

BIRTH OF A NATION

THE STORY OF ACTS: TAG, YOU'RE IT.

W E E K F O U R T E E N

IS IT MAGIC?



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THE STORY OF ACTS: TAG, YOU'RE IT.



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ACTS 8:18-19

**NOW WHEN SIMON SAW
THAT THE SPIRIT WAS GIVEN
THROUGH THE LAYING ON
OF THE APOSTLES' HANDS,
HE OFFERED THEM MONEY,
19 SAYING, "GIVE ME THIS
POWER ALSO, SO THAT
ANYONE ON WHOM I LAY MY
HANDS MAY RECEIVE THE
HOLY SPIRIT.**

OUTREACH OPPORTUNITY

Join the Detroit Church team that provides hope to teens who have suffered the effect of abuse, neglect and trauma. For more information about volunteering at Vista Maria contact Debra@detroitchurch.com

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IS IT MAGIC?



THE STORY: ACTS 8:4-25 [ESV]

4 Now those who were scattered went about preaching the word. **5** Philip went down to the city of Samaria and proclaimed to them the Christ. **6** 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. **7** 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. **8** So there was much joy in that city.

Simon the Magician Believes

9 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. **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." **11** And they paid attention to him because for a long time he had amazed them with his magic. **12** 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. **13** Even Simon himself believed, and after being baptized he continued with Philip. And seeing signs and great miracles performed, he was amazed. **14** Now when the apostles at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent to them Peter and John, **15** who came down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit, **16** for he had not yet fallen on any of them, but they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. **17** Then they laid their hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit. **18** Now when Simon saw that the Spirit was given through the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money, **19** saying, "Give me this power also, so that anyone on whom I lay my hands

may receive the Holy Spirit.” **20** But Peter said to him, “May your silver perish with you, because you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money! **21** You have neither part nor lot in this matter, for your heart is not right before God. **22** Repent, therefore, of this wickedness of yours, and pray to the Lord that, if possible, the intent of your heart may be forgiven you. **23** For I see that you are in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity.” **24** And Simon answered, “Pray for me to the Lord, that nothing of what you have said may come upon me.” **25** 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.



BIG IDEA

THE GOSPEL IS AMAZING, NOT BECAUSE OF THE GIFTS, BUT BECAUSE OF THE GIVER.

On The Run

What would you do if all around you things seemed to be falling apart? You’ve just watched your friend and brother be executed. People you love are being dragged out of homes; this new revealed mystery called the church is under attack. You have to get out of town. You find yourself in this city called Samaria. You can sense the tension that’s existed between Jews from Jerusalem and Samaritans for many years. On one hand you can choose to simply lay low, not be noticed, and not make a scene. Or, listen to the Spirit of God within; having witnessed his might and power. In an incredible time of transition, Philip chooses to obey the Holy Spirit and the call for those who have been invited to the table of eternal love and forgiveness, to also live their lives inviting others to come and follow Jesus. During a time of great uncertainty Philip begins to “preach Christ”, not wait for better days or calmer circumstances. And something incredible happens...the people believed.

New Cultural Space

Up until this point, we’ve seen the Gospel spread in a largely Jewish context. Even if people from different cultural backgrounds accepted the truth about the Messiah, they were on some level proselytized into Judaism. Now we get to see the impact of the Gospel in a different cultural space; one that has lots of historical baggage. Undoubtedly, there were some that thought the Samaritans would be closed-off to the Gospel proclamation, especially coming from Philip a Jew from Jerusalem. There’s biblically documented prejudice, even dare we say racism between them. In John 4:9, Jesus asked a Samaritan woman for a drink of water and she responds with disgust. “How is it that you, a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a woman of Samaria?” (For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.) She’s not some high ranking official of Samaria, but you can sense the detestation in her response. Also, in Luke 9:52-54, there’s an instance in which Jesus is looking to travel to Jerusalem by way of Samaria, and as he sends word to set up a place of hospitality and rest in Samaria, he is rejected. The

Samaritans refuse his request simply because he was headed to Jerusalem. They wanted nothing to do with Jerusalem or anyone headed there! To add even more context, after being refused James and John actually offer to call fire down from Heaven and burn up the Samaritans. Wow! This proves that there was a real history between the 2 cultures. Let's examine why.

Six hundred years before Philip enters Samaria, the Assyrians conquered this area of northern Israel and deported all of the wealthy and middle class Jews from the area. They then moved in a pagan population from afar. These pagans intermarried with the lowest classes of remaining Jews in northern Israel. From these people came the Samaritans. As a result, the Jews view the Samaritans as having compromised their godly heritage and worship of the one true God, by mixing their bloodlines with that of pagan nations.

So, imagine the identity and disposition of this people group. They're not Jewish enough for the Jews in Jerusalem, but still too Jewish for the surrounding pagan nations. They are trapped in an emotional corridor, and have done what most of us do when it seems like we can't climb high enough and crouch down low enough. They decide to own it. They hewed an identity and socio-political stance based on the tension and energy around them. This is why we see them so "battle-ready" with the Jews.

