

## Acts 8:9-40

### *The Sorcerer & The Eunuch*

#### Objectives

- Understand our motivations for seeking Christ.
- Identify ways in which we use our status as Christians for our own glory/advancement/comfort.
- Renew our understanding that we enter into a relationship with God to fulfill our need for him.

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**Pray for your time together as a group.**

**?** What is something impulsive you've done? Why did you feel compelled to do what you did right then?

#### Simon the Sorcerer

##### **Read Out Loud: Previously in Acts**

So far in Acts we've seen how God is building the early church in Jerusalem. In Acts 7 we see the church coming under persecution with the stoning of Steven and Saul's attacks on Christians. At the end of chapter 7 and the beginning of chapter 8 we learn that because of this persecution the believers were scattered through Judea and Samaria. However, as the disciples fled from persecution, they continued to share the Gospel. Here in chapter 8 we'll see the impact that these disciples had as they preached in Samaria.

##### **Read Out Loud: Acts 8:9-25 (NIV)**

9 Now for some time a man named Simon had practiced sorcery in the city and amazed all the people of Samaria. He boasted that he was someone great, 10 and all the people, both high and low, gave him their attention and exclaimed, "This man is rightly called the Great Power of God." 11 They followed him because he had amazed them for a long time with his sorcery. 12 But when they believed Philip as he proclaimed the good news of the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women. 13 Simon himself believed and was baptized. And he followed Philip everywhere, astonished by the great signs and miracles he saw.

14 When the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had accepted the word of God, they sent Peter and John to Samaria. 15 When they arrived, they prayed for the new believers there that they might receive the Holy Spirit, 16 because the Holy Spirit had not yet come on any of them; they had simply been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. 17 Then Peter and John placed their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit.

18 When Simon saw that the Spirit was given at the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money 19 and said, "Give me also this ability so that everyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit."

20 Peter answered: "May your money perish with you, because you thought you could buy the gift of God with money! 21 You have no part or share in this ministry, because your heart is not right before God. 22 Repent of this wickedness and pray to the Lord in the hope that he may forgive you for having such a thought in your heart. 23 For I see that you are full of bitterness and captive to sin."

24 Then Simon answered, "Pray to the Lord for me so that nothing you have said may happen to me."

25 After they had further proclaimed the word of the Lord and testified about Jesus, Peter and John returned to Jerusalem, preaching the gospel in many Samaritan villages.

The passage notes that the Samaritans did not receive the Holy Spirit until Peter and John came and placed their hands on the people, even though they already believed and had been baptized. This giving of the Holy Spirit is probably connected to Acts 2. God used the Holy Spirit and spiritual gifts to affirm his presence among the Church.

*Leader's Note: Don't allow a discussion of why the Samaritans received the Holy Spirit apart from their baptism or why/how Philip disappeared and then reappeared somewhere else to distract the group. If your group has questions about this encourage them to discuss it after group so that you can get through the study.*

? Why did the people of Samaria follow Simon and say he was the "Great Power of God"?

*Possible Answers: He was a sorcerer, or person who practices magic with assistance from evil spirits. He showed them amazing feats and appeared to be very powerful.*

? How do people today mistake things/people who are not God for God?

*Possible Answers: We worship all sorts of things that are not God: success, money, power, stuff. People may not always call these things their "gods" but they treat them as if they were. People will also often treat religious leaders, nature, goodness, and other things and ideas as if they were their own personal god.*

? Why do you think Simon asked to pay for the power to give the Holy Spirit to people?

*Possible Answers: He was used to the people following him for his "powers" of sorcery and likely charged for his services. He saw the disciples' giving of the Holy Spirit as another "power" he could capitalize on either to make more money or grow his own personal notoriety.*

? Simon sees the power of the Holy Spirit as a way to get ahead personally and potentially make money for himself. Are there any ways you see yourself or you've observed others use their Christianity for self-promotion or personal gain?

