

**Christ's Authority is Greater, Part 2—Acts 8:9-25—10/5/25**  
**Copyright by Mark Vaughan 10/2025**

Open your Bible to Acts 8 & let's read where we were last week.

Many of you were already asking all the right questions of the text last week as we think about Simon the magician.

We'll consider how to assess him today as we continue this study.

Follow along as I read Acts 8:4-25. [READ]

Murdering Christians does not work to silence them.

As is said, the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church, meaning God uses faithful martyrs to grow new Christians.

That growth may come as increased boldness in others who were already Christians & it may come from unbelievers turning to Christ.

It may be people like Philip, who was likely a precursor of what would become a deacon role or office in the church.

Like Stephen, Philip was telling the Good News of Jesus the Christ wherever he went, explaining the Scriptures to whoever would listen.

Philip was one of many who scattered & were sharing Christ.

Christ's supremacy was greater than the governmental powers who crucified Him & who still tried to silence talk of Him after He rose.

Christ was greater then & He is still greater now.

And just as His church trusted Him at the beginning despite opposition, so also now we must keep on trusting Christ as greater.

We must grow to know Christ like they knew Him & to follow their bold & life-consuming focus on His importance.

We need to trust Him when suffering meets us not only through persecution, but also through the pains of disappointments.

The Lord Jesus is still sovereign even when what appeared to be ministry blessings are exposed as frauds or challenges.

Those may be people who claimed to be Christians or who spoke of Jesus favorably or who wanted some form of spiritual power.

We need to assess those accurately & address them faithfully.

That's the kind of situation we find in Acts 8 with Simon the magician who made a profession of faith in Christ & then proved to be a fraud.

Peter's dealings with Simon teach us to trust & speak of Christ's authority as greater in 2 more ways that add to the first two points we made from this passage last week.

Last week, we noted 1<sup>st</sup> how Christ's authority is greater than demonic magic as people began giving attention to Philip's preaching rather than Simon's astonishing dealing with devils.

People were being freed from unclean spirits by the power of Christ through Philip's preaching & signs.

Then we saw in verses 14-17 how Christ's authority is greater than historic divisions or ethnic strife between Jews & Samaritans.

Overcoming the separation & hatred between Jews & Samaritans was why the church at Jerusalem sent Peter & John to affirm the salvation of Samaritans.

Acts tells how this new multinational body called the church began to be experienced even before it was explained in the NT letters.

Since Samaritans were half-Jews ethnically & religiously, the church's expansion needed to be affirmed by Jesus' Apostles.

That's what verses 14-17 described in the coming of Peter & John to lay hands on the Samaritan believers & to pray for them to receive the Holy Spirit just as the church had at its inception in Jerusalem.

The answer to that prayer demonstrated their oneness in Christ.

So Christ's authority was greater than historic division & ethnic strife.

But what about Simon the magician mentioned there?

Verse 13 said even Simon himself believed, was baptized, & attached himself to Philip as he saw signs & great miracles & was amazed.

Was he truly converted or did he just like the spectacular show by Philip & the Apostles Peter & John?

Verse 13 alluded to Simon's bad motive of simply seeking signs, which was something Jesus had rebuked during His ministry.

Verse 13 is very similar to what's said in John 2:23-25 of the empty faith of some at the start of Jesus' ministry.

After Jesus' miracle of turning water into wine & His first cleansing of the Temple, many believed in Jesus, but Jesus did not believe in them.

*John 2:23-25 says: Now when He was in Jerusalem at the Passover, during the feast, many believed in His name, observing His signs which He was doing. But Jesus, on His part, was not entrusting Himself to them, for He knew all men, and because He did not need anyone to testify concerning man, for He Himself knew what was in man.*

Jesus did not entrust Himself to these who saw the signs & believed in His authority but who must not have turned from sin to Him savingly.

When you know that happened during Jesus' ministry, then what happened with Simon the magician is not a shock.

When you know that Jesus had warned crowds of the cost of following Him & the danger of false professions, you are prepared for Simon.

When you know Jesus' parable of the soils in Matthew 13, you know that some appear to respond to the Word but are choked out by the worries of the world & the deceitfulness of riches.

That kind of false faith is exposed in how Simon responded to Peter & John after he had initially believed.

But understand that this was NOT Simon losing an initial salvation that he once had.

This was EXPOSING the selfish, worldly heart that wanted power but never had true salvation in the first place.

Read Acts 8:18-19 again to see that. [READ]

Simon the magician saw this powerful gift from God proven by some kind of miraculous display & he wanted to do the same trick.