This is the cultural space that Philip finds himself in by the providence of God. But Jesus had so transformed Philip's life that any prejudice against the Samaritans was put to death. This is a great reminder that we too should reject categorizing people groups as being without hope in the gospel.¹

Even in this unique context, the Gospel thrives. The Samaritans paid attention, believed and were baptized. Philip preached Jesus Christ, and not in the formal context that many of us might imagine. It was more through the informal conversations, chance acquaintances, unexpected interactions, and smaller organic opportunities. Philip didn't grab a mic once a week, make some slides, and start a four-week series. He lived the truth among them,

he proclaimed the Gospel to as many as he could, as often as he could. The Holy Spirit confirmed His Gospel proclamation with many signs and wonders; even demonic dispossession. Those who had built up this internal mound of hate, fear, anxiety, loss, and even perversion, weren't attacked or ostracized by the Gospel. Instead they were liberated. The gospel of Jesus sets us free! Those with spiritual brokenness and those with physical brokenness are all made whole by the finished work of Jesus.



¹Tony Merida, *Exalting Jesus in Acts*, ed. David Platt, Daniel L. Akin, and Tony Merida, Christ-centered exposition (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2017).

Simon: the “Magic” Man

The author of Acts, Dr. Luke, zooms in a bit and we are introduced to a magician named Simon. Simon had convinced the Samaritans that he was “somebody great”. So much so that the people called him “the power of God that is great.” We are told that to get to the place of popularity in Samaria, he simply spent time amazing and amusing them. Interesting. The etymology of the word amusement means to cause to muse. It denotes diverting ones attention. Even the word entertain comes from the words “to detain to enter.” Let’s be clear, this does not mean that we must never be amused or entertained. But ask anyone with a smartphone and they’ll admit that the line between being amused during down time and wasting time that could be spent being productive is paper thin. Of course not all amusement is bad. But let’s inspect Simon’s intentions a bit. He “amazed the people of Samaria, saying that he himself was somebody great.” His intention may have appeared to serve the Samaritans, but the true value proposition was that of making his name great. And it worked! Simon’s magic amazed them so much, that they didn’t just say he has the power of God, they said he “IS the power of God”. It’s not surprising given the interior world of the people group for which he became a source of amusement and entertainment. This people saw this sorcerer as the power of God because he consistently made them his target audience. For just a few moments they weren’t the hated half-breeds the Jews said they were. They were more than the not good enough for some and too good for others bunch. They were those deserving of pleasure and amusement. Those that deserved to feel significant and served. Remember, at one point only kings enlisted court jesters. Even here and now, there are those that have learned how to prey on our desire for amusement and entertainment in order to present themselves as great and powerful. Some will even attempt to puff up oppressed or ignored people groups so that they might in turn hoist them up on the very shoulders as “somebody great.” They will use tricks, music, gifts, emotional responses, and even bits of truth, if it gets them what they want; which for them, is for us to bow to the magnitude of their greatness and brilliance. Simon preyed on their need for more; their desire to connect with something greater than themselves. They loved him for it. And it was working great...until the Gospel showed up.

Transforming MISSION?

We may, then, summarize evangelism as that dimension and authority of the church’s mission which by word and deed and in light of particular conditions and a particular context, offers every person and community everywhere a valid opportunity to be directly challenged to a radical reorientation of their lives, an orientation which involves such things as deliverance from slavery to the world and its powers; embracing Christ as Savior and Lord; becoming living members of his community, the church, being enlisted into his service of reconciliation, peace, and justice on earth; and being committed to God’s purpose of placing all things under the rule of Christ.¹

¹Bosch, David Jacobus, Darrell L. Guder, and Martin Reppenhagen. Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission. New York: Orbis, 2011.

Truth > Lies

When Truth appears, Lies retreat. The only reason lies are given the opportunity to consistently scream at us is because we aren't insulating ourselves with and aren't fluent in the Gospel truth. The scriptures tell us that as Philip preaches Christ, the people believed. This was a very different reality for them because previously they were amused and excited as if there had been a change in their status, standing, or even their perspective of it. But nothing had changed. We can also identify with this. After the tricks, gifted experiences, pretty words, beautiful displays, and fun moments, the only thing that changes us is Jesus. Which is why we don't follow gifts, we follow the God of the gifts. It is Jesus that changes us, which causes us to want to use our gifts to point people back to him. The gifts are cool, until the Gift Giver: God shows up. God converts, not gifts. After seeing God at work even Simon proclaimed to believe and was baptized. Simon, the same man that soaked up all of the glory and fame prior, decides to join in and follow. Even fake power pays attention when real power shows up. And God is most definitely real power! When the apostles back in Jerusalem get word about what's happening they send Peter and John. (The same John that wanted to set them on fire in Luke 9, now changed) As they prayed for them and laid their hands on the Samaritans, they received the Holy Spirit. Simon is exposed as being in the "gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity," by offering Peter and John money for the Holy Spirit.



