

Abracadabra!

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[0 : 00] But if we could, this morning, with the Lord's help, and the Lord's enabling, if we could turn back to that portion of scripture that we read, the book of Acts, chapter 8, page 1104, Acts chapter 8, and if we read again at verse 9, Acts 8 at verse 9.

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.

You know, from what we read here in the book of Acts, it seems that people in the first century, people in the first century were as interested and as intrigued by magic as those in the 21st century. Because magic has attracted our attention for centuries with its illusions and its ability to trick our minds, or even our eyes, into believing that something miraculous is happening.

[1 : 31] But as you know, the entertainment of magic has progressed from the standard card trick, or pulling a rabbit out of a hat. It's progressed to things that seem to be much more and more miraculous.

Whether it would be the, well, it would be Harry Houdini untying himself, or Paul Daniels, we've seen him years ago. He was cutting people in half.

There was also David Blaine a few years ago, he was defying human ability. There's a man, Derren Brown, some people like to follow him because he could read your mind.

And there was also the newest man, the newest magician, was a man called Dynamo, who says he can walk through walls. These men, although they're entertaining to many and they attract the attention of crowds, they claim to be magicians, and some they even claim to have supernatural gifts.

And like Simon the magician here in Acts 8, some of them claim to have the power of God. But you know, a TV program I used to love watching, it was on TV years ago, maybe you saw it yourself, it was the Masked Magician.

[2 : 42] Where the Masked Magician, he would perform a magic trick, and then afterwards he would reveal how it was done. And many of the other magicians at the time, they all, they didn't like this Masked Magician because he was revealing all their secrets.

But what was fascinating to watch and discover was how the magicians performed their magic tricks. Because that's all it was. It was just a performance. Their so-called magic was a performance in order to entertain the crowds and attract attention.

And you know, that's actually the key word in this passage, the word attention. Attracting attention. Because we're told in verse 6 that when the gospel spread to the region of Samaria, we're told in verse 6, and the crowds with one accord paid attention to what was being said by Philip when they heard him and saw the signs that he did.

But we're also told then in verse 10 that before the gospel even arrived in Samaria, this man, Simon the Magician, he had practiced magic, and we're told that he bewitched the people, portraying to them that he was someone great.

And in verse 10 we're told 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.

[4 : 11] They paid attention. They paid attention. And that's the key word in this passage, because what magic really does is it entertains the crowds.

And it attracts our attention. And what we'll see in this passage, that it attracts attention away from the one person who has all authority in heaven and on earth.

That is, of course, Jesus Christ. But you know what I find fascinating? Is the word that's often used with magicians.

I'm sure you'd know the word, abracadabra. Maybe it's not so much used now. But you'd often hear a magician, they'd have their top hat, and they'd tap the hat, and wave their wand, and say abracadabra, and they'd pull a rabbit out of a hat.

But you know what's interesting, is that the word abracadabra, is actually an old Hebrew word, which means Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Abracadabra, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

[5 : 20] And what I want us to see this morning, is that the people in Samaria, they came to know abracadabra. They came to know and experience God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

And they came to know abracadabra, not through the magic of Simon. They came to know it through Philip preaching the gospel. And that's what I want us to see this morning.

I want us to see abracadabra, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, working here in this passage. And I just want us to consider this passage under three simple headings. Miracles, magic, and mercy.

Miracles, magic, and mercy. So we'll look first of all at miracles. Look at verse four. We're told, Now those who were scattered went about preaching the word.

Philip went down to the city, or a city, of Samaria, and proclaimed to them the Christ. And the crowds, with one accord, paid attention to what was being said by Philip when they heard him and saw the signs that he did.

[6 : 26] Now, when we considered last time the opening verses of chapter eight, we saw that the early church, they experienced fierce persecution from the Jews. Prior to Stephen's powerful and thought-provoking speech, the persecution of Christians, you could say, it was kept secret.

