Northwest Community Evangelical Free Church

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Sermon manuscript

Sermon Series: Jesus' Faithful Witnesses…
…bearing witness to Jesus' life-changing message.

(Studies in the book of Acts)

Helping Beginners
Take "Next Steps" with Jesus

Study #11

(Acts 8:4-40)

Introduction: Beginners will be beginners …

Kathy and I have a grandson who is a sophomore in High School. He plays soccer, and he's pretty good. He's fun to watch. And, yes, I could go on.

But you should know that our grandson wasn't always a good soccer player. You should have seen him before he got good.

He was always in the wrong spot on the field, couldn't dribble the ball, avoided all contact, missed shots on the goal, and would even use his hands.

Back when he was five, he didn't know what he was doing on the soccer field. But a funny thing happened as he kept playing.

Yes, he grew. But, crucially, his coaches coached him. They drilled him on the fundamentals of soccer and on strategy. They taught him basic skills, corrected bad form, and helped him develop a competitive mindset. He got better.

Now, after a pretty shaky five-year-old beginning, our grandson is a good soccer player.

Critical to the transformation from awful to really good was coaching and wise mentoring.

His story is not unusual. Most of us here can recall a time when we were a beginner at something. There's no reason to be embarrassed about being an unskilled beginner. Early on in anything, everyone needs help.

And when you and I were beginners in a sport, or in an academic pursuit, or a life skill (car repair, plumbing, carpentry), a coach was (or would have been) a great help.

What is true for beginners in most anything is also true when it comes to following Jesus.

Faith beginners…

I trusted Jesus for eternal life when I was in High School. So I'm not now a beginner. But I remember when I was.

A loving next-door neighbor told me about Jesus. I believed and God gave me eternal life. I know that He did that because He promises that anyone who believes in Jesus receives the free gift of eternal life.

Then, for about a year and a half afterwards, I floundered. I didn't grow in Christ.

Then, I started attending the church that my next-door neighbors attended. A few people there showed me what it looked like to follow Jesus and THAT changed everything.

I was a beginner in Jesus. I needed older brothers and sisters who would help me take my first "next steps." These coaches and mentors walked me into spiritual growth.

Today, as we open to the book of Acts, we'll see two scenes where beginners get just the help they need to take their "next steps."

And we will be equipped with key truths that will help us help those who are a step behind us in following Jesus.

When I say this, I don't want you to think I'm not talking to each one of you. I am speaking exactly to you. You are here, today, learning about Jesus. I am confident that you know people who need the help you can give. This morning is for you.

The scattering of the church...

Last Sunday, we watched as Stephen (one of seven men who served widows in the church in Jerusalem) preached a powerful sermon. He was stoned to death for his bold witness.

That act of violence sparked a wide-scale persecution against Jesus' followers. Luke then writes, ***[8:4] Therefore, those who had been scattered went through places preaching the word.***

Among the scattered was Philip, another of the seven leaders of the widows' ministry. What we'll see today is all about Philip.[1]

Due to the persecution, Philip left Jerusalem. Then he traveled north, preaching Jesus as he went. He landed in, of all places, Samaria.

Philip went to Samaria…

That's remarkable, because by the first century, the Jews and Samaritans had hated each other for centuries. They were divided by geography, culture, race, and religion.[2]

But Jesus had already cast vision for reaching Samaria.

In His last words to the disciples before ascending to heaven, He sent them to be His witnesses in the relatively friendly areas of ***"Jerusalem and Judea"*** and to the sexy, exciting ***"remotest part of the world."***

He also sent them to the unfriendly land of Samaria. (Acts 1:8)

So, in obedience to Jesus, Philip went to the uncomfortable place. He left Judea and headed north into hard Samaria.

Samaria was geographically near. But the people there were not like Philip. They may have dressed differently and talked with an accent. Samaria was geographically near and culturally distant.[3]

<u>Philip Went North Into Samaria (Acts 8:5-24)</u>

An AMAZED Response to the Gospel in Samaria (8:5-8)

Philip proclaimed Christ to the Samaritans (v. 5)

[Acts 8:5] Philip went down[4] to the city of Samaria and began proclaiming the Christ to them.

We're proud of Philip for bringing the good news about Jesus to Samaria. But we wonder. Will the Samaritans pay any attention to what he, a Jew, has to say?

