

# Simon the Sorcerer

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[ 0 : 00 ] If you've got a Bible, you can turn to the book of Acts, Acts chapter 8. Acts chapter 8, and we're going to read from verse 1 all the way through to verse 24.

Verse 25, actually. We start with actually the second part of verse 1 of chapter 8 there. Listen to these words as Luke writes to us this account of the early church.

Judea and Samaria. Godly men buried Stephen and mourned deeply for him. But Saul began to destroy the church. Going from house to house, he dragged off both men and women and put them in prison.

Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went. Philip went down to a city in Samaria and proclaimed the Messiah there. When the crowds heard Philip and saw the signs he performed, they all paid close attention to what he said.

For with shrieks, impure spirits came out of many, and many who were paralyzed or lame were healed. So there was great joy in that city. Now for some time a man named Simon had practiced sorcery in the city and amazed all the people of Samaria.

[ 1 : 39 ] He boasted that he was someone great. And all the people, both high and low, gave him their attention and exclaimed, This man is rightly called the great power of God. They followed him because he had amazed them for a long time with a sorcery.

But when they believed Philip as he proclaimed the good news of the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women. Simon himself believed and was baptized.

And he followed Philip everywhere, astonished by the great signs and the miracles he saw. Then the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had accepted the word of God.

They sent Peter and John to Samaria. When they arrived, they prayed for the new believers there that they might receive the Holy Spirit, because the Holy Spirit had not yet come on any of them. They had simply been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.

Then Peter and John placed their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit. When Simon saw that the Spirit was given at the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money and said, Give me also this ability, so that everyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit.

[ 2 : 45 ] Peter answered, May your money perish with you, because you thought you could buy the gift of God with money. You have no part or share in this ministry, because your heart is not right before God.

Repent of this wickedness and pray to the Lord in the hope that he may forgive you for having such a thought in your heart. For I see that you are full of bitterness and captive to sin. Then Simon answered, Pray to the Lord for me, so that nothing you have said may happen to me.

After they had further proclaimed the word of the Lord and testified about Jesus, Peter and John returned to Jerusalem, preaching the gospel in many Samaritan villages. This is the word of the Lord.

Let's pray. Let's ask for God's help together as we look at this. Let's pray. May your spirit strengthen us in this task, Lord, as this is a supernatural exercise.

And may we be captivated by your son, Jesus, as we see him in the pages of scripture. We ask for your help by Christ's sake. Amen. So it's been a long, long time since we were in the book of Acts.

[ 4 : 22 ] I think it's more than six months since we were last in Acts, maybe seven, almost eight months. But we are back. And we pick up the journey of following Luke's account, Luke who writes the book of Acts, Luke's account of the very first Christians, the very first New Testament Christians at least, the early church and what it looks like and what happens.

And we learn things about ourselves and about church and about what we should be doing, what our priorities might be as Christians in a church as we follow this. But it also raises all sorts of pastoral issues that we think about and we wrestle with as we follow this story.

Perhaps one of the most perplexing things that Christians actually face as they think about their own growth in that is the issue of assurance. How do I know that the gospel has actually really taken root in me?

Like, do I really believe this stuff or not? How do I know that? Now this passage in the book of Acts is in some ways a pretty intriguing case study that speaks into this issue.

It doesn't say everything that needs to be said about the issue of assurance. There's a lot more we can do there, but it does start to give us an insight into this whole idea of false faith. And when you know what insincere faith looks like from a passage like this, then I think you're much more able to be able to appropriate and apply God's grace in a way that it speaks to your doubts or maybe even shakes you out of unbelief and interbelief.

[ 5 : 49 ] And so that's what we're going to talk about a little bit this morning. Now, we left off in Acts after the martyrdom of Stephen. And this young fledgling church, which at that point has all been in the city of Jerusalem, is now coming under intense persecution.

And so they're moving outwards from the city of Jerusalem. And what the text does is the text follows Philip. You might remember Philip was one of the seven, the sort of proto-deacons that we have appointed in chapter six.

