

**Text: Acts 8:9-25**

**Title: “Unstoppable in the Face of Counterfeits”**

Before I get started this morning I want to tell you about a something our church is part of that will impact our city with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Perhaps you have already seen billboards around related to “Explore God.” This is an effort to connect with people who have questions about God and the Christian life. There’s a website at [www.exploreGod.com](http://www.exploreGod.com) with videos that answer just about any spiritual question a person could have. We want to connect them with discussion groups that are a safe place to ask questions. On Aug.2 & 9 we will have training sessions to equip you to host a group in your neighborhood, office or somewhere else. Explore God officially takes place September 13 - October 25. During those seven Sundays I will be preaching a series that answers some of the basic questions about God and the Christian life. So you can invite your spiritually-seeking friends to come to church during those weeks. Here’s a short video that introduces us to it. VIDEO

Let’s open our Bibles to Acts 8:9. We’re talking about God’s unstoppable quest to get the Gospel to everyone. Last week we saw how God used persecution to force believers like Philip to leave Jerusalem to go to a very unlikely place ... a town in Samaria. And there he proclaimed the Good News of Jesus Christ. In the next verses we see how the Gospel impacted this city. Read Acts 8:9-24.

There are several remarkable things about this passage and I won’t have time to address all of them in depth. First, for this kind of revival to break out in Samaria would be like us finding out that a great revival is taking place in Iran. Second, for someone like Simon the Magician to get baptized and join the church would be like finding out that Penn and Gillette (the atheistic illusionist team) had been baptized and joined a church. Third, the way the Holy Spirit came to these believers in Samaria is different ... at a time *after* they are saved. Up to this point in Acts after Pentecost the pattern has been that the Holy Spirit comes to live in people when they are saved, like He does for us today. So what are we to make of this? Fourth, as it turns out, apparently Simon the Magician really wasn’t saved after all. Sometimes people who make a decision, get baptized and join a church, but it turns out that it wasn’t real salvation. So how do we know if a person is truly saved?

So what I want to do today is to examine this passage through that lens ... through the lens of the question of what is saving faith. And my prayer is that the Lord will give us some clarity on these unusual circumstances that occurred when the Gospel came to this strange land of Samaria. But also perhaps the Lord will draw people to Christ who have never put their faith in Him.

The Bible shows us that faith is absolutely essential for a person to be saved. It’s not by anything we do other than believe:

**Ephesians 2:8 - For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—**

So here in Acts 8 is a man who, on the surface, seems to have been saved. He heard the message and was baptized but, as it turns out, he was not genuinely saved. How do we know if one has activated true, saving faith? We see in these verses that saving faith is a ...

## 1. **RESPONSE TO THE GOSPEL**

This spiritual awakening in Samaria happened as a result of the Gospel being proclaimed there by Philip .

**Acts 8:12 - But when they believed Philip as he preached the good news of the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women.**

People who have been truly saved have first heard the Gospel. In order to believe the right thing you must know the right thing.

**Romans 10:17 - Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ.**

Yes, Philip performed miracles in Samaria, but those miracles served to cause people to pay greater attention to what Philip said about the Gospel. And many including Simon “believed.”

**Acts 8:13 - Simon himself believed and was baptized. And he followed Philip everywhere, astonished by the great signs and miracles he saw.**

And here’s one clue that Simon’s faith was not saving faith. It was not focused on the Gospel, but on the miracles that Philip performed. He was trusting *miracles*, not the *message* about Jesus. We’ll talk more in a moment about the purpose of miracles. But true, saving faith is in response to the Gospel’s presentation of the glory of Jesus Christ as the Son of God who was crucified for our sins and raised from the dead to give us new life.

If you have questions about whether or not you have been saved, the first place to start is by asking yourself, “Have I heard the Gospel? Has someone told me the truth that I must believe?”

But that’s not the complete picture because Simon heard the Gospel proclaimed. So it isn’t enough just to hear the Gospel. But you can’t be saved *without* hearing the Gospel. And that’s why our witness as believers is so important.

But our text shows us something else about saving faith. It is...

## 2. **MORE THAN AMAZEMENT**

There’s a lot of amazing going on in Samaria. We see it in three verses.

**Acts 8:9 - Simon had practiced sorcery in the city and amazed all the people of Samaria.**

**Acts 8:11 - They followed him because he had amazed them for a long time with his magic.**

**Acts 8:13 - Simon himself believed and was baptized. And he followed Philip everywhere, astonished** (same word for “amazed” in vv.9,11) **by the great signs and miracles he saw.**

Faith in Christ is more than just being amazed by the things He has done. Faith is surrender to the person of Jesus Christ, not just admiration for Him. There are many people who think they are Christians when in fact they are just admirers of Jesus.

The amazement at supernatural power is deceptive. The miracles Philip performed were signs that were intended to point people to the Jesus, not just to amaze people by the miracles.

**PHOTO ILLUSTRATION** – Most of us have been to Six Flags over Texas? I remember my first time to go there as a boy. After we parked our car I remember walking up to the entrance where I saw this sign for the first time. It was a dream come true. But do you think I stood there admiring the sign? Not on your life. I ran past that sign to the full experience of Six Flags. Signs say “go this way,” and are meant to move you deeper toward or into something. And miracles are signs.