*Leader's Note: Try to avoid this turning into church bashing or gossiping about misuse of leadership. Direct people toward personal reflections or broad generalizations of misused power.*

*Possible Answers: General examples of misuse people may observe in society are televangelists, politicians who tout their faith to win votes, etc.*

? What should Simon's reaction/request to Peter and John have been when he saw the work they were doing with the Holy Spirit?

*Possible Answers: Simon doesn't ask for the Holy Spirit from the disciples, but the power to give the Holy Spirit. He misses the relationship aspect of Jesus and the saving power of grace.*

? How does Peter's rebuke in verses 20-23 redirect Simon? What hope does it offer for Simon?

*Possible Answers: He tells Simon to repent and points out the sin in his heart. His rebuke may sound harsh, but he is warning Simon against attempting to lead others in ministry before he examines his own heart and where he is at with God.*

? Based on Peter's rebuke of Simon, how should we respond when we are confronted by sin in our own lives?

*Possible Answers: Examine our hearts and motivation. Repent and turn back to God.*

## **The Eunuch**

### **Read to the Group: Acts 8:26-40 (NIV)**

26 Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, "Go south to the road—the desert road—that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza." 27 So he started out, and on his way he met an Ethiopian eunuch, an important official in charge of all the treasury of the Kandake (which means "queen of the Ethiopians"). This man had gone to Jerusalem to worship, 28 and on his way home was sitting in his chariot reading the Book of Isaiah the prophet. 29 The Spirit told Philip, "Go to that chariot and stay near it."

30 Then Philip ran up to the chariot and heard the man reading Isaiah the prophet. "Do you understand what you are reading?" Philip asked.

31 "How can I," he said, "unless someone explains it to me?" So he invited Philip to come up and sit with him. 32 This is the passage of Scripture the eunuch was reading: "He was led like a sheep to the slaughter, and as a lamb before its shearer is silent, so he did not open his mouth."

33 In his humiliation he was deprived of justice. Who can speak of his descendants? For his life was taken from the earth.” 34 The eunuch asked Philip, “Tell me, please, who is the prophet talking about, himself or someone else?” 35 Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus.

36 As they traveled along the road, they came to some water and the eunuch said, “Look, here is water. What can stand in the way of my being baptized?” 38 And he gave orders to stop the chariot. Then both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and Philip baptized him. 39 When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord suddenly took Philip away, and the eunuch did not see him again, but went on his way rejoicing. 40 Philip, however, appeared at Azotus and traveled about, preaching the gospel in all the towns until he reached Caesarea.

**?** What sort of role do directions from God seem to have in Philip’s life? How do we see Philip’s response to those directions glorify God?

*Possible Answers: Philip responds faithfully and immediately to directions from God and seems to be listening intently for them. As Philip responds we see God using his obedience to spread the gospel and help others come to know God.*

**?** How can we learn from Philip’s example? Can you think of a time when you felt prompted by the Holy Spirit to do something? What were the results of your action or inaction?

*Possible Answers: We can be discerning and listening for God’s direction and follow it faithfully when God gives us opportunities to respond to Him.*

**?** What is the Eunuch's reaction to hearing the “good news about Jesus?” What does this say about his heart?

*Possible Answers: He immediately asks to be baptized. It shows he wanted to make an immediate commitment and change the direction of his life.*

**?** How does the Eunuch's wealth and position impact his decision to follow Christ?

*Possible Answers: It doesn’t. He drops everything to be baptized.*

**?** Compare Simon and the Eunuch's reaction to the “good news about Jesus”. Who should we model our response after?

*Possible Answers: Simon uses his discovery of Christianity as a way to further his career and influence over the people who were following him. The Eunuch hears the gospel and wants to follow God immediately despite any impact it may have on his position in society. Also, unlike Simon, the Eunuch isn’t following the trend of those around him and getting baptized just because others are - he hears the*

*gospel and makes the decision for himself without the influence of those around him. We should follow Christ with the same sort of urgency and commitment as the Eunuch.*

#### **For Discussion and Accountability**

- ? Are there ways you are using your faith for personal gain that you need to repent of?
- ? Are there things God is asking you to respond to immediately?