

Father God, we come to you this day grateful and thankful and worshipful. We know to worship you at all times and through all things. We know that you are the author and perfecter of our faith. We know that you are creator, you are our redeemer and your Holy Spirit. Dear Lord, you are our sustainer. We ask you now to take your place as the pastor, the teacher of this church and the church universal. Lord, let your word pour forth. Let it be understood. Let it grow your disciples into the people that you know they can be. Let it begin here, this day, at Church Town. In the name of Jesus, the Christ of God, we pray. Amen. As we transition to the word here, as I mentioned, I want to talk to you about two different people today that you'll find in Acts 8. The back story is that the church now is being persecuted and the disciples are moving out. Philip ends up in Samaria and he ends up preaching to the Samaritans. People begin to believe. Now, these are people that are steeped in Jewish tradition and all of that. We're not exactly out in Corinth or in Rome yet, but we're up in Samaria and these folks, even given their history, even given the tensions between them and the "pure" Jews, if you will, they begin to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. So Peter and James, they hear about this. They head on up and do some more preaching there. And the power of God's Holy Spirit comes upon those who believe. I want to talk about, and I think, well I know, that the Lord put these two examples back to back, in Scripture as they are, as lessons to us as individuals and to us as a church regarding God's Holy Spirit and His power in our lives and how we receive it, how it is used, how He uses it through us. So beginning in verse 9, now you have the back story of all the preaching and all of that, a man named Simon had been a sorcerer there for many years. So okay, I'm not going to preach the way through it, but the context is important. Stop laughing, Ryan, I'm not going to preach the way through it. But he's a sorcerer. So you know that he really likes his power, whether it is smoke and mirrors or whether it is demonic, whatever the case may be, he is identified as a sorcerer. So he is going to be very interested, don't you think, in the power of the Holy Spirit? It may be amazing to people of Samaria at claiming to be someone great. Everyone from the least to the greatest often spoke of him as the Great One, the power of God. They listened closely to him because for a long time he had astounded them with his magic. But now the people believe 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. Then Simon himself believed and was baptized. He began following Philip wherever he went. He was amazed by the signs and great miracles Philip performed. We have a not cut and dried situation, right? A man who is a sorcerer, they call him the Great One. He evidently performs magic and people are astounded by the things that he can do. But he hears Philip preaching. He sees the signs and wonders of Almighty God and he decides to profess his faith and be baptized as well. I wonder why. So we're going to skip forward to what I said. The apostles in Jerusalem, they heard, they sent Peter and John there, sorry, and then they arrived and they started preaching and the Holy Spirit came upon all of the people. Verse 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. Let me have this power too, he explained, so that when I lay my hands on people, they will receive the Holy Spirit. But Peter replied, "May your money be destroyed with you for thinking God's gift can be bought. You can have no part in this for your heart is not right with God. Repent of your wickedness and pray to the Lord. Perhaps he will forgive your evil." Those are strong words. Perhaps he will forgive your evil. Peter, as we know, has these moments gifted by God of clarity and discernment and he sees right into, as Jesus did, right into the heart of what people are saying and the motivations behind them. Now, like I said, it's not a cut and dry situation. It's not as though this totally wicked man remained totally wicked and then tried to buy God's power from Peter. No, he professes to believe. He professes to believe. He was baptized on a profession of faith. We just did that last week, on a profession of faith. And you're baptized. And now Peter says, "Repent of your wickedness for your heart is not where it needs to be." Repent, perhaps God will forgive you of your evil. Those are strong words. If somebody came to me with an issue from the congregation and said, "I've done this or I've done that or I've fought this or whatever," and I said, "Well, you should repent. Maybe God will forgive you." How would you feel? I write, I know. It must have

