False Faith (Part 1)

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Preacher: Mike Scrivani

[0:00] Music Well, if you remember the last time we were in Acts, the church had faced its first major onslaught of persecution. There was some interrogation that went along with that, too.

And Stephen was a martyr, if you remember. And after that, that sparked widespread persecution against the church in Jerusalem, which caused many of those believers to be scattered. And one of those was Philip, and he went to Samaria. And so tonight we're going to read Acts 8, verses 9 through 24. And again, it'll take us a couple lessons to get through this, but we're going to see some of the fruits that resulted from that persecution. And also, what we're primarily going to be focused on is the first false convert in the history of the church.
And unfortunately, there have been many since, but Simon the magician, Simon the sorcerer. And so he is who we're going to focus on tonight. But first, let's read our text for the night, Acts chapter 8, verses 9 through 24.
But there was a man named Simon who had previously practiced magic in the city and amazed the people of Samaria, saying that he himself was somebody great. They all paid attention to him, from the least to the greatest, saying, This man is the power of God that is called great. And they paid attention to him, because for a long time he had amazed them with his magic. But when they believed Philip, as he preached good news about the kingdom of God in the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women. Even Simon himself believed, and after being baptized, he continued with Philip, and seeing signs and great miracles performed, he was amazed. Now when the apostles at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent to them Peter and John, who came down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit. For he had not yet fallen on any of them, but they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Now they laid their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit. Now 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 on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit. But Peter said to him, May your silver perish with you, because you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money. You have neither part nor lot in this matter, for your heart is not right before God. Repent therefore of this wickedness of yours, and pray to the Lord that if possible the intent of your heart may be forgiven you. For I see that you are in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity. And Simon answered,
Pray for me to the Lord that nothing of what you have said may come to me. Now when they had testified and spoken the word of the Lord, they returned to Jerusalem preaching the gospel to many villages of the Samaritans. So there on your handout, the main point of the passage or the part that we're going to look at tonight is that when the gospel is preached, it will produce genuine saving faith in some, and at the same time it will produce a false sense of salvation in others. When the gospel is preached, it will produce genuine saving faith in some, and at the same time it will produce a false sense of salvation in others. And of course, others will completely flat out reject it.
[3:53] Jesus said that the seed of the word will fall on good soil, and that it will also fall on bad soil. If you remember, he told the parable of the soils and the sower and the seed. He said that there would be branches who abide in the vine, and at the same time he said that there are those that will be cut off and burned. Jesus said that there would be those whom he'd entrust himself to, and he said that there would also be those whom he wouldn't entrust himself to. He said that there will be wheat, and there will be tares. So grab your Bible. Let's look at that parable in Matthew chapter 13, and beginning in verse 24. And I'm going to read through verse 30, and then we'll read verse 36 through 43. He put another parable before them, saying, The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field. But while his men were sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat and went away. So when the plants came up and bore

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grain, then the weeds appeared also. And the servants of the master of the house came and said to him, Master, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have weeds? He said to them, An enemy has done this. So the servant said to him, Then do you want us to go and gather them? But he said, No, lest in gathering the weeds you root up the wheat along with them. Let both grow together until the harvest, and at harvest time

I will tell the reapers, Gather the weeds first, and bind them in bundles to be burned. But gather the wheat into my barn. And so as often was the case, the disciples did not understand the point of Jesus' parable, so they asked for an explanation. And so if you jump down to verse 36 through 43, we see the Lord's explanation of this parable. Let's read that. Then he left the crowds and went into the house, and his disciples came to him, saying, Explain to us the parable of the weeds of the field. He answered, The one who sows the good seed is the son of man, the field is the world, and the good seed is the sons of the kingdom. The weeds are the sons of the evil one, and the enemy who sowed them is the devil. The harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are angels. Just as the weeds are gathered and burned with fire, so will it be at the end of the age. The son of man will send his angels, and they will gather up his kingdom, all causes of sin and all lawbreakers, and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their father. He who has ears, let him hear. So the question here is, what is a tare? I don't know if any of you guys are familiar with agriculture, even though I'm from Kansas. I know next to nothing about agriculture, right? There are a lot of wheat fields in Kansas, but if you showed me a tare next to wheat, I probably wouldn't be able to tell you what it is. I can now because I've prepared for this lesson, right? But otherwise, I would not. So darnel is what is being talked about here. It was hard to distinguish from wheat, especially when it was in the early growing stages. When they were both ripening and they were green, they looked a lot alike. And so it was hard to distinguish one from the other. However, when they reached maturity, it was easier to tell. In fact, I think that a tare, a wheat will bend, whereas a tare will stand, or this darnel will stand straight up.

