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SERMON TITLE: Recognizing the Sacrifice
SCRIPTURE: Acts 8:9-25
DATE: June 6, 2021
View online service at www.fpcd.org/live-stream

Read also Isaiah 53:1-12

Three men: Simon, Philip, Jesus

What makes these men real men? What shapes them? Every man or woman is a leader for someone. What kind of leaders were they? What kind of leader do you want to be?

Philip:

He was chosen as a leader because he was “well respected and full of the Spirit and wisdom” (Acts 6:3). He lived in Caesarea on the Mediterranean coast with his four unmarried daughters, each of whom had the gift of prophecy. Philip built a reputation as The Evangelist because he went to Samaria to share the news about the Messiah. Remember the woman at the well? Remember how she said to Jesus, “I know the Messiah is coming -- the one who is called Christ” (John 4:25).

She lived in the same area where Philip went.

Philip talked about Jesus, and did powerful signs of healing and exorcism to confirm his message. (Acts 21:8-9)

No wonder Simon was attracted to him—he was a magician and recognized power when he saw it.

What kind of men were these men? What shapes them? How do their lives impact the lives of their families and those around them?

Philip was not professional clergy. He was someone involved in his church. You know what? There can be no church growth unless the people in the church—men, women, and youths—get out of their church to share about Jesus and what kind of person he is.

Philip simply got out of the church and said, “I’ve got good news!”

Philip had confidence in the truth. His message played out in the lives of his daughters, who also talked about Jesus. His message also impacted many others.

We don’t know whether it was a crowd in a bar on Main Street, or a crowd in an open air arena, or gatherings at homes. But we do know that because of Philip’s message, “there was great joy in that city” (Acts 8:8).

What kind of men were these men? What shapes them? How do their lives impact the lives of their families and those around them?

Simon, part of the crowd who responded to the message, prominently stood out because of his profession. We do not know the facet of magic he practiced. Magic has many facets. We don’t know if he was into astrology, tarot cards, witchcraft; a shaman or a medicine man. He was called a sorcerer; that’s black magic, the power of evil spirits.

If you ask what kind of man Simon was, that word points to something sinister. As you heard, Simon built a reputation on his power in sorcery.

Lest you think this is a profession that is no longer around, I assure you this is not the case. There are several psychic reader storefronts in our town.

Magic is a form of insurance. Charms for hunting, for personal safety, amulets for good crops, astrology for getting married or pregnant, casting spells on enemies; well you get the idea. People add magic because it gives them confidence.

Those things are considered help, but I’m here to say *you better direct your dependency to the right helper.*

People saw Simon as “great, amazing, even having the powers of “a god.”

When Philip arrived, the crowds turned to Jesus and were baptized. Even Simon believed and was baptized. Simon kept hanging around Philip, watching him, and being awed by his miraculous signs which came from Jesus.

Philip, though, hung with Jesus’ message.

Simon was impressed with Philip’s miracles and the Holy Spirit’s gifts. Philip was full of God’s wisdom.

What kind of men were these men? What shaped them? Both of them accepted Christ. Philip had his eyes on Jesus.

Simon saw evidence of Jesus, but Simon failed to be “all in.”

Simon said, “I believe in Jesus as God’s Son and my Savior.” But Simon failed to embrace the story fully. Simon wanted some insurance. “I’m going to keep my idols.” “I’m going to hedge my bets.” “I’ll increase my chances for luck.” “I’ll just make this an economic engagement—I’ll buy in enough to have the power, but hey, let’s not get too religious.”

Acts 8:9-25

The apostles, Peter and John, sniffed him out.

“Jesus is God’s gift,” they said. “Jesus can’t be bought.” “You haven’t even made one step of progress and your heart is not right before God, for I see you are in the gall of bitterness and the chains of wickedness” (Acts 8:23).

He did not want to lose a bit of his notoriety. Likely that he was jealous of Philip, Peter and John. Maybe he was angry that the town followed them instead of him.

“Give me my power back,” he was saying to them!

What kind of men were these men? Do we ever fall into their trap ourselves? Do we fail to engage with Jesus? Sure we do, each in our own way.

So how can we avoid being here in church, but not finding the gift of being fully engaged? Let’s look at how Jesus did it.

It wasn’t by power and might. He was born into an ordinary, working class family. He lived in a town like our towns—Duncanville, Cedar Hill, or Midlothian. He wasn’t majestic, appealing, or attractive. In fact he was acquainted with our deepest grief; he carried our weaknesses because he cared about people, meeting them in their most difficult losses and failures. He was ignored, even though he spoke powerfully to famous church leaders, the pope, senators, congressmen, presidents, and kings. They rejected his wisdom, his words, his power, instead replacing it with their own ideologies, dreams, and positions of power.

Jesus listened to God, following every inclination of God’s heart, while we, like Simon, left God’s paths to follow our own. We know Jesus now because the Lord laid on him all our sins. Jesus carried them; sacrificing for us; even to the death. He took our wounds and gave us healing.

Simon and Philip had different responses. Are you all in because of this great salvation?

Now we have the opportunity—everyone around the entire globe—Samaria was just the beginning of the gain. Wherever his name is spoken and his story told, it changes everything. Nothing, not even war, has to be the same. Nothing has to be defeat.

I want to cast for you a vision of what can happen if Jesus is truly involved. Let’s watch this video. VIDEO¹

Christ’s sacrifice changes the course of everything.

What kind of man or woman are you? Are you embracing the story? It takes sacrifice. But it also brings the opportunity to experience the greatest joy and our town will be filled with your joy.

AMEN

⁹ A man named Simon had been a sorcerer there for many years, amazing the people of Samaria and claiming to be someone great. ¹⁰ Everyone, from the least to the greatest, often spoke of him as “the Great One -- the Power of God.” ¹¹ They listened closely to him because for a long time he had astounded them with his magic.

¹² But now the people believed Philip’s message of Good News concerning the Kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ. As a result, many men and women were baptized. ¹³ Then Simon himself believed and was baptized. He began following Philip wherever he went, and he was amazed by the signs and great miracles Philip performed.

¹⁴ When the apostles in Jerusalem heard that the people of Samaria had accepted God’s message, they sent Peter and John there. ¹⁵ As soon as they arrived, they prayed for these new believers to receive the Holy Spirit. ¹⁶ The Holy Spirit had not yet come upon any of them, for they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. ¹⁷ Then Peter and John laid their hands upon these believers, and they received the Holy Spirit.

¹⁸ When Simon saw that the Spirit was given when the apostles laid their hands on people, he offered them money to buy this power. ¹⁹ “Let me have this power, too,” he exclaimed, “so that when I lay my hands on people, they will receive the Holy Spirit!” ²⁰ But Peter replied, “May your money be destroyed with you for thinking God’s gift can be bought! ²¹ You can have no part in this, for your heart is not right with God. ²² Repent of your wickedness and pray to the Lord. Perhaps he will forgive your evil thoughts, ²³ for I can see that you are full of bitter jealousy and are held captive by sin.”

²⁴ “Pray to the Lord for me,” Simon exclaimed, “that these terrible things you’ve said won’t happen to me!” ²⁵ After testifying and preaching the word of the Lord in Samaria, Peter and John returned to Jerusalem. And they stopped in many Samaritan villages along the way to preach the Good News.

¹ See “The Real Story of the Christmas Truce” at <https://www.iwm.org.uk/history/the-real-story-of-the-christmas-truce>, accessed June 3, 2021.