Philip's message received! (v. 6-8)

[6] The crowds were paying attention with one mind to what was being said by Philip, as they heard and saw the signs which he was performing. [7] For in the case of many who had unclean spirits, they were coming out of them shouting with a loud voice; and many who had been paralyzed or limped on crutches were healed. [8] So there was much rejoicing in that city.

Small wonder that there was ***"much rejoicing"*** in the city. Bodies were healed. Minds were renewed. Eternal souls were saved.

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[1] This Philip (NOT the apostle by the same name) is the only person in the New Testament identified as an ***"evangelist."*** (Acts 21:8)

[2] See Appendix for notes about Israel and Samaria.

[3] You and I are familiar with Samaritans. Now that the world has come to San Antonio, some of our neighbors are Samaritans. You might work with Samaritans or go to school with them. They are right by you - geographically close - and yet are different in culture, language, favorite foods, and more. Keep that person you're thinking about right now in mind as we watch Philip in action. Some of them might really appreciate knowing more about Jesus - and YOU have been strategically placed in their world.

[4] Of course, by "down" Luke is referring to an elevation loss, as Samaria was north. Jerusalem sits at the highest elevation in Palestine.

The miracles God empowered Philip to perform softened the hearts of the Samaritans to the message Philip brought.

There was a general turning to Jesus in the city AND there was one remarkable turning in the city.

A BELIEVING Response in Samaria (8:9-13)

The influence of Simon, the magician, in Samaria (vv. 9-11)

[9] Now a man named Simon had previously been practicing magic in the city and astonishing the people of Samaria, claiming to be someone great; [10] and all the people, from small to great, were paying attention to him, saying, "This man is the Power of God that is called Great." [11] And they were paying attention to him because for a long time he had astounded them with his magic arts.

This Simon was not a con man, and he didn't do card tricks. He was involved in something far more sinister.

The kind of magic practiced by Simon - his nickname was, ***"The Power of God that is called Great"*** - was the most debased form of religion in that age.[5] It was occult, demonic stuff.

But when Philip rolled into town, he performed miracles by the power of the one, true God. The Samaritans saw a power greater than Simon and received the Jesus Philip proclaimed.[6]

The influence of the Gospel, in Samaria, generally (v. 12)

[12] But when they believed Philip as he was preaching the good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, both men and women were being baptized.

These people turned from paying attention to Simon, instead believed in Jesus, and were saved. We're shocked to read that Simon the magician also believed in Jesus.

The influence of the Gospel's power, on Simon (v. 13)

[13] Now even Simon himself believed; and after being baptized, he continued on with Philip, and as he observed signs and great miracles taking place, he was repeatedly amazed.

Now, it's a big deal when anybody comes to faith in Jesus.

Today or in the first century, in San Antonio or in any place, it's a big deal. But it was a REALLY big deal when the Samaritans believed because the Samaritans were NOT 100% Jewish.

Word that the faith had spread to Samaria quickly reached the mother church in Jerusalem.

The leaders there were so surprised that they sent a delegation to Samaria to check out what was going on, firsthand.

A VALIDATING Apostolic Response in Samaria (8:14-17)

[14] Now when the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent them Peter and John,[7] [15] who came down and prayed for them that they would receive the Holy Spirit. [16] (For He had not yet fallen upon any of them; they had simply been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.) [17] Then they began laying their hands on them, and they were receiving the Holy Spirit.[8]

That was Luke, describing a second, Samaritan Pentecost. God was validating that the Samaritan turning to Jesus was legit.

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[5] So, author Susan Garrett, who wrote Demise of the Devil, a study of encounters between the Gospel and satanic powers in the writings of Luke (Gospel and Acts).
[6] Had Philip performed no miracles, the Samaritans might have concluded that Philip represented something inferior to Simon.

[7] Interestingly, this is the last mention of the Apostle John in the book of Acts.
[8] We are to understand that the reception of the Spirit here was marked by external manifestations such as had marked the Spirit's arrival on the first disciples at Pentecost - i.e. tongues, miracles, healings, exorcisms.

Peter and John saw it all happen. So now, they can go back and tell the church in Jerusalem, *"Jesus saved THEM just like He saved US!"*

Had this NOT happened, there might have developed a Jewish church, a Samaritan church, and, eventually, a Gentile church.

But with the Samaritans receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit exactly as the Jews did at Pentecost, it is clear that there is one church, consisting of Jews and Samaritans - and soon - Gentiles.

The Samaritan church was for real. And with Peter and John still in Samaria, Luke shifts our focus back to Simon.