It was kept to a minimum. But when Stephen was stoned to death, there arose this great persecution of the Christian church. And one man in particular, we're told of him in verse one, this man Saul, he was trying to destroy the church.

And he was breaking down doors. He was entering every Christian home, dragging men and women out, and throwing them into prison. And for fear of their lives, the Christian church, they scattered.

They scattered out into the regions of Judea, and then further out into Samaria. But remarkably, through it all, the gospel was beginning to spread. And this scattering, we mentioned it before, this scattering of the Jews, or Jewish Christians, from Jerusalem to Judea to Samaria, it's often been called the Diaspora, or the Dispersion, where Christians were dispersed and displaced outside Jerusalem, into these places of Judea, Samaria, and even beyond.

But as we said before, the scattering of Christians into these regions, it was the fulfillment of Jesus' promise to the early church.

[7 : 55] Jesus said to the early apostles, he said to them, when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, you will be my witnesses, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, to the uttermost parts of the earth.

And that's what's happening here. As the persecution rages in these places, believers were being scattered out into these regions. But you know, the most important part was that they were bringing the gospel with them.

These committed Christians, although they were being persecuted for their faith, they were committed to living out the gospel of Jesus Christ. And one such man, we're told here, was Philip. Now, Philip was one of the seven deacons who were ordained in Acts chapter 6. It wasn't Philip the apostle, because we're told in verse 1 that the apostles stayed in Jerusalem.

But Philip the deacon, or Philip the evangelist, as he's often known, Philip went down into a city in Samaria, and we're told in verse 4 that he proclaimed to them the Christ.

[9 : 04] Now, although that may not be an earth-shattering statement to our eyes, but you know, for those who read the book of Acts in the first century, just after it had been written, those who read this book and reading that a Jew, Philip, went into Samaria, proclaiming to the Samaritans that the Messiah had come, that was massive.

Because when we hear the word Samaritan, we often think immediately, well, Good Samaritan, the parable of the Good Samaritan. We think of the Samaritan's charity that helps people.

We often think of Samaritans in a positive way. But for the Jews, the Jews hated the Samaritans. Even though Samaria was just the neighbouring region to Israel, the Jews and the Samaritans, they never got on with one another.

There was this hatred and animosity between them. It was a long history of hatred towards one another. And you know, their bitterness between the Jews and the Samaritans, it was actually a family feud.

Because the Samaritans, they were descendants of Joseph. Joseph who had the multicoloured coat. But you know, the hostility between the Jews and the Samaritans, it arose around the time of the exile.

[10:28] When the Jews, they experienced exile, they went off into Babylon under God's judgment. And while they were off in Babylon experiencing God's judgment, the Samaritans were still at home.

And they were intermarrying with all the foreign nations. And they were adopting all these foreign religions. But when the Jews returned to Israel and they tried to rebuild their temple, the Samaritans tried to stop them.

The Samaritans tried to get in their way. But they couldn't stop them. And so the Samaritans, they built their own temple and they worshipped in their own way. And after a while, it created this long history of animosity.

And it escalated to the point that the Samaritans were regarded by the Jews as the vilest part of the human race.

The Jews hated the Samaritans. And you know, when you understand the hatred that existed between these two people groups, these people groups who were related, they were even neighbours with one another.

[11:32] When we understand that Philip, a Jew, went into Samaria to preach the gospel, what we're seeing there is actually the power of the gospel in transforming hearts and lives.

Because when Philip, the evangelist, went into Samaria preaching the Christ, we're told there the crowds paid attention to him. And there's the key word in the passage, the crowds paid attention. They listened. The crowds took heed of Philip's message. Because the message that Philip proclaimed is this Jesus is the Christ.

Philip the evangelist, he proclaimed the gospel that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. And no doubt, Philip, he would have told the Samaritans that this Jesus, he has all authority in heaven and on earth.

Philip would have told them that the Christ, he has authority. He taught with authority, not like the scribes. He would have told them that the Christ had authority over sickness because he cleansed lepers and he made the blind see.