been something really bad. So for Peter to say this, having discernment given to him from the Holy Spirit is obviously there for the impact to Simon, of course, and for the impact for us today. I can see that you are full of bitter jealousy and are held captive by sin. He can see that by the power of the Holy Spirit. "Pray to the Lord for me," Simon exclaimed, "that these terrible things you said won't happen to me." After testifying and preaching the word of the Lord in Samaria, Peter and John returned to Jerusalem. They stopped in many Samaritan villages along the way to preach the good news. I added that part because we don't know what happened next. We don't know what happened with Simon next. We don't know how Peter and John decided they were going to handle this situation. We don't know how Philip tried to handle this situation. Scripture leaves that there for us to absorb and understand. We're going to try to understand it more as we look at Simon set against the Ethiopian prince. Okay, I'm trying to gather myself back up here and refocus because we were talking about Simon who wanted the power of God's Holy Spirit for all the wrong reasons. There are a lot of red flags going into his conversion and there then was one huge red flag coming out of his conversion. Even though he was baptized on a profession of faith, there is a stark indication here, not subtle at all, that you may see in the church today, there is subtle behavior toward this direction. He says, "Give me this power." How much does it cost? Well, we can do an entire sermon on that. The cost of discipleship and everything that Jesus speaks about, the cost of discipleship and the rich young ruler and all of those different things. When he has something in mind, he cannot see past the demonic, if you will. He can't see past the natural, which is the demonic. He can't see past the transactional. I give you something, you give me something. But we have nothing to offer the Lord but our sin and our humility and he gives us his grace. That's not transactional. He forgives us, we have nothing to forgive him for. And Simon can't get, he can't wrap his mind around this way of thinking. A lot of people can't because our daily activities are transactional in nature and it's very difficult. This is one reason why it's taught that Jesus Christ will be the salvation of many and the stumbling block of many because he can't get past this idea of human power and human self-worth. And I can take the Lord's power and I will do even better things with it than he ever would. Or, that's incredibly arrogant and egotistical, or completely wicked, I will take the Lord's power and I will build an empire out of it. I will make a ton of money and I will multiply church, I will do all of these things in the name of the Lord. Just give me his power. And so Simon's way out of whack here. And I know that God's Holy Spirit wrote it this way so that we can see that stark contrast. You don't have to read into any subtleties there with Simon. We know what he wants and we know why he wants it. Even though, and I keep saying this as a caveat, because we need to be discerning within the church, we know that judgment begins in the house of the Lord. The whole sheep and the goats will be separated in the house of the Lord first, so we know that somebody does not have to be doing overt, wicked, demonic things. Somebody can be a professing Christian and we still, remember the whole thing about the neighbor, we still have discernment. We have the truth and we are able to judge the fruit of the Spirit within an individual. Well, Simon's fruit is rotten. He says, "I want power and I'll use it better than you, I'll use it better than God. I'll use it for my benefit." So here we go, so Philip now is told to go south and I want to contrast these two people because we have Simon in our heads now. "As for Philip, an angel of the Lord said to him, 'Go south.'" I just said that. "Go south down the desert road that runs from Jerusalem to Gaza." So he started out and he met the treasurer of Ethiopia, a eunuch of great authority under the kandate, the queen of Ethiopia. The eunuch had gone to Jerusalem to worship and he was now returning, seated in his carriage, he was reading aloud from the book of the prophet Isaiah. The Holy Spirit said to Philip, "Go over and walk along beside the carriage." This is just a fantastic scene. Go over and walk along beside the carriage. Philip ran over, heard the man reading from the prophet Isaiah and Philip asked, "Do you understand what you're reading?" The man replied, "How can I unless someone instructs me?" Lots of lessons built in here. Get all of that. "And he urged Philip to come up into the carriage and sit with them. The passage of scripture he had been reading was this, "He was led like a sheep to the slaughter and as the lamb is silent before the shearers, he did not open his mouth, he was humiliated and received no justice. Who can speak of his descendants, for his life was taken from the