And you can see from his activity and what he's doing now that his work has sort of moved on from diaconal work to almost being like a traveling evangelist. In fact, he's later given that title.

He's the only person in the New Testament that's given the title evangelist. And he goes out from Jerusalem, forced out by that persecution, and he preaches the gospel in an area called Samaria. And guess what? The same things that happened in Jesus' ministry, the same things that happened in the apostles' ministry in Jerusalem, those same things start to happen.

[ 6 : 57 ] Conversions, miracles, signs and wonders. And so you can see as you read the book of Acts, the Holy Spirit is making, was trying to make it crystal clear to you and me, and Luke is recording this, that the same gospel that's being preached by Jesus is the same gospel that's being preached by the apostles in Jerusalem at Pentecost.

It's now the same gospel that's being preached by Philip and the other Christians as they go out and they scatter around the area around Jerusalem. But it's in Samaria then that we meet this character named Simon, Simon the sorcerer, or if you look in some other early church documents, Simon Magus, the magician.

And he appears to be some sort of regional holy man, claiming to do great miracles, and he has a following. The people even give him a name there. They call him the great power of God because they're amazed by what they see, his sorcery.

But when the gospel comes to town and the people start converting and getting baptized, he gets caught up in all of this as well. So he believes and is baptized. Look at verse 12. When they believed Philip as he proclaimed the good news of the kingdom of God in the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women.

Simon himself believed and was baptized, and he followed Philip everywhere, astonished by the great signs and the miracles he saw. Now I think Luke actually wants us to take that at face value as we read that.

[ 8 : 19 ] Before you start making assessments, like, okay, well, what really happened here? Luke is like, he seemed to believe that he was baptized. So take it at face value.

From all external observations, Simon seemed to believe the gospel. But then the rest of the story unfolds in the passage, and it becomes very clear, I think, that things are not as they seem.

And really by the end, it's sort of hard to believe that Simon did actually have a genuine faith. And so the question then is, well, what went wrong? How did this happen?

That's what we need to figure out. That's what we're going to explore this morning. And I think if you want a thesis for what I think went wrong here, I think you can say it this way. I think that what we're going to see is that Simon has an enslaved heart.

An enslaved heart. And so those are really like our two points this morning. We're going to look at the issue of the heart, and we're going to look at the issue of slavery. The heart and slavery. So here's the first one, the heart.

[ 9 : 22 ] Have that passage open, and look down at verse 14. It says, Now the area where all of this is happening is really important.

This area called Samaria. Samaritans were notorious for having a pretty rocky relationship with the Jews of the time. These two groups essentially have the same origin, but from the time of the exile onwards, in the Old Testament, they start to diverge to the point that the Samaritans begin to have their own culture, even their own quirky religious beliefs that are sort of adjacent to mainstream Judaism.

And so the Jews start to look down their noses at them and consider them sort of half-breeds almost. There's some pretty damning literature you'll find in the period between the Old and the New Testament about Samaritans in Jewish literature.

Now remembering that all the early Christians, they're all Jews. Samaria is not a natural place, one would think, to go and preach the gospel. But the persecution comes along, and what it does is it forces Philip out.

And so he preaches there, and conversions happen. Now this is really interesting to the apostles who have remained. They're the only guys who've remained back in Jerusalem.

[ 11 : 05 ] And they're like, well, we need to check this out. We need to go and see what's happening here, because this is interesting. The Samaritans are believing the gospel. So Peter and John head up to Samaria to investigate, and long story short, when they lay hands on these new converts and pray for them, they, just like in Acts 2 at Pentecost, receive the Holy Spirit.

And so it's a further confirmation to them and to the readers, to us and to everyone who's following the story, that God's gospel is going even to the Samaritans. But Simon, in all of this, he sees something else.

He sees something else that he wants, that he wants for himself. Verse 18. When Simon saw that the Spirit was given at the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money, and he said, give me also this ability, so that everyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit. Now you read that, and you think, well, is that just sort of naive, baby, Christian exuberance? Like we've all had that person who comes to faith and wants to start this brand new ministry that the elders and the pastors are going like, no.