[12:37] He made the deaf hear and the mute to speak. Philip would have explained that he had authority over creation because he could calm the seas, he could walk on water, he could feed 5,000 people.

Philip would have even assured the Samaritans that this Jesus, who is the Christ, has authority over forgiveness, over sin because he can forgive sin.

Philip would have preached the Christ to them. But you know, the question that it always leaves me with is, what was it that attracted the Samaritans to Philip's preaching?

What was it that made the Samaritans pay attention to what this Jew, Philip, had to say to them, Samaritans, about the Christ? What was it that attracted the Samaritans to Philip's preaching?

Because as we said, the Jews and the Samaritans, they hated one another. So why would they bother listening to Philip? Because regardless of how good and how eloquent a preacher Philip may have been, the Samaritans wouldn't have wanted to listen to a word he had to say.

[13:45] But you know, I believe it was the fact that Philip loved his neighbours so much that he preached the Christ to them.

The Jews and the Samaritans, they both had the first five books of the Old Testament. They all had the Torah. They had the law. And within the law, they were given the greatest commandment.

Love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength and your neighbour as yourself. And so what attracted the attention of the Samaritans to the message of the Gospel?

It wasn't the outward performance of being healed. It was the inward reality of knowing the love of Christ through the Christian. It was knowing the love of Christ through the witness of a Christian.

My friend, what attracted the attention of the Gospel was the love of the Christian. Because the Gospel, you know, it's more meaningful. And the Gospel is more personal when it's lived out in love. [14:53] And my Christian friend, that's what our family and neighbours in this community need to see and know about us. They should know our love for Jesus.

And they should know our love for them as lost sinners. Because, you know, what has often destroyed the work, witness and worship of the Gospel is a lack of love.

The lack of love from Christians. The lack of love of Christians towards one another and towards other people. But it's Jesus who says to us, a new commandment I give to you, that you love one another as I have loved you.

We're to love our neighbour as ourselves. But Jesus says, no, no, more. You're to love your neighbour as I have loved you. Which is sacrificial love. And Jesus says, by this, by this love all people will know that you are my disciples if you have love towards one another.

It's by love that they will know the Gospel. And you know, when I was leaving the Free Church College, it was Professor Bob Aykroyd, he gave me the best advice for being a Christian and for being a minister.

[16:11] He said, Murdo, love Jesus and love people and let the Holy Spirit do the rest. Love Jesus and love people and let the Holy Spirit do the rest.

And you know, my unconverted friend, I hope and pray that you know that I love Jesus. But I hope and pray that you also know that I love and have a concern for you.

And my longing is that you'll be saved. And I long that you'll come to know and experience as we were saying earlier, abracadabra. My longing is that you'll come to know the love of God, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit in your life.

that's what I want to know more than anything else, that you'll come to know Jesus for yourself. And so miracles and secondly, magic.

Magic. That's what we see in verse 9. 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.

[17:22] 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.

Now even though there was joy in the cities of Samaria because of Philip's preaching and Philip as we said he had attracted their attention by showing them the love of Christ in his own life and also the love of Christ for them as lost sinners.

But we're told here that in verses 9 to 11 we're told we're told that for a long time before this the people of Samaria had been amazed and they were amazed by this Simon the Magician.

Simon the Magician he had performed illusions and he had practiced magic and he bewitched the people. Simon had convinced the crowds of their need to be entertained by him and have their attention directed towards him.

and you know with his ever increasing entertainment business and attracting the attention of the crowds we're told that Simon sought to make a name for himself.

[18:33] He told the people of Samaria that he's someone great he's someone good he's someone who is worth coming to watch and someone who is worth being entertained by.

And we're told in verse 10 that the people of Samaria they fell for it. They fell for it. We're told in verse 10 they all paid attention to him from the least to the greatest and they all confessed this man has the power of God this man is great.

