

A Conversion that Wasn't

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[0 : 00] Let's now turn for a short time to Acts chapter 8. Acts chapter 8, looking at this incident with regard to Simon. Simon who came to be known by a number of names, Simon Magus, Simon the Sorcerer, all to do with what we find in this chapter here recorded about him.

We can read just to focus our minds on verse 18. 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.

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 with 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. Well, we learn from this passage, as we are looking at conversions in the Bible, that there is actually such a thing as false conversion.

[1 : 23] Something that looks like conversion outwardly, but actually has never had any change in our hearts, in our inner soul, which is of course where conversion actually takes place, where God's work takes place to bring us into a new situation, a new relationship with himself.

And it's a very solemn thing in many ways, that something can look like conversion, outwardly actually follow the same kind of pattern or lifestyle, to some degree at least of a converted person. There's an outward conformity to begin with in this man Simon, to the extent that he was baptized. And even those who were like Philip, in charge of that gospel movement at the time, saw nothing wrong with that, and neither was there, because they were going by what they could see.

And in order to be baptized, you would need to make some confession, some profession of your faith, or your experience in the gospel. And this man fitted and ticked all the boxes at that stage, until it became obvious, when Peter and the other apostles came down to Samaria.

And then things happened, as we'll see, that really brought out the fact that there had been no change at all in this man's heart, even though he had outwardly started to join with those who were of the church.

[2 : 49] Simon was very impressed, but he was not saved. He was impressed by the things he saw Philip doing, especially. We'll see why that was in a minute.

The miracles that God enabled Peter and others to do, he was really caught up in that. He was impressed by that. And as we'll see, that's really the main reason why he joined them, why he followed them, why he became part of this movement.

Not because he desired God, and not because he really saw himself as a needy sinner, but simply the fact that he was impressed by this spectacular thing as he saw it.

And when it came to him seeing the apostles, and the Holy Spirit given through the laying on of the hands of the apostles, well, that really impressed him. And he thought, well, here's something else I can do, or gain to my advantage.

Let's look at this. Let's look at this under two headings. We're looking firstly at the fact that Simon seemed to be converted. And secondly, at how Simon showed that he had not changed.

[3 : 55] Now verses 9 to 11 tell us something about his background. He was, he belonged to that city of Samaria, and he had previously practiced magic in the city, and amazed the people of Samaria.

An old magic, we can call it. This is not the kind of magic that you find sometimes on entertainment shows, where you find somebody like the great Soprendo, or some names like that, pulling rabbits

out of hats, or taking things out of their sleeves, or doing tricks with cards, all those sort of things that you find in entertainment.

That's not the kind of magic this was. This is the dark, sinister, evil kind of magic, that manipulates people, that has its origin in the satanic. That you find are the likes of witch doctors.

And probably in the next chapter, the little, the young girl who was restored by, by, by Paul. Sorry, not next chapter, chapter 16, as we saw where, where the church was established in, in Philippi, where along with the jailer, this young girl was, was possessed by a demon, and she brought her owners, a lot of monetary profit.

Well, Paul actually, of course, spoke and cast the demon out of her. Well, this is something similar. And this man, Simon, the magician, it's that kind of magic, that kind of sinister, evil, black magic.

[5 : 22] And by it, people were mesmerized. He obviously had, an ability to do things, that were quite remarkable. We're not told, what they were. But if you cast your mind back, to the Old Testament, you can find, for example, in the days of Moses, before Pharaoh, where Moses had a number of things, that he was able to do, as God, actually, instructed him.

He was able to do, some miraculous things, which the, magicians of Egypt, were able to copy. There are powers given, to darkness, to the satanic, to do things, that are, spectacular, to do things, that actually, impress people, so much, that they're taken in.

By it. They're caught up in it. They're mesmerized, by it. And that's what this man, was doing. He was passing himself off. In fact, the translation there, doesn't quite bring out, the meaning of it. He was passing himself, off as, somebody great. And the confession, of the people there, said this man, is the power of God, that is called great. He kept people, mesmerized, with not only, what he was doing, but he was claiming, to be divine, or some element, of the divine in him.

And people said, yeah, this man definitely, has a divine quality. This man is from the gods. Maybe he's even a god. And that's why people, gave him, such a place.

[6 : 40] Now remember that, in the book of Acts, what you're reading about, really, is the movement, of the gospel, the movement, of the church. It's the advance, of the gospel, the advance, of the church.

The Lord, actually, taking his cause, onwards. And all the way through, from the beginning, of the book of Acts, you find that, that is the central theme. But accompanying that, there are incidents, along the way, like this one, where you can see, that as the gospel, advances, so to the efforts, of that power, that opposes the gospel, increases as well.