He wanted to have the same power & authority & right to bestow or give the Holy Spirit by the laying on of his hands.

He wanted the freedom to be sovereign to choose to dispense the Spirit in power on whomever he placed his hands upon.

Whereas the Apostles had prayed & God answered by giving the Spirit, Simon wanted a guarantee for him to do the same.

He wanted the power & prestige of influence to restore the control over people that he formerly had.

He had lost that when people were freed by Philip's preaching.

And since practitioners in those times would purchase their tricks from other magicians, Simon tried to buy the Spirit with money.

He brought money as if Christ's authority could be received transactionally, as if some earthly value could be paid for it.

That leads to a 1<sup>st</sup> point for today & a 3<sup>rd</sup> point continuing from last week—Christ's authority is greater than human achievements.

Note as point #3 that Christ's authority is greater than human achievements—& by that I mean money or any human merits.

Simon tried to purchase Christ's authority with money.

But it does not work that way—He cannot be earned or bought.

The Lord Jesus sends His Spirit wherever He wishes—as He told Nicodemus in John 3—so He's not controlled by human manipulation.

That's why we PRAY for revival—because it's a work of God!

We can't schedule it or create it or coerce it or drum it up or effect it.

The supernatural saving & indwelling & transforming work of the Spirit is not for sale or for attainment by worldly methods.

No one can work his way into earning a status where Christ owes him.

No one can labor to accrue merits before God that must force God to dispense blessings.

Divine power is not available to bargain for with choices or currency.

The Lord Jesus Christ pours out His power by His grace alone.

The Holy Spirit is a gift that God gives in the work of drawing sinners to repentance & faith in Jesus Christ.

God gives the Spirit to regenerate hearts, to cause new birth, to make new creatures in Christ.

All that is done by God's grace, not by human achievements.

That means it's freely given as God chooses, never as achieved or earned or deserved by humans.

We could cite many passages throughout Scripture to prove this, but let's allow Peter's rebuke to say enough to instruct us.

Read Acts 8:20-21. [READ]

Realize how strong Peter's words were here—that word for perish is the word for destruction where the broad way leads in Matthew 7:13 & that vessels of wrath are prepared for in Romans 9:22.

It's the word for perdition that described Judas in John 17:12.

It's the end of the lost, the opposite of salvation, in Philippians 1:28 & 3:19 & 1<sup>st</sup> Timothy 6:9 & 2<sup>nd</sup> Peter 2:1, 3 & 3:7, 16.

The idea is that your money may be with you into hell.

Peter's words were that strong because thinking that you can buy the gift of God will get you into hell.

Approaching God like you can purchase His favor, achieve His blessings, or earn & bargain for His gifts is blasphemous.

Such trust in human achievement is a damning lie.

Peter did the LOVING thing & warned Simon.

He did not let it pass in fear of upsetting Simon & the whole region who had followed him—he did not leave Simon to maybe learn later.

Peter made clear that any such approach to God leaves a person with no inheritance or portion in this Word.

There is no share marked out for such a person in this.

Such a heart is not right before God, not set straight in relation to God, not steadfast in a good place with God (Psalm 78:37).

The thought of buying the gift of God is out of alignment before God.

Simon's sin is the origin of the word *simony* that describes buying & selling spiritual or ecclesiastical favors or offices.

Get the point—we cannot buy or sell God's grace because it's free.

And that means the Gospel is not a means of building your own platform or following or padding your own cashflow.

The Gospel ministry is a path of slavery, not self-elevation.

As Peter later wrote in 1<sup>st</sup> Peter 5:2-3: *shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness; nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock.*

In contrast to the mindset of Simon the magician, spiritual leadership is not to be done for money or power or status.

Ministry is not conducted by magic or manipulation or other fleshly methods that appeal to greed or pride or personality.

The Gospel is freely received & freely offered.

From Isaiah 55:1 & Revelation 22:17, God's call is to come to Him without money & without cost.

We receive what God has promised by His grace & not by our trades.

God is not for sale & neither are His gifts.

The Spirit is not for sale & neither is His coming on other people.

He is far too valuable to put a price on & no sinful human can ever achieve the perfection required to be right with God.

So it is impossible to reach the level of Christ's authority to approach God at any kind of bargaining table or transactional relationship.

But what's fascinating is that God still offers His grace even to people who have approached Him wrongly like that.

Peter did not end the conversation with that condemnation.

He did not confront Simon's sin & fail to offer any forgiveness.

