

## The gospel encourages and empowers growth and change

How long has it been since you first believed? How long since the gospel has penetrated your heart and mind, and brought about Spirit empowered transformation? Perhaps you can count it in weeks. For others it might be years, or even decades. Think back, not just to the experience of your conversion, but to what you were like, even soon after that conversion. How does that early-Christian version of you compare with today's version? You're the same person, but hopefully, by the grace of God at work in you, you're different. Have you grown and changed? This is the gospel call, is it not? When Jesus called his disciples he called them to leave what they were doing and to follow him. Lucrative businesses, family trades, social ties. In fact, some wished to follow Jesus, but said that first they had some other things to tend to. Jesus' response? **Luke 9:62** "*Jesus said to him, 'No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.'*" It's all, or it's nothing. The cost of following Jesus is full obedience, total devotion, growth and change. This is the gospel's call, to forsake reliance on self and depend on Christ alone. The gospel's call is to trust and obey Christ. **The gospel encourages and empowers growth and change.**

### Scripture Passage: **Acts 8:9-25**

In our passage this morning, we'll see the **gospel encouraging and empowering growth and change**. Old believers and new believers alike are growing and changing, trusting and obeying Christ as he reigns from on high. The gospel is being taken to new places, to people once forsaken by their fellow man, but not forsaken by God. The gospel goes to new places, and we learn about new people coming to believe in Christ, even those unlikely, as God fulfills his promise to build his church. We'll see stereotypes overcome, and the gospel bringing about growth and change.

### **The Unlikely are Converted (vv.9-13)**

1. **vv.9-11** "*But there was a man named Simon, who had previously practiced magic in the city and amazed the people of Samaria...*" - Last week Nathan taught us through the first part of **Acts 8**, and we saw that, as a result of persecution, the gospel spread beyond Jerusalem, even to Samaria. You Bible students know that the relationship between Jews and Samaritans was not a friendly one. But this spread of the gospel was according to God's plan. In **Acts 1:8** we read that the gospel was to be preached in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.

1. Now we're introduced to Simon. No longer are we looking at the people of Samaria in general, but this one man in particular. Luke, by telling us about this man and his influence, gives us a great deal of information about the people of Samaria. But, we'll see that we learn even more about the power of the gospel.

2. Simon is a man who practiced magic. We're not told what he did specifically, but it was enough to amaze the people of Samaria, and convince them that he was somebody great. Magic was, in all likelihood, the way he made a living. This wasn't all that uncommon.

1. Think back with me to the book of Exodus. Pharaoh had his magicians, and as Moses and Aaron pronounced the plagues on Egypt, Pharaoh's magicians were able to replicate some of them. They couldn't stop them, or overcome them, and could only replicate two of them. The work of Pharaoh's magicians, along with Simon's magic, I believe is more than just sleight of hand and illusion. There are spiritual forces at work in this world. In **Daniel 10** an angelic messenger comes to Daniel, and says that he was withstood 21 days by the prince of the kingdom of Persia, but Michael came to his aid. Paul brings this spiritual warfare to our attention in **Ephesians 6:11-13** "*Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm.*"

2. Now, we have to note, that there's not a single case of evil overpowering good. There isn't some cosmic battle between good and evil, with any question about where real power is. In every case it is clear that God is powerful and overcomes. We should be aware, battle-ready, sober and vigilant, confident in and devoted to our powerful God. We see this carried out even in our passage. The people paid attention to Simon (**vv.10, 11**), but when Philip came preaching they paid attention to Philip and were convinced and converted (**vv.6, 12**).

3. **v.12** *“But when they believed Philip as he preached good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus, they were baptized, both men and women.”* - If the gospel being preached to Samaritans wasn't stretching enough, Luke makes clear that it was both men and women who believed and were baptized. Do you remember **John 4**, and Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan woman at the well? She couldn't believe that Jesus was asking for a drink from her. Even his disciples (**v.27**) marveled that he was talking with her. The gospel is crossing cultural and social borders. Samaritans, men *and* women.
4. **v.13** Even Simon himself believes, is baptized, and continues on with Philip. When we're introduced to him in this passage we're given the impression that he had a pretty high opinion of himself and his magic. But now we read that he was amazed at what Philip was able to do in the power of the Spirit.

