

## **FIXATED ON POWER**

### **Introduction**

I once knew a young man who was troubled over that fact that he could not speak in tongues. He felt like a second-class Christian because he did not speak in tongues. Worst yet, he even doubted his salvation based on the fact that he could not speak in unknown spiritual tongue. The more I spoke with him, the more apparent it became that for him speaking in tongues was not only the benchmark of one being truly saved, but it would cause others to admire him and think more highly of him. In his mind, he would become an elite Christian while those who did not speak in tongues remained normal or second-class Christians and God would show that He loved this young man more than others by giving him this gift of tongues. He had put more value in the gift or sign of tongues than he was giving to Christ. There are many churches today that teach speaking in an unknown tongue is the benchmark of a true Christian.

The truth is their desire to be noticed and special was much like a man named Simon who lived in Samaria who heard and saw the power of Christ used Philip and the Apostles to show God had given them His authority. Simon also desired to be looked up to and be, as it were, the center of attention. Simon wanted all the ohhs and ahhs pointed in his direction. Simon had become famous through magic and tricks, but when Philip arrived preaching the Gospel and performing miracles his desire moved to the power to perform miracles instead of magic.

People who make the test of being truly saved or being a superior Christian by having the gift of tongues, or to do miracles or give prophecies even though they would reject what I am now saying, they are like Simon of Acts chapter 8 or Pharaoh, in Exodus, When Moses and Aaron were before Pharaoh, God commanded Aaron to put down his staff and it turned into a snake. Moses tells us,<sup>11</sup> “Then Pharaoh summoned the wise men and the sorcerers, and they, the magicians of Egypt, also did the same by their secret arts.”<sup>12</sup> For each man cast down his staff, and they became serpents. But Aaron’s staff swallowed up their staffs.<sup>13</sup> Still Pharaoh’s heart was hardened, and he would not listen to them, as the LORD had said.” (Exodus 7:11-13) The truth is simple; God’s power is the only true supernatural power and God’s power swallowed up the fake magic summoned by Pharaoh who thought of himself as God and his sorcerers. God’s power is not about me or you, it is about His glory; as God the Father and God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. The focus of Christianity is to be on God, not on me or you, and not on any human. Evil power always is focused on the person because Satan does not want people seeking God above all else, he wants people to seek sin.

**Primary Truth:** If you take nothing else from this message, take this to heart; *We must live in awe of God and find amazement in Him alone!*

This passage today challenges all Christians to reevaluate our devotion to God the Father and His salvation through His Son, Jesus Christ. We may even ask ourselves these questions, “Why did I come to Christ or why am I a Christian? Is it so I can get something out of it; recognition or power or heaven or God’s blessings?” My hope would be that your answer would be something like this, “I am a Christian because Christ is my treasure and in Him alone am I amazed and in awe, He is my Savior and Lord.”

## Amazed By Magic (vs. 9-13)

Our focus this morning is on Acts chapter 8. Reading verses 9 to 13 will show us what Simon thought of himself and how the people reacted to him and how differently they reacted to Philip, “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. <sup>10</sup> They all paid attention to him, from the least to the greatest, saying, ‘This man is the power of God that is called Great.’ <sup>11</sup> And they paid attention to him because for a long time he had amazed them with his magic. <sup>12</sup> But 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. <sup>13</sup> Even Simon himself believed, and after being baptized he continued with Philip. And seeing signs and great miracles performed, he was amazed.”

Simon the sorcerer was a very important man in Samaria. He had kept the people amazed with occult magic for some time. So, before Philip entered the area of Samaria, Simon was a star attraction. His magic was occult fueled and demonic in origin. This may very well account for the need for people “seeing signs and great miracles performed” (v. 13) that Philip did in the name of Jesus as he came to the land. Many people were demon possessed possibly, in part, due to Simon’s witchcraft and occult sorcery. Simon associates himself with God, the people said Simon “is the power of God” and therefore, “Great”, reading verse 10, “They all paid attention to him, from the least to the greatest, saying, “This man is the power of God that is called Great.” Most scholars believe that Simon being referred to as “This man is the power of God” and calling himself “Great” with a capital “G” went far beyond just being a great performer of magic among the people, but his

desire to be worshipped as a false little god, Simon desired for people to see him as divine.