And all of these things, that you read about, in the book of Acts, similar to this, are actually, satanic attempts, to thwart the gospel, to stem, the tide of this gospel.

And that's what happened, with Saul of Tarsus himself. He was being used, by the power of Satan, at the time, by the power, that opposed the gospel, that didn't want to see, the kingdom of God advance.

That's what you still find, in the world today. Where, the kingdom of God, is, powerfully advancing, where the kingdom of God, is, spreading its influence, you find, accompanying that, and standing against that, another power, a dark power, a power that, manipulates people's minds, so that they will not, accept the gospel.

[8 : 06] It's always been the case, and that's what you find, in Samaria, in these days. That's why this man, was, given the place that he was, because he was, held in this power, and used by this power, and bringing such attention, to himself, and obviously, bringing much gain, to himself, and to his status, and to people's opinion of him.

That's the old magic. There's nothing new about it, in the days of, of Simon, the magician, the sorcerer, goes back right into, the old testament days.

It's the old magic, of being, able to perform things, from the dark side, against the power, of the gospel.

Which of course, is a greater power. That's what you now see. But here is a new power. Something else, has come into Samaria. They're used to this man, actually, going around, claiming who he was, and performing, all of these spectacular deeds, and saying that, this man is the power of God, that is called great.

But here's something new. They've never actually, had this before, in Samaria. Here's a man, called Philip, and he's bringing, a message, about Jesus, and about his death, and about his resurrection, from the dead.

[9 : 26] And he's also able, to perform things, remarkable things. You find that, in the previous part, of the passage there, for the crowds, with one accord, paid attention, to what was being said, by Philip, when they heard him, and saw the signs, or miracles that he did.

Unclean spirits, crying out with a loud voice, came out of many. Many who were paralyzed, or lame were healed. So there was much joy, in that city. You can just imagine, Simon the magician, actually seeing this, and his eyes, are beginning to open, and he says, this is fantastic, this is something, I can add on to, my repertoire.

But this is a new power, and this is a clean power. This is not black magic. This is the, the power of the Holy Spirit, the power of Christ.

This is the power of the Gospel. It's coming to Samaria. God is at work in Samaria. God is doing great things, through Philip, in Samaria. And Simon, is impressed.

Simon is impressed, because, when he sees, these things happening, he realizes, that there's something here, that, is liable actually, to take away, the attention from him.

[10 : 41] But at the same time, there's something here, that, he himself can be part of. And it can be, to his benefit too. And if he just gets, into, this crowd, and gets some of these, abilities, that they have as well, well that's all to the good, that's going to just, advance his cause.

The key to it, is really in verse 13, the end of verse 13, when he came, and he started following, Philip, and, Simon himself, believed.

Now that's interesting. Simon himself, believed. That's the word that's used. You can be, a believer in things, in a formal sense, in an intellectual sense, in an outward sense, and yet not have, your heart changed.

There are plenty of people, that believe, the Bible's a special book, that believe, that God exists, that believe, Jesus lived in the world, that he did in fact die, perhaps even that, being the son of God, he rose from the dead.

That doesn't mean, automatically, that believing those things, that our heart has changed. But here's a man, who's said to have believed, and after being baptized, he continued with people, he joined himself, you see, to this number, in the church of the time, he joined himself, to that group, he continued with Philip, he specially, stayed with Philip, and along with Philip, and seeing the signs, and miracles, performed, he was amazed.

[12 : 16] That's the key, to what Simon is about, that's the key, to why he did this. He was seeing the miracles, he was impressed, by the miracles, he was saying, concerning Philip, that he was pretty much, the same as himself, he was involved, in what Simon, would have regarded, as magical arts, and involved in powers, that belong to another world.

Simon was drawn to that. Simon himself, joined this group. And then something happened, when the apostles, at Jerusalem, heard that Samaria, had received the word of God, they came down, and 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, and then they laid, their hands on them, and they received, the Holy Spirit.

Now that's a difficult passage, because, some people, of a more, Pentecostal, or charismatic, leaning, theological, we said, that's proof, you see, that you can, actually be converted, and not yet have the spirit, or have the fullness, of the spirit.

and you get into, all that theology, that speaks about, second baptisms, spiritual baptisms, that there's a two stage, or two tier thing, in salvation, that some people, are in the lower tier, they've never really, had hands laid on them, so that they get up, to the higher sphere, the higher tier, where you actually have, a baptism in the spirit, that's the kind of, misuse, we have to say, that people say, use this passage for.