A DISCIPLING Response to a New Samaritan Believer (vv. 18-24)

Simon's reprehensible offer (vv. 18-19)

Luke told us that Simon believed and was baptized, just as others in Samaria believed and were baptized.

And notice. Luke didn't add any qualifiers. He didn't say that Simon *"appeared to believe"* or *"sort of believed"* or *"said he believed"* or *"made people think that he believed."* The Bible's testimony is that this Samaritan magician believed in Jesus.[9]

Plus, Simon saw and was amazed by the miracles that Philip was performing, like others had seen and had been amazed.

Simon was really impressed that Peter and John could bestow the Holy Spirit by the laying on of hands.

So, he offered them money and asked them, ***[19]…"Give this authority to me as well, so that everyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit."***

No, Simon wasn't asking to buy salvation or eternal life. But he did offer to buy the power to produce signs of the Spirit's power.

[9] Based on the Lord's promise, the believing Simon received the gift of eternal life. (John 3:16)

Of course, Peter and John were appalled by Simon's offer.

Peter's scathing rebuke (vv. 20-23)

[20] But Peter said to him, "May your silver perish with you, because you thought you could acquire the gift of God with money! [21] You have no part or share in this matter, for your heart is not right before God. [22] Therefore repent of this wickedness of yours, and pray to the Lord that, if possible, the intention of your heart will be forgiven you. [23] For I see that you are in the gall of bitterness and in the bondage of unrighteousness."

That was one scathing rebuke. But it doesn't negate what Luke had already told us about Simon and his spiritual condition.

- Simon believed, just as other Samaritans had believed.
- Philip accepted Simon's testimony and baptized Simon.

So, while what we have here is a mess, Simon was a saved Samaritan.

Here is where I want to highlight something from this episode that will be especially helpful to you as you seek to help a beginner take his or her next step with Jesus.

***Helping the beginner #1: BE UNSHOCKABLE; STAY ENGAGED**

Simon's ugly offer tells us that people who are just beginning to follow Jesus - like Simon was - will sometimes go off in dangerous and wrong directions.

Simon thought he could buy with money the ability to impart the Holy Spirit's presence and power. Yes, and that's a serious error.

But is it really surprising that after having spent years (Acts 8:11 says ***"a long time"***) as a satanically empowered sorcerer known far and wide as **"The Great Power of God"** (!), Simon, after being a Christian for several whole days, still had baggage from his former life?

I'm not surprised at Simon's proposal at all. I am, though, instructed by Peter's response to Simon's offer.

He didn't dismiss Simon. He didn't roll his eyes, call him a loser, and walk away in disgust. No. Peter dealt with Simon. He engaged him. He was blunt. He confronted.

These hard things that Peter said to Simon are the things you say when you are in a relationship with someone who has gone off the rails and you want to help.

And I believe Peter's willingness to speak as bluntly as he did bore fruit. Simon's response (***[Acts 8:24] "Pray to the Lord for me, so that nothing of what you have said may come upon me."***) was his repentance.

He took Peter's words to heart. He learned and he turned. Mission accomplished.

If you want to be helpful to beginners in Jesus, be unshockable. Be patient. Stay engaged. Direct them to truth. Call them to repentance. Point them to holiness.

When new Jesus followers get off track, it is up to those who have been following Jesus for a bit longer to help them.

And the moment a brand new believer falls into error or gets mixed up in ugly stuff is not the time to back off. That's when you move in to help.

You who have walked with Jesus will never be of help if you disengage or withdraw. But in relationship, the Lord can use you to make impact for God and for good.

As this Samaritan adventure comes to a close, we watch Peter and John make their way back to Jerusalem. As they do, it becomes clear that God was not only working in the hearts of Samaritans.

[25] So, when they had solemnly testified and spoken the word of the Lord, they started back to Jerusalem, and were preaching the gospel to many villages of the Samaritans.

John is now reaching out to Samaritans, the same Apostle John who wanted to call down fire from heaven on the Samaritans when they refused hospitality to Jesus. (Luke 9:51-55)

The Gospel really does change hearts and lives…and we're only halfway through the Philip Saga.

While things were wrapping up in Samaria, God sent Philip on another category-busting mission.

<u>Philip Went South Toward Africa (Acts 8:26-40)</u>

Philip Met an Ethiopian (8:26-29)

A re-commissioned Philip (v. 26)

[26] But an angel of the Lord spoke to Philip saying, "Get ready and go south to the road that descends from Jerusalem to Gaza." (This is a desert road.)[10]

Philip hadn't gone too far from Jerusalem when he met up with a man who was on his way to his home back in Africa.