And we're told in verse 11 they paid attention to him because for a long time he had amazed them with his magic. And there's the key words again. It's used twice in these verses.

They paid attention to him. They paid attention to Simon the Magician and they were entertained by him. And like it is today the attraction takes away our attention from Jesus.

The attraction takes away our attention from Jesus. Because you know my friend there are many people today who want to make a name for themselves and they want to be famous and they want to be known and they want to be loved by everyone and attract their attention.

[19:49] And in order to make a name for themselves these people they'll seek to attract our attention and they'll fill our time and they'll entertain our minds and they'll distract our thoughts.

And they'll seek to do it either through the medium of magic music film TV sport or even social media or even hobbies themselves.

Now I'm not saying that any of these things are wrong in and of themselves but the danger of them the danger of them is that they attract our attention and fill our time and entertain our minds and distract our thoughts from the one thing needful.

The one thing needful. And you know my friend I need not remind you that the one thing needful in our life is not entertainment but eternal life.

The one thing needful in our life is not entertainment but eternal life through Jesus Christ. And that's the message the Samaritans heard from Philip the Evangelist.

[20 : 58] We're told in verse 12 when they believed Philip as he preached the good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus they were baptized both men and women.

We're told they that the Samaritans they committed their life to Jesus Christ because when they heard the good news of the kingdom they realized very very quickly that eternal life is of more value to them than being entertained.

When the Samaritans heard the gospel what had previously attracted their attention and filled their time and entertained their minds and even distracted their thoughts it all paled into insignificance in comparison to the promise of eternal life.

In other words they came to love and know Jesus more than all their entertainment. They came to love Jesus more than their entertainment and the wonderful thing is now that Jesus is attracting their attention.

Jesus is filling their time. Jesus is entertaining their mind. Jesus is distracting their thoughts. when they heard the gospel everything else became irrelevant and meaningless because they were taken up with Jesus.

[22 : 18] And you know is that not how Paul the apostle described his experience when he became a Christian. He said what things were gained to me those I count as lost for the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus as my Lord.

that's the testimony of the Christian. That's how you know you're a Christian when you're taken up with Jesus because everything else it pales into insignificance in comparison to knowing Jesus as your Lord and Saviour.

My friend you know that you're a Christian when the matters of eternal life are more important than your entertainment. entertainment. You know you're a Christian when the matters of eternal life are more important than your entertainment.

You know that you're a Christian when you love Jesus more than magic, more than music, more than film, more than TV, more than sport, more than social media, more than your hobbies.

Nothing wrong with any of these. Absolutely nothing wrong with any of these in and of themselves. But a Christian loves Jesus more. a Christian loves Jesus more.

[23 : 35] A Christian puts Jesus first in everything. A Christian has Jesus as the priority in their life. A Christian has Jesus as Lord over their life and King upon the throne of their heart.

A Christian is committed in their character, conduct and conversation. A Christian is always concerned about the work, witness and worship of the Lord.

That's a Christian. That's what a Christian is. And so my friend, are you a Christian? Are you a Christian?

Are the matters of eternal life more important than your entertainment? Do you remember what Jesus asked Peter beside the Sea of Galilee?

He pointed to the boats and he said, do you love me more than these? And you know my friend, Jesus is asking you the same question today. Do you love me more than your entertainment?

[24 : 45] Do you love me more than these? Do you love me more than these? Samaritans? Do you know the beautiful thing about the conversion and the commitment of these Samaritans?

Is the reality was they saw themselves as unclean and unworthy of salvation. For centuries the Jews had told them salvation belongs to the Jews.

The Samaritans, you're excluded. But with the conversion and commitment of the Samaritans here, we're reminded that there's no one who is too unclean or too unworthy to be saved.

There's no one who is beyond hope and beyond redemption. You know my friend, this is the glory of the gospel that you're not too unclean that Jesus can't cleanse you.

