

## 12. Savage and seekers

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According to Dictionary.com, the definition of the word 'savage' is: "fierce, ferocious, or cruel." Seeker means "a person who is searching for something or someone." In chapter 8, we will meet three main characters for these two definitions:

1) **Saul of Tarsus** – A brilliant young pharisee who had all the promises of becoming the next chief of the Sanhedrin, the Jewish religious and civil supreme court.

2) **Simon the sorcerer** – A seeker with a wrong motive

3) **Unnamed Ethiopian eunuch** – A seeker with a right motive

At the same time, we'll get to know a man named Philip who was on fire for Christ.

We all have important choices to make in our lives. Let's see what kind of choices these four people had made get to where they were and what kind of next choices made go from there.

### A. SAUL THE SAVAGE

*Acts 8:1-3 Now Saul was consenting to his death. At that time a great persecution arose against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. 2 And devout men carried Stephen to his burial, and made great lamentation over him. 3 As for Saul, he made havoc of the church, entering every house, and dragging off men and women, committing them to prison.*

Saul was living off hatred and threats against the Christians, like a savage wild beast stalking its prey. He was on a search not for God, but for the followers of God to destroy them. A raging fury obsessed him.

The Greek word for "made havoc" is "lymaino" which means "an army destroying a city or a wild animal tearing at its meat." Saul viciously attacked Christians with glee, including women.

So how was it that a man who was so religious ultimately became nothing more than a common murderer? It is because religion can be blinding. Religion can be a destructive force. Religious people conspired to put Jesus to death. And religious people put a young man Stephen to death as well.

When I say "religion," I am not talking about faith in Christ; I am talking about religion. There is a big difference between man-made religion and true faith in Christ.

I believe that religion is probably keeping more people from Christ than everything else put together, because it gives them a false sense of security. But they will be in for a big shock when they find out that religion will not satisfy the requirements of our holy God.

In his mind, Saul thought that he was doing service to God by removing these people. Little did he know that even before Saul was a part of the kingdom of God, he was working for Christianity unwittingly. By attacking Christians, he caused them to spread out geographically. If he had not done this, it is entirely possible that the believers would have remained in a holy huddle in Jerusalem.

## **B. PHILIP THE EVANGELIST**

*Acts 8:4-8 Therefore those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the word. 5 Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria and preached Christ to them. 6 And the multitudes with one accord heeded the things spoken by Philip, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did. 7 For unclean spirits, crying with a loud voice, came out of many who were possessed; and many who were paralyzed and lame were healed. 8 And there was great joy in that city .*

In our chapter 6 study, we came across a group of men who became the first deacons of the church in Jerusalem. One of them was Philip. He not only was a great servant for the Lord and his people, but also he was gifted in evangelism. The Lord's leading and Saul's persecution made Philip relocate himself in the midst of Samaritans where a typical orthodox Jew would never set his foot.

600 years before this, the Assyrians conquered this area of northern Israel and deported all the wealthy and middle-class Jews from the area. Then they moved in a pagan population from afar. These pagans intermarried with the lowest classes of remaining Jews in northern Israel, and from these people came the Samaritans.

Generally speaking, the Jews of that day hated the Samaritans. They considered them compromising half-breeds who corrupted the worship of the true God. There was deep-seated prejudice, amounting almost to hatred, standing between the Jews and the Samaritans.

Yet, by the leading and power of the Holy Spirit, Philip preached Christ to them. There was no room for prejudice or racism in his mind. He wanted these Samaritans to know Jesus Christ as their Savior and Lord.

Don't think that this is a job for pastors, preachers, and evangelists only . Jesus told all of us to go into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature. It is the Great Commission for every single follower of Jesus.

Being an effective communicator of the Gospel requires a willingness to reach out to people who are different from us. We tend to want to hang around people who look like us, who talk like us, and who are just like us. But how willing are we to leave our comfort zone and go to a person completely different from us with the message of the Gospel?

To put it another way, are we willing to acknowledge that all prejudice is wrong? Everyone needs Jesus, and we need to go without embarrassment or pride and share the Gospel with them. We can talk all day about how to do evangelism effectively . We can go to classes on how to share our faith and read books about it. We can memorize a list of conversation-starters that can help turn a conversation toward evangelism. All these things are good. But none of them will matter if we don't care about others. Unbelievers can tell whether or not we care about them. Even a dog can tell. And a person will know whether you are sharing the Gospel out of sincerity or a mere sense of duty.