And so that's also neat when we think about Jesus comparing the believers, his children, to the wheat, who are willing to bow in humility, whereas the tares are not bowing, right? They're prideful and they're unwilling to submit to Christ as Savior. But a way to sabotage an enemy's field was to sow this weed into their field. And Jesus used this parable to picture the way in which Satan seeks to deceive his church by mingling his children, Satan's children, in with God's children in his church. In some cases, it's nearly impossible to distinguish a true believer from a false convert. And though we may be deceived, the good news is that God never is. God is never deceived by these false converts. So there you have the picture. And so now I want to put you to the test.

One is wheat, and the other is a tare. So raise your hand if you think the picture on the right is wheat.

[8:39] Okay. Raise your hand if you think the picture on the left is wheat. All right. Well, I'm glad we did that. I thought... I heard you say right and you said left. Oh, sorry. I think the one on the right.

So you think the one on the right is wheat? Okay. So the one on the left is wheat, and the one on the right is a tare. See how hard that is? And so there's a reason why Jesus uses this illustration to show us that for us it's going to be really hard in some cases to tell a true believer from a false convert. But again, we can take peace in knowing that God knows. But as these plants ripen, right, as they mature or as they're supposed to mature, it's a lot easier to tell one from the other, such as the case also with true believers and false converts. Here's the other thing. Remember Judas Iscariot, right, who betrayed Jesus, and he knew all along that that's exactly what Judas was going to do? But to the rest of the world, they counted him as one of the 12. They saw him as a close follower and disciple of Jesus. Even the other disciples, if you remember, when Jesus was with them in that last supper in the upper room, and he said, one of you will betray me. Remember what they said?

What they didn't say is, oh, it's Judas. We all saw that coming, right? No, they kept saying one by one. Is it me, Lord? Is it me, Lord? Is it me, Lord? And so they didn't even know. They weren't even able at that point in time to distinguish the fact that Judas was a false convert and would be the one who would betray their Lord. The other thing about this is that it's heartbreaking. When you thought someone was truly saved and they end up displaying, or I should say not displaying, the fruits that are in keeping with salvation, and eventually they leave the church, they fall back into their old habits.

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It's not that they lost their salvation, but that they never truly were saved in the first place. They're like the seed that fell on the shallow, the rocky soil, and it came up, and it looked to be healthy, and then the sun came. When temptation or trials came, it scorched it and burned it up, proving that it was not truly planted in good soil, and such is the case with these people as well. And it's heartbreaking because as I was preparing the sermon, I thought of some people that I know, some people that, you know, have came forward for an invitation who I baptized, in fact, and then a month or two down the road, they disappear, and you find out what's going on.
You try to reach out to them, and lo and behold, they never truly believed in the first place. In other cases, there's people who are in the church for their life, and they appear to be a true believer, when in reality, they are a false convert. And again, we see that in Jesus talking about the end of days, when he comes back and he separates the right from the left, and there will be those who think that they know Jesus, and in reality, they never did. And Jesus says, depart from me, you who practice lawlessness, right? I never truly knew you. So how can we spot a false believer from a true believer? Should we start some kind of an inquisition, right? Maybe Tom can hook us up with a lie detector machine before, I don't know if you guys use those even, but maybe you can get one for us, and we can put every church member to the test, right?
[12:26] Does that sound like a good idea? That's not a good idea. We're not going to do that. So we're not going to start some kind of church inquisition here. But we are called, as the church, primarily to go and make disciples, with the understanding that it's the job of the angels. Again, according to Jesus' explanation of this parable, it's the job of the angels to sort out the wheat from the tares, and then ultimately it's the Lord's job to judge them accordingly, and that responsibility doesn't fall on us. However, we do have the Bible, and we do have this story of Simon the magician to give us deeper insight as to what motivates a false convert, and how we should respond to them when they are exposed as being such. So the first thing that we see here from verses 9 through 11 is that false converts have an incorrect understanding of their own goodness.