Is that what it is? Look how Peter responds. Peter answered, may your money perish with you. Like no, there's nothing soft about his response.

[ 12 : 33 ] Because you thought you could buy the gift of God with money. You have no part or share in this ministry because your heart is not right before God. Repent of this wickedness and pray to the Lord in the hope that he may forgive you for having such a thought in your heart.

For I see that you are full of bitterness and captive to sin. Peter, presumably by the help of the Holy Spirit, and we've seen this in several places in the book of Acts, is able to see right into the heart behind this particular request.

And his conclusion is that this is actually coming from a poisoned heart. There is something inside of Simon at the level of his heart that is horribly, horribly wrong.

And that has then motivated this sinful request and has thrown really his entire conversion into doubt. See friends, Christianity is, and this is something really important to get our heads and our hearts around, Christianity is intrinsically a religion of the heart.

When the Apostle Paul in the book of Romans gives us a very, very, very brief description of conversion, of coming to faith, Romans 10, he talks about declaring with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believing in your heart that God raised him from the dead.

[ 13 : 49 ] So it's actually not just about profession and comprehension where an individual sort of intellectually understands the content of the gospel message, what it is that we believe as Christians, and then sort of can profess it back and acknowledge it.

It's also heart comprehension, taking hold of it with your heart, that your heart is so moved to it, to this gospel, that it takes hold of this gospel in a way that moves beyond mere comprehension and profession.

Now one of the reasons I think we sometimes struggle to understand this is because we impose a modern conception of the heart back onto the biblical text and what the original writers would have thought and understood by the term heart.

So in today's language, the heart is shorthand for our emotions, how you feel, that that's your heart. And so we can sometimes confuse warm fuzzies for Jesus and the gospel with heartfelt belief, but

they're not necessarily the same thing.

See in scripture, in both the Old Testament and the New Testament, this is both in sort of Hebrew thought and even the way it's used in the New Testament, the heart is the internal center of a person, encompassing the will, the intellect and the emotions.

[ 15 : 11 ] So it's a lot more comprehensive I think than the way we would use the word heart today. And so to believe with your heart, well that's really to have your center convicted and convinced to the point that your intellect has some grasp of it, it affects your will and your emotions.

All of that is getting engaged in this new heartfelt belief. Simon may well have had some intellectual comprehension here. He might have listened to Philip and gone, yep, that makes sense.

I'm on board. But Peter's words here betray that his heart didn't really take hold of what Philip preached. Christianity is a faith to have a faith of that center, of that heart.

That is it works from the inside out. I think a lot of people think that the way to get your internal life right is to fix the external. And what I mean by that is to give you an example, think of a 40 year old father has three primary school kids.

I said three on purpose so you don't think I'm talking about myself here. But think of a 40 year old father and I'm also not 40, but he has three primary school kids and he finds himself often verbally lashing out at them for like relatively small misdemeanors.

[ 16 : 33 ] Like there's a bedroom with some clothes and some toys on the floor and instead of like a gentle, like hey, you really should clean your bedroom, he just unloads with like heightened language and anger and frustration and manipulative rhetoric.

And then after he does that, he feels terrible. It's guilt. This horrible, horrible shame. And he hates the way that this just sort of comes out of him.

But then he starts to rationalize what's happening. And he thinks to himself, he says, you know what, I'm under incredible pressure at work. My boss is making my life a living hell and in this economy, this volatile economy, if you don't work longer and harder than everybody else, you're going to be out.

The next guy's going to be in. And I could be in trouble. So I'm exhausted and I'm frustrated in these evenings when I get home and so that's why I lash out. Maybe he thinks that.

Or maybe he thinks, you know, well maybe he thinks that and he actually takes the thought a little bit further and he thinks, if I could get a different job, different work environment, better job security, well then I'd be a much better dad.