## **C. SIMON THE SORCERER**

*Acts 8:9-25 But there was a certain man called Simon, who previously practiced sorcery in the city and astonished the people of Samaria, claiming that he was someone great, 10 to whom they all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying, "This man is the great power of God." 11 And they heeded*

him because he had astonished them with his sorceries for a long time. 12 But when they believed Philip as he preached the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, both men and women were baptized. 13 Then Simon himself also believed; and when he was baptized he continued with Philip, and was amazed, seeing the miracles and signs which were done. 14 Now when the apostles who were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them, 15 who, when they had come down, prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit. 16 For as yet He had fallen upon none of them. They had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. 17 Then they laid hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit. 18 And when Simon saw that through the laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Spirit was given, he offered them money, 19 saying, "Give me this power also, that anyone on whom I lay hands may receive the Holy Spirit." 20 But Peter said to him, "Your money perish with you, because you thought that the gift of God could be purchased with money! 21 You have neither part nor portion in this matter, for your heart is not right in the sight of God. 22 Repent therefore of this your wickedness, and pray God if perhaps the thought of your heart may be forgiven you. 23 For I see that you are poisoned by bitterness and bound by iniquity." 24 Then Simon answered and said, "Pray to the Lord for me, that none of the things which you have spoken may come upon me." 25 So when they had testified and preached the word of the Lord, they returned to Jerusalem, preaching the gospel in many villages of the Samaritans.

In the midst of the Samaritans, there was a sorcerer whose name was Simon. He had a fair amount of local fame due to his magic that came from satan.

Just a side note, I pray and hope that you don't let your children involve with any occult stuff whether it is a game board, novels, movies, or video games. If you do, you are opening the door of their minds to satanic influences.

As the Samaritans were coming to faith and miracles were being performed, Simon realized that he had to change his tactics. So in v13, Simon himself believed and was baptized. He followed Philip everywhere and was astonished by the great signs and wonders he saw.

When Simon approached the apostles and offered them money because he saw God's power working through them and wanted to buy it, he showed his true spiritual condition by his actions that he never was a believer. Yes, he was baptized; yes, he attended every service Philip was conducting; yes, he was moved by the miracles happening in Samaria. But just because someone is baptized, or attends church services, or get goose-bumps during the worship time doesn't necessarily mean he or she is a Christian.

This shows us that people can be in a godly place, around godly people, and not have it affect them in the right way. As it has been said, the same sun that softens the wax hardens the clay. The light of Jesus Christ, if it does not convert the listener, plunges him or her into deeper darkness.

Simon the Sorcerer thought that the Holy Spirit was merely a power that could be bought or sold. He wanted to control the working of the Spirit, and regarded the Holy Spirit as a power he could use as he wanted, instead of a Person who ruled his life.

Have you ever heard a word 'Simony'? It came from this sorcerer's action. It is the word for the sin of buying or selling church offices or privileges, because it is done in the same concept as this man.

This sin is still practiced today. Some Christians think that they should be deacons or elders because they are big donors to their churches or some silly people buy an honorary doctoral degree of divinity at \$36.98 from the places like Universal Life Church Monastery where they practice Crystal, Metal Magic, and Wicca. Obviously, they are NOT talking about the same God as ours.

A friend of mine who is a pastor of a Calvary Chapel somewhere in Arizona allowed a big donor to be his assistant pastor because he thought that this guy was really helpful in many ways, especially with the church finance. Later that pastor friend told me that he regretted his stupidity of appointing that man into the assistant pastor position because he turned out to be a wolf in sheep clothing.

In our church some time ago, we had a man who tried to tell me about his financial donation to the church and told me that I should treat him differently. I thought about telling him what apostle Peter told Simon the Sorcerer, "*Your money perish with you.*" Don't look around. He ain't here, he was gone because I didn't cater to his demand.

Simon's response to these severe words of warning by Peter in v24 was not at all encouraging. He was more concerned about avoiding judgment than getting right with God. There is no evidence that he repented and sought forgiveness. A sinner who wants the prayers of others but who will not repent of his sins is not going to enter God's kingdom.

This incident only shows how close a person can come to salvation and still not be converted. Simon heard the Gospel, saw the miracles, even made a profession of faith in Christ, and was baptized; and yet he was never born again. He was one of Satan's clever counterfeits; and, had Peter not exposed the wickedness of his heart, Simon would have been accepted as a member of the Samaritan congregation.

#### **D. APPLICATIONS**

- 1) True faith in Jesus Christ gives us salvation, not any of man-made religions.
- 2) Being an effective communicator of the Gospel requires a willingness to reach out to people who are different from us.
- 3) Our God is not impressed by our financial offerings or social status. The only thing He cares about is our dedicated hearts to Him.