False converts have an incorrect understanding of their own goodness. Let me read verses 9 through 11 again. But there was a man named Simon who had previously practiced magic in the city and amazed the people of Samaria, saying that he himself was somebody great. They all paid attention to him from the least to the greatest, saying, this man is the power of God that is called great. And they paid attention to him because for a long time he had amazed them with his magic. So here Simon declared himself that he was somebody great, and somebody who he declared was also greatly to be praised. Now this is a lie that man has bought into ever since Adam and Eve's temptation in the garden of Eden by the evil serpent, right? Satan, who enticed them by his law, telling them that they could become like God. And that lie sounded so good to them that they exchanged the truth of God for the lie of Satan. And they believed that it was Satan who was the father of lies. They believed that it was Satan who was telling the truth. And that God, who is the source of all truth, was the one who was lying to them. And so Satan still does the same thing today. Men like to receive praise, not just from themselves, right? Not only do they like to praise themselves, but they also love to receive the praise from others. And along with that, they believe oftentimes that they are worthy of receiving such praise and such adoration from other people. Mankind, as a result of the fall, has an incorrect view, or an incorrect sense, I should say, of their own goodness. I was surfing the internet last week and a story popped up about the Pope. And he was at some kind of function where there was a lot of children. And they were asking him questions. And one little boy had a question, but he was shy and afraid to ask it. And so the Pope called him up and the boy whispered into his ear what his question was. And his question was that he was concerned about his father who was an atheist, whether or not his father was in heaven. And so the Pope had the little boy sit down and he told the rest of the children about the conversation that he had with this little boy, about this little boy's concern for his father who was an atheist. But he also had found out from this little boy that his father was a good father. He was a good man, right? He took care of his wife and his children. And so the Pope asked the kids this question. He said to them, do you think that God would turn such a man away? And the kids said no, but it wasn't loud enough for him.
And so he encouraged them to be bold and to be brave with their response. And so they all shouted, no, that God would not turn such a man away. And so, of course, the media ate this story up.

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They loved it because what unbeliever wouldn't? Wouldn't want to hear that it doesn't matter that you don't believe in God, that you're going to go to heaven. But you know, the other thing that happened as a result of the story, even though it gave people, unbelievers, warm, fuzzy feelings, not one of them came to salvation by hearing this story. And again, why would they? Because according to the Pope, who is the, what do they call him, the vicar of Christ or something like that, he's next to God. And if he says that it doesn't matter, that you don't believe in God, that all people go to heaven, then why would you need to ever repent of your sins? And if that's the case, then why did Jesus die? Right? So it's tragic. And now that's a difficult question. And that's a hard thing to say to a little boy. But in that case, is the loving thing to do to tell that boy a lie that contradicts scripture or to tell him the truth? The view that mankind is essentially good as a popularly held belief in our world. And many people develop a sense of security from this misheld belief. A lot of people think that salvation is dependent upon them being a quote unquote good person. But we see from scripture that no one is good, that no one seeks after God, that mankind is not essentially good, but that he is sinful. People who don't believe that they are sinners will see no need for a savior. People who don't believe they are sinners will see no need for a savior.
[18:35] Simon was full of himself and it was that that led him to his claim to be somebody great. He thought he truly was somebody great. He was not convicted by Philip's preaching of his need for a savior, but saw Philip as an opportunity to gain greater greatness for himself. Does that make sense? So he saw Philip as, hey, here's somebody that I can use to elevate myself further. So now the question that I asked is, well, what kind of magic did Simon practice? Here in the Greek, this referred originally to the to the lore of the Magi, the priests of the Medo-Persian era. It was a mixture of science and superstition combined with astrology, divination, which is like psychic readings or telling the future, and occultic practices. So this is the kind of magic that he was mixed up in. So you think of Simon as being less of a David Copperfield type of magician, you know, it's all smoke and mirrors, though maybe he used those type of things, but he's more of like an Alistair Crowley type. You guys know who he is?