**Transition:** As the gospel works, the unlikely are converted. But even when people very different are saved, the gospel assures that the unity of the church still remains intact.

### **Church Unity is Confirmed (vv.14-17)**

1. **v.14** *“Now when the apostles at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent to them Peter and John...”* - This is church unity on display. The church in Jerusalem learns about what has taken place in Samaria, and they send Peter and John to confirm and support this new church.
  1. John had some history with Samaritans. **Luke 9:51-56** *“When the days drew near for him to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem. And he sent messengers ahead of him, who went and entered a village of the Samaritans, to make preparations for him. But the people did not receive him, because his face was set toward Jerusalem. And when his disciples James and John saw it, they said, “Lord, do you want us to tell fire to come down from heaven and consume them?” But he turned and rebuked them. And they went on to another village.”*
    1. Jesus knew there was a plan for these Samaritan villages. What if they were consumed by fire from heaven? The disciples had written them off, but Jesus knew that the gospel would be preached to many villages of the Samaritans.
    2. **The church grows through gospel preaching, expanding beyond borders, but even with its growth it still remains unified. The church should be a unique model to the world of unity and diversity.**
2. **v.17** Theologically, there's often question about why there was a delay in the Samaritan believers receiving the Holy Spirit. There's the thought that maybe this is normative, and this is what every believer should expect; that they would believe in Christ and be saved, and then at some point later receive the Holy Spirit. But I think there's a better answer than that. This isn't normative or prescriptive, but this is a unique scenario. This is the beginning of the great missionary explosion, the fulfillment of **Acts 1:8**, and the first instance of the gospel going outside of a Jewish zip code. I believe God delayed their reception of the Holy Spirit so that it could be witnessed and confirmed by the apostles.
  1. The next major step in fulfillment of **Acts 1:8** would be to the Gentiles, which occurs in **Acts 10**. Peter preaches to Cornelius and his household, they believe and the Holy Spirit falls on them (**v.44**). This is really stretching the Jerusalem church, to believe that Gentiles could also be included and saved. Peter reports to the Jerusalem church. In **Acts 11:15-18** he tells them that they also received the Holy Spirit, which was proof of their conversion. The Holy Spirit is a seal and guarantee of salvation. **Ephesians 1:13-14** *“In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.”*
  2. The Holy Spirit also is a sign of their unity with the one church. **Ephesians 2:19-22** *“So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.”*

**Transition:** The gospel works to save the unlikely and to bring church unity. But the gospel doesn't only work to change old standards or norms, but also works among new believers.

### **A New Believer Confronted (vv.18-24)**

1. **v.18** *“Now when Simon saw that the Spirit was given through the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money...”* - Now we're back to Simon, and Simon seems to be slipping back to his old ways. It was common for magicians to buy and sell tricks. We're not told that he was wanting to buy this ability so he could make a living, but he was wanting to buy this ability nonetheless. He was trying to import his old ways into the Christian life, but to be born again is a new start.
2. **v.20** *“But Peter said to him...”* - Peter confronts him, and does so very directly. Many commentators believe that what Peter says to Simon shows that Simon didn't truly believe in Christ and wasn't saved. I'm wanting to give Simon the benefit of the doubt, and believe this is more about his sanctification than it is about his justification. He believed and was baptized, and then spent time with Philip for some days (**v.13**).

1. Peter tells him that his thinking, what he is attempting, is a path to destruction. This is a stern warning. But instead of being seen as harsh, this is the most loving thing that Peter could do. Here is Simon, a freshly minted believer, in danger of falling away.

1. **Jude 22-23** *“And have mercy on those who doubt; save others by snatching them out of the fire; to others show mercy with fear, hating even the garment stained by the flesh.”*

3. **v.22** *“Repent, therefore, of this wickedness of yours, and pray to the Lord...”* - Peter warns him of the direction he is headed, then calls him to repentance.

