

Sermon Series – Resilient: Rediscovering the Lost Art of Being Unshakeable  
Spiritualism without Christ – Acts 8:9-24  
December 6<sup>th</sup>, 2020 // Daniel Hickenbotham

Introduction:

- Series Intro: Thin worldviews vs. Thick worldviews
- We are not to be conformed to the pattern of this age. But TRANSFORMED by the renewing of the mind...
  - As much as we may think we live in a world of competing religions, or values, or politics, or whatever, we really live in a world of competing worldviews... all those other things, the things that make up culture, are determined by, and thus are primarily an expression of, our worldview.
    - Because, where politics and values are usually loud and explicit, worldview is frequently subtle... implicit.
      - Worldview is our operating system, that thing constantly running in the background enabling the functions of everything else... but it is not neutral.
        - **Worldviews are battling for supremacy**... always... and we are called not to be conformed to pattern of this age... the worldview of this age... but to be transformed by the renewing of the mind.
- Last week, Jeff laid out some of the innate faults of the naturalist, secularist worldview.
  - Inherently self-defeating as a philosophical/intellectual system
  - Intrinsically demeaning and dehumanizing
    - The danger of fully embracing this worldview as a society had its fullest revelation in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, under the reign of various Marxist systems.
      - Estimated that 100 million people were killed under communist or socialist regimes, which are fundamentally natural secularist.
        - Here's the thing: if your worldview says that people came from randomness and really are just accidentally evolved meat computers... then 100 million deaths aren't a horrific tragedy...
          - They just are. Like air or gravity or the spinning of the planets.
    - This isn't to say that there aren't plenty of secular naturalists who aren't wonderful, moral, people, but it is in contradiction to their professed worldview.
      - Our society has, and seems to be becoming, progressively more secularist, more naturalist...
        - Jeff pointed out that along with that, spiritual belief is rising as well...
          - Sadly, that isn't because of pure evangelism...
          - Along with this burgeoning belief rises a spirituality devoid of Christ, devoid of the God of the Bible...
- This is the rise of the "spiritual but not religious," "the spiritual but unaffiliated," demographic.
  - The "religion" of "irreligion"
    - This a more subtle distinction to address...
      - Much of it
        - Uses the same language... divinity, grace, peace, love, forgiveness, relationship,

- Professes an admiration for the scriptures, calling it “ancient wisdom” or “sacred texts”
  - Uses the same philosophical arguments for the existence of God or the generalized Divine...
- Yet, they fundamentally reject or pervert the lynch pin, the chief cornerstone, of a biblical worldview: Jesus, the Christ and his work on the cross...
- Let’s look at our scripture for today: Acts 8:9-24
  - 9 A man named Simon had previously practiced sorcery in that city and amazed the Samaritan people, while claiming to be somebody great. 10 They all paid attention to him, from the least of them to the greatest, and they said, “This man is called the Great Power of God.”[b] 11 They were attentive to him because he had amazed them with his sorceries for a long time. 12 But when they believed Philip, as he proclaimed the good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, both men and women were baptized. 13 Even Simon himself believed. And after he was baptized, he followed Philip everywhere and was amazed as he observed the signs and great miracles that were being performed.... 18 When Simon saw that the Spirit[c] was given through the laying on of the apostles’ hands, he offered them money, 19 saying, “Give me this power also so that anyone I lay hands on may receive the Holy Spirit.” 20 But Peter told him, “May your silver be destroyed with you, because you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money! 21 You have no part or share in this matter, because your heart is not right before God. 22 Therefore repent of this wickedness of yours, and pray to the Lord that, if possible, your heart’s intent may be forgiven. 23 For I see you are poisoned by bitterness and bound by wickedness.” 24 “Pray to the Lord for me,” Simon replied, “so that nothing you have said may happen to me.”

- Point 1: **Spiritualism without Christ is our default setting.**
    - Verses 9-10
      - **9 A man named Simon had previously practiced sorcery in that city and amazed the Samaritan people, while claiming to be somebody great. 10 They