# THE SCROLLS

## The Gospel Goes Global: Every Road Leads to Mission | Acts 8:14-25

### Life Lesson

True spiritual freedom is realized when we abandon the exhausting pretense of transactional religion and rest entirely in God's unmerited grace. The warning reminds us that the Holy Spirit and salvation are not commodities to leverage, purchase, or manage for personal status, comfort, or control. When we try to trade our spiritual résumé, moral performance, or religious service for God's favor, we cheapen the infinite value of the cross and reveal a heart still captive to self-exaltation. Instead of approaching God with a list of achievements, we are called to come empty-handed, surrender our desire for self-promotional power, and receive Jesus not as a "power" to use, but as a sovereign Lord to worship and obey.

### Examine Scripture

***Read Acts 8:14-25***

*As you read Scripture, slow down and ask these three questions to move from information to transformation:*

*1. What does this passage reveal about who God is?*

*2. How is God calling you to grow or change?*

*3. What is God leading you to do or who is He calling you to be in your everyday life?*

### Not for Sale

The human heart has a fallen inclination toward religious transaction. Since the fall in Eden, humanity has repeatedly tried to treat God as a cosmic merchant, offering religious performance, moral leverage, ceremonial duty, or material wealth in exchange for divine favor, power, and prestige. We naturally gravitate toward systems in which power can be bought and spiritual status earned.

In Acts 8:14–25, this transactional impulse collides with the unyielding reality of divine grace. As the Gospel breaks through centuries of ethnic hatred in Samaria, God sends the Holy Spirit in a sovereign, undeniable manifestation. Yet in the shadow of this genuine revival stands Simon. As we read last week, he was a former sorcerer who sees the holy, unearned presence of the Holy Spirit not as an object of worship but as a commodity to be acquired. By offering money for the power to dispense God's Spirit, Simon commits the sin that bears his name: simony. Simony is the selling of church offices, authority, and spiritual things. Especially in medieval times, simony was very common in the Catholic Church. Church offices were given to those of tremendous wealth and power. It was not until the Reformation that this practice was publicly condemned. However, the sin of simony still occasionally slithers into our church, with people handed positions based on wealth, influence, or power, not spiritual maturity or wisdom.

Peter's stinging rebuke to Simon is a thunderous declaration that echoes across the ages. Salvation and the filling of the Holy Spirit are not trade secrets, professional qualifications, or commodities for self-promotion. They are sovereign, unpurchasable gifts from a holy God. Attempting to put a price tag on the grace of God insults the cross of Jesus Christ and reveals a heart still bound by the venom of sin.

As we step into this passage, verse by verse, we must ask the searching question: Are we coming to God to receive Him as our supreme treasure, or are we trying to negotiate with Him to secure leverage or power for ourselves?

***"When the apostles who were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them.***

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***After they went down there, they prayed for them so that the Samaritans might receive the Holy Spirit because he had not yet come down on any of them. (They had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.) Then Peter and John laid their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit." (vs. 14-17)***

When news reaches Jerusalem that Samaria has "received the word of God," the Apostles send Peter and John. The Greek verb for "received" is "dechomai" (δέχομαι), which conveys a warm, active embrace of Philip's Gospel proclamation. It is not merely agreement with the Gospel but acceptance of the Gospel and its requirements. Yet, Luke records a unique historical delay: though baptized, the Samaritan believers had not yet experienced the miraculous coming of the Holy Spirit.

Luke uses this delay to underscore the importance of the Apostles' "approval" of the new converts, which served a vital redemptive-historical purpose. It was important for the Jerusalem Church to verify and approve the Samaritan believers because of the Jews' tense racism toward the Samaritans. Centuries of deep prejudice separated Jews and Samaritans (John 4:9). Had the Samaritan church been established entirely independent of Apostolic oversight, a permanent schism in the early Church would have been inevitable. God sovereignly withheld the Holy Spirit's dramatic manifestation until Peter and John arrived, binding Jews and Samaritans into one unified body.

As John MacArthur notes: "The gift of the Spirit was delayed in Samaria so that the Samaritan believers would be integrated into the Jerusalem church. It prevented a Samaritan sect from starting independently. The Holy Spirit is God's sovereign gift to the church, given according to His timing and plan, not human manipulation." R.C. Sproul similarly writes: "Salvation in Christ is an act of unmerited favor. The Holy Spirit's indwelling validates our adoption into the family of God, bridging ancient divides by pure grace, not human initiation." In other words, this one moment- Peter and John's approval of the Samaritan believers, confirmed by the reception of the Holy Spirit- shows that the Gospel is global, without regard to ethnic, social, or economic barriers.

***"When Simon saw that the Spirit was given through the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money, saying, 'Give me this power also so that anyone I lay hands on may receive the Holy Spirit.'" (vs. 18-19)***

Now, we read of one of those tragic moments that usually accompany any genuine movement of God: counterfeit faith. As we saw last week, Simon's faith was superficial and counterfeit; he was not a

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genuine believer. Often, in movements of God, people are raptured in emotional bliss, responding with surface spirituality, but are no more than seeds that fall on rocky ground (Luke 8:4-15). They may appear to have received the Gospel, but their spiritual lives have no root or depth. From this passage, it seems Simon was among those baptized in Jesus' name. So, on the surface, Simon seems genuine, but he soon reveals that his faith is counterfeit.

