

Money Can't Buy Me Love, Joy, Peace, Patience, Kindness, Goodness, Faithfulness, Gentleness and Self-control

Acts 8:2-25 NIV

There were two men shipwrecked and swam to an island. The minute they got to the island, one of them started screaming and yelling. "We're going to die! We're going to die! There's no food! No water! We're going to die!"

The second man was propped up against a palm tree and acting so calmly it drove the first man crazy. "Don't you understand?!" "We're going to die!!!" the first man said.

"You don't understand. I make \$100,000 a week," said the second man. The first man looked at him quite dumbfounded and asked, "What difference does it make? We're on an island with no food and no water! We're going to die!!!"

The second man answered, "You just don't get it. I make \$100,000 a week. I tithe. My pastor will find me!"

Several applications could be made to this story. Some say money makes the world go 'round. This isn't true-God makes the world go around. He did this long before there was money. Maybe we could say that money isn't everything, but it is way ahead of whatever is in second place.

Money is often the deciding factor in people's lives as far as what is most important. The misuse of an over abundance of money, or the lack thereof, often steals an individual's joy and clouds his or her judgment.

Following Stephen's death, in Acts, Chapter 8, Luke gives us some 'general information' involving the church.

Unlike the former 'general information' areas of chapters 2, 4, and 5 where we read of the favor of the people, the sharing of possessions, and the healing of many, in verses 2-3 of chapter 8, we are now informed of a great persecution against the church at Jerusalem.

Where the apostles once went from house to house, and maybe continued to do so, Saul was now going from house to house arresting believers. The church was scattered, but the word continued to spread.

In the New Testament History-Acts by Reece, one of the text books I used in college, there is a quote by Dale on verse 4 concerning the preaching of the word. I believe this Dale is Thomas Dale, the brother of Andy Dale, one of the teachers I had at Kentucky Christian College.

Here is the quote:

"The people doing this evangelizing were not elders, deacons, and preachers. They were the disciples, great hosts of them, seeking a place of refuge from the destruction of Saul. As they found places to sleep or stay for a few days, they would have to explain the purpose of their plight and flight. In doing so, they went everywhere telling the bad news of their persecution and the good news of salvation in Christ." (New Testament History-Acts, Reece, page 317)

Following the stoning of Stephen, the church scattered, except for the apostles who stayed in Jerusalem. The believers scattered

throughout Judea and Samaria to avoid Saul, and possibly others, who set out to destroy the church. There is an exception to the above quote concerning deacons: the Seven of Acts 6 minus Stephen were scattered as well. Luke writes that Philip, the second minister listed in Acts 6:5, went to Samaria and began to preach and perform miraculous signs.

The apostles, Stephen, now Philip are able to verify by signs and wonders that their message is from God. Unclean spirits are removed and people are healed.

It's hard for some of us to imagine grabbing just the necessities; what we can carry or quickly pack in a car and get out of town. I was not in the military to experience a war or police action like some of you have. I have nothing in my experience to compare this to. I question if anything like this will ever happen in this country.

I know that the acceptance of anti-Christian attitudes in the United States is on the rise. For example, a woman in Houston, Texas was ordered by local police to stop handing out gospel tracts to children who knocked on her door during Halloween. Officers informed her that such activity is illegal, which is not true, and that she would be arrested if she continued. This is persecution I suppose. But this is nothing compared to what began following Stephen's death.

If statistics are a reliable indicator of direction, then Christians in America have cause for alarm.

I have read that the average age of people in the United States is 25. But the average age of church members is 55—thirty years older than the national average. The following are statics that are a few years dated, but still alarming.

- 1997-2001 occult book sales doubled
- Colleges and Universities offer credited courses on the occult and many college campuses are known to be set up with computerized horoscopes, 24 hours a day, so students can seek the guidance they are demanding.
- Psychic hotlines, once small-time and laughed at are now a multi-billion dollar a year business employing tens of thousands and touching tens of millions.
- Americans today spend millions per year on Astrology.
- Check out the net for witches registered in America.
- Check out the Ouija boards sales in America.
- Thousands of public schools where prayer is outlawed now have courses which teach witchcraft and Harry Potter is required reading.

By the way, Harry Potter received a people's choice award this year.

Christians in America may want to have some emergency overnight bags packed. Just kidding. It's not that bad yet, is it?

For the Jerusalem Church, the anti-Christian floodgate burst, and the believers grabbed their overnight bags and scattered, taking the story of their persecution and the gospel message with them. Some of the best preaching or sermons in the first century never took place in a temple, synagogue, or pulpit by a trained ordained minister. To me, it looks like we need this kind of preaching in America today.

You, as well as I, need to be preaching. I encourage you to preach wherever you go to whomever you can: to neighbors, friends, family, and even strangers; anyone who will listen.

I know that it is frustrating. Some of the people closest to you don't seem to care. But, some will listen. We can't give up.

Matthew records this parable of Jesus:

“The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field. ²⁵ But while everyone was sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and went away. ²⁶ When the wheat sprouted and formed heads, then the weeds also appeared.

²⁷ “The owner's servants came to him and said, ‘Sir, didn't you sow good seed in your field? Where then did the weeds come from?’

²⁸ “‘An enemy did this,’ he replied.

“The servants asked him, ‘Do you want us to go and pull them up?’

²⁹ “‘No,’ he answered, ‘because while you are pulling the weeds, you may root up the wheat with them. ³⁰ Let both grow together until the harvest. At that time I will tell the harvesters: First collect the weeds and tie them in bundles to be burned; then gather the wheat and bring it into my barn.’” (Matthew 8:24-30)

In Matthew 3, when the Pharisees and Sadducees came to John to be baptized, they had not repented of their sins, and there was no evidence they had been truly converted, and their lifestyle was the same wicked one it had always been.

In Acts 5, when Peter confronted Ananias and Sapphira about the price of their land, an attempt by Satan to infiltrate the church was exposed.

Just as John the Baptist, Jesus, and the apostles had to deal with weeds among the wheat; counterfeits, fakes and pretenders, Philip had his.

His name was Simon.

Now for some time a man named Simon had practiced sorcery in the city and amazed all the people of Samaria. He boasted that he was someone great, ¹⁰ and all the people, both high and low, gave him their attention and exclaimed, “This man is the divine power known as the Great Power.” ¹¹ They followed him because he had amazed them for a long time with his magic. ¹² But when they believed Philip as he preached the good news of the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women. ¹³ Simon himself believed and was baptized. And he followed Philip everywhere, astonished by the great signs and miracles he saw. (Acts 8:9-13)

Just before Luke introduces us to Simon, he writes this about Samaria:

⁸ So there was great joy in that city. (Acts 8:8)

Philip was preaching the word and verifying God's word with signs and wonders. People were being miraculously healed. People were paying attention. And there was great joy in the city.

Unfortunately, there is a principle in this sin-sick world that attempts to steal our joy. Every time God sows wheat, Satan attempts to sow weeds.

And, here is a scriptural principle; a truth:

...if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! (2 Corinthians 5:17)

Everything that God does, Satan attempts to counterfeit, especially if he can counterfeit this ‘new creation.’

Where there is the real thing, Satan will plant counterfeits, fakes, and pretenders and make them look real.

For example, did you know that there is a counterfeit gospel recorded in the scripture?

Paul writes to the Galatians: **I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel—⁷ which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ.⁸ But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned!⁹ As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let him be eternally condemned! (Galatians 1:6-9)**

We read about a counterfeit righteousness in Romans 10; a counterfeit church in Rev. 2; counterfeit preachers in 2 Peter 2; and there is even a counterfeit Christ called antichrist.

By the way, some counterfeit preachers soften and alter their message so much to this world that they inadvertently create a counterfeit Jesus of their own. They preach another Jesus...not the literal God-Man of the Bible, but a more tolerable Jesus; a Jesus that won't send anyone to hell.

A preacher in a small country church began a series on hell. One of the farmers who had attended this church for a long time let the preacher know in no uncertain terms that he did not like the sermon series. “Preach about the meek and lowly Jesus,” he said. The preacher replied, “It’s from that

meek and lowly Jesus that I got my information on hell.”

Counterfeit gospel, righteousness, church, preachers, Christ...and along with all these counterfeits, Satan has Counterfeit Christians. Such is the case of Simon here in Acts 8.

Notice that Simon looked good. Everybody knew who he was. He was somebody. The people of the area were convinced that he was extraordinary.

Even so, he believed and was baptized, just like everyone else. He followed Philip everywhere. Luke does not indicate that this caused Philip alarm when Simon showed up at every meeting.

He looked good. Simon appeared to be a new creation. And maybe he was, for a while. But we have to finish the story.

In verses 14-17, Peter and John come to Samaria to pray and lay hands on them; that the Holy Spirit might impart some spiritual gifts to the believers. And this is where Simon falls apart. If he was genuine to this point, it is possible that dollar signs flashed in his eyes when he saw spiritual gifts come to the people.

He wanted the ability to pass on the Spirit.

I’m going to guess that Simon wasn’t a pauper. I’m going to say that what he offered Peter was no small sum of money. Just a guess. Let’s finish with Peter’s answer and Simon’s reply.

Peter answered: “May your money perish with you, because you thought you could buy the gift of God with money!²¹ You have no part or share in this ministry, because your heart is not right before God.²² Repent of this wickedness and pray to the Lord. Perhaps he will forgive you for having such a thought in

your heart.²³ For I see that you are full of bitterness and captive to sin.”

²⁴ Then Simon answered, “Pray to the Lord for me so that nothing you have said may happen to me.” (Acts 8:20-24)

At this point, Simon disappears from the pages of Acts. Luke leaves us wondering about Simon. Did he repent, or did he remain a counterfeit; a tool for Satan to use against the church.

Some say that everyone has a price. We know that isn’t true. Peter is our example. However, the story of Simon raises the question: is there a price that Satan can offer that would turn a committed Christian into a counterfeit?

Each week, we offer communion as Jesus has instructed. During that time, we are to examine ourselves. This is not just a ceremony involving juice and wafer that helps us get our hour in.

Communion is the time to ask the hard questions and answer ourselves honestly. Our eternity depends on it. Is there a price that Satan could offer you that would cause you to become a counterfeit?