A seeking Ethiopian (vv. 27-28)

[27] So he got ready and went; and there was an Ethiopian eunuch, a court official of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, who was in charge of all her treasure; and he had come to Jerusalem to worship, [28] and he was returning and sitting in his chariot, and was reading Isaiah the prophet.

This Ethiopian was a high-ranking government official.

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[10] Gaza and Jerusalem were separated by about sixty miles of desert. The land between Gaza and Jerusalem was not "desert" in the sense that the land around Pecos, Texas is desert (whew!). It was simply uninhabited, "deserted" country.

Most scholars believe that he was the treasurer[11] of the kingdom of Ethiopia, a large territory south of Egypt that stretched far into the African continent (much larger than present-day Ethiopia).[12]

He was a Gentile by birth and culture. But he was what the Jews called a "God-fearer," a Gentile who was drawn to the one, true God.

When we catch up to him, this man was returning from a time of worship at the temple in Jerusalem. He was traveling by chariot[13] and was at the front end of a long, five-month journey back to Africa.

Philip, who was gaining on the Ethiopian, got word from the Holy Spirit (v. 29) to join the chariot, which he did.

An Ethiopian Met Jesus (vv. 30-38)

The Ethiopian's request for help (vv. 30-31)

As he approached, he overheard the man reading from the prophet Isaiah, which means that he was reading out loud, the common practice in the ancient world.[14]

Philip asked this man if he understood what he was reading.

The Ethiopian knew what he knew and he knew what he didn't know. And he knew that he didn't know what the prophet Isaiah was talking about.

[31] And he said, "Well, how could I, unless someone guides me?" And he invited Philip to come up and sit with him.

Here's what he was reading.

Philip was more than happy to help (vv. 32-33)

[32] Now the passage of Scripture which he was reading was this:
"HE WAS LED LIKE A SHEEP TO SLAUGHTER;
AND LIKE A LAMB THAT IS SILENT BEFORE ITS SHEARER,
SO HE DOES NOT OPEN HIS MOUTH.
[33] "IN HUMILIATION HIS JUSTICE WAS TAKEN AWAY;
WHO WILL DESCRIBE HIS GENERATION?
FOR HIS LIFE IS TAKEN AWAY FROM THE EARTH."

This passage from Isaiah 53 was known among the Jews of the first century as one of a number of *"Servant Passages."*

The Jews believed that these passages described the suffering of either Isaiah himself or the experiences of the nation of Israel.

They did NOT think that the passage was about the Messiah, because the Jews couldn't fathom the thought of a suffering Messiah. The man from Ethiopian was wrestling with the text.

A request for insight (v. 34)

[34] The eunuch answered Philip and said, "Please tell me, of whom does the prophet say this? Of himself or of someone else?"

As a lifelong Jew, Philip would have had a wealth of knowledge about what we call the Old Testament.

As well, being a recent convert to faith in Jesus, Philip had heard the apostles' teaching in Jerusalem. He knew about the life, ministry, suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

And as Philip listened to the words of Isaiah, he understood, maybe for the first time, that Isaiah was describing Jesus, the Messiah.

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[11] He was a eunuch; the type of man typically put in charge of a king's harem. Men who were made eunuchs frequently rose to governmental prominence.
[12] Ethiopia *then* is not the same thing as Ethiopia *now*. It was probably what is currently central Sudan, and nearly one thousand miles from the Mediterranean. It was also known as Nubia (Yamauchi, 2006).
[13] Royal chariots used for long-distance travel sat three people, two passengers and a driver. There was probably a driver and/or a guard with this man.
[14] Try it sometime. Reading out loud enhances retention. It allows the reader to "hear" the words of the author, taking in the words with both eyes and ears. So, reading aloud is a great way to read.

Telling the best story ever (v. 35)

[35] Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning from this Scripture he preached Jesus to him.

Philip explained Isaiah's words through a Jesus grid.

Here's a second crucial piece of help for you as you help your friend - who knows a little bit less than you do about Jesus - to take a "next step" toward Jesus: Own your Bible.

***Helping the beginner #2: KNOW YOUR BIBLE**

I would have loved to have heard Philip explain Isaiah 53 to this Ethiopian official.

Did he march through the whole chapter, showing every place where the life of Jesus paralleled the words of the prophet? Maybe.

Did he move to other places in the Old Testament that spoke of the ministry of the Messiah? Probably.