Read Acts 8:22-23 to see God's grace extended to Simon. [READ]

Christ's authority is greater than what human achievements can reach or purchase, but Christ does command a response.

Therefore—because of Simon being destined for perdition & having no share in the Word—the command was to repent.

To repent is to change one's mind, to turn away from one way of thinking & living to a new direction of thinking & living.

Peter said to repent from—to turn away from—this evil of yours—referring to Simon's thinking that he could get God's gift with money.

That trust in earthly earnings, in human transactional abilities, was wicked & out of alignment with God.

Peter told Simon to turn away from that theology of human ability & achievement & to seek & ask the Lord for forgiveness.

And the evil that needed to be forgiven reached down into his heart intentions, his thought process of how to approach God.

He thought wrongly about himself—wrongly assuming that God can be served by human hands as if need anything as Acts 17:25 corrects.

He thought he could bargain with God, that he could have something to give to God as if God did not give everything that we have in the first place as 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 4:7 points out.

He missed what Job learned & Romans 11:35 quoted in saying “*who has first given to Him that it might be paid back to Him again?*”

So Simon needed to repent of his self-trust & his wrong view of sin & to admit his inability to reach God on his own.

He needed to repent of the works-based premise of every false religion that a person can do something to buy or earn God’s favor.

And Peter phrased the forgiveness as conditional—if it’s possible for God to forgive his sins—Simon needed to ask.

Peter commanded him to pray—to ask, request, plead, beg.

Such commands to repent & pray & seek God are the call that God uses to bring sinners from spiritual death to spiritual life.

The proclamation of such Gospel truth is like Jesus’ call to Lazarus to come out of the grave & come to life.

It’s a call to freedom because, as Peter said in verse 23, he saw that Simon was in the poison of wrath, the gall of bitterness.

As Proverbs 5:22 warns: *his own iniquities will capture the wicked, and he will be held with the cords of his sin.*

Simon was in the cords of slavery & chains of his own sin.

Such pictures of Simon’s sin come from Deuteronomy 29:18-21 & Isaiah 58:6 to describe what deserved severe punishment.

Since Simon had heard the freeing power of Jesus from Philip’s preaching, he knew enough to turn to Jesus.

But Simon’s response is not clear as we read in verse 24. [READ]

I’m not sure we can say absolutely what Simon meant by that.

I don’t think it’s a good sign that Simon did not respond with prayer.

Simon did not immediately agree with Peter & confess his sins & call out to God begging for forgiveness.

We don’t know if he did so later & we don’t know if him telling Peter to pray to the Lord for him was a humble & honest step of faith.

We also don’t know if his response was only so that he might escape the condemnation Peter had said was coming upon him.

It does appear that Simon only wanted to escape wrath & it’s not clear if he truly wanted to surrender to Christ & was seeking Peter’s help.

Neither Peter’s words nor Simon’s reply are enough to know for certain whether the Lord saved Simon.

And that’s ok for us to leave in the Lord’s hands about Simon & about all the other people that come to your mind with questionable faith.

I mean, right?—you can probably think of people like Simon in one way or another that you are not sure responded genuinely to the Gospel even though they maybe said some right things.

Look—Christ chooses if & when to exercise His sovereign authority to awaken dead sinners to life by His Spirit through the Gospel.

He is not manipulated by money or fooled by false professions & so we are always subject to Him as we pray for His work.

We don’t control Him or coerce His grace for ourselves or for others.

We walk by submissive faith, trusting Him to work by His grace in the ways He has promised—but we don't control Him.

So we might note 2<sup>nd</sup>ly today, & 4<sup>th</sup>ly overall, that Christ's authority is greater than earthly controls.

We've said today that Christ's authority is greater than human achievement & now add that it's greater than earthly controls.

Christ's authority is greater than earthly controls, meaning He is not forced to act by personal initiatives or societal pressures.

You cannot force someone else to be saved & no one can force God to forgive them on their own terms by their own will.

As Romans 9:16 says, *it does not depend on the man who wills or the man who runs, but on God who has mercy.*

As John 1:13 says, those who believe are *born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.*

Of course, that does not mean we should not pray—we absolutely should pray for ourselves & for others.

As Peter commanded Simon, we should pray with confession of our sins including our heart intentions & ask Him to forgive us as we trust who Christ is & what He has done.

Listen—you should tell God that you have no other hope except Jesus' life, death & resurrection & that you know your sins deserve hell.

From a sincere heart, ask God to forgive you & tell Him the reason He has said He can do so is because of Jesus.