You have to remember, two things. This was a unique time. The apostles were unique, in their status, in their position. Forget about people, today that call themselves, apostles, just so that they can, or are able to carry out, certain things.

[14 : 16] There were only, twelve apostles. The apostles, in these days, are the only ones, that really, have the name properly, of apostles. apostles.

They were, by God, used to found, the New Testament church. The church in a new age. And to have the church, established, in that new age, the apostles, were given, abilities, that others, generally were not.

That's why you must, never think that, what happened, on the day of Pentecost, or what happened, during the time, of the apostles, is something, that's meant to continue, in the church, to the end of time. God can still, do miracles.

But God chose, the way, by which he established, his church, in the days of the apostles, and you have to, confine certain things, to those days.

That's the first thing. It's a unique time. And they are unique, in that they are apostles, at that time. The second thing is, that Samaria, was very, very detached, from Jerusalem.

[15:19] Remember that, the Jews and Samaritans, had a really, serious rift, between them, on the course, during the course of history. You find that, mentioned for example, in John chapter 4, that woman of Samaria, with whom Jesus spoke.

That's one of the reasons, that disciples were surprised, when they came back, and found him. He wasn't just talking, to a woman, he was talking to a woman, who was a Samaritan. Just didn't happen.

Samaria was detached. Samaria was, almost another world, to the world that, people in Jerusalem, and Jews, were concerned for, and lived in.

So here, are people in Samaria, being converted. Here are people in Samaria, actually coming to receive, salvation. Coming to believe, in Jesus Christ.

And the, really important thing, for the apostles, is, the unity of the church. There are no apostles, in Samaria. And yet, those who are converted, in Samaria, have to be seen, to be part, of the one church of Christ.

[16:29] So the apostles, send two of their number, so that, what has not yet happened, to make it clear, that Samaria, is not another church, it's not a second church, it's the same church, as that in Jerusalem.

And people in Samaria, need to be incorporated, need to be incorporated, into the church, in the same way, they need to have, the same Holy Spirit, as those in Jerusalem have. And so, that's what happens.

They laid their hands on them, and they received, the Holy Spirit. Well, Simon is really, now very impressed. When he saw, that the Spirit was given, through the laying on, of apostles' hands, he offered them money.

You see, he wanted this, new, aspect, of his, of power, this ability, to give the Holy Spirit, to people. What a coup, that would be, if he could add that, to his repertoire.

If he could actually now, go to people, and say, do you want this, do you want this Holy Spirit, thing? Do you want this, to happen to you? I can give you this. That's, why he was so impressed.

[17:39] But, you know, it's the same old Simon. Nothing's really changed, essentially. He's just out for himself, and for his bag of magic tricks.

That's where you come, to Peter's, rebuke. Simon said to him, to Peter, give me this power also, so that anyone, on whom I lay my hands, may receive the Holy Spirit.

But Peter said to him, may your silver, perish with you, because you thought, you could obtain, the gift of God, with money. Now Peter is using, the strongest possible terms, and we'll see in a minute, why.

He's using words, that are very, very strong. And the reason for that, is that, he's faced with a very, very serious situation. It's not simply that, this is a man, who's joined the church, and a man, who's passing himself off, as the same, as those who've been, genuinely converted, but isn't.

It's serious for him, personally, that apparently, he's converted, but he isn't. That here is a conversion, that wasn't in fact, a conversion at all. But it's also, a serious thing, as Peter will show, for the church at large, because of the danger, that's posed, by somebody, who claims, to be converted, but isn't.

[19:03] Now he takes Simon, to the core of the problem. You have neither lot, nor part, nor lot in this matter, for your heart, is not right, before God.

We cannot, share, in the things of salvation. We cannot, have a portion, in the things of salvation. We cannot possess, any of the things of salvation, if our heart, is the same old heart, it's always been. That's what Peter, is saying to Simon.

Your heart is not right, with God. Whatever you say, outwardly Simon, you've not had, any change, radically within you. You're not actually, looking for this power, for the right reasons, at all.

Your heart is not right, before God. Your heart is not right, with God. You're not in, a proper, spiritual, fitting, relationship, with God.

[20 : 06] And that's where, the solemnity of the issue, comes to confront, myself, and yourself. What's our relationship, with God? What are we today, as we sit here, and worship him?

As we listen to, the gospel message, from this chapter. What are we? What are we in our, relationship to God? Are we resting, on something, other than, an essential, change of heart? Are we just, following the crowd, like Simon was, but doing it, for the wrong reasons? Are we content, with an outward, conformity, or formality, without really, having any change, inwardly, in our hearts, at all?