Philip drew on his knowledge of Scripture to share Jesus with someone who was seeking God.

The more thoroughly you and I "own" the Book, the more helpful we will be when those we want to help are at the beginning stages of learning about Jesus.

The questions about life and God that your friend is asking are addressed in the Bible.

- Is there a God and what is He like?
- Why is there evil in the world?
- Is there a point or any meaning to life?

If you want to be the sharpest tool for God possible, someone the Holy Spirit can use to help beginners take "next steps" toward Jesus, you'll immerse yourself in the Bible. Be like Philip.

After more time of riding in the chariot and talking, it's clear that the Ethiopian believes in Jesus. It's clear because of what he said to Philip.

Philip welcomed this rejected man into life in Jesus (vv. 36-38)

[36] As they went along the road they came to some water; and the eunuch said, "Look! Water! What prevents me from being baptized?"

So, Philip must have told this man about all those in Jerusalem who had believed in Jesus and had been baptized AND about how all of those who had just recently believed in Jesus in Samaria were baptized.

It was perfectly fitting for this man to point to some water at a desert oasis and request baptism. He has come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God as Philip told him Jesus stories.[15]

Thus, the question. But what an odd way to frame the question.

Not, *"I want to be baptized."* or *"Baptize me now!,"* but ***"What prevents me from being baptized?"***

Remember. This man wasn't quite a Jew. He was a God-fearer. He wouldn't have been allowed to fully participate in all things Jewish.

And he was a eunuch.[16] Judaism placed limits on eunuchs for involvement in Jewish rituals, rites, and festivals.

By asking for baptism, he wants to know if he - a non-Jewish, God-fearing eunuch - could be fully immersed in life in Christ?

"Philip, will I be accepted, just as I am? Or will Jesus place limits on my participation in this faith, too?

[15] Harrison, Bock, and most other commentators, take verse 37 as a gloss. It almost certainly was not a part of the original book of Acts but was added later.

[16] We might say, not quite a man.

" You've told me that baptism symbolizes full inclusion in life in Jesus. Is there anything preventing me from being baptized? Am I really and fully welcomed?"

There was no hesitation.

[38] And he ordered that the chariot stop; and they both went down into the water, Philip as well as the eunuch, and he baptized him.

By baptism, Philip obeyed Jesus' Great Commission and welcomed a man into life in Jesus who wasn't full welcomed anywhere else.[17]

And here is the third help we see from the Bible today when we want to help someone who is just beginning to follow Jesus.

***Helping the beginner #3: WELCOME WELL**

Once someone has believed in Jesus, place no conditions on their inclusion in Jesus' church. There is no probationary period for a beginning believer.

When you are out to help a beginner, welcome her or him with open arms. Accept the newcomer as warmly and as well as God accepts you.

Give the newbie no reason to doubt that they are "in." Assure the new brother or sister that they are fully accepted, both by your love and by your continuing invitations to them to grow.

You've been following Jesus longer than he has - maybe by years and maybe by days. The beginner desperately needs what you can provide to take those critical next steps with Jesus.

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[17] Several commentators note that in the ancient world, Ethiopia was regarded by Asia and the Near East as *"the end of the earth."* The inclusion of this episode may have been Luke's intentional tie-in with Matthew 28:18-20 and Acts 1:8. Although, clearly, the gospel continued to expand as Acts continues.

APPENDIX

- *Samaria vs. Israel*

The tension between Israel and Samaria began because of geography when the kingdom of Israel divided north and south (into Judah in the south; Israel in the north), following the reign of Solomon.

The southern tribes (Judah and Benjamin) were always ruled by direct descendants of David while the northern tribes (the other ten) were ruled by a succession of dynasties not related to the Davidic line.

The tension became permanent when the Assyrian Empire defeated the northern kingdom (722 BC). The Assyrian conquerors intermarried with the Jews, creating a Jewish/Gentile race that was rejected by the pure-blooded Jews of the south.

When the Samaritans offered to help the Jews rebuild the temple in Jerusalem in the days of Ezra, the Jews would not allow them to help. The Samaritans responded to that slight by erecting a rival temple on their own sacred hill, Mt. Gerizim.

During the days of Jesus and the apostles, the hatred of Jews against the Samaritans was intense. When traveling between Galilee in the north and Judea in the south, Jews would cross the Jordan River twice to enter the Decapolis to avoid polluting their feet on Samaritan soil.

