

Gospel Gladness and Grasping Greed

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Date: 24 June 2018

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[0 : 0 0] Good. We turn now to God's Word and to the book of Acts. And this evening we're in Acts chapter 8 and reading from verse 1 to 25.

And if you're using one of the bits of Bibles, that's on page 916. So Acts chapter 8. So last week we were in chapter 7 and at the end of chapter 7 after Stephen's speech he was martyred.

He was brought out of the city and was stoned to death. And so we pick up the story in chapter 8 verse 1. And Saul approved of Stephen's execution.

And there arose on that day a great persecution against the church in Jerusalem. And they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria except the apostles.

Devout men buried Stephen and made great lamentation over him. But Saul was ravaging the church and entering house after house. He dragged off men and women and committed them to prison.

[1 : 1 4] Now those who were scattered went about preaching the Word. Philip went down to the city of Samaria and proclaimed to them the Christ.

And the crowds with one accord paid attention to what was being said by Philip when they heard him. And they saw the signs that he did. For unclean spirits crying out with a loud voice came out of many who had had them.

And many who were paralyzed or lame were healed. So there was much joy in that city. 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. 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 Philip as he preached good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ.

[2 : 1 8] 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.

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. But Peter said to him. May your silver perish with you.

- [3 : 19] 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. 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. Amen. This is the word of the Lord.
- Good. Well please do turn back to Acts chapter 8.
- [4 : 20] And we'll spend a little time looking at this together. So Acts chapter 8. Jesus has set his agenda for his church until he returns.
- He said it out in Acts chapter 1. His plan for the progress of the gospel. And it's a plan that has not yet reached its conclusion. Because Jesus hasn't yet returned.
- And the agenda is this. He says you will be my witnesses. In Jerusalem. And in all Judea. And Samaria. And to the end of the earth.
- Jerusalem. And Judea. And Samaria. And to the end of the earth. And the martyrdom of Stephen that we saw last week. That was the turning point.
- The focus from this point on. It shifts. Having been very much on Jerusalem. The focus now shifts. And the first port of call is Samaria.
- [5 : 31] You see the severe persecution of God's people. It doesn't lead to gospel retreat. That's what you might expect. Isn't it? But it's quite the opposite. The great irony.
- Despite the enemy's best efforts. The great irony is that. Gospel persecution. It goes hand in hand. In fact it often leads to. Gospel expansion. And that is so clear.
- As we read these opening words. From chapter 8. Just look there. At the end. Of chapter 7. The beginning of chapter 8. The persecution. The martyrdom of Stephen.
- And there arose. A great persecution. Against the church. In Jerusalem. And that leads to. Scattering throughout. The regions of Judea. And Samaria.
- But notice. What these ordinary Christians do. As they're scattered. And it is ordinary Christians. Remember that the apostles. They stay put. End of verse 1.
- [6 : 30] They stay in Jerusalem. So it's the ordinary Christians. That are scattered. And what do they do? Verse 4 of chapter 8. They went about. Preaching the words.
- Testifying. Witnessing to the Lord Jesus. And that was. The key priority. For the church then. And it remains so. For the church today. As ordinary Christians.
- Then went about. With Christ on their lips. Scattered. Everywhere they went. They preached the word. It remains so. For us. So will our colleagues.
- Will they over time. As trust is built up. As relationships are nurtured. Will they hear something of Jesus. From our lips. Will our neighbors.
- As the months and years go by. Will they learn some of the gospel. From spending time with us. And listening to us talk. Scattered Christians. They are to be Christians.
- [7 : 26] With Christ on their lips. Scattered Christians. Are at the coalface. Of gospel advance. That's what we see here. In the beginning of chapter 8.
- And Martin Luther. Rather charmingly. Wants to describe Christians. As being like manure. If stagnant. They can start to smell a little bit. But if spread out.

They can prove very fruitful. And the latter. Was certainly in evidence. Here in Acts chapter 8. They're scattered. They're spread out. And immediately.

There's fruitfulness. The Christians are scattered. From Jerusalem. And wherever they're scattered. It's the gospels on their lips. And there is. As Luke goes on to detail.

For us. There is great fruitfulness. But it's not without. Some weeds. Along the way. And that is what we see. In our passage.

[8 : 20] This afternoon. The first point of interest. In the geographic spread. Of the gospels. Recorded by Luke. It's Samaria. That's the first place. They go. And so.

We'll take this passage. In two sections. And we see two responses. To the gospel. As the word. That is on normal Christians lips. Is proclaimed. As it advances into Samaria.

There is. Gospel gladness. But there's also. Grasping greed. There is. Real repentance. But there's also. Self-service.