As we observed in Exodus chapter 7 read by Ivan,<sup>10</sup> “So Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh and did just as the LORD commanded. Aaron cast down his staff before Pharaoh and his servants, and it became a serpent.<sup>11</sup> Then Pharaoh summoned the **wise men** and the **sorcerers**, and they, the **magicians** of Egypt, also did the same by their **secret arts**.<sup>12</sup> For each man cast down his staff, and they became serpents. But Aaron’s staff swallowed up their staffs.” So, by Old Testament standards Simon would have been considered to be a **wise man** (**khaw·kawm**) meaning cunning or sly or an enchanter. He was a sorcerer (**kaw·shaf**) a man that practiced witchcraft or sorcery, to deceive people. **Sorcery** is the use of power gained from the assistance or control of evil spirits. Simon was also a magician (**khar·tome**) meaning a diviner; one who uses occult knowledge to influence others. Let me define a few of these terms that would define the practices of Simon.

**Divination** (**keh·sem**) is the art or practice that seeks to foresee or foretell future events or discover hidden knowledge usually by the interpretation of omens or by the aid of supernatural powers. It is witchcraft. Divination comes from the same root word as divine – Simon thought he had divine qualities.

**Enchanter** (**nachash**), because of the similarity of this Hebrew word to the word for snake, many scholars are of the opinion that there is a connection to snake charming. Since there is a similarity of hissing sounds of enchanters as they chant and snakes that respond; scholars believe this accounts for the similarity of the words.

As a **sorcerer** or **magician** or **witch**, Simon would have claimed he had the power to communicate with the dead and spirits. In Samuel chapter 28 this person is called a medium (**haw·yaw**) and in Deuteronomy 18:11 a necromancer (**yid·deh·o·nee**).

For Simon magic brought him fame and no doubt fortune as well. He was important and literally had people call him “**Great**” or divine. For Simon, magic meant power and power was the end he sought and magic was the means to the end. The people, got something also, they were amazed by the show, by Simon’s magic and his magic showed his supposed supernatural powers. They were in awe of Simon and all he could do and they did not understand that all man magic is an illusion.

Luke reports that the people heard Philip’s message, believed and were then baptized. They believed the message about the Kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ and they were baptized. So, they believed in God’s kingdom, His eternal rule and reign. They believed in the name of Jesus and all Philip taught about Jesus and about man’s need for a Savior. When they believed they were baptized.

So far so good, what has been presented is clear in our understanding. The people hear the Word of God and the Gospel of Christ being preached and understand and agree, they see the signs that accompany the Word as proof that God’s Word is true. The miracles Philip performs are truly supernatural, not man-made magic. However, in the middle of all this we find this troubling verse, verse 13, “**Even Simon himself believed, and after being baptized he continued with Philip. And seeing signs and great miracles performed, he was amazed.**” This troubling verse had created much debate over the centuries. Was Simon a

Christian? After all, it says he believed and was baptized. Was he saved at this point? How are we to understand verse 13? Is it possible to believe and be baptized and still not be saved? Are there other places in the Bible that might help us understand what is going on here? There are other passages that will help us in seeking understanding and I will use a couple. But before we look at these, let me be clear and up front; I do not believe Simon was a Christian and I believe he was not saved.

As we explore what was going on with Simon, let me begin with a couple of passages to help us better understand verse 13. I begin with the Gospel According to John, <sup>23</sup>“Now when he was in Jerusalem at the Passover Feast, many believed in his name when they saw the signs that he was doing. <sup>24</sup> But Jesus on his part did not entrust himself to them, because he knew all people <sup>25</sup> and needed no one to bear witness about man, for he himself knew what was in man.” (John 2:23-25) Here is an example of a large group who, John states, believed in Jesus’ name when they saw signs and wonders. It also says that Jesus did not entrust Himself to them. The issue was that this large crowd believed more in the signs and wonders than in Jesus’ name. This helps us discern what is going on with Simon. So, Simon had some level of belief but it was mainly focused on the signs and wonders Philip was performing rather than in the message he was preaching. Signs and wonders were not the end point of belief. The signs were intended only to show authority given by God pointing to Jesus Christ as the Son of God. God’s message was Jesus is His solution to salvation for mankind – sign and wonders are not the solution to sin.

