

Sermon for Sunday, October 10, 1976, by Andrew A. Jumper, D.D., Senior Pastor
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"THE MAN WITH THE WRONG HEART"

Acts 8:4-24

Text: "You have neither part nor lot in this matter, for your heart is not right
before God."
--Acts 8:21

There are a couple of observations that I want to make about our scripture for this morning. The first observation is this: persecution always spreads the gospel. Recently I have been reading some things by Corrie ten Boom. During the Second World War, Corrie and her entire family were arrested for helping Jews escape from the Nazis in Holland. Some of the family died and all of them endured incredible suffering. Yet, God used that persecution to bring many people to Jesus Christ. I suppose Corrie ten Boom has led more people to Jesus than almost any other modern figure. Some months ago Ruth Graham was passing through town and she called me from the airport. She had just spent some time with a lady who had been in China for many years. She told me that in spite of intense persecution the underground Christian church in China was vibrant and alive. In our scripture for this morning we read how persecution broke out against the early Christian church in Jerusalem. But persecuting the church is like beating out a grass fire with a broom because all you do is scatter the sparks. So the Bible says, "Now those who were scattered went about preaching the word." Yes, persecution always spreads the gospel. I am told that in Russia a Christian endures great persecution. He is discriminated against by the state and by society. Just to gather together to worship is a great risk. Yet, in spite of this we are told that the church in Russia is very much alive. Here in our own country it may yet take persecution for us Christians to realize our duty to others to share the good news about Jesus.

The second observation I want to make is this: When Jesus is preached, when Jesus is honored and held up, it always brings joy to the hearts of people. In our scripture for this morning we read how Philip went to Samaria and began to tell the people about Jesus. And then the Bible says, "So there was much joy in that city." The people in Samaria had many problems. They lived under the tyrannical rule of Rome, a captive people; they lived in harsh and cruel times when there was often hunger and want; they lived in a time of great suffering when there was much illness and pain. Yet, in the midst of all these needs there was an even greater need for there was a spiritual need in the world--there was a spiritual need in the hearts of men. And Jesus met that need! So, in the midst of the needs and sufferings and pains of life they found someone who ministered to their deepest need--the need for a saviour. Yes, there is always joy when Jesus is preached.

We are told that Americans enjoy the highest standard of living in the world. And of those Americans, you here this morning for the most part are in the upper ten percent of all Americans in what you have. But being a part of the most privileged people in the world has not made you happy. There are many of you this morning who are unhappy. There are those who have serious emotional problems, those who have marriages under strain, those who are unhappy and discontented. Jesus is the only thing that will bring you joy. Many of you have already made that wonderful discovery and you are praising God for what he has done in your lives. Many of you have already made the wonderful discovery that Jesus can change your life, that he can give you peace and joy when everything else fails. Yes, there is always joy when Jesus is preached and men find a new heart in him.

In our scripture for this morning we read about a man who was a success in terms of the world. He was an important man that the people called "Great". Undoubtedly he was a man of considerable means because he had money to offer the disciples.

But being important, having money, having people give heed to him had not met his deepest need. So, when Philip began to tell about Jesus, he believed. The Bible says of him, "Even Simon himself believed, and after being baptized he continued with Philip." Yet, in spite of the fact that he was a baptized believer, something was wrong in Simon's life. We hear Peter saying to him, "you have neither part nor lot in this matter, for your heart is not right before God."

The Bible says, "A new heart I will give you..." (Ex. 36:26) But if Simon had a new heart, the transplant had failed. If Simon had a new heart, it was the wrong one. Do you feel that way sometimes? I suppose most of us here this morning believe in Jesus. We believe he is the Son of God. We believe he died for our sins, and we have been baptized as Christians. Yet, something is wrong. We don't have that joy. We don't have that peace and assurance and contentment. And for many of us, life isn't working out very well. Like Simon we have the wrong heart. There were several things wrong with Simon's heart and I would like to share them with you this morning.

Notice in the first place that Simon wanted magic and not religion. He thought religion was some trick you could use and he said to the disciples, "give me this power..." Yes, he wanted some magic by which he could change and manipulate life to his benefit, some magic by which he could change the realities of life to suit his whim. Are you guilty of that? I know I am. Life has often brought to me hardships or heartaches, it has brought trials and difficulties, and what I have wanted at a time like that is some magic wand to wave. I've wanted Peter Pan and his stardust rather than Jesus and his cross. Like one popular song puts it, "make the world go away, get it all off my shoulder".