Started the Church of Satan and he was an evil man. So he was more of that type of magician who meddled with dark spiritual forces than he was just a smoke and mirrors kind of a guy.
The people of the city gave Simon, it says there in verse 10, they paid attention to him from the least to the greatest. So all of them thought that he was this great person and they said about him that this man is the power of God. The title seems to indicate that Simon claimed some kind of deity for himself. How did they get this nickname for him? Well, he probably fed into it.
He told them or he would allude to the fact that he was some kind of super human person, that he had some kind of deity about him. In fact, many of the early church fathers, Justin Martyr being one of them, reported that Simon was the founder of Gnosticism and claimed to be God incarnate. So this man was, again, a very evil man and he was not for God as much as he was completely for himself.
As long as Simon thought he was God, he would never come to a proper understanding of himself and the reality of his fallen nature. So here I have, well, how do we, how do we bring this about for people, right? When somebody is so full of themselves, they don't need, they don't see their need for a savior. Have you guys ever heard of Ray Comfort before? Ray Comfort, he's a great evangelist. He's a little guy. I've never, I've never seen him in person, but you see him on, on, you know, like YouTube videos or whatever TV and he's, he's short and he's got a, he's real diminutive and he's got a high pitched Australian. I think he's Australian, isn't he? Australian accent.
[21:55] New Zealand. New Zealand. Okay. Okay. So he's this little itty bitty guy, this high pitched voice, but man, he is powerful for the Lord, especially with his evangelism. And so his strategy is a law before grace, a strategy whenever he's talking to an unbeliever and he's going to share the gospel with them. And it's, I think it's based off of Roman four, four 14, where there it says, for the law brings wrath, but where there is no law, there is no transgression. So he brings the law out to show people that they are guilty before a holy God. And so what he'll do is he'll ask them a series of questions, right? Have you ever stolen anything, even something as small as, you know, a piece of gum from the convenience store. And of course, everybody has stolen something, even if it's something itty bitty, even if it's something they stole from their brother or sister when they were a kid. And so the next thing he'll ask them is if they've ever told a lie. And again, if people are being honest with them, they say, yeah, of course, you know, I've told a lie who hasn't told a lie.

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And then he'll ask them if they've ever hated anybody in their heart. And of course, again, people confess if they're being honest. Yeah, I've hated people. And he says, well, the Bible says, Jesus says, if you've hated somebody in your heart, that's like murdering them.
So then he'll say by your own confession, you're a liar, you're a thief, and you're a murderer. And the person agrees with what he says, because right, they just confessed it to him. And so then he asked them, so what are you going to say when you stand before a holy God, admitting that you're all these things? What are you going to tell him as to why you should be in heaven or why he should let you in? Right? They're without excuse. And so law before grace in those situations, I think, are very good, especially when you're dealing with somebody who thinks that they're going to get into heaven based upon their own goodness, which the Bible says that's not how it works. The second thing we see here is that false converts have an incorrect understanding of salvation. They have an incorrect understanding of salvation, verses 12 through 13. I'll read those again. 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. Even Simon himself believed, and after being baptized, he continued with Philip and seeing signs and great miracles performed, he was amazed. So as people in this city were hearing the gospel, they were believing it, they were being baptized. And what
Simon saw was that his crowd, his following was diminishing before his eyes. So seeing that his popularity was dwindling and having a desire to be associated with this new movement and seeing the Holy Spirit's power working through Philip, Simon was motivated to believe, be baptized, and then to follow Philip around wherever he was going. As far as Philip knew at this point, Simon was the genuine article.
Now, maybe not. I mean, we don't want to read too much into it. But as far as we can tell from this point to Philip, Simon was the genuine article. However, his motivation for following Philip was not as pure as it seemed. So why did he follow Philip? Well, I think first of all, because again, he wanted to stay in contact with the people who had once followed him. These were his people. These were his cash cow, so to speak. And so he wanted to keep his tabs on them. And he wanted to stay near to them because these are the people that he used to make his living and to receive his praise from. So he wanted to keep his eye on them. He also had a professional interest in the power that Philip was wielding.
[25:55] He was entertained by what he saw Philip doing. And he probably, right, being some kind of magician, being some kind of a sorcerer, was trying to figure out how he was doing the things that he was doing.

And, you know, what's the trick here? You ever seen those magic shows where they reveal the secrets that the magicians use? And I used to love watching this. It's like, how do they do these things? And then they show you all of the tricks. And so maybe Philip thought if I look closely or Simon thought if I follow him closely enough, I can see how he's doing these things and I can copy his tricks.
Because, again, this man wasn't truly saved and he didn't understand that he was truly a sinner in need of God's grace. Thirdly, he wanted to acquire this power for himself. Magicians then, like they do today, they sell their tricks to one another. And so he was wanting to acquire this power for himself.
And that's primarily why he was following Philip around, because as we saw later on, he was offering money to acquire this power because he wanted to be able to do the things that the Holy Spirit was doing through Philip. And again, he didn't really understand that he was a sinner. He thought that these were tricks that he could buy with money. And here again is another proof for us that baptism, baptism, though very important, does not save anyone. Baptism does not bestow salvation upon anyone. And here we see again, case in point, of a man who claimed to believe and who was baptized, but who clearly was not saved. He proclaimed faith in Christ, but his life did not reveal that he'd undergone the internal transformation of any sort that coincides with genuine saving faith.
What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith, James says, but does not have works? Can that faith save him? If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, and one of you says to them, go in peace, be warmed and filled without giving them the things needed for the body? What good is that? So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. And then he continues by saying, even the demons believe and shudder, but they're not saved, right? They

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believe, they even tremble, but they don't love God. They do not seek God's righteousness. [28:33] They don't hate sin, which would be evidence of somebody who is truly saved. They agree with what God says about sin, right? Even though we're, we have this new nature, we have the old nature still, and they're at war with each other. As we walk with Christ, right? We should be, we should be obeying that new nature more than that old nature. It has less and less and less power over us, and we hate sin more and more and more, especially sin in our own life.

