

1929 - REVIVAL & SIMON SORCERER - Acts 8:1-25

PRELIMS. Stephen has just been martyred – for his faith in Christ. Mention is made of a young man named Saul who kept watch over the clothes which the stone-throwers threw down at his feet!

CHRISTIAN REVIVAL

No one, but no one, can destroy the Church of Jesus Christ! Saul tried to destroy the church - but he could not! When people try to do so, they are being counter-productive – the reverse happens, the Church grows! NT testifies and history! Even in the past 100yrs! Stott reminds us in 1949 in China, the Communists defeated the National Government. 637 China Inland Missionaries had to leave. It seemed a disaster. Within 4yrs, 286 of them were redeployed in South-East Asia and Japan, while the national Christians in China who were under severer persecutions began to multiply and now total 30 or 40 times the original number who left! From 637 to 25,480!! That's only CIM!

there arose...a great persecution against the church (2) is actually great news! The problem today in the West is, do the authorities consider we Xns enough of a threat to their present way of life?

A time comes when it is right to move out! *When they persecute you in one place flee to another* (Mat 10:23) is the **command** of our Lord! And so they did here, they **scattered** because of the persecution! God never intends us to stand still and be **killed**! Despite, no home, no income, the one thing that consumed them was the gospel *they were preaching the Word* (4) The original is the root for evangelising! **Lloyd-Jones** translates as 'gossiping the gospel'! The **common Xns** gossiped! That is when you know there is revival – when it is on the people's lips, when people, the public, can't help talking about Jesus *out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks* (Mat 12:34)!

Now we are told that *Philip went down to the city of Samaria* (5) Did God tell him to go? Son't know! In [v26] and angel told Philip to 'go south to Gaza'! **APP** Not often, but sometimes! He took a risk by going there! The Jews had no dealings with the Samaritans! Hostility for centuries.

Important principle: As at Ephesus revival [Acts 19:23cf], so here in Samaria: You **cannot force** people to believe what they are not personally convicted of! The Jewish authorities here tried to force the people to believe that Jesus was an impostor! But they **could not**! Despite the fact that the authorities **dragged off** men and women and put them in prison (3) it **did not change the minds** of the people. Yet when Philip **proclaimed to them the Christ** without any pressure, the people believed! That is why it is important that we **pray for the Holy Spirit** to work in people's **hearts**!

The **world's method** (Dictator or Government) to bring about obedience is: first demand it; then intimidate/threaten, then **legislate/prosecute**, then persecute, then destroy! Ie, top down pressure - as in Communism, force the people **to believe in their philosophy** telling them it is good and best for them! It is the false shepherd who comes and steals your liberty your funds, and finally kills and destroys [John 10] **APP** thus legislation re Gays in Parliament - forcing us!

Biblical change is not 'top-down' but bottom up! **Convert** the **masses** of people. Change the people in **heart**! Spread the word. Politicians follow the people's wishes! In a godly democracy the people will elect a godly man to rule over them! Thus important to obey X's command to preach the gospel to every creature. Convert more and more people - **politicians are not interested in minority views**!! This is the Church's task to preach in a positive way **the gospel** of Jesus Christ!

SIMON'S FAITH

We are now introduced to a man who had faith - Even Simon himself believed and after being baptised he continued with Philip (13) My friends, you can believe and yet not be saved! The devils believe and even tremble! It is a new heart you need. You need to be **regenerated**! Simon, note, **wanted** this thing that Philip had. He was **fascinated** with it and **desired** it.

But it was for the wrong reason. Simon wanted Xnity so that he could continue his business and keep his followers! Simon did not want the Holy Spirit for **sanctification!** Simon was a magician/sorcerer. He had a great following *they all paid attention to him from the least to the greatest* (10) He was even considered to be a god with divine power! The people said *This man is the power of God that is called Great* (10) (Lit: The Mega Dunamis of God) he dealt in the **spirit world** and **was able** to do amazing things! Still happens to day! Like the Egyptian magicians, they had power from the devil! The devil has power!

The crowds followed Simon and were amazed at what he did, but when Philip came on the scene, the crowds left Simon and started following Philip because he performed *signs and great miracles* (13) Of course Philip did something else! *he preached (evangelidzo) good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ!* Ultimately people **want more** than just tricks & amusements! People need something with meaning/purpose! Our TV programmes which may entertain us for a while need to be replaced with something more 'edifying' - something more substantial!

Philip's preaching provided **hope** – something with **good news** for the future! It amazes me how many people are now believing in the supernatural! On one of the TV phone-in programmes recently I was surprised to see how many people believed in angels – represented as a feather/dove – all because something good happened immediately afterwards! And the hosts were all excited and believed it too! People are actually looking for something spiritual - to give them hope! People have no problem believing the supernatural – just God's supernaturalism! Satan has prejudiced our minds against **God** and **His** miracles! Man has actually a **penchant** for the **supernatural!**

Here we see the **unity** of the Church - when the apostles in Jerusalem heard *that Samaria had received the Word of God* (14). They '**felt**' an **affinity with them** in their new experience! so they wanted to **encourage** and **help** them! Note: they did not simply 'believe Philip', but *received the Word of God!* Philip **offered** them something - Jesus Christ! It was not Philip's word they received but God's Word! In their love and interest in them, they decided to send *to them Peter and John* (14) - and they were the **two most experienced and best men** they had!! **How lovely!!**

LESSONS from SIMON

- (1) there will always be a **counterfeits!** Where there is the real thing, counterfeits will arise!
- (2) Some people come to church and make a profession without realising what they are doing. In the **hope** things will get better. For some social, psychological, religious reason! Simon came for power *Give me this power also so that anyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the holy Spirit* (19) Whom Simon understood was a power by which he could continue attracting people **his campaign of wonder working!**
- (3) Salvation is a **heart work** your **heart** is not right before God (21) we all need a **new** heart - not a heart of atone (which can be broken), but a brand new heart of **flesh!**
- (4) We need to be delivered from the **dominion of sin!** Simon was still *in the bond of iniquity* ie, in the grip/bond of sin! Salvation and conversion is being delivered from sin! His prayer was not for salvation but to **escape punishment** - so that **nothing** of what you have said may come upon me (24)
- (5) He did **not repent** - Peter recognised this *repent therefore of this wickedness of yours* (22)
- (6) There **was still mercy** for Simon. The gospel was still relevant after he walked away! Although unlikely, yet Christ **will receive repentant** people back - as long as they come back! Peter did not condemn Simon to hell - but still held out the gospel to him!