So first. We'll look at the Samaritans. And then secondly. Simon. So the Samaritans. They respond. With a glad reception. To the preaching of the gospel.

And we see here. The unity. That comes. From acceptance. Of the one gospel. Now the contrast. Between the events.

[9 : 16] In Jerusalem. That we read about. At the end of chapter 7. And the events. At the start of chapter 8. They are stark. Aren't they? In Jerusalem. There's murderous hostility.

To the preaching. Of the word. But here in Samaria. Look at verses 4 to 8. In Samaria. There is glad reception. Look at verse 6. The crowds.

With one accord. Paid attention. To what was being said. By Philip. There was. Verse 8. Much joy. In that city. What a total contrast.

To the scenes. In Jerusalem. Murderous intent. In Jerusalem. Glad reception. Here in Samaria. And this is really. Quite surprising. That there should be.

Such a glad reception. To the gospel. In Samaria. That is. Astonishing. Think about the history. There had.

[10 : 10] For many centuries. Been deep. Rooted hostilities. And suspicions. Between the Jews. And the Samaritans. A thousand years before. The nation of Israel.

Had split into two. The southern tribes. With its capital. In Jerusalem. And the ten northern tribes. With their capital. In Samaria. And ever since then.

Deep hostility. And despite. The split. The Samaritans. Of course. Shared much in common. With the Jews. They believed. The same God.

They shared. The first five books. Of the Bible. But they had. Rejected. Subsequent revelation. From the Lord. They rejected. Jerusalem. As the center.

Of God's plans. And purposes. They rejected. Jerusalem. As the location. For the temple. They set up. Their own temple. In some other place. And there was. Therefore. Huge confusion.

[11 : 03] In Samaria. Amongst the Samaritans. When it came to understanding. And responding rightly. To the God of Israel. Just think of. Jesus' interaction.

With the woman. From Samaria. You read about it. In John chapter 4. Listen to what happened there. The woman. The Samaritan woman. Comes to Jesus. And she says this. Sir. I perceive.

That you are a prophet. Our fathers. Worshipped. On this mountain. But you say. That in Jerusalem. Is the place. Where the people. Ought to worship. Worship.

So great confusion. Isn't there? She thinks that. Where she is. Is the place. Not Jerusalem. And so Jesus said to her. Woman. Believe me. The hour is coming.

When neither on this mountain. Nor in Jerusalem. Will you worship the father. You worship. What you do not know. We worship. What we know. For salvation.

[11 : 57] Is from the Jews. And so. For the Samaritans. Here in Acts chapter 8. To receive the gospel.

As proclaimed by Philip. A Jew from Jerusalem. To hear the gospel. Proclaimed by him. The gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. To receive it.

And to respond gladly. That is astonishing. Isn't it? To acknowledge that. Salvation did in fact. Come from the Jews. That must have been quite a hurdle.

To overcome. To have to admit. That they've been wrong. For all these centuries. That takes some swallowing of pride. But Luke's point here.

Is that what these Samaritans. Are responding to. Is the very same gospel. That's been proclaimed in Jerusalem. Theirs is. The same salvation. They believed Philip.

[12 : 53] As he preached the good news. About the kingdom of God. And the name of Jesus Christ. They respond to the call to repent. And to be baptized. It's the same gospel. And that is the key.

To understanding. The rather unexpected. And often misunderstood. Verses. 14 to 17. You see. This is the only place.

In Acts. Post Pentecost. When we read about the spirit. The Holy Spirit. Being held back. Back in Acts chapter 2.

Peter makes this appeal. To those who are listening to him. He says this. 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. That's the normal pattern. Repent. Receive forgiveness of sins. And the gift of the Holy Spirit. At the same time.

[13 : 49] No delay. So real repentance. That brings forgiveness of sin. And the gift of the Holy Spirit. Why then. Is there a delay here.

In chapter 8. That's what we see there. In verses 14 to 17. They had not yet. Received the Holy Spirit. Why is that? Well remember.

That the gospel. Is breaking new ground. At this point. As we move. Beyond Jerusalem. And into Samaritan territory. This is a big. Geographical shift.

A huge border. Has been crossed. As the gospel. Enters into Samaritan territory. But despite. That shift. Here's Luke's emphasis. Despite that shift.

It is the one. And the same gospel. Notice the geographical markers. Here in the text. Look at verse 14. Now when the apostles.

[14 : 45] 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.

So the apostles. From Jerusalem. They go out of their way. Literally. To demonstrate. That because. Those in Samaria. Had believed. In Jesus.