And you're not too unworthy that Jesus can't save you. The wonder is that the gospel calls us, the gospel calls us to to be washed and worthy not before we come to Jesus, but by coming to Jesus. [26 : 00] The gospel doesn't call us to be washed and worthy before we come to this Jesus. The gospel calls us to come to Jesus in order to be washed and in order to be made worthy.

And so the question is not, are you good enough? it's never been that question. The question has never been, are you good enough? The question has always been, are you bad enough? Do you see your sin? Do you see there's a problem? Do you see your need of a saviour? Are you bad enough? And if you see your problem, then you need to seek forgiveness. You need to seek salvation. My friend, you need mercy. You need mercy. That's what was on offer to Simon the magician. And that's what's on offer to you today.

Mercy. That's what I want us to consider lastly. Mercy. Miracles, magic, and mercy. Mercy.

[27 : 05] Look at verse 14. 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. Then 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 whom I lay my hands on may receive the Holy Spirit. But Peter said to him, may your silver perish with you because you thought that you could obtain the gift of God with money. When Philip the Evangelist, when he preached the gospel in Samaria, many of the Samaritans, we've seen that, they were converted and they committed their life to Jesus Christ.

And we're told that they received the word of God and they were baptized, but they hadn't yet received the Holy Spirit. And so Peter and John, they go down from Jerusalem into Samaria to lay hands on these new Christians so that they will receive the Holy Spirit.

Now, at this point, we may question, should the church still be laying hands on new converts so that they will receive the Holy Spirit? But what we have to understand is that the early church wasn't establishing a normative practice for receiving the Holy Spirit.

[28 : 34] This wasn't going to be the norm for the church. But as the Samaritans were receiving the Holy Spirit, it was actually marking this momentous occasion in the life of the early church because it was a clear indicator that the gospel had now spread.

The gospel church had grown from its beginnings in Jerusalem out into Judea and now out into Samaria and it was going to go further.

So receiving the Spirit or the laying on of hands was just simply a sign that the church was growing. But what we see here is that even though many other Christians they were converted and they committed their life to Jesus Christ, Simon the magician was still careless about his soul.

We're told in verse 13 that even though Simon believed in Jesus and he was baptized, he wasn't converted or committed to Jesus.

He was still careless about his soul. And Simon was still careless with his soul because even though his magic business had now collapsed because the gospel had arrived in Samaria, we're told that Simon was willing to pay the apostles in order to receive this new phenomenon of touching people and the Spirit coming upon them.

[29 : 56] And we're told in verse 18, when Simon saw that the Spirit was given through the laying on of hands, he offered the money. He says, give me this power also that anyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit.

And the sad thing is that even though Simon believed in Jesus intellectually and even though Simon was baptized, Simon saw the arrival of the Holy Spirit not as a gift but as a business opportunity. there are many people like that today. They were in town recently, a few months ago, there were clairvoyants there, fortune tellers, telling people about their future, speaking to the dead, finding answers to questions that the living wanted to know.

There are people who are even tele-evangelists who say they can heal people. people. It's all nonsense. It's all nonsense.

It's all here in Scripture. The answer to everyone's worries or thoughts about eternity and death and the future, it's all here in Scripture.

[31 : 07] And what people need is not money, it's mercy. It's mercy. That's what we're seeing here. That's what Simon needed. We're told in verse 20, 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.

Peter addressed Simon directly, saying that his baptism and his belief in Jesus was not enough to save him. Simon needed to repent of his sin.

Simon needed to pray to the Lord for forgiveness, because that and that alone will lead to genuine conversion and commitment to Jesus Christ. And you know, my friend, like Simon, your baptism and your intellectual belief in Jesus Christ, and I know that you'll all tell me you believe in Jesus. Jesus. You all believe in Jesus. I'm not trying to convince any atheist in here. You all believe in Jesus, but it's not enough to save you.

[32 : 26] Because as the Bible reminds us, even the devils of hell believe in Jesus. So you're only on the same path as them at the moment. What you need to do is what Peter says here.

repent of your sins. Turn away from your sin. Turn to Jesus for salvation. Turn from the entertainment that's distracting your mind and turn to Jesus for eternal life.