Peter knew Simon was in extreme danger because his heart was so corrupt before God. Rather than possessing a humble faith that receives God's good gifts, Simon thought he could manipulate, control, and pay God off. Such wickedness, which was exposed in his question, was met by Peter's gracious and stern exhortation. Peter perceives that Simon is poisoned in hostility and enslaved to sin. He tells him to pray, without presuming on God's grace ("if possible"), and to ask the Lord for forgiveness. Simon then responds in what seems to be sincerity.

This event teaches us 2 important lessons:

1. The Holy Spirit isn't for sale. The prerogative to give the Holy Spirit belongs to God. We can't purchase salvation or the gifts of God. He isn't our personal genie: he's our omnipotent God. That means our money, social status and talents cannot save us or cause God to appoint us to a position in his kingdom. Salvation is a gift from God by faith in Jesus Christ. Our spiritual gifts, which should be used to serve the church, are gifts from God that are distributed according to his perfect will. Sure influence in the kingdom should be sought, but we should do it Jesus' way for Jesus' glory. This involves humble faith, courageous hope, hard work, sacrificial love, and hearts continually enthralled with the grace of God.

2. We really marvel at God's amazing grace. I feel a degree of sympathy for Simon, since he was rooted deeply in paganism and trying, at least at some level, to understand Christianity. It saddens me that he didn't realize that the gospel frees a person from addiction to self and possessions. It makes one honest and generous. But where I can't feel sorry for Simon is when I realize that his lack of understanding happened partially because he was so interested in his own glory and power. What a gift he received in Peter's rebuke! He was offered a chance to repent and be forgiven. This is grace.¹

"Foolish" Things

This particular passage ends the same way it begins; with believers sharing the Gospel story. This isn't just a ministry for the "professional" Christians or ministers. This is a commission for each and every believer that has been impacted by the Gospel of the Kingdom and the name of Jesus. The term Gospel existed before Jesus used it. In its origin, a gospel was a message, good news about a history-changing event that impacted and affected everyone. For example, there was a gospel of Caesar after he became ruler. There were messengers who travel miles for hours just shouting the news so that all would hear and respond to it. This is a powerful definition. This means that God has done ALL of the heavy lifting like the immaculate conception, sinless life, brutal unlawful death, resurrection, and ascension to the Father's right hand in glory. We just get the pleasure of telling as many people as we can by sharing our lives with others, proclaiming our one true king before all! He could've chosen a plethora of ways to do it, but he chose the foolishness of preaching.

21 FOR SINCE, IN THE WISDOM OF GOD, THE WORLD THROUGH WISDOM DID NOT KNOW GOD, IT PLEASSED GOD THROUGH THE FOOLISHNESS OF THE MESSAGE PREACHED TO SAVE THOSE WHO BELIEVE. [1 COR 1:21 NKJV]

Here we are, a redeemed people that God has given a voice, given a story, and given a hope. If we believe, we are all evangelists. We're all messengers carrying the "good news" about a history-changing event that changes everything for those who hear it.

13 FOR "EVERYONE WHO CALLS ON THE NAME OF THE LORD WILL BE SAVED." 14 HOW THEN WILL THEY CALL ON HIM IN WHOM THEY HAVE NOT BELIEVED? AND HOW ARE THEY TO BELIEVE IN HIM OF WHOM THEY HAVE NEVER HEARD? AND HOW ARE THEY TO HEAR WITHOUT SOMEONE PREACHING? [ROM 10:13-14 ESV]

Your story is really HIS story, and it is not finished yet. You have to share it. Philip didn't even know where he was headed next, let alone where he'd end up when all was said and done. But he obeyed the same Holy Spirit that raised Jesus from the Dead, which is the same Holy Spirit that empowers us today. He's our helper, helping us to fully mature in our evangelism.

¹Tony Merida, *Exalting Jesus in Acts*, ed. David Platt, Daniel L. Akin, and Tony Merida, Christ-centered exposition (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2017).



REFLECT & DISCUSS

- Have you ever shared your faith with someone that you assumed wouldn't be open to it? How was it?
- What does this story teach about preaching Christ?
- What intrigues or disappoints you about the character of Simon? Why?
- Do you believe that Simon genuinely believed the gospel? Why?
- Why is Acts 8:5-25 a good illustration of Matthew 28:18-20?

Bonus Question: The Jews hated the Samaritans, but they were a part of them. Have we ever criticized or disliked a quality in others that we've also found at work in us? How has it affected our view of different people and cultures?

4 Mature Expressions of Evangelism:

- 1 ALWAYS HOPEFUL**
Believing each person is an object of God's eternal compassion and worthy to hear
- 2 REDEPTIVE**
Drawing people into and after Jesus the Savior, not us.
- 3 INFECTIOUS**
An intentional people movement spreading from an unchanging core message
- 4 CULTURALLY RELEVANT**
Contextualizing the Gospel's timelessness in the here and now

THE GOOD NEWS OF JESUS WAS IN THE HEART OF THE WIDOW AND ON THE LIPS OF THE COMMON MAN.

AND THIS MESSAGE WAS "THE POWER OF GOD FOR SALVATION TO EVERYONE WHO BELIEVES" (ROM 1:16)