They would receive. The very same gift. They would receive. Receive the same. Holy Spirit. That those. In Jerusalem. Had received. When they believed. See God is clear.

He's clear. To authenticate. Their salvation. It's the very same. Salvation. It's not a different one. Despite all their history. Despite all the suspicion. And division.

They received. The very same. Salvation. Theirs is not. A second rate. Salvation. It's not. A special. Samaritan. Salvation.

[15 : 43] No. It's the very same. Gospel. It's the very. Same. Salvation. And this is. A unique event. You don't see it. Anywhere else.

This delay. In receiving. Of the spirit. It's not seen again. So it is definitely. Not. Normative. Many Pentecostals. Would want you.

To believe that. This is not normative. This is a one-off. Unique event. And so we can say to you. If you're here this evening. If you. Today.

Believe. In your heart. Confess. With your lips. That Jesus is Lord. Then you receive. Forgiveness for sin. The promise. Of everlasting life.

And. The Holy Spirit. No delay. No requirement. For an apostle. To lay on hands. This event.

[16 : 36] We read about here. It's not repeatable. It's unique. This is. A unique moment. In the expansion. Of the gospel. And particularly. It's the uniting.

Of two. Old foes. The Jews. And the Samaritans. This is the reunification. Of Israel. North and south. Brought back together. And there is therefore.

A real unity. That comes. From accepting. The one gospel. That is what this little incident. Here in verses 14 to 17. Teaches us. The fact that it is. The same gospel.

That has implications. For both the Samaritans. And for the Jews. The Samaritans. Had to come to terms. With the fact. That salvation. They needed. It came only.

From the Jews. The gospel. Had. A historical basis. That they need. To come to terms with. It's significant. Isn't it? That the apostles. Have to come.

[17 : 31] From Jerusalem. To authenticate. The gospel. It was a place. They rejected. As a center of worship. Quite a hurdle. For the Samaritans. To overcome. But also.

For the Jews. They needed. To overcome. The centuries. Of antagonism. Between the two groups. And to realize. And accept. That these Samaritans. By. Repenting.

And believing. In the same gospel. They were just. As much. A part of God's people. As they were. They had to realize. That Samaritan Christians. They weren't somehow.

Second-class citizens. They weren't. Second-class Christians. They were the same. Same gospel. Same salvation. And for them then.

And for us today. It is so necessary to grasp. And to come to terms. With the one gospel. It's found nowhere else. Salvation is found nowhere else.

[18 : 26] Only in the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. As contained in his word. And that's hard. For those today. Who would stand.

In a similar position. To the Samaritans. Of that day. Remember that they. Shared something. Of the historic faith. With the Jews. Didn't they? Lots of common language.

And history. But along the way. There have been a significant departure. A refusal to recognize. God's prophets. And revelation. A refusal to recognize. Jerusalem. As the place of the temple.

And there are some today. Who would claim to share. A similar Christian heritage. As those who profess. Evangelical faith. But in reality.

They refuse to acknowledge. The gospel. As revealed in the Bible. There is a nominal. Christianity there. Perhaps. They used to attend church. Perhaps they still do.

[19 : 23] But. They don't regard the Bible. As the authority. They haven't ever. Really acknowledged their sin. And their need for a savior. But the reality is.

There is no salvation. Outside of the gospel. As it's been handed down. As it's written. In God's words. And so. For folk like that.

They must come to terms. With. Historic Christianity. Like those Samaritans. In Acts chapter 8. They must acknowledge. The one source of salvation.

Christian. But it's hard too. For those today. Who would stand. In a similar position. As the Jewish believers. Did then. Those.

Who've had. The privilege. Of being part of God's people. Perhaps even from birth. It's tempting. Tempting to look down. On those. Who are new to the faith.

[20 : 19] To look down. On those. Who don't have. The same. Evangelical pedigree. That you might claim. For yourself. Tempting. To consider newcomers. Who don't. Speak with the right.

Sort of reform language. Or. Who aren't up to speed. With the latest. Bud words. And trends. Can be tempting. To think of some. As second class Christians. They're not quite.

At my level. But that is nonsense. Isn't it? There is only. One gospel. There is only. One way of salvation. There is.

No distinction. Between. You. And the person. Sat next to you. There is no distinction. Between you. And the person. You never consider. Sitting next to you.

We are all. In need of salvation. The same salvation. And we are one. In Christ. Just like. The new. Samaritan converts. Here.

[21 : 15] And the Christians. In Jerusalem. In chapter 8. Of Acts. One. Faith. One. Salvation. One. Holy Spirit. One. One. One. Church. So let's be a church.