1. **Repentance is a divine gift. That we can turn from sinful ways toward our saving God, receive forgiveness for our sin, is truly remarkable. Martin Luther was right when he spoke of repentance - “When our Lord and Master, Jesus Christ, said, ‘Repent’, He called for the entire life of believers to be one of repentance.”** Whenever we are confronted by our sin, whether it be by conviction of the Holy Spirit or by a brother or sister bringing it to our attention, we have the privilege of confession and repentance. Just because Simon professed faith, that didn’t mean there was no more to do. Not that there is any hint of salvation by works, but Simon is being called to sanctification and growth, The gospel encourages and empowers growth and change, and that is what Simon is being called to.

4. **v.24** *“Pray for me to the Lord, that nothing of what you have said may come upon me.”* - Simon’s repentance is pretty weak. But, I’m still wanting to give him the benefit of the doubt as a new believer. Do you see any problem with his answer to Peter? Peter confronted him about his heart, but Simon is focused on the consequences. Peter called him to change his ways (which is repentance), and Simon doesn’t want bad things to happen to him. This isn’t a model of repentance to follow.

1. Repentance involves a genuine sorrow for sin, specific sin, and realizing that every sin is an offense against God. Repentance involves a turning away from that sin, and dependence on the help of God the Holy Spirit to overcome and be free from that sin. And, it typically involves a personal prayer, rather than requesting someone else to pray for you, as Simon did.

**Transition:** But Simon’s rough start didn’t discredit the Samaritan church, or discourage the apostles. They continued their gospel-preaching.

### **Gospel-Preaching Continued (v.25)**

1. **v.25** *“Now when they had testified and spoken the word of the Lord...”* - The apostles didn’t make a direct shot back to Jerusalem, but they went about preaching to Samaritan villages along the way. There was new territory opened up to the gospel.

1. They knew this was their purpose and calling, the command and commission of Jesus - **Matthew 28:19–20** *“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”*

**Conclusion:** As we reflect on this passage this morning, it’s my hope that we’ve each been confronted and encouraged. Is there a group of people, or maybe one person in particular, that you’ve avoided sharing the truth of the gospel with, thinking they are too unlikely? Have stereotypes stood in your way? This passage would have us know that the gospel is powerful to save even the most unlikely. The gospel would call you to grow and change, to explore new territories for the heralding of the good news of Jesus Christ. This passage would have us lay hold of the privilege of repentance, whether we’re old in the faith or new, to see what a great gift we have, that by the gospel’s power we can turn away from sin and turn to Christ. The gospel encourages and empowers growth and change.

# Family

## Table Talk



July 8, 2018

### Family Discussion

1. Do you remember when you first believed in Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior? What changes took place in your life? Share with one another your experience.
2. Did you find you had a bond of faith with other believers; believers different from yourself in culture, age, interests and backgrounds? Why do you think this is?
3. By whose power do we grow and change as Christians? In this power, what are we to do wherever we are? Is this your mission, your purpose?
4. Spend time in prayer together for renewed zeal to share the Gospel to those perishing without salvation in Jesus Christ!

### GOD'S TRUTH

The Gospel encourages and empowers growth and change!

#### Key Verse

"But when they believed Philip as he preached good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women."

Acts 8:12 (ESV)

#### TABLE READING

Lead your kids into  
God's Word...

1. 2 Corinthians 5:17; Ephesians 1:13-14
2. Ephesians 2:19-22; Ephesians 4:1-6; 2 Corinthians 5:14-17
3. Acts 1:8; Matthew 28:19-20; Romans 1:16



#### Scripture Memory: Acts 9:31

"AND THESE WORDS THAT I COMMAND YOU TODAY SHALL BE ON YOUR HEART. YOU SHALL TEACH THEM DILIGENTLY TO YOUR CHILDREN, AND SHALL TALK OF THEM WHEN YOU SIT IN YOUR HOUSE, AND WHEN YOU WALK BY THE WAY, AND WHEN YOU LIE DOWN, AND WHEN YOU RISE. YOU SHALL BIND THEM AS A SIGN ON YOUR HAND, AND THEY SHALL BE AS FRONTLETS BETWEEN YOUR EYES. YOU SHALL WRITE THEM ON THE DOORPOSTS OF YOUR HOUSE AND ON YOUR GATES." - DEUTERONOMY 6:6-9 (ESV)