And many people think they have believed when really they have only been amazed or amused by something exciting. Maybe it happened at an amazing worship service at youth camp. People can get caught up in the excitement of the Spirit of God moving in power, and they are amazed by the power, but never commit themselves personally to Jesus Christ.

And this can even happen after we’re saved. We can be amazed by beautiful music, or a stirring testimony, or even a moving sermon. But in a sense those are just “signs” that are intended to move us deeper into Christ. Don’t just stop and hug the sign. If you are not moved to Christ you’re not exercising true faith.

But there’s something else about the faith that saves. It results in...

### **3. RECEIVING THE HOLY SPIRIT**

True saving faith will always result in the receiving of the Holy Spirit into a person’s life. Then the Holy Spirit of Jesus makes salvation effective in us. But here it gets a little confusing because that’s not the way it happened for these new believers in Samaria. Acts 8 tells us that when word reached the apostles in Jerusalem that a great spiritual awakening was happening in Samaria, two of them (Peter and John) immediately went to Samaria. Why? Remember that the Samaritans were despised by Jews, even by many Jewish Christians. Many believed it was just not possible for Samaritans to get in on the blessings of salvation. So the apostles arrive, and here’s what happened:

**Acts 8:15 - When they arrived, they prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit,**

**Acts 8:16 - because the Holy Spirit had not yet come upon any of them; they had simply been baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus.**

**Acts 8:17 - Then Peter and John placed their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit.**

Again, what happened for these Samaritan believers is unusual. Normally the Spirit is given to a person when they believe and are saved. Why is it different when the first people are saved in Samaria? Some people use this text as proof that people don't get the Holy Spirit when they are saved; they need a second-blessing to get the Holy Spirit (most of the time accompanied by speaking in tongues). But as we study this more carefully and look at the entire NT message about salvation and the gift of the Holy Spirit, the Samaritan experience isn't intended to be the norm.

Remember, the Holy Spirit comes upon the new believers in Samaria by the laying on of the apostles' hands. God did it this way in Samaria to signify by His apostles that the Samaritans are saved like believers in Jerusalem. Their baptism is the same baptism that Jewish believers received when they were saved. The Holy Spirit coming to dwell within the Samaritan believers is the same Holy Spirit indwelling the believers saved in Jerusalem. God did it this way to insure that the church would be unified under the same Lord and Spirit. But the normal way for people to receive the Holy Spirit is when they put their faith in Christ for the gift of salvation.

**Ephesians 1:13b - Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit,**

So we believe and receive. And when the Holy Spirit comes to indwell believers He brings about the changes that come with salvation. The Spirit comes to help us understand the truth of Scripture and to pray effectively. The Spirit comes to produce a holy life and what is called the "fruit of the Spirit" ... love, joy, peace, patience and more. The Spirit comes to give us power in witnessing and to impart spiritual gifts that make us useful in service and ministry. And there's so much more.

Simon didn't receive the Holy Spirit because He never truly trusted in Christ. In fact, when he saw how the Holy Spirit came upon the true believers, Simon thought he could buy the power to confer the Holy Spirit on people. And the apostles rebuked him:

**Acts 8:20 - Peter answered: "May your money perish with you, because you thought you could buy the gift of God with money!"**

**Acts 8:21 - You have no part or share in this ministry, because your heart is not right before God.**

And that leads me to the next thing that demonstrates saving faith. It is ...

#### **4. ACCOMPANIED BY REPENTANCE**

Peter said to Simon in v.21, “Your heart is not right before God” ... literally “not straight before God.” All the evidence is that Simon the Magician was not truly saved. History would go on to prove this out as church historians believe Simon became the leader of a heretical cult in his day. And all this because his heart was not right with God. His heart was still crooked. And that’s the condition of everyone’s heart before they believe and are saved. We have crooked hearts that are bent toward sin. We’re all like Simon the Magician with pride in our hearts that makes us think we are great. And the only thing that can change that is true faith that is accompanied by repentance. Peter told Simon...

**Acts 8:22-23 - Repent of this wickedness and pray to the Lord. Perhaps he will forgive you for having such a thought in your heart. For I see that you are full of bitterness and captive to sin.”**

Saving faith recognizes our absolute sinfulness which causes us to turn to Christ in humility and brokenness. The Gospel gives us the *bad news* that leads to the *Good News*. The bad news is that we are sinners far from God, more sinful than we know. The Good News is that we are also loved more than we know. God has made a way for us to come to Him through faith in Christ.

That was a big part of Jesus’ message when He came. He said:

**Matthew 3:2,8 - Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near ... Produce fruit in keeping with repentance.**

And that’s the last thing about saving faith. It ...

#### **5. LEADS TO LIFE-CHANGE**

Saving faith ultimately leads to a changed life. God performs the miracle of the new birth ... we become new creatures with changed hearts by the power of Christ. The Bible says that any faith that doesn’t produce the good fruit of a changed life isn’t really saving faith ... it’s a dead faith. It’s clear that Simon’s heart is still unchanged. He’s not broken over his sin; he just wants to avoid punishment for his sin.

**Acts 8:24 - Then Simon answered, “Pray to the Lord for me so that nothing you have said may happen to me.”**

No one can do this for you. The only way that we can avoid eternal punishment is to place our complete confidence in Jesus Christ to save us. Have you done that? If not, I want to give you that opportunity today.