Known. For rejoicing. When any. Come to Christ. Whether they're like us. Or not. And praise God. We've seen that. Haven't we? In recent months.

And years. We're a motley crew. But let's keep at it. Let's be a church. That rejoices. When the unexpected. Come to Christ.

Let's welcome all. With equal. Gladness and joy. And that means. Going out of our way. Sometimes. Doing the sort of things. That don't come naturally. I don't suppose. That Peter and John.

Especially relished. Heading up. To Samaria. For so long. We've been enemy territory. But they were prepared. To do it. And so. Are we prepared.

[22 : 12] Similarly. Who are you prepared. To speak to. After a service. Who are you prepared. To welcome. Into your home. Well there's the first.

Response. To the gospel. The Samaritans. They respond. With. Glad reception. To the preaching. Of the gospel. So we've seen. The unity. That comes.

From accepting. The one gospel. There is only one gospel. And all who accept it. Are gladly welcomed. But second. We see a very different.

Response. And it's Simon. He responds. With greedy. Opportunism. Grasping. For himself. At the power. Of the gospel. And we see here.

The self-interest. That persists. From a bitter heart. Look again. At verse eight. There was much joy. In that city. And then.

[23 : 07] Verse nine. There's a but. But there was a man. Named. Simon. Of all the people. In Samaria. Luke.

Zooms in. On one man. Simon. Why would he do that? Well it's clear. Isn't it? As we read. That this. Is a man. Of some influence. But Luke.

Is at pain. To demonstrate. That sometimes. The real motivation. Behind someone's apparent. Glad reception. Of the gospel. Is in reality. Motivated. By self-interest. Let's trace.

Simon's story. He was a man. Of some influence. He used to practice. Magic. And he's attributed. To himself. Greatness. Look at there. At the end of verse nine.

He. Said. Of himself. That he was. Somebody great. And he had a great following. From across the board. From the least. To the greatest. And they paid.

[24 : 03] Attention to him. Did you notice. That little phrase. It comes in verse ten. They paid attention to him. And again. In verse eleven. The people. They paid attention.

To Simon. But Philip. Is now in town. How did the people. Who once. Paid attention to Simon. Respond to Philip. Look at verse six.

The crowds. With one accord. Paid attention. To what's being said. By Philip. With the coming. Of the gospel. With the preaching.

Of the gospel. From Philip. Simon's power. And influence. Over the people. Is gone. That's the great contrast. Drawn out by Luke. There in verse eleven. And twelve. They paid attention.

To Simon. Because for a long time. He had amazed them. With his magic. But when they believed. Philip. As he preached. The good news. About the kingdom of God. And the name of Jesus Christ.

[24 : 58] They were baptized. Even Simon himself. Is baptized. Or you might think. Great. A superstar conversion.

A celebrity Christian. This is the famous Simon. He's been converted. But Luke. Doesn't stop there. The story. Doesn't end.

At Simon's baptism. All is not. As it seems. With Simon. He's lost. The power. He once wielded. Over the people. But has he really. Submitted.

To the power. Of the gospel. And Luke. Tells us. Clearly. No. He's not submitted. Yes. Simon. Could see.

Something. Of the power. Of the gospel. He seemed. To understand. It to be true. He even confessed. It to be true. But. At heart. He was in it.

[25 : 51] For himself. Notice. At the end. Of verse 13. What it is. That really. Captivates. Simon. It's seeing. The signs.

And the great. Miracles. Performed. He's amazed. By it. And when the apostles. Peter and John. Come and lay their hands. On the people. To receive the Holy Spirit. Luke.

Is careful. To record. Simon's response. He saw this. And he offered. The money. Saying. Give me this power. Also. Simon.

Was in it. For the power. That might. Enable him. To wield. He wanted. The attention. That was now. Turned. Towards the Lord. Jesus Christ. He wanted it.

For himself. He wanted to buy it. But Peter. Sees right. Through him. Look at what. Peter says there. Verse 20. May. Your silver. Perish with you.

[26 : 44] 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. Peter.

Sees right. To the issue. Yes. Simon may have. Confessed faith. But his heart. Was not right. Before the Lord. In fact. Peter says. He's deeply bitter.

Peter. And he goes on to say. Repent therefore. And pray to the Lord. That if possible. The intent of your heart. May be forgiven you. Simon's problem.

Was a problem with his heart. It was his envious motivation. Repent and pray. Says Peter. It. What does Simon do?

Well. He does neither. He doesn't pray. Instead. He asks Peter. To pray for him. And he doesn't repent. Rather. He seems sorry. For the consequences.