These are the kind, of questions, that God, today, is bringing to us, for us to address them, and for us, ourselves, to apply, these, solemn things, to ourselves.

We all want, to be converted. We all want, to be genuinely, converted, surely. We all want, to have a part, in salvation, that is to say, a participation, meaningfully in it.

[21 : 15] We all want, to share in the things, that are in Christ, the salvation, the redemption, the forgiveness, of sins, the eternal life, that's in him, that comes to us, in the gospel, that's offered to us, in the gospel, that the gospel, as it was in Samaria, pronounces, and proclaims, and offers.

That's why, people were turning, to God, and turning, to the gospel, and people, were accepting this, with a change of heart, but not Simon. And you and I, cannot, have a share, in the things, of salvation, without a change, of heart.

That's why, Peter used the word, repent. But first of all, he says, I can see, that, you are in the gall, of bitterness, and in the bond, of iniquity.

Very strong words. You know what gall is, or bile, it's, a very, bitter, liquid, that's, that's, emitted by the liver, in the human body.

It's something that, tastes very, very bitter indeed, if you were to taste it. Sounds like you get, in a reflux situation, when you get, your food coming back on you.

[22 : 41] That's the kind of thing, that's mentioned there. You are in, the gall, of bitterness. Simon was still, in a situation, where, his life was dominated, by gall, by the bitterness, of sin, by the rancid, flavor of sin, because, his heart, had never changed, and whatever he was, outwardly, this what was still, inside him, there was inside him, this, this bitterness, this gall, this bile, this spiritual, horrid thing, that had such, a stench to it, and, in the bond, of iniquity, not only was there, a bitterness, and is there, a bitterness, to sin, and to being, still in our sins, but there is, a bondage to it, we are bound in it, it's something that, so frequently, in the Bible, is represented, as being either, imprisoned, or in chains, or in bonds, that's what's said here, of this man, you are in the gall, of bitterness, and in the bond, of iniquity, that's what sin does, it's like, like that, spiritually, for us, and, what, what Peter actually, is doing, is drawing from the Old Testament, because, there's a passage, in the Old Testament, there,

I think I've given to you, in the notes, there, in the book of Deuteronomy, and chapter 29, and in, verses 18 and 19, and this is what you find there, in that passage, where God is, actually, warning the people of Israel, against, serious decline, away from him, or you might say, apostasy, or somebody, rising up amongst them, who will lead them, astray from God, this is how he puts it, beware, lest there be among you, a man or woman, or clan, or tribe, whose heart is turning away, today, from the Lord our God, to go and serve, the gods of these nations, beware, lest there be among you, a root bearing, poisonous, and bitter fruit, one who, when he hears, the words of this sworn covenant, blesses himself, in his heart, saying, I shall be safe, though I walk, in the stubbornness, of my heart, this will lead, to the sweeping away, of the moist, and dry, alike, what does that mean, it means, that it's a dangerous influence, in the church, and Peter could see, that if this man, was left untouched, and unrebuked, and if he was left, to go about, with the message, that he was able to, still bring about, that he himself, actually was a Christian, and that Christians, could do the kind of things, that he was doing, well a lot of people, were going to be led astray, it was going to be, an ongoing influence, in a bad way, amongst the people, of Samaria, who were converted, and they too, would be in danger, of being led away, and led astray, by this man, and others would follow him, and that's why, why Peter, went to use, the kind of language, of Deuteronomy, chapter 29, and why he spoke to him, in such strong terms, that he was in the Gaul, of bitterness, and the bond of iniquity, there was a danger there, there was an influence there, and that's why, you have to look at your life, and I have to look at my life, what are people, actually seeing about us, what influence do we have, with regard to others, are we influences, for good, or

are we influences, in the other direction, do people see, in us, that you can be, that you must be serious, about your Christian standing, about belonging to the church, or, is it something else, again that's applying to me, as much as to anyone else, but you see, what Peter then says to him, in verse 22, repent therefore, of this your wickedness, and pray to the Lord, that if possible, the intent of your heart, may be forgiven, that's a very important verse, because here is a man, who's apparently converted, but isn't, here's a man, who's really just involved, in the things of the gospel, for his own ends, here's a man, who is actually a danger, to those around him, in the church, because he's liable, to lead them astray, if this movement, beginning with him, goes on unchecked, if the powers, that he has, are used, not for the gospel, but against the gospel, and he's at the same time, professing that he's a Christian, the huge danger of that, is apparent to Peter, and yet, yet Peter is saying to him, repent,

