

When the Counterfeit Looks Authentic

Acts 8:9-23

Introduction

We live in a world that is full of counterfeits ... Counterfeit money – counterfeit art – counterfeit signatures – and worst of all – counterfeit people ... But the most dangerous counterfeit of them all – is the one that comes across as being truly authentic ... That’s why it works so well – the more authentic it looks – the easier it is to deceive.

The enemy is a master at imitation ... He can’t create – all he can do is imitate and pervert the original ... Obviously – he can’t create humanity but he certainly knows how to manipulate them – in a manner that makes them look like they are flowing in the anointing ... Recall the warning from our Lord - - “Be wary of false preachers who smile a lot – dripping with practiced sincerity ... Chances are – they’re out to rip you off somehow ... Don’t be impressed with charisma – look for character ... Who preachers are – is the main thing – not what they say.” ... Unfortunately – the church has lost its discernment – and readily settles for the counterfeit – as long as they are entertaining the crowd.

Our text introduces us to a man named Simon – a sorcerer who dazzled the people of Samaria ... He performed deeds that appeared to be supernatural – so much so – that the people of the city called him “The Great Power of God” ... Think about that – an entire community mistook manipulation for power ... They were deceived by an illusion and believed it to be a miracle ... They confused performance for the presence of the Almighty ... Now catch this – this climate of counterfeit – is exactly where the angel sent Philip ... A true *kainos* being – who fully embodied the authentic Kingdom.

This encounter between Simon and Philip – and we will also see Peter – will expose two realities that still confront the church today – the deception of anointing and the deception of

conversion ... One imitates the Spirit's works – the other imitates the Spirit's birth ... And both must be discerned if we are to walk in true Kingdom alignment ... So, let's dive into this text – and uncover what happens when the counterfeit mimics the Kingdom.

Power over Persuasion

Acts 8:9–11

Our text says in verse 9 – “There was a man named Simon, who had practiced sorcery in the city and amazed the people of Samaria, claiming that he was someone great” ... Simon didn't just entertain the folk – he bewitched them ... He had captured their admiration – their allegiance – to the place where they considered him to be from God ... In verse 10 we read – “All the people – from the least to the greatest – paid attention to him and said – This man is the Great Power of God” ... Simon didn't just have influence – he actually controlled the spiritual atmosphere of the region.

What they saw looked supernatural – but it wasn't Kingdom – it was persuasion dressed up as power ... Simon used supernatural theatrics to deceive – then convince – natural minds ... He cloaked manipulation in spiritual language – illusion wrapped in imitation ... And because the city had no reference for authentic Kingdom power – the counterfeit became convincing ... Catch this – when the real is absent – the counterfeit always looks authentic.

Today – the church keeps falling for the same counterfeit that the Samaritans did ... They confuse natural charisma – with kingdom calling ... They can't discern between natural talent – and spiritual anointing ... Paul warned us that in the last days – “people would have a form of godliness” ... What does that mean? ... What they did and what they said – would appear to be coming from the Spirit of God ... But Paul continued and said – “but denying the power thereof” ... What does that mean? ... Their power source flowed from personality – not His Presence.

Spiritual Nugget

Counterfeit power thrives wherever authentic presence is absent ... It feeds on admiration – not

alignment ... It draws crowds – but never births change ... Persuasion can stir emotions – but only Presence can transform the atmosphere ... When the source is self – the fruit is shallow – but when the source is Spirit – transformation becomes inevitable ... Simon dazzled a city – but Philip awakened one ... Because true power doesn't perform – it reveals ... It unveils the Kingdom that's already here – not the illusion people want to see ... The counterfeit must always convince – but the authentic always awakens ... And this is where the distinction becomes undeniable – because when the counterfeit tries to impress – the authentic simply manifests ... When truth shows up – the counterfeit loses its luster ... That's exactly what happens next – as Philip steps into divine demonstration.

The Demonstration of Kingdom

Acts 8:12–13

Our text continues – “But when they believed Philip as he preached the good news concerning the Kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ – they were baptized, both men and women” ... Take note of the word – **But** ... It marks a shift in the atmosphere in Samaria ... Everything that had been formed by the counterfeit – was now being overturned by kingdom truth ... Catch this important truth – Philip never confronted – attacked – nor sought to refute Simon's words or activities ... Philip simply released kingdom authenticity – and it was kingdom truth that destroyed the counterfeit which plagued Samaria.

Notice – Philip simply preached the kingdom message – and the kingdom confirmed the message through corresponding manifestations ... Paul reminds us - - “My message and my preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom – but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power.” ... The world doesn't need persuasive speeches nor convincing arguments – it needs undeniable encounters with the kingdom ... Philip knew / believed who he was as a kainos being and simply lived it out ... He didn't go to Samaria to minister or put on a crusade ... He simply went where the angel sent him – and lived life – the kainos life.

Now this is crazy – look at verse 13 ... It says - “Simon himself believed and was baptized – and he followed Philip everywhere – amazed by the great signs and miracles he saw” ... The guy who was called the great power of God – was now enamored by Philip ... Why? ... Because Simon knew what he had was a fake – and he knew what Philip had was genuine ... This created a wonder and excitement within Simon ... It drew him closer to kingdom realities – but did Simon actually cross over into the kingdom?