[ 17 : 51 ] I'd be so much more in control of my interactions than with my kids. So maybe he thinks that. Maybe he thinks something else. Maybe he thinks, look, you know what, my wife has been so distant from me for the last few years.

Like we don't fight out loud a lot but there's this gap. I don't feel like we're on the same team anymore. I don't feel like she gives me the attention and the affection that I need and when I think about that, when I think about what I'm not getting for her and how she seems to not notice my needs, an anger starts to rise up inside of me.

I deserve better than this. I mean the amount of stuff that I've done for her and for my family. I'm not some deadbeat husband. I deserve better for this.

And then he thinks, you know what, maybe, maybe these flashes of anger that I have towards my kids well they're an extension of the anger that I have for her. If she could just see what she's actually doing.

If she could see that she's just not playing her part in this team. If she could see that she could just, if she could just give me the attention, the affection that I need, the support I would need, then I would be more composed, I wouldn't be so irritable and I would be a better dad.

[ 19 : 10 ] Now you see, those two examples are looking to the external to fix the internal. If I fix my outside world, my inside world will get better.

I think a lot of us default to that way of operating. But Christianity comes along and it says human beings do not work like that.

That is not how human beings work. Old Testament, Proverbs 4 verse 23, above all else guard your heart for everything you do flows from it.

Jesus, in the New Testament, Matthew 15, and he says this in a number of places, but Matthew 15 verse 18, the things that come out of a person's mouth come from the heart and these defile them.

For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander. He's basically going through the Ten Commandments there. These are what defile a person.

[ 20 : 18 ] If you've got defiling anger coming out from the inside, it is not going to get fixed by just moving things around on the outside.

Maybe you're a person who would consider themselves an unbeliever this morning and you're sitting here and you're figuring out Jesus. You're saying, I'm not sure what I think about Christianity and the church. I haven't been to church for years and I'm trying to think what I make of this Jesus person and Christian faith again.

If you're looking in on the Christian faith, you need to know very clearly this morning that the call to become a Christian is to have your heart changed from the inside out.

It is not primarily about moral improvement on the outside. Being a Christian is not about being a good person so that God will accept you.

It's about having that defiled heart taken out, really, and replaced with a new heart. That's Christianity. And if you are a believer, if you're a Christian this morning, then you need to really, really be clear on this inside out dynamic because you will face immense, incredible frustration in your Christian growth journey if you keep instinctively defaulting to outside in strategies to deal with growth.

[ 21 : 46 ] You're going to keep butting your head against the same problems and you're not going to see change and you're going to go, why am I not seeing change? Why am I not becoming more Christ-like and more holy? Right now, if you're trapped in certain besetting sins over and over again right now that just don't seem to go away no matter how strong the guilt feels, no matter how much shame you feel about those particular sins, it might be because you're using outside end strategies to get rid of them and you're not realizing that you need to have your heart changed.

Christianity is fundamentally a religion of the heart. Now that's kind of the big picture. So the second point here, talking about slavery, I think will give us a little bit more detail because that can stay a little bit up in the air.

So let's try and bring it down a little bit. Let's talk about slavery. Simon has some telltale signs that his heart is not taken hard of the gospel. Wanting the good things that God brings instead of God himself.

You see that in the way he's talking there. He's like, I see this power that comes along with following Jesus. I want that, not so much Jesus himself. Or the transactional way in which he approaches God, maybe I can buy this thing for myself.

Maybe that's how it works. Far for money. Or the false repentance even at the end. I don't know if you noticed that, but we'll talk about that in a second, but that's not real repentance going on there at the end. There are signs all the way through that his heart is not fixated on Jesus.

[ 23 : 12 ] Now what drives these signs? What brings them out? What's the symptoms? If his heart is not clinging to Jesus, what is it actually holding on to? And so this is where the issue of slavery comes in. Simon, I think, is enslaved to a lust for power and status and prestige.

And the reason I think that is because of what Peter says. Look at verse 23. I'll start actually reading from verse 22. Peter says, repent of this wickedness and pray to the Lord in the hope that he may forgive you for having such a thought in your heart.

For I see that you are full of bitterness and captive to sin. It's not just that Simon sort of has occasional moments where he desires power and status in an ungodly way.

He's actually captive to those lusts. Enslaved by them, they master him, they control him. Now you would imagine that Simon, given his background, would struggle with this particular sin.

For some time the people in the area have been deifying him, given him this name, the great power of God, and it's not like he's just gone, oh you flatter me.

[ 24 : 23 ] He's fueled this because the text says that he has boasted himself that he's somebody great. And so this particular struggle that he already has, comes out in his encounter with the gospel.

And yet instead of putting it to death, at the foot of the cross of the one who is truly the great one, instead of repenting, he continues to feed the craving and he becomes enslaved by it.

I was listening to this week to some podcasts on the subject of moral philosophy, something you all do every day when you drive to work.

But one of the topics that came up was the history of slavery and the history of the abolitionist movement in the 18th and 19th century, particularly in Britain. And it's striking, I was listening to a historian talk about it, it's striking how successful the abolitionist movement was in reshaping moral intuitions in the world that we live in today.

For so much of human history, slavery has just been a given. It's just been like, well, the sky is blue, the grass is green, and there are slaves.

[ 25 : 41 ] Some people are slaves and some people are not. In so many parts of human history, and throughout history, there have been occasional small slave uprisings, because it's not particularly nice to be a slave in a lot of societies, and there have even been small abolitionist attempts, but they never won support from the majority of people in the way that the abolitionist movement did in Britain.

Today, for many of us, slavery is unthinkable, totally unthinkable, so morally reprehensible that it is unthinkable. There's only one country in the world that has laws on their books that make a provision for slavery, and that is actually Afghanistan under the Taliban, and they only reintroduced those laws in January.

They added the categories of enslaved and free into their legislation. at the beginning of this year. For the vast majority of us, it's unthinkable.

The horror of slavery has been so deeply, deeply impressed upon our moral consciences. Now, friends, I think we need to have something of the same kind of awakening, moral awakening, but now a spiritual awakening to the horror of spiritual slavery.

Peter says to Simon that when he looks into his heart, he sees bitterness and enslavement. I think that's what the NIV translation says, but in the original language there, it's that bitterness is literally the gall of bitterness, and it's most likely actually a reference back to the Old Testament, to the book of Deuteronomy.

[ 27 : 19 ] Deuteronomy 29, verse 18, where Moses says, make sure there is no man or woman, clan or tribe among you today whose heart turns away from the Lord our God to go and worship the gods of the nations.

Make sure there is no root among you that produces such bitter poison. Literally, gall. Gall is a bitter poison that you get from a plant like wormwood.

Peter is saying to Simon, Simon, your root is poisoned. Your root is riddled through with poison. The slavery that you're in is poison at the core. You're dying from the inside out.

Any sort of signs of life that you might have on the exterior, they are just a facade covering over the fact that you are terminal. You are a walking corpse. Friends, I think we need sobriety when it comes to the issue of spiritual slavery.

slavery. We need to be horrified. We need to see it as it actually is so that we will, by the help of God's Holy Spirit, put it to death when we start to see the signs of it in our life.

[ 28 : 32 ] Now, how do you tell? How do you tell if you're enslaved or you're at least en route to being enslaved? There are a bunch of different ways, but here's one way.

You tell when your desire is, everybody has desires when your desires start to turn into non-negotiables. That is a big warning sign that you might be in trouble. We all have desires.

We all have desires for good things, sometimes for bad things, but when those desires for good or for bad become all-consuming, that's when we've turned a corner and we're heading in the direction of slavery.

So I'll give you an example of what I mean by this. An example of a good, healthy desire would be, I really would like a little bit more financial security than I currently have. It's a good desire.

Example of a non-negotiable desire would be, I must have financial security. Without it, life is pointless. It's a move that's happened there. And the presence of non-negotiable desires in your life is a telltale sign of you heading down the route of slavery.

[ 29 : 42 ] And listen, we're often not honest with ourselves about these things, about these desires, we play them down. We often only get to see how many non-negotiable desires we have when someone or something pushes back on them.

And then what happens is we react in irrational and disproportionate ways to the pushback. So for example, using that financial security illustration, when your very close friend comes to you and gently points out that you are spending an inordinate amount of time at the work, at the office, and it's having this negative impact upon your friendship, you don't go, thanks for that.

You react, disproportionately react, to his gentle correction or gentle challenge. desire. That's a big warning sign.

Which desires in your life right now, that are in your life right now, we all have desires, but which ones border on the non-negotiable? Which ones would elicit a really, really strong reaction from you if they were gently challenged by somebody close to you?

I think many of us can think of many things in our lives that might fall into that category or be on a trajectory to that category.

[ 31 : 06 ] And so I want to say don't ignore them, friends, don't ignore them. Don't downplay them and say, well, it's not so bad. It's not such a big issue. See the horror of slavery.

See that spiritual slavery has the potential to turn you into a walking corpse. And what do you do if you get there?

And you do see these things. And now I'm worried about them. What do you do? How do you guard yourself against that danger? Will you stop by repenting?

Heartful, heartfelt repentance. Not like what Simon does here. So look what Simon does. Verse 22, Peter says to him, repent of this wickedness and pray to the Lord in the hope that he might forgive you for having such a thought in your heart.

What does Simon do though? He tries to sound spiritual and humble, sort of deferring to Peter, but almost all of the commentators point out that he's actually just sidestepping repentance here.

[ 32 : 16 ] Verse 24, Simon answered, pray to the Lord for me so that nothing you have said may happen to me. He doesn't repent. He says to Peter, you pray for me.

Peter says, repent. He says, no, you pray for me. He wants to procure, I think, what he perceives to be a sort of like powerful spiritual middleman in Peter to bargain with God.

instead of falling on his face and crying out, Lord have mercy on me a sinner, which is what Peter says he should do. Real repentance is the starting point for spiritual emancipation.

It's how you start to get free. You own your sin and you consciously choose to turn away from it. But you're going to need more than that.

You're going to need more to be free from slavery because your will and your resolve to turn away from the sin, even when you see it, is not going to be strong enough by itself. You need something to capture you.

[ 33 : 16 ] You need something to master you. You need something to so capture your heart, to move you, that you will then, with conviction, run in the opposite direction. Because that's where real change comes from.

That's where real freedom comes from, when you're caught by that. You know what one of the most powerful tools was in Britain, in the abolitionist movement?

It was an image. An image. This is actually new to me, I didn't know this. It was an image of a black man on his knees, in chains, with his hands sort of clasped together as if pleading for mercy, and underneath the image were the words, am I not a man and a brother?

It was this powerfully emotive image that brought the horror of slavery home to the ordinary British people who weren't on the plantations, who weren't on the slave ships, who weren't in the colonies, but were just in Liverpool or Manchester or somewhere else, going about their daily business, hardly ever sometimes even seeing a black person.

But they saw this image, and suddenly that slave they'd heard about is humanized. It was a powerful, powerful emotive image. A guy by the name of Josiah Wedgwood, who was an abolitionist, was also an entrepreneur, and he was involved in the pottery business.

[ 34 : 45 ] And so he mass-produced medallions with this image on, and was spread around the country, put in all sorts of different places, and it's possible, and there's some writing on this, and it's possible that that image of a suffering man had more of an effect on the moral psyche of the average British person than any of the speeches in parliament by people like William Wilberforce or Clarkson and the other abolitionists.

Because it spoke right to the heart. It provoked the heart. That's what you need. That's what you need for freedom, for change, for transformation, something so powerful that it goes right to your heart.

Because that's where transformation happens. There's actually a beautiful picture of transformation in this passage. True freedom.

happening in this passage, in the text. You might actually miss it if you don't know carefully. I've missed it every single time I've come to this passage before, and it took some smarter people than me to point this out. But look at this. It's John.

The Apostle John. This is the last time in the book of Acts that John gets mentioned. He moves off of the scene, the narrative after this point. He's never mentioned again, but it's a very poignant scene that he's mentioned here in Samaria of all places.

[ 36 : 12 ] Because in the first volume of Acts, which is the Gospel of Luke, in Luke chapter 9, with Jesus heading off to Jerusalem to face his death, the apostles are traveling along with him and they go through Samaria and they come to a Samaritan town hoping to find hospitality, hoping to find some support on their journey.

But instead of hospitality, they find opposition. Samaritans don't want them in the town. they're not welcomed in. And enraged by this, John and his brother James turn to Jesus and they say to Jesus, Lord, do you want us to call fire down from heaven and destroy them?

Can we burn them? Can we burn these sorry, miserable Samaritans who can't see the Messiah for who he actually is? Can we wipe them out? That was John's heart.

That was his enslaved heart. Him and his brother were nicknamed the sons of thunder. That was their personality. They were explosive and they want to unleash judgment on these Samaritans. That's where his heart naturally went when he faced opposition. But now look at him. Now he's in Samaria again. Now he is gently laying his hands on the heads of these same Samaritans.

[ 37 : 38 ] And again he's asking for fire. He's asking for fire. But not the fire of judgment. He is asking that the fire of the Holy Spirit who brings life and healing and forgiveness would come down upon these people.

John has undergone a remarkable change. His heart, his center has taken hold of the gospel and his chains have fallen off.

You can see Charles Wesley's famous hymns, hymn words in the life of John here. Long my imprisoned spirit lay fast bound in sin and nature's night.

Thine eye diffused a quickening ray. I woke the dungeon flamed with light. My chains fell off. My heart was free. I rose, went forth and followed thee.

What changed him? What did he see? He saw the image of a suffering man. He saw his Savior, his Lord Jesus Christ, stand under the fire of judgment.

[ 38 : 47 ] That very fire that he wanted to call down. He saw his Savior stand under the fire of judgment. He saw Jesus stand under that fire as he endured the wrath that is due to human sin on the cross.

And when he saw that, he realized that that was for me. He is standing there under that wrath so that I don't receive that fire. An incredible love, incredible compassion, incredible mercy.

The vision of his suffering Savior changed him, freed him, made him new, gave him a new heart.

And so friends, you and I, we're never going to be free from slavery until we see that, until we savor that. It's why we gather for worship Sunday after Sunday, to hear that good news over and over again, to look at that image over and over again, to have it in our faces, why we go to the table over and over again.

It's why we sing the same songs over and over again. We are a one trick pony as Christians because there's only one thing that's going to get us free from this slavery that kills us from the inside out.

[ 39 : 56 ] And that is the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ. And so I encourage you friends, look there, repent of sin, put it to death, be ruthless with it, and then run to Jesus, look there, and you will find your emancipation.

Let's pray together. Our gracious God, have mercy upon us this morning. Have mercy and free us. Free us from slavery to sin. Simon's story is a tragic story because we see a man who doesn't turn from that slavery.

We see a man ensnared. We don't even get to see what happens in the end. May that not be our story this morning, Lord. May we repent of our sin and may we run to the forgiving blood of our Lord Jesus Christ.

That's where we will find the freedom that we need, Lord. Father, I pray for any person who sits here this morning who doesn't know that forgiveness. Won't you bring them to faith this morning? Won't you awaken true faith in their hearts?

[ 41 : 08 ] Give them a new heart this morning. And for those of us who trust in you and who walk in your ways, Lord, help us, strengthen us because it's so easy to slip back into these patterns. It's so easy to try and move externals around to fix the internal instead of going to the very ordinary work of repenting and trusting in you and our Lord Jesus Christ.

lead us in that, Lord, we pray and we ask this for Christ's sake and his glory. Amen.