But Jesus loved Samaritans. ***[John 4:4]…"He HAD TO pass through Samaria"*** to speak with a woman at Jacob's well. The woman believed in Jesus and told her follow Samaritans all about Him. We learn that ***[John 4:39] many of the Samaritans believed in Him*** after hearing the woman's testimony about Him.

The disciples - including Peter and John - were with Jesus when He stopped off in Samaria. And that time of ministry to the Samaritans not only prepared the Samaritans to receive the Gospel through Philip, it also prepared Peter and John for what they were about to see: a Holy-Spirit outpouring in Samaria.

- *The post-conversion reception of the Holy Spirit in Samaria*

I understand from the New Testament letters that when someone believes in Jesus, they receive the Holy Spirit. Simultaneously.

Yet that is clearly NOT what happened in Samaria. The Samaritans believed in Jesus. Days passed and THEN they received the Holy Spirit in the presence of the apostles Peter and John.

So, do I need to re-think my theology? Does a person who believes in Jesus today receive the Spirit later, as a separate act? Is that the norm?

And if not, if it is normative for a person to receive the Spirit when he receives Christ, why didn't it work that way for the Samaritans?

This much is clear: The New Testament says frequently that a believer in Jesus, by definition, has the Holy Spirit's presence and power. (See Romans 8:9; 1 Corinthians 6:19; also chapter 12; Galatians 4:6)

And beyond apostolic teaching, there is apostolic practice.

A couple of chapters over in Acts there is no separation of time between salvation and the reception of the Spirit at the home of Cornelius, the Gentile (Acts 10:44-48).

In fact, nowhere else in Acts (besides here) can we point to an example of people being saved and then receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit.

(Some point to Acts 19 as an example of a post-conversion reception of the Holy Spirit. But the disciples that Paul found in Ephesus were not Christians, having only been baptized into John the Baptist's baptism. As soon as they heard about Jesus, they believed, were saved, were baptized, and received the Holy Spirit, as is the norm.)

So, why the separation of days between FAITH and RECEPTION OF THE SPIRIT in Samaria?

It was to validate to the rest of the church (especially the church in Jerusalem) that the Body of Christ, the church, is One Church, not a Jewish church and a Samaritan church.

What happened in Samaria defined the future of the church. It drew a line in the sand that said, *"Anyone who crosses that line by placing faith in Jesus is united with every other person who has crossed that line. You may be Jewish or Samaritan (or soon, Gentile). It doesn't matter."*

So, today, you may be left- or right-handed, blue- or brown-eyed, rich or poor, young or old. It doesn't matter.

You may hold to any or no particular political persuasion. You may be of whatever ethnicity, a patriot serving in the military or a pacifist.

You may be an athlete, a millionaire, a computer geek or homeless. You may be a graduate school student or a High School dropout - it doesn't matter.

If you have believed in Jesus, you are united with every other person who has believed in Jesus. And you are welcomed here!

- *The spiritual condition of Simon (Magus)*

There is much discussion about the spiritual condition of Simon the magician. (i.e. - whether or not he was saved)

Some who say that he was not saved point out that Simon didn't personally pray after Peter's rebuke. They will say that this proves that he didn't have a relationship with God or that he merely dismissed Peter's words (as in, *"You can pray if you wish. I'm not about to pray."*)

I think it is better to see Simon's request for prayer as a humble petition from a believer that the apostles pray for him to receive fresh cleansing from God.

Many, too, doubt that he was saved because of the enormity of his sin / misunderstanding of spiritual things, shown in his desire to purchase with money the ability to impart the gift of the Holy Spirit.

But, as I sought to demonstrate from the text, his misunderstanding is understandable when we remember his former life as a satanically-empowered magician.

Plus, what Peter said about Simon being in the ***"bondage of iniquity"*** is best taken as a comment about Simon needing to enter more fully into the freedom that Christ brings and NOT as a comment that he wasn't saved.

Besides, what believer is totally free of all bondage to sinful practices and habits? In Acts 19:19, for instance, believers in Jesus in the city of Ephesus burned 50,000 pieces of silver's worth of magic books - and this was at least two to three years after they had come to faith.

The best evidence that he was saved is that Luke tells us that ***"he believed"*** (8:13) and was baptized (indicating that Philip certainly counted Simon among the saved). Even the phrase ***"he continued on with Philip"*** indicates a seriousness of desire to follow Jesus.

So, yes, Simon was saved. He believed in Jesus and was baptized as a believer. Simon was without question a flawed man, was clearly a beginner in following Jesus, and a brother in Christ.