

Series: How Jesus Acts through Us Today; Sermon: Real Church; delivered by Dr. Josh Moody, senior pastor, on May 31, 2020

Bible text explored: Acts 8:9–25

⁹But 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. ¹⁰They all paid attention to him, from the least to the greatest, saying, “This man is the power of God that is called Great.” ¹¹And they paid attention to him because for a long time he had amazed them with his magic. ¹²But 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. ¹³Even Simon himself believed, and after being baptized he continued with Philip. And seeing signs and great miracles performed, he was amazed.

¹⁴Now when the apostles at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent to them Peter and John, ¹⁵who came down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit, ¹⁶for he had not yet fallen on any of them, but they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. ¹⁷Then they laid their hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit. ¹⁸Now when Simon saw that the Spirit was given through the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money, ¹⁹saying, “Give me this power also, so that anyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit.” ²⁰But Peter said to him, “May your silver perish with you, because you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money! ²¹You have neither part nor lot in this matter, for your heart is not right before God. ²²Repent, therefore, of this wickedness of yours, and pray to the Lord that, if possible, the intent of your heart may be forgiven you. ²³For I see that you are in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity.” ²⁴And Simon answered, “Pray for me to the Lord, that nothing of what you have said may come upon me.”

²⁵Now when they had testified and spoken the word of the Lord, they returned to Jerusalem, preaching the gospel to many villages of the Samaritans. [ESV]

Review and application:

The root issues behind today's surge in social challenges go much deeper than the material or political. The essential solutions required are spiritual. They can be provided only through a church whose basis is not just simulated, but genuine. The two Simons of this narrative personify these contrasting approaches.

1. What (verses 9-11) was behind the celebrity attained by the first Simon?
(His surname, Magus, is listed in early church records.)
2. How (verses 18-19) did he propose to the apostles to enhance his own position?
What is deficient about the health, wealth, and success emphasis of those who advocate a prosperity gospel?
3. How (verse 23) did Peter (the second Simon*), evaluate the motives of Simon Magus?
Read Psalm 36:1-4, which the church father Origen saw as a biblical description of self-promoters. About what warning signs do we need to be vigilant today?
4. What (verses 14-16) was the first thing that Peter and John did on arriving at Samaria?
Do we place a similar priority on prayer as our primary spiritual resource?
(See James 5:16.)

**See Matthew 16:17-18.*

5. How (*verses 17-21*) did Peter's unhesitating response to the Magus request demonstrate his purity, both private and public?

When tempted to compromise, what is the biblical injunction?

(See *1 Timothy 6:10-11*; *2 Timothy 2:22*; *James 4:7*.)

6. Based (*verse 22*) on his reply to Simon Magus, what principles had Peter internalized about . . .

. . . the assured result of true repentance?

. . . the necessity of a heart-felt commitment?

. . . the danger of ongoing disregard of the Spirit's prompting?

Pastor Moody concluded by relating the story of how the principles held by young German Dietrich Bonhoeffer, recently arrived in America as a guest lecturer during World War II, cause him to write to fellow theologian Reinhold Niebuhr: "I will have no right to participate in the reconstruction of Christian life in Germany after the war if I do not share the trials of this time with my people." He returned to Germany, and was imprisoned for two years. In the last weeks of the war, just before he was hung, he told a guard, "For you this is the end. For me it is just the beginning."

7. How does the way I adhere to biblical principles help make my church real?