- [27 : 43] Of his sin. Rather than the sin itself. He doesn't want bad stuff. To happen to him. He's more concerned. About self. Than Christ. It's all. About Simon. Before Philip.
- Arrived in town. Simon. Was the one. People. Listen to you. He called himself. Great. And after Philip. Had proclaimed the gospel. And many had come to faith. Well.
- Simon still. Wanted that power. And glory. That hadn't changed. His heart. It was consumed. With self. Not Christ. Quite the opposite.
- To what we saw. Last week. With Stephen. Stephen. Was prepared. To lay down. His life. For Christ. Not so. With Simon. And it's a sober. Sober warning.
- It's a sober warning. For you and I today. For all. In the professing church. You see. Simon professed. He followed Peter around. If Simon was here today.
- [28 : 41] We'd probably want to give him. Top billing. At our conferences. Wouldn't we? A man of great power. And influence. Who. Appears to be converted. But in reality.
- He hasn't changed. And there will be people. In the professing church. Whose hearts. Like Simon's. Haven't really changed.
- They're in it. For self. Power. For glory. Like Simon. They're driven by self-interest. That flows from a bitter.
- And envious heart. You see. Simon. He had heard the gospel. He professed faith. He was baptized. He followed Philip around. He was in and amongst the crowds.
- But he wasn't really converted. At least at this point. He didn't really know Jesus. As someone put it.
- [29 : 37] He. He was varnished. With religion. But never visited with grace. Varnished with religion. But never visited with grace.
- And so if that's you. That's you here. This evening. You must. Hear and heed. Peter's words. Repent. Pray. Pray. But there will be many.
- I'm sure. Here this evening. As we've read. As we've heard. You might feel a bit panicked. Is this me? Am I like Simon? And the reality is.
- That so many of us. Have mixed motives. Don't we? Even when our prime motivation. Is to bring glory to Jesus. There's no doubt. A little part of us. Wants. Some sort of recognition. And glory.
- Maybe it's just me. But. That's what we're like. Aren't we? Even when our motivations. Are generally good. There's always a little. Bit of self-interest. That creeps in. But if that's you.
- [30 : 40] Don't panic. Yes. We're to repent. Of those selfish moments. But. You're not in the same boat. As Simon. His sin. Was absolutely persistent. His profession.
- Was a sham. There was no concern. For Christ. Only for self. His. Was. A false faith. Which is why. He drew such.
- Sharp words. From Peter. They are sharp. Aren't they? Stern rebuke. May your silver. Perish with you. Because you thought. You could obtain. The gift of God.
- With money. So the question is. Whose glory. Are you really seeking? Whose glory. Do you desire? Is it your own? Or is it primarily.
- Christ's? Simon. Well. He responded. To the gospel. With greedy. Opportunism. He grasped.
- [31 : 34] At the power. Of the gospel. He thought. There was something. In it for him. To gain more. Power. Over the people. And we've seen. The sad reality. That sometimes.
- Even within. The professing church. We do see. That self-interest. That persists. From a bitter heart. But it is a self-interest. That will be exposed. It was exposed.

Straight away. In Simon's case. And for those. In the church. Today. It will be exposed. If not now. Then one day. And certainly. At the last day.

When Christ. Will expose all. But this. Sobering reality. It does not change. Or alter. Or prevent.

The progress. Of the gospel. Notice. How our passage. Concludes. Verse 25. Now. When they had testified. And spoken. The word of the Lord. They returned.

[32 : 29] To Jerusalem. Preaching. The gospel. To many villages. Of the Samaritans. And as. The glorious gospel.

Goes forward. As it goes. To the ends. Of the earth. It will be met. At times. By grasping. Greed. But it will also.

Don't forget. It will also be met. By gospel. Gladness. That is a big picture. Of this passage. As the gospel. Enters new territory.

Yes. It brings glad. Reception. From some. But. Face the reality. That sometimes. There will be. Real opposition. Those who are grasping. For power within.

So. In the big picture. Of gospel. Fruitfulness. Are you a weed. Amongst the blessing. Are you a Simon. Or are you.

[33 : 27] Evidence. Of the fruits. Of the gospel. Glad receivers. And those who scatter. The gospel. Be the latter. Be the latter.

Let's pray. Let's pray. Father, we thank you so much for the one gospel for the salvation that came from the Jews that went out from Jerusalem and Judea to Samaria and to the end of the earth how we thank you so much that we share in that one gospel we are one in Christ and so Lord, humble us and help us to be a people that can truly sing and evidence in our lives that we will not boast in anything no gifts no power no wisdom but that we would only boast in Jesus Christ his death and resurrection help us in Jesus name

Amen Thank you Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen