

Journeys In Pentecost
July 1, 2007
Text: Acts 8: 4-25

THE ART OF MAGIC

For centuries the art of magic has captured the attention of people. Over the centuries of time, the art of magic has become increasingly supplicated such as David Copperfield making the Status of Liberty disappear. The fun of magic is that it makes us believe natural law has been suspended through the trick. So, the enduring question is, "How did the magician do the trick?" In the back of our minds we know somehow, someday, the magician has pulled a slight of hand. Every magic show has an end. People return to their homes, once again facing the challenges and the reality of everyday living happy that for a brief moment in time, they were entertained. Maybe, just maybe, on a deeply personal level, we want to believe in magic. We want to believe in magic. Why? Somehow and someday, the natural order of life might be suspended and our problems would go away. Maybe there is such magic. Let's take a look at our continuing study in the book of Acts.

MAGIC IN SAMARIA

Before we can appreciate magic we must know what is real. For example: the Status of Liberty cannot just disappear. A 25-ton railroad car does not vanish into thin air. What is real at the time out story takes place is the century old hatred the Jews had towards Samaritans. I'm not sure why this was. I've heard many explanations. I guess in the final analysis it really doesn't matter. The hate was real. There was a man in Samaria named Simon. This man was a magician. However, he practiced black magic. What do I mean by the statement, "black magic?" Simon had crossed a very serious boundary. In his mind, he was no longer a magician; he was a great religious leader that claimed to be the power of God. We are told the people listened eagerly to him because for a long time he had amazed them with his magic. The only problem was, his magic did nothing for the people.

PHILIP ENTERS

Philip comes to the city of Samaria. At this point a magical reality begins. Simon and Philip were both representatives from God. Who then is the real representative? The story affirms Philip as the authentic representative from God. How does this affirmation take place? Philip breaks the natural order of things by going to a non-Jewish city and preaching to a non-Jewish crowd. There is another important difference between Simon and Philip. Simon proclaimed he was the power of God. Philip directed the people to the power of God. Perhaps the biggest difference is in the magic itself. Simon was probably a great illusionist for his time. His magic was an illusion because it

did nothing for the people. On the other hand, the magic of Philip touched the lives of the people and really changed them. How could this happen? First of all, Philip preached the Gospel. What does that mean? Well...John 3:16 sums it up. God loves all people. God offers the opportunity to experience the joy of eternity. Philip's message was not about Philip. It was about God. Certainly there were skeptics about this message. In the depths of their hearts they asks the question, can the magic of the Gospel really come into our lives. Philip affirms the magic of the Gospel and the power of God by healing people of whatever plagued them.

THE MAGIC OF THE GOSPEL

There is an important detail that we must notice. Multitudes of people came to the faith and ask to be baptized. The people who needed physical healing were a minority. So the healing was not the primary attraction. What was that power in Philip's message that brought so many people to the faith, including Simon. The answer to that question is simple. The Gospel set people free. They were free from the guilt of sin and the feeling of being rejected by God. This was the magic of Philips message. The physically affirmed were set free from the shame and guilt of feeling their problems were caused because God did not like them. The Samaritans were set free from the feeling they were sub-species of humanity. Indeed, they too were God's people. Simon was set free from keeping up an illusion. He could be himself.

THE CELEBRATION OF FREEDOM

This week we celebrate Independence Day when people were set free from tyranny. Today is a celebration of freedom. The magical power of God's love is real, not an illusion. This magic show didn't end when Jesus walked off the stage or ascended into heaven. The magical power of the Gospel is alive and well today, setting people free from the bondage of sin. This power is ours, both to give and receive. Amen