earth?" The eunuch asked Philip, "Tell me, was the prophet talking about himself or someone else?" So beginning with the same scripture, Philip told him the good news about Jesus. There you go. Now, not all of our evangelism is led by the Holy Spirit, but not necessarily that overtly, where we are just moved to move into a certain region and then moved to walk right up beside somebody and then move to teach them and evangelize to them. But we have a great lesson here. In simple evangelism, do you know the word of God? If, and we talk about this all the time, if somebody asks you a question, could you exposit, could you talk about what has been written in the word of God? This is simple evangelism. And I don't mean that in a negative way. This is the process of evangelism. You might think of a Billy Graham standing in front of a hundred thousand people, but really evangelism is when somebody says, "Who is this Jesus that you're talking about? Who is the savior that you're proclaiming? Why do you have such peace in the middle of such chaos? Why are you joyful as we celebrate the passing of an individual that doesn't make any sense to me?" Well, let me tell you about that. Well I've read the word and it says this in one area and then it contradicts itself over here. Can you explain that? This is why we have, for several years now, made it a very profound point to go deeply into the word of God and not just preach sermons about money, marriage, sex, and stress. Right? You need to get into the word of God. You need to understand the theology of it. So who is Jesus? What is the good news if somebody said to you, and I'm challenging you just as though I'm standing in front of a mirror, trust me. If somebody said to you, "What is the good news? What is the gospel?" Think to yourself, what would you say to them? It's a very, very good question to ask yourself and that's the question that the eunuch asked. "Philip, what is the good news?" Now it is interesting that he is reading from Isaiah 53, the forbidden chapter of Isaiah, which is not read in synagogues because it is so profoundly Christological such prophecy of Christ right there. So that tells us something right there, but we won't go down that rabbit trail. What he wants to know is the prophet talking about himself or somebody else and this opens the door. He's talking about somebody else. He's talking about the Christ of God. He's talking about Emmanuel, God with us. Well, how does that work? Well, God became flesh and dwelt among us and he lived and he ministered and he healed and he shared the image and the likeness of God himself with his creation. He lived a perfect and sinless life, being both human and divine. And when the time came, he offered himself as a sacrifice to humankind because you know from your reading that there can be no remission of sin without the shedding of blood. You've read about the sacrificial system. This Jesus of which we speak is the final sacrifice because until that time, sir, there was no perfect sacrifice. Only animals would suffice. So God himself became flesh and he sacrificed himself for all humankind. That's good news. That's good news for the Jew who had come up through the ranks. That is good news for the Gentile who had never heard of the law and the prophets before. It is good news for all of humanity and take this good news with you as you travel. And this is the best part right here. Well, it's all good parts. Every part is the best part. But verse 36, as they wrote along, I love this. I would love to do this someday. I want to baptize somebody in a mud puddle. I really want to. That would be fantastic. I believe what you're saying, Pastor Brian. When can I be baptized? Oh, there is a puddle along the road. Let's do it now. As they wrote along, they came to some water and the eunuch said, "Look, there's some water. Why can't I be baptized?" He ordered the carriage to stop and they went down into the water. Philip baptized them. When they come up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord snatched Philip away. The eunuch never saw him again but went on his way rejoicing. Meanwhile, Philip found himself farther north at the town of Lazarus. So he's going. Philip is being used to evangelizing and preaching different spots of the world. Now it's going to go south, it's going to go north, it's going to go east, it's going to go west and the persecution continues. This is before Saul's conversion. But we see the difference here. And the difference is this. The eunuch didn't want the power of God. The power of God came upon him as he heard the good news. Simon saw the power of God and wanted it. You see the difference? The eunuch came from a place of understanding his depravity and his need for a Savior. Simon came from a place of self-serving arrogance wanting this power of healing. And the eunuch learns very simply about the good news, believes, is inspired by God's Holy Spirit and baptized by water. There you go. He never