Simon doesn't need to die like this, Simon doesn't need to carry on like this, he can turn from it, he can leave his bag of tricks behind, he can be done with that kind of life, and he can turn genuinely to the Lord, he can have Jesus, he can have the power of Christ, he can have the Holy Spirit, he can have the riches that Jesus gives, he can have all of these things, by turning in his heart, to Christ genuinely, by repenting, by turning from, what he is, to what he could be, and what he should be, and that's why, there's that great note, of hope, in the rebuke, that Peter gives him, he doesn't just say to him, get out of here, take your bag of tricks with you, and be gone, yes he rebuked him, but he also opened a door, of hope to him, in the word repent, repent, repent, repent, why don't we like the word repent, why do people actually find it, objectionable, well because it contains something, which is entirely contrary, to our sinful nature, it's something, that involves, a complete turnaround, from what we are as sinners, to what we become, as believers in Christ, we turn from pleasing ourselves, from living for ourselves, to pleasing God, and living for him, repent, have we done that, have we come, to know that turning point, in life, where we realise, that we are going to lose everything, unless we come to Christ, unless we embrace him, unless we turn round, and have the things, that are in him, because without repentance, they will not be ours, our heart will remain, as it is, will be condemned, by God, he showed that he was not changed, and in fact, that's all we read about him, and it is very interesting, and I think it's also, right for us, to look at the passage, and see the way Luke, has written this for us, that as he, he comes to, verse 24,

Simon answered, pray to the Lord for me, that nothing of what you have said, may come upon me, now Peter may have said more, than is recorded there, because, he's afraid obviously now, Simon, he began by, being somebody, who was very impressed, somebody who actually, wanted this power for himself, for his own ends, somebody who wanted to add, to his repertoire, of magic, and dark arts, but now he's somebody, who's afraid, Peter has said things to him, that have made him afraid, Peter has said to him, something about, the judgment of God, something about, being in the gall of bitterness, and the bond of iniquity, and to repent of this wickedness, and pray to the Lord, that if possible, this might be forgiven you, and he's become afraid, somewhat, that God will judge him, but he doesn't pray, he doesn't come to God, for forgiveness, he's a man who's afraid, and yet doesn't want to pray, all he can say is, pray to the Lord for me, that nothing of what you have said, may come upon you, a concern, with regard to God's judgment, but no concern to be forgiven, no concern about his sin, but how serious a sin, is to God, nothing of that, still unconverted, still the same old Simon, he's going to leave the scene, as he entered it, a lost, hopeless sinner, we understand that, from the way that Luke, is ending the passage for us, because you read nothing else, about Peter, or about Simon, the sorcerer, just this final request, pray for me to the Lord, that nothing of what you have said, may come upon me, while you can't be dogmatic, about it, that's really the way Luke, leaves it, so that we're left with the, very distinct impression, that nothing changed, as far as Simon was concerned, in fact, it seems deliberate, that the next person, mentioned this Ethiopian, you know, is such a bright contrast, a man, who is, as we'll see, a man, who actually, is genuinely converted, came to be genuinely converted, came to know Christ, led by Philip, to the Lord, having been reading, the scriptures, nothing like that, is said, of Simon, we leave him, as we found him, a poor lost sinner, a man still embroiled, in his dark magic, a man who heard the gospel, but remained in his sins, a man who preferred, the power of darkness, to the clean power, of Jesus Christ, there is a solemnity there, isn't there, none of us, of course, want, to be tied, to that dark power, none of us, none of us, would say willingly, of ourselves, that's what I prefer, to the power, that's in Christ, of course not, not suggesting that, for a moment, about anyone here, but what this is, saying to us is, make sure, that we're genuinely, converted, make sure, that we do indeed, have Christ, make sure, that our change, is not just an outward one, an external conformity,

to being a Christian,

God is saying to us, through this passage, make sure, that your heart, is right with God, because when that is so, everything else, will then be right, let's pray, Lord our God, we give thanks, for such passages, in your word, as bring us, things that are solemn, and necessary for us, to examine ourselves by, we thank you, that you have not left us, to treat of, your salvation, or the relationship, we have with you, in a casual manner, we pray, that you would, help us Lord, today, to examine ourselves, in the light of your word, and to be able, Lord we pray, assuredly to say, my beloved is mine, and I am his, and to be able, to see in ourselves, the evidences, that we are indeed, a people of God, people whose heart, is right with you, and we ask Lord, that you would, teach us continually, to do this, that we may use your word, to our advantage, that we may not, in any way, step aside, from repentance, and the things, that we require to do, and to have done, so that we will come, to possess, that salvation, continue with us, we pray now, and forgive our sin, for Christ's sake,

[35 : 38] Amen.