Observing the visible manifestation of the Holy Spirit, Simon sees an opportunity to expand his "magical" repertoire. He "offered them money," again an act from which we derive the term simony. Simon requests "this power," seeking the authority to dispense the Holy Spirit at will. He does not pray for personal sanctification or brokenness over sin; he seeks supernatural power to boost his public influence and maintain his reputation as "someone great" (Acts 8:9). He treats the Holy Spirit as a trade secret or commodity to be acquired for personal profit. Notice his selfish motive: "Give me this power also so that anyone I lay hands on may receive the Holy Spirit" (v. 19). Simon focuses more on "I" and "me" than on Jesus. In fact, he never mentions Jesus. He seeks power and prestige, not Jesus.

Matthew Henry observes: "Simon looked upon the Holy Ghost as a sort of magic spell, or secret of trade, by which he might gain money and reputation. He wished to purchase the gift of God, that he might sell it again, and make a profit of it." Simon wanted to profit from God's free gift. Like modern-day televangelists and prosperity preachers, Simon thought he could use God's free gift to gain wealth and prestige. Charles Spurgeon declared this act treason: "To attempt to mix the filthy lucre of this world with the sacred power of the Holy Ghost is a high treason against Heaven. Divine grace is not a commodity to be bought in the marketplace; it is a free gift bestowed by sovereign mercy upon the bankrupt sinner."

***"But Peter told him, 'May your silver be destroyed with you, because you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money! You have no part or share in this matter, because your heart is not right before God. Therefore repent of this wickedness of yours, and pray to the Lord that, if possible, your heart's intent may be forgiven. For I see you are poisoned by bitterness and bound by wickedness.'" (vs. 20-23)***

Peter's response is immediate and severe: "May your silver be destroyed with you." The Greek is somewhat softened in English. In the Greek, Peter is literally saying, "May your silver go with you into damnation!" The contrast between human currency and divine grace is stark: salvation and the Holy Spirit are gifts. The Greek term for "gift" is "dōrea" (δωρεά), which denotes a completely unmerited present.

## Personal Reflection

1. Where in your spiritual life or ministry might you be seeking God's power or recognition for self-promotion rather than for His sovereign glory?

2. In what ways do you subtly expect specific blessings, answers, or spiritual status from God as payment for your moral performance or religious service?

3. When confronted with your sin, is your heart moved by genuine, godly sorrow for offending a holy God, or are you primarily seeking to manage the consequences and avoid punishment, like Simon?

4. How does recognizing that salvation and the Holy Spirit are completely free, unpurchasable gifts shift your daily posture from striving to rest?

5. What personal or cultural prejudices do you need the Holy Spirit to tear down so you can share God's grace freely with others?

## Commentaries

*ESV Expository Commentary: John-Acts (Volume 9)* by Iain M. Duguid, James M. Hamilton Jr., and Jay Sklar

*Expositor's Bible Commentary (Abridged Edition): New Testament* Edited by Kenneth Barker

*Acts* by John MacArthur

## Mt. Zion's Mission

*Mt. Zion Baptist Church exists to* ***MAKE***, ***MATURE***, *and* ***MULTIPLY*** *disciples of Jesus Christ.*

Attempting to buy a "dōrea" is a great insult to the Giver. This is especially true of salvation. It is the free gift of God, not because it has no cost, but because Jesus paid the cost completely by sacrificing Himself on the cross. So, to attempt to purchase this gift, already purchased by the blood of Christ, is incredibly offensive to God. R.C. Sproul explains, "Peter's response to Simon is one of the most severe rebukes in all of Scripture. Why? Because to try to buy God's gift is to assault the very core of the Gospel. If salvation or the Holy Spirit could be purchased, then grace would no longer be grace, and Christ's cross would be rendered unnecessary."

Peter diagnoses Simon's internal condition: he has "no part or share" in the Kingdom, for his heart is not right before God. He describes Simon as being "poisoned by bitterness," referring to an idolatrous root of apostasy, and "bound by wickedness," denoting spiritual bondage. Simon's initial belief (Acts 8:13) was a counterfeit, superficial amazement at miracles rather than a genuine, heart-regenerating faith in Christ. Jeremiah Burroughs writes: "A hypocrite may perform religious duties and desire spiritual gifts, but he desires them for selfish ends. His heart is not right in the sight of God because he seeks himself in the very things of God."

***"'Pray to the Lord for me,' Simon replied, 'so that nothing you have said may happen to me.' So, after they had testified and spoken the word of the Lord, they traveled back to Jerusalem, preaching the gospel in many villages of the Samaritans." (vs. 24-25)***

Simon's reaction to Peter's rebuke reveals the nature of his heart: "Pray to the Lord for me... so that nothing you have said may happen to me." Notably, Simon does not pray himself, nor does he grieve over his sin against a holy God. His sole concern is escaping punishment, not being cleansed from unrighteousness. This exhibits worldly sorrow rather than true, spirit-wrought repentance (2 Cor. 7:10). As Charles Spurgeon writes: "Simon felt the fear of hell, but not the guilt of sin. He said, 'Pray that none of these things come upon me,' not 'Pray that my wicked heart may be made clean.' Alas, how many want escape from punishment, but have no desire for deliverance from impurity!"

Notice the silence of Peter and John in response to Simon. Nothing! Simon's selfishness resulted in a damning silence. He attempted to buy a gift of grace but ended up spiritually impoverished.

Having witnessed God's grace among the Samaritans, Peter and John return to Jerusalem and joyfully preach the good news in many Samaritan villages. Their approval shows that God freely offers the unmerited gift of salvation to all who believe, including Samaritans and Gentiles.