But if you don't hate sin, that would be an indication, certainly, that you're not truly saved. So, unfortunately, Simon was the first of many false converts. We should, so what should we do when a false convert is exposed? Now, again, sometimes we won't know until that very last day, and I've heard people say before, and I believe it, that on that last day, when we see who's on the right and who's on the left, there's going to be people on the side of salvation that we are going to be surprised by. At the same time, there's going to be people on the left side who are going to be there that we're going to be surprised by. We don't know, only Christ knows, but at some points in time, these false converts will be exposed. And so, what as a church should we do when that is the case? Well, Peter shows us what to do. Speak the truth in love, right? Notice Peter rebukes him. Speaking the truth in love, sometimes the loving thing is to offer harsh correction, is it not?
You look at a parent. I had a conversation with somebody the other day about another topic, but it deals with this, and I was talking about, well, what about being a loving parent, right?
Does that mean that you allow your children to make whatever choices they want to make? Unfortunately, in the world's eyes, that's becoming more the case, and I say no, like case in point. My son hates getting up for school in the morning, and he's just like me. I was the same way. I hated getting up for school in the morning, and I confess to you that I hated getting up for church in the morning as well for a kid. And I remember battles with my dad, especially on Sunday morning, where he'd rip the covers off of me and give me a countdown and say, you know, the car's going to start in two minutes, and if you're not out there by this time, we're leaving, and if you're not with us, you're not going to like what happens when I come back home, right?
[31:04] We're going to jump out of bed and get ready. And so I say, as a loving father, you know, was that mean for my dad to do that to me? Absolutely not, right? That was the loving thing to do.

It would be unloving for me if I went into Jack's room every morning and said, hey, buddy, it's time to go to school. You want to go to school today? And I'd tell you, five out of five, right? Five days in the school week, he's going to say, nope, I don't want to go to school today. And what if I just close the, okay, sleep well, right? And I would think, well, I'm loving my son. That's not love, right? That's not giving him what he needs. He needs to go to school so he can read and write and learn how to do math so he's not living in my house for the rest of his life. Amen. He's got to learn that responsibility. And so speaking the truth in love often is just like that. We are telling people not what they want to hear, but what they need to hear. And so Peter is telling Simon there what he needs to hear. He needs to hear that he's got to do the next thing, which is to urge him to repent. He urges him to repent.
What he's asked is terrible. And in fact, Peter's words there, we'll get into that maybe next week, are very harsh words. And he very harshly warns him to repent. Again, you can be harsh while speaking the truth in love, right? And so he's urging him to repent and then pray that God will forgive them. And so Peter says, you know, pray that God will forgive you. So what do we do when we come across these false converts and they're exposed? Again, we speak the truth in love.
We urge them to repentance and we pray for them and tell them that they need to pray as well, that God will forgive them for their sin. And next time we'll see the next, the following two things that we can see in a false convert that exposes the fact that they're not truly a believer.
Let's close in prayer. Lord God, thank you for your word. Lord, we thank you for salvation. And God, if it wasn't for you intervening in our lives, sending somebody to us with these good words, this good news of Jesus Christ, convicting our hearts of sin, leading us to repentance, Lord, and receiving Christ as our Lord and Savior, Lord, we'd be just as lost as anybody else.
[33:41] God, we understand that unfortunately, as you've made clear to us, there will be people within our churches who claim to be one of yours, who will claim to be a believer, but God, they aren't.

And we understand that for some people, we won't know until that last day when you expose that for all the universe to see, for all and everybody to see. But God, there are times, as we see here in Simon's case, where those false converts are exposed. And so, Lord, in those moments, we pray

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that you would give us wisdom, that we would be bold, that we would speak the truth to them in a loving way, that we would urge them to repent, that we would pray for them, and encourage them to pray as well, that they would be forgiven by you, Lord, that ultimately we would hope that they would experience the true conversion, Lord, the only type that causes us to be saved and have eternal life.
Lord, we thank you for who you are. Thank you for all that you do for us. And we ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.

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