Do you have things happen in your life and you complain bitterly, "Why me, Lord?" Does some failure occur, some sickness come, some trouble break into your life and you cry out, "Lord, take this away." And then, when God doesn't do that, do you feel betrayed and resentful and begin to wonder is there is a God after all? That happened to a young ministerial student from New Zealand named Chris Lethbridge. His neck was fractured in a swimming accident and he was paralyzed from his neck down. He began to doubt God's vision and love. Did God care? "Why doesn't the Lord heal me?" he asked, unable to accept his suffering. Then one day as he read his Bible he read the story of Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane. There his Saviour knelt to pray and in his agony as he faced the suffering of the cross he cried out to God. Yet, he surrendered his will to God's and prayed, "Nevertheless, not my will, but thine be done." Chris made that prayer, too, and from that hour on he had a glad heart and a beaming face. Yes, surrender to God's will, and not magic.

Notice in the second place that Simon thought religion could be bought. When he saw the disciples being used as channels of God's Spirit, he wanted that power for himself and he offered to buy that power from the disciples. Are you ever guilty of trying to buy God off? I know I have been. Something goes wrong in life, or there is something I want, and I say, "God, if you'll do this thing for me, I'll pray every day--or I'll live a better life--or I'll tithe my income--or I'll really be a devoted Christian." Do you do that? I suspect most of us do. Peter said to Simon, "Your silver perish with you, because you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money!" Now, God can't be bought off--money is no substitute for surrender.

Have you ever stopped to think what it would cost if you tried to give God his money's worth? In your mind's eye picture the hill of Calvary and the cross with Jesus suffering there. How much is that worth? What price would you put on one precious drop of the blood of Jesus? And if God paid such a high price for you, what will you give him so that he will have his money's worth? Yes, "love so amazing, so divine, demands my soul, my life, my all" (Isaac Watts).

God can't be bought off. Just to say we believe in God isn't enough. To belong to the church isn't enough. To contribute to the church isn't enough. No, you can't buy God off that cheaply. The only thing he will accept from any of us is a surrendered life. Love so amazing, so divine, does indeed demand my soul, my life, my all. You see, that's the only thing the Lord will accept.

Finally, notice in the third place that there was something in Simon's heart that was still untouched. Peter said to him, "your heart is not right before God." And then he went on to say, "Pray to the Lord that, if possible, the intent of your heart may be forgiven you." What is the intent of your heart this morning? Is there anything in your heart this morning that stands between you and God?

Isn't this the problem most of us have? There is some old, unrepented sin in our hearts, some old evil habit, some old passion, some old desire that lies unconverted in our hearts. We are not really willing to surrender it, to give it up, Corrie ten Boom, whom I mentioned earlier, tells of shopping in Switzerland for some watches for her jewelry shop in Holland. To avoid the high duty on the watches that the Dutch customs would demand, she hid them in a corner of her suitcase. As she boarded the plane for home she began to pray, "Lord, will you give us a good trip and a safe journey: good flying weather, skill and ability to the pilot, a safe landing. And Lord, help me to smug.." But she could not finish her prayer. Smuggling was stealing and she could not pray for a sin.

Can you pray for what is in your heart this morning? Can you pray for the book you are reading? Can you pray for the clubs you belong to? Can you pray for God's blessings on how you use your spare time--on your sex life--on your friendships--on your language--on your goals and ambitions--on the way you make your living--on how you treat other people? Can you truly? Or is there something for which you cannot or will not pray? If you cannot or will not pray about something, then there is sin. And, like Simon, if there is some untouched sin, some unrepented deed, some unsundered desire in our hearts, we are not in tune with God.

Back during the depression years of the 30s, a young man was offered a job playing and singing over the radio. Fame and possible riches lay within his grasp. One night as he was thinking over the decision he had to make, he sat down at the piano. As he sat there with his fingers aimlessly running over the keys, his eyes fell on a poem his mother had put there. His fingers began to pick out a tune as he read the words. When he finished, he dedicated that song and his life to Jesus. God used that young man richly in the years that followed. You have heard him sing many times for his name is Beverly Shea. That day he wrote the tune to the words, "I'd rather have Jesus." Yes, "I'd rather have Jesus than silver or gold, I'd rather be his than have riches untold."

Is your heart right with God this morning? If not, what would you rather have than Jesus?