You need to turn to the Lord and seek the one thing needful. This Jesus who saves to the uttermost. You need to seek him and you need to seek him today.

You know, we don't know if Simon was converted. We don't even know if he was, if he actually committed his life to Jesus Christ. We're not told. But you know, I love how he responded to Peter when Peter rebuked him.

He asked Peter to pray for him. It says in verse 24, Simon answered, pray for me. Pray for me to the Lord that nothing of what you have said may come upon me.

[33 : 36] Simon asked Peter to pray for him. But Simon also had to pray for himself. And you know, my unconverted friend, I can promise and I can assure you today that as a congregation, we are earnestly praying for your salvation.

I can assure you today that there are people probably sitting near you or sitting beside you who are praying for you every day. We're praying that you'll repent, praying that you'll believe in the gospel, praying that you'll commit your life to Jesus Christ, praying that you'll be converted.

We're praying for you. We're praying that you'll come to know and experience abracadabra, that you'd come to know the love of God, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in your life.

We're praying for you. But the thing is, you need to pray for yourself. You need to go home today, and you need to go on your knees, and you need to ask the Lord to save you.

You need to repent and say, as the publican did, God, be merciful to me, a sinner.

[35 : 01] God, be merciful to me, a sinner. You need to commit your life to Jesus Christ, because that's the only way you will ever come to know and experience abracadabra, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Miracles, magic, and mercy. My friend, you need mercy. You need mercy, and you're only going to find it when you come to Jesus.

May the Lord bless these thoughts to us. Let us pray. O Lord, our gracious God, we give thanks to thee that the Lord one who shows us mercy, a God who does not deal with us as we deserve, but is so gracious towards us.

And Lord, we pray that all for those in here who have not yet bowed the knee before thee, that they would bow even in the silence of their own room and say, God, be merciful to me, a sinner.

And Lord, how we need to be saved, that we would see that the entertainment of this world, it is only passing us by, it is fleeting, and it will not last.

[36 : 29] But what's on offer in the gospel today is eternal life. Eternal life that takes us not only through life, but also through the grave itself. And we thank thee, Lord, that it is only found in Jesus Christ.

Help us to come to him. Help us to come humbly. Help us to come and be obedient to the call of the gospel. O Lord, do us good, and we pray. Speak to us, we ask, for we ask it in Jesus' name, and for his sake.

Amen. We're going to bring our service to a conclusion by singing the words of Psalm 51. Psalm 51.

It's in the Sing Psalms version on page 67. Psalm 51. We're singing from the beginning down to the verse mark 9.

Psalm 51 in the Sing Psalms version. And in this Psalm, David, he is asking for mercy. If you don't know how to pray and ask the Lord for mercy, I can speak from experience.

[37 : 48] Psalm 51 is a wonderful psalm to pray. Because David says here, O my God, have mercy on me. In your steadfast love I pray.

In your infinite compassion, my transgressions wipe away. Cleanse me from iniquity. wash my sin away from me. So we'll sing Psalm 51 from the beginning down to the verse mark 9.

And we'll stand to sing, if you're able, to God's praise. O my God, have mercy on me.

In your steadfast love I pray. in your infinite compassion my transgressions wipe away.

Cleanse me from iniquity. Wash my sin away from me.

[38 : 55] for I know my own transgressions I can't see my sinful plight.

You, you only I've offended and done evil in your sight.

so your words are verified and your verdict justified.

From my birth I have been sinful such the nature I received.

sinful from my first beginning in my mother's womb conceived.

[40 : 02] Truth you look for in my heart wisdom to me you impart.

cleanse with this of purify me I'll be whiter than the snow.

Let the bones you crush be joyful may I joy and gladness know.

From all my failure hide your face blot out all my wickedness.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ the love of God the Father and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all now and forevermore. Amen.