Earlier in Acts chapter 2, we read, <sup>5</sup>“Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven. <sup>6</sup> And at this sound the multitude came together, and they were bewildered, because each one was hearing them speak in his own language. <sup>7</sup> And they were amazed and astonished, saying,

‘Are not all these who are speaking Galileans?’<sup>8</sup> And how is it that we hear, each of us in his own native language? ...<sup>11</sup> we hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God.’<sup>12</sup> And all were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, ‘**What does this mean?**’” (Acts 2:5-8 & 11-12) Here we have a correct response. These people at Pentecost were not distracted by the signs and wonders but looked past them to whom they pointed to, the Son of God. Simon on the other hand, stays focused on the power to do miracles and not the message nor the Savior. Being amazed with miracles does not always bring people to believing with their heart and mind and soul in Jesus as their Lord and Savior.

Today, it is the same; people may see someone perform what they believe is a miracle, like the magic of Simon or TV evangelists or faith healers, they may hear the Word of God, they may believe Jesus was a prophet as Muslims do, but if one does not believe in Jesus of the Bible as the Son of God, as the Christ, as their Savior, they are not saved. Even if they go to church and live good lives, doing good works, they remain unsaved. This was my father, a good man who did good works, went to church, but was unsaved, until shortly before his death when for the first time he came to believe in Jesus as his Savior and all that goes with this belief.

### **Amazed By Christ** (vs. 14-17)

When Philip entered into the region of Samaria, he was also performing “**signs and great miracles**”. Philip and his signs of healing and demonic exorcism amazed the people and give support to his gospel message. These are the same people hearing Philip were the same people who had previously been amazed by Simon and his occult magic.

Reading God’s Word at verse 14, “**Now when the apostles at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent to them Peter and John,**

<sup>15</sup> who came down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit,  
<sup>16</sup> for he had not yet fallen on any of them, but they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. <sup>17</sup> Then they laid their hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit.” Why did the apostles in Jerusalem send Peter and John? We read it was because Samaria had received the Word of God. Remember Samaritans were considered half-breed Hebrews and therefore strongly disliked by true Hebrews. Jerusalem sent Peter and John based on what we read earlier in Acts, turn back in your Bible a few verses, reading at verse 4, “Now those who were scattered went about preaching the word. <sup>5</sup> Philip went down to the city of Samaria and proclaimed to them the Christ. <sup>6</sup> **And the crowds with one accord paid attention to what was being said by Philip, when they heard him and saw the signs that he did.** <sup>7</sup> For unclean spirits, crying out with a loud voice, came out of many who had them, and many who were paralyzed or lame were healed. <sup>8</sup> So there was much joy in that city.” (Acts 8:4-8) Previously, the people paid attention to Simon and his magic. Now they are paying attention to Philip because he is preaching Christ and God with truth and power and his preaching is accompanied by true signs and wonders to show his authority comes from God. Simon had no message of eternal life and his magic was slight-of-hand and infinitely small compared to the true miracles God worked through Philip.

There is an immeasurable difference between being amazed by magic and being amazed by Christ. I pray we are amazed by Christ and all He has accomplished and never get tempted to think that miracles or spiritual gifts are greater or even equal to Christ or the Gospel message.

**Preferring The Sign Over The Savior** (vs. 18-25)



Peter is not fooled for a second. Simon does not love Jesus - he loves the signs and wonders of miracles. He does not rejoice in being saved from sin but longs to be able to perform miracles as the Apostles. Simon wants people to admire him as much as they do the Apostles. For the Apostles, it is not about them but all about Christ, they are just Christ's messengers. For Simon his heart remained unconverted and he remained in his sins.

Reading at verse 18 of Acts chapter 8, “Now when Simon saw that the Spirit was given through the laying on of the apostles’ hands, he offered them money, <sup>19</sup> saying, ‘Give me this power also, so that anyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit.’ <sup>20</sup> But Peter said to him, ‘May your silver perish with you, because you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money! <sup>21</sup> You have neither part nor lot in this matter, for your heart is not right before God. <sup>22</sup> Repent, therefore, of this wickedness of yours, and pray to the Lord that, if possible, the intent of your heart may be forgiven you. <sup>23</sup> For I see that you are in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity.’ <sup>24</sup> And Simon answered, ‘Pray for me to the Lord, that nothing of what you have said may come upon me.’”

