

Sermon for Dec 13, 2020, “We live under the freedom of God’s grace”

Acts 8:4-24 ⁴ Now those who were scattered went from place to place, proclaiming the word. ⁵ Philip went down to the city of Samaria and proclaimed the Messiah to them. ⁶ The crowds with one accord listened eagerly to what was said by Philip, hearing and seeing the signs that he did, ⁷ for unclean spirits, crying with loud shrieks, came out of many who were possessed; and many others who were paralyzed or lame were cured. ⁸ So there was great joy in that city. ⁹ Now a certain man named Simon had previously practiced magic in the city and amazed the people of Samaria, saying that he was someone great. ¹⁰ All of them, from the least to the greatest, listened to him eagerly, saying, “This man is the power of God that is called Great.” ¹¹ And they listened eagerly to him because for a long time he had amazed them with his magic. ¹² But when they believed Philip, who was proclaiming the 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. After being baptized, he stayed constantly with Philip and was amazed when he saw the signs and great miracles that took place. ¹⁴ Now when the apostles at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had accepted the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them. ¹⁵ The two went down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit ¹⁶ (for as yet the Spirit had not come upon any of them; they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus). ¹⁷ Then Peter and John 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 also this power 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 God’s gift with money! ²¹ You have no part or share in this, 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 the chains of wickedness.” ²⁴ Simon answered, “Pray for me to the Lord, that nothing of what you have said may happen to me.”

Introduction: What is living by the grace of the Lord?

Today is the third Sunday of Advent. In a sermon last week, I gave you three reasons for the Lord to come to this world. For the third reason, I said that the Lord wants to send us into the world to save souls.

Today's text is based on the situation in which Christians are scattered around the world due to the persecution that came to Jerusalem after the martyrdom of the Stephen. As Jesus ascended to heaven, he commanded his disciples to **“Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.”**(Matthew 28:19) And Acts chapter 1 verse 8 says, **“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”** Today's text shows us how true Jesus' command and will are.

In the aftermath of the persecution against the church in Jerusalem, the Gospel is preached to Samaria. Philip, one of the seven men selected by the early church for the daily distribution of food, preaches the gospel to Samaria. As a result, God's signs and powers will appear, and the Samaritans will receive the Gospel. But in today's text, another person appears in contrast to Philip's activities. His name is Simon. He had astounded Samaritans with his magic, and after meeting Philip, was baptized by him. However, Simon is a person who has a wrong idea and understanding of the gospel.

Advent is the time to prepare for the coming of the baby Jesus who saved us. We must think of the grace that the Lord has given us, and live for the will of the Lord to be done on this earth. However, there are people who misunderstand living by the grace of the Lord. Simon in Acts chapter 8 today is such a person. I hope today's text will give us a time to think deeply about what it means to live by the grace of the Lord.

Body: Philip and Simon

In verse 9 of today's text, a man named Simon appears. Simon had been a sorcerer there for many years. He boasted that he was someone great. In addition, **verse 10 says, "and all the people, both high and low, gave**

him their attention and exclaimed, this man is the divine power known as the Great Power." This verse shows that the Samaritans recognized Simon's spiritual authority and power.

But Simon meets Philip, who came to preach the Gospel to Samaria. However, Simon cannot surpass Philip's spiritual authority and power. Rather, Simon believed the gospel Philip has delivered. **Verse 13 says, "Simon himself believed and was baptized. And he followed Philip everywhere, astonished by the great signs and miracles he saw."**

However, the apostles of the church in Jerusalem heard that gospel was preached to Samaria, and Samaritans were baptized by Philip. However, the Samaritans were baptized only in the name of Jesus and did not receive the Holy Spirit. Apostle Peter and John go to Samaria to baptize them with the Holy Spirit. So theologians refer to this as the **"Samaria Pentecost event."** Similar to coming upon the Holy Spirit in the church of Jerusalem, this took place in Samaria.

The Gospel of Jesus was witnessed in Samaria, the gateway to the Gentiles regions, and the Holy Spirit was given to the Samaritans by the apostles as a confirmation. But the problem appears. In today's text verse 19 says, Simon saw that the Spirit was given at the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money and said, **"Give me also this ability so that everyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit."** Simon wanted to buy the power of the apostles with money.

In the early church, it took more than six months to be baptized to become a member of the church. And at the end of the process, they were asked the following questions, **"Can you die for Jesus?" "If so, could you die on behalf of the brothers and sisters standing here?"** If the question is not answered, the person cannot be a member of the church.

Christians must value the salvation the Lord has given us by grace. **So what's Simon's misunderstanding about the gospel?**

First, Simon did not sincerely believe in Jesus, but in a form.

Verse 12 says, **"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."** In this verse, Philip shared the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ to people. People believed it, and everyone was baptized by Philip.

But Simon was different. **Verse 13 of the text says, "Simon himself believed and was baptized. And he followed Philip everywhere, astonished by the great signs and miracles he saw."** The exact object of what Simon believes is missing in this verse. He doesn't believe in the kingdom of God and Jesus Christ, he simply believed and was baptized. This did not mean that Simon truly turned back to repent and returned to Jesus, but was just simply baptized. **So what is another misunderstanding about the gospel found in Simon?**

Second, Simon did not pursue Jesus, but pursued people.

Today's text verse 6 says, **"When the crowds heard Philip and saw the miraculous signs he did, they all paid close attention to what he said."** This verse shows us that those who heard Philip's message about the gospel did not follow Philip, but followed the message itself.

But Simon is different. **Verse 13 says, "Simon himself believed and was baptized. And he followed Philip everywhere, astonished by the great signs and miracles he saw."** Simon follows Philip. This was because he wants to show great power like Philip. The most important thing in our life of faith is what kind of relationship we have with God. Our relationship with God is more important than whether we know a lot, what background we have, and whether we are capable. But we don't see a close relationship with Jesus in Simon. **So what is another problem for Simon?**

Third, Simon was not born again in Jesus.

Verse 23 of the text says, **“For I see that you are full of bitterness and captive to sin.”** This is what the apostle Peter is saying to Simon. Simon's heart was full of sin and was unsanctified, because Simon thought that God's gift could be bought for money. The apostle Peter said of this to Simon: **“You have no part or share in this ministry, because your heart is not right before God.”(Acts 8:21)**

This shows that we are not born again just because we are baptized, do good, and belong to Church. So, Christians must become sanctified through meeting with Jesus. Peter tells Simon: **“Repent of this wickedness and pray to the Lord. Perhaps he will forgive you for having such a thought in your heart.”(v.22)**

Then Simon answered, **“Pray to the Lord for me so that nothing you have said may happen to me.”(Acts 8:24)** Simon just needs to repent and go to the Lord in prayer. But he tries to solve the problem the way he wants.

Those who have experienced grace are those who sincerely pursue Jesus, dwell in Him, look to Him, and live by His power. The Lord came to us by grace so that we can live that way.

Conclusion: We live under the grace of the Lord

To live under grace is to truly trust in Jesus and what the Bible tells us. To live under grace is not to pursue power and results, but to live in a deep relationship with Jesus. To live under grace means to live born again in Jesus. That is, living in the freedom of certainty that all our sins are forgiven in Him.

Romans chapter 6 verses 22 through 23 says, **“But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves to God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness, and the result is eternal life. For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”**

I bless you to be one who enjoys abundance under the grace of the Lord.