Don't trust that you will say it right or fix your life enough or that you can offer Him money or anything else that can earn His favor.

Instead, admit you are bankrupt, unable to offer anything, but you want Christ's righteousness & redemption counted for you.

Plead with Him like the tax collector in Luke 18—God have mercy on me, the sinner—make that appeal in faith & bank on Christ alone.

Do not merely tell others to pray for you like Simon did & like Pharaoh did with Moses while never seeking God on his own.

Do not assume that someone else's prayers will save you when God has commanded you to repent & entrust your own self to Jesus.

And as you share Christ, don't let others' uncertain responses hinder you from praying for them & speaking the truth.

Just as earthly controls cannot force Christ to give salvation, so earthly controls cannot restrict or stop Him from giving it.

Even when unclear responses or unbelievers' persecution seek to stop the Gospel, Christ's authority will prove supreme.

Read verse 25 to see how that happened. [READ]

Peter & John are referred to here—they had exercised their authority as Apostles to testify as Jesus' witnesses who spoke His Word.

Having completed those Apostolic responsibilities, they were returning to Jerusalem, but apparently not in a hurry.

Rather, they were evangelizing many villages of the Samaritans along the way, taking the opportunity as they traveled to preach the Gospel.

Contrary to attempts to silence the church & control the message of Christ, the Word continued to spread.

Against the forces of persecution, the church's scattering led to Gospel growth as believers spoke of Jesus to more people in more places.

Christ's authority is greater than such earthly controls that try to stop the church from speaking of Christ.

It was not merely where Philip had traveled that heard the Gospel, it was likely *all over the region* of Samaria as Peter & John traveled.

That's not what those persecuting the church wanted.

But it is exactly what the Lord Jesus wanted & so it's what occurred.

So be emboldened by the fact that Christ's authority is greater than earthly controls.

Don't be intimidated or silenced or scared of sharing Christ.

Don't allow those who oppose you—whether personally or governmentally—stop you from speaking of Christ.

Don't be discouraged by resistance—it may be evidence that what you are saying matters.

And don't be disheartened by false professions, by those who crush you because you loved them & thought they responded.

Christ's authority is greater than all such earthly controls—pray & keep speaking with certainty that Christ is greater & He is worth it.

As Jesus said in Matthew 10:28: *Do not fear those who kill the body but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.*

Remember He said in Luke 9:26: *For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when He comes in His glory, and the glory of the Father and of the holy angels.*

So do not fear others & what they can do & do not be ashamed of Jesus & His Words.

And don't be discouraged from sharing Christ even when people's professions of faith turn out to be false like Simon's seemed to be.

Jesus warned that some soils would seem to let the seed of the Word sprout & grow, but it would later prove to be lifeless.

Don't let the responses of others tempt you either to trust the power of the Gospel less or to trust your own delivery more.

We are just messengers who report Christ's authority—we announce it, but we do not control it.

And our task is to announce it faithfully, even the hard parts.

We learn from Peter to be clear about condemnation & be compassionate to offer forgiveness.

We are not called to tone down the message to make it more palatable because in doing so we may make it less powerful.

We need to see Peter's words not as harsh, but as healing.

He was releasing the truth to do the work of transformation.

Being clear about condemnation of sin & the call to repent is not being unkind or insensitive.

It is being loving enough to tell others what we all need to hear.

Then we can come to Christ, repenting of self-trust & sin & trusting Jesus & gladly proclaiming Him wherever we go.

Acts 8 shows us ways to trust Christ's authority as (1) greater than human achievements & (2) greater than earthly controls.

So surrender to His sovereignty & savor His gracious promises.

Jesus has come as God the Son to be a man to live perfectly, die sacrificially & rise victoriously so that sinners like us can be forgiven.

He is the Lord & Savior who is worthy of trust & worship.

And He is worthy to be talked about wherever we go.

Will you trust Him & talk of Him as He deserves?

To help us, now let's honor Him now in the ceremony of communion.

If you do not know Christ, I urge you to seek Him as you watch this ceremony with symbols of Jesus' body & blood.

Watch & pray & then let us know how we can help you follow Christ.

And if you do know Christ, we welcome you to worship Him as we meditate on His death to pay for our sins.

Let's praise the Redeemer who gave His life to purchase us in the wonderful exchange of the Gospel.

Take a minute to quietly respond to Him with confession of sin & trust in His work to graciously forgive you.

Pray alone & then I'll lead us in prayer as we remember this glorious Christ as He said until He comes again.