When Peter declares, may your silver perish with you, he is telling Simon that he still remains unconverted and his heart is still very wicked and for Simon it is still about money or silver and fame. Because Simon desired power more than he desired Jesus, Peter says to him <sup>21</sup> “You have neither part nor lot in this matter, for your heart is not right before God”. Simon wants what Jesus can get him, not Jesus Himself. Do you see how the desires of Simon's heart made a world of difference? A difference between salvation and damnation. How about you? Do you desire the things of Christianity more than Jesus or do you desire Jesus above all else? I pray as individuals and as families and as a church we can say with truth and from our hearts as David did, “I will bless the LORD at all times; his praise shall continually

be in my mouth. <sup>2</sup> My soul makes its boast in the LORD; let the humble hear and be glad. <sup>3</sup> Oh, magnify the LORD with me, and let us exalt his name together!” (Psalm 34:1-3) We are to bless the Lord both in good and hard times, we are to bless Him as individuals and as a church, together. The Apostle Paul believed so deeply in Jesus as the Christ he wrote to the Ephesians church, during good or bad times believers are <sup>20</sup> “... **giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ,** <sup>21</sup> submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.” (Ephesians 5:20-21) Paul also wrote to the Thessalonian church with the same concern, in short to-the-point declarations he wrote, <sup>16</sup> “**Rejoice always,** <sup>17</sup> **pray without ceasing,** <sup>18</sup> **give thanks in all circumstances;** for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. <sup>19</sup> Do not quench the Spirit. <sup>20</sup> Do not despise prophecies, <sup>21</sup> but test everything; hold fast what is good. <sup>22</sup> Abstain from every form of evil. <sup>23</sup> Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.” (1 Thessalonians 5:16-23) Philip preached the Gospel of Christ and to prove what he preached was true by God’s authority, he healed people and did miracles. It was not about Philip or Peter or John - but it was only about Christ. These signs pointed to Jesus not to Philip or the other apostles themselves. So, whether the Gospel is coupled with signs and wonders or not, it is Jesus who must be loved and desired not the signs. It is not seeing a miracle or even believing in the miracle, nor is it baptism that saves but only the power of Christ alone that saves.

Simon wanted fame and fortune rather than Christ. We must be careful never to desire the signs nor anything else over Jesus. It appears Simon could not set aside the desire to do miracles for a desire to worship Jesus. Luke surely would have recorded if Simon had repented and turned to Jesus fully with all his heart,

mind and soul. Since Luke makes no mention of Simon's repentance one is left to understand Simon remained lost.

As I begin drawing this message to a close, I want to return to the young man that so desired to speak in tongues in order to be an elite Christian. Did he speak in unknown tongues? No. As we discussed his desire to be elevated to be above others was what was behind his desire to speak in tongues. So, I asked him, "If God allowed you could speak in a spiritual tongue what would you say? What would God want to hear you say?" He sat back and thought for a few minutes and then said, "I would want to tell people about Jesus the Son of God. I would want people to know God sent Jesus to bring salvation. That their sins could be forgiven by believing in Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God and as the Redeemer. All they would need to do is admit they are a sinner, repent and surrender their life to Jesus as their Lord and Savior." I said your covetous to speak in unknown tongues is about you, your like Simon who desired signs and wonders more than the Savior and this is sin and you need to repent. Yet, when I asked if God gave the spiritual gift of tongues and listened to what your answer was, I said, what you just expressed sounded a lot like what Jesus had said to the people, <sup>16</sup> "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. <sup>17</sup> For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. <sup>18</sup> Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God. <sup>19</sup> And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. <sup>20</sup> For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed. <sup>21</sup> But whoever does what is true comes to the

light, so that it may be clearly seen that his works have been carried out in God.”

(John 3:16-21) You see, Jesus has given us His words to speak, just like on the Day of Pentecost, “each one was hearing them speak in his own language.” (Acts 2:6) The gospel message needs to be clear and understood. I explained, we do not need some unknown tongue to make Jesus known; we have God’s words, Jesus’ words, the Apostle’s inspired words and we have our testimony of what God, through Jesus, has done in our own life. Do not let anything distract you from our purpose, our mission; which is to live a life bringing glory to God and sharing the saving Gospel message of Jesus Christ. Never elevate anything above our worship of Jesus. Live for God’s glory and proclaiming the gospel will enable us to, like Peter and John,<sup>25</sup> “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.” May we proclaim the Gospel as we travel through village and may our life give glory to God!

In closing, let me repeat what I said at the beginning, the primary truth from our passage, and if you take nothing else from this message, take this to heart; *We must live in awe of God and find amazement in Him alone!* Amen and again I say amen!