Believing without Becoming

Acts 8:13, 18–23

This portion of scripture strikes at the heart of the salvation experience ... Here we find Simon – who believed the message of the kingdom Philip preached ... Simon was then baptized and began following Philip around – amazed at what he was seeing – all of this stated in verse 13 ... Today – we would say – look at that young convert on fire for Jesus ... But as we will soon find out – that was far from reality ... We now see in our text – Peter and John show up in Samaria – laying hands on the believers – so they may receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit ... Simon gets all fired up watching what is happening – then this interesting exchange happens between him and Peter.

Acts 8:18-24 NLT

When Simon saw that the Spirit was given when the apostles laid their hands on people, he offered them money to buy this power ... 19 “Let me have this power, too,” he exclaimed, “so that when I lay my hands on people, they will receive the Holy Spirit!” ... 20 But Peter replied, “May your money be destroyed with you for thinking God’s gift can be bought! ... 21 You can have no part in this, for your heart is not right with God. ... 22 Repent of your wickedness and pray to the Lord. ... Perhaps he will forgive your evil thoughts, ... 23 for I can see that you are full of bitter jealousy and are held captive by sin.” ... 24 “Pray to the Lord for me,” Simon exclaimed, “that these terrible things you’ve said won’t happen to me!”

Now let’s refocus ... Our text this morning is dealing with this concept of counterfeit ... We have just seen how the power – signs and wonders – the anointing – can be counterfeited by the

man named Simon – where he deceived an entire region ... Let me just drop this little truth bomb here – this same counterfeit continues today in our Christian culture.

But now we enter into a serious and dangerous counterfeit ... The counterfeit of salvation ... Simon could no longer walk in the counterfeit of power – as Philip clearly exposed the counterfeit by demonstrating the authentic ... So, Simon shifts gears – and now chooses to counterfeit the salvation experience ... Let me remind you of verse 13 ... Simon believed the message – he was baptized – he followed the preacher – but it was all a counterfeit ... Once again – it is the discerning eye of Peter that clears things up for us – as he states in verse 23 – “for I see that you are full of bitter jealousy and are held captive by sin.”

Today – all too many people – are walking around with a counterfeit salvation experience ... We still have counterfeit preachers – preaching a counterfeit message – producing counterfeit conversions ... Don’t mistake Peter’s calling out of Simon as being from a heart of anger or accusation ... Peter’s heart felt pity for Simon and gave him opportunity to repent – so that he may truly have a kingdom salvation experience.

Unfortunately – our churches struggle with this issue of counterfeit ... Why? ... Because we lack the Peter’s who will call it out ... People are more afraid of offending others – than they are of speaking truth to them – so that they may have a real conversion experience ... What is encouraging is what Peter stated in verses 22, 24 ... Peter told Simon to repent and Simon asked for prayer ... Here we can discern that Simon’s heart wasn’t seared like Ananias – who Peter never told to repent.

A true kingdom salvation experience comes from a heart that is broken – sorrowful – and humble ... Broken because you finally see the reality of who you really are ... Sorrowful because you realize all those you used and abused through your brokenness ... Humble because you realize the reality that in your present state – you are doomed ... You come to the place where you finally comprehend that without God – you are nothing – and you can do nothing

Takeaway

This week – take some time to sit alone with the Spirit and let Him search your heart ... Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 13:5 – “Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith – test yourselves. Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you – unless, of course, you fail the test?” ... This isn’t about condemnation – it’s about confirmation ... It’s about confirming the reality of your oneness with Christ.

Here is a few key steps on how to do a self-examination ... Find a time that works – where you can be alone ... Remove all distractions – don’t forget your cellphone ... Do some breathing exercises to calm and settle your inner man ... You may want to say quietly – “Be still and know I Am God” a few times until you sense a peaceful atmosphere ... Then honestly ask – “Spirit of Truth – clearly show me – if I have believed the counterfeit or the truth of the kingdom ... Don’t rush the process – remain still until your awareness arises.

Depending upon what you sense the Spirit saying – settle the matter ... Repent if need be ... Rejoice in His confirmation ... Remember – conviction isn’t judgment – it is an invitation ... It’s the Father drawing His sons and daughters back into authentic union – because where the counterfeit dies and the authentic begins to live.

Closing Prayer

Father – awaken our hearts ... Strip away every counterfeit that has dulled our discernment ... Remove every imitation we’ve mistaken for intimacy ... Spirit of Truth – we open our hearts before you – as David confessed in Psalm 139 - - “Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: And see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.” ... Our intent in this searching is so that we may remove any counterfeit that has invaded our being ... Our desire is to be conformed into the image of our Lord Jesus.

Lord – I decree over every heart under the sound of my voice ... May the fog of confusion lift ... May discernment re-awaken within each heart ... May there no longer be any confusion over discerning the authentic or the counterfeit ... I declare the Spirit of Truth is recalibrating every heart to be in complete alignment with the indwelling Spirit – the Spirit of Christ.

As we leave Your house this day ... We go challenged – enlightened – and strengthened by Your Spirit in Jesus mighty name - Amen