wanted it. He was reading, writing along, reading, didn't understand what he was reading. He never wanted this but he found it. But he found it. Simon wanted it bad so he could use it. There's a huge point of discernment in the church today when you are finding other sources of teaching and preaching and resources as you study scripture and so forth. The huge point of discernment. What is a church teaching about the power of God's Holy Spirit? Is it a commodity that you can be guaranteed to have if you pray this prayer or do this thing and then you can wield it for your own benefit and you can show off with whatever signs and wonders and you can do this and you control the Holy Spirit of God. Wow, you're special. You control the Holy Spirit of God. Good on ya. Impossible. You don't control the Holy Spirit of God. If that is where the teaching and preaching is going, run away. Because the exact opposite is true. That's how you know that that is demonic straight from hell because the exact opposite is true. You open yourself in humility. You receive the power of God's Holy Spirit and you allow Him to guide you. His will be done through you. Not your will be done by His power. In His name. Uh-uh. Nope. I profess and I proclaim and I manifest and I do these things. No, you don't do anything except His will. If you're running around saying all of these things and the power of God's Holy Spirit does this and I claim this and I claim that and I do this. No. You are in humility submitted to His authority, living according to His standard and living to fulfill His will in your life. It is unique. It is powerful. It is anything but boring. But don't get it twisted because that human desire to say, "Wow, the very power of God. I can wield that." No, you can't. He will wield it through you. See the difference? If you are meant to heal somebody, it's not you wielding the power of God. It will be you coming upon an individual led by God's Holy Spirit, empowered by God's Holy Spirit and that will happen by His power. So we can't get that mixed up and unfortunately we see it mixed up all the time. I've said this before and I'll continue to say it. One of the biggest mistakes, or maybe the biggest heresy of the modern Protestant church is that we build churches to serve people. We have, in many cases, the best intentions to build a church and have all of the programs and all of the things and all of the stuff to serve people. It sounds really great but Jesus Christ did not create the church to serve people. He created the church to serve Him. He will serve the people through the church. See how we get that twisted? We put ourselves first and we say, "Come on, bless what we're doing here. Give us some of your power so that we can do all of these good things that I want to do." We've got it backwards. He created the church to worship and serve Him. And as we do that, He will move out through us and serve people beginning here, one to the other and extending beyond. So that's Simon and that's the eunuch wrapped up in the church as well. What is your church seeking? Well we seek to wield the power of God for the benefit of humankind. That's not your job. That's His job. Your job is to be humble and submit yourself. If He has these great plans for church to go for it but have you discern that it is God's will for you in your life. This relates back as most everything does to the Beatitudes. And I mention that so you can see how all the Scripture is connected. What's the first Beatitude? You are in the best possible state of being when you realize how desperately you need God. You are in the best possible state of being when you recognize your spiritual depravity, your spiritual poverty. And if we ever, if that is our base, if we ever step off of that base, things go sideways very quickly. Because now we're thinking that we are somehow God or God's servant in the sense that He gives me power to do with what I want or some other wacky things. Forgive me, George, for I have sinned. Jesus son of the living God have mercy on me a sinner. Should be our opening prayer every day. Jesus son of the living God have mercy on me a sinner. Should be something that we repeat regularly throughout the course of the day. We can't come off of that square. We can't come off of that first Beatitude. That is the foundation. Breaking our human spirit, breaking our pride, breaking all of the strongholds that we as a broken people hold up as a wall between us and God. And humbling ourselves and understanding our need for a Savior. And when we stray, Simon professing Christian, and when we stray, we realize that we stray and we pray, Jesus son of the living God have mercy on me a sinner. I'm sorry. We come back to that square. Let your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. I am yours. We see that in Acts 8 and of course we see that all throughout scripture. Nothing happens if we are not first, if we do not first break our own human spirit, egotism, self-interest, pride. If we do not first break that and understand our

spiritual poverty, the human found that out. He was like, that is good news. I know who I am. I know who he is and I believe, and he was saved and he didn't want any of that a few hours before. He told that Simon thought, give me that power. I'm better than God. I can do better things. Don't think so Simon. As a matter of fact, again, fine point. As a matter of fact, kind of leaves us hanging there. Pray to your good help. Pray. Maybe God will forgive you. And then the text goes on. I don't want to be left hanging in that sort of limbo. So I think that I will take the lesson of the union and not the lesson of Simon. Amen.