesus and seemed to be walking that path and then they are 180 and doing a completely different lifestyle, well, maybe they're saved, maybe they're not.

That's not for me to judge, but it's for me to warn them that this is not honoring to God and that they will stand in judgment for Him one day and that they need to repent.

And I think that's, you know, that's definitely what Peter did. He told them, you need to repent and pray. And in verse 24, Simon's response basically is telling them, you pray for me.

Pray to the Lord, pray for me to the Lord that nothing of what you've said may come upon me.

Simon's not concerned about praying for himself.

He's, he, whatever, no, you pray for me that nothing of what you said will come upon me. Maybe he was genuinely concerned and scared, but I suspect that it was a, yeah, I don't know, maybe a little bit of scared, but not scared enough that he's going to do anything about it himself.

[26 : 18] And the reality is that when we stand before God, we are responsible for our response and our actions and our proclamation in our lives. So, the focus in this, you know, I've looked a lot at Simon.

And there's a question mark whether or not he was saved or not. And we won't know until we're in heaven, ultimately. There's a lot of evidence that points to the fact that he wasn't. But I think the thing we need to take from this is exactly what Peter and John did, what Philip did.

Verse 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. We continue to share and preach the truth of the word of God.

And that's what we do. And there's going to be a lot of people that, you know, if we're sharing, if we're faithful and we're sharing, and we're sharing with a lot of people, there are going to be a lot of people that are going to close the door on your face, basically. They're going to reject it.

They're going to shun you, push you away. And that's, you know, they've been warned. They need to be warned from Scripture. We don't bring, you know, call hellfire down on them, but we plead with them.

[27 : 32] As I quoted Spurgeon a few weeks ago, you know, we're wrapping our arms around their legs that they may not go into hell, but they would stay and call on Christ.

There's going to be people that may respond and seemingly become your, you know, best bud or whatever. And they want to know more and learn more. And then the time comes where they turn and they don't care.

And then they start maligning you or whatever. At that point, you just need to warn them from Scripture and continue on. Let's pray.

Lord, I thank you for your word. Thank you for what you call us to. It's not easy. Lord, it's not easy. It's not easy. It's not easy. It's not easy. And Lord, it's certainly going to be, when we're obeying, that there's going to be times of persecution, hardship, trials.

There's going to be tears. But you're good, God. And you have shown us from your word that we need to be faithful to share the truth of the gospel, that people might be saved.

[28 : 41] That you may work in their hearts and their lives, that you can change them. That through your word, as they study and learn and memorize, they will be transformed for your glory into the image of your son.

Lord, I pray that even now you'd be working in our hearts and our minds, in our relationships, to see how we can engage our community.

Lord, to see how we can build relationships with people in this community, Lord, who may have a very negative view of who you are or what this church is about.

That, Lord, maybe there's been folks from the church who have wronged people in our community. I don't know. But, Lord, we want Jesus to be magnified and glorified.

And we want these folks to come to know you for salvation. And, Lord, help us to know the needs around us.

[29 : 44] And, Lord, help us not to be presumptuous, to assume we know what a need is and where it is. And that, you know, we seek to meet it but make things even more awkward. Lord, help us to continue to submit to you and to seek your face.

And to allow you to work in our lives and that we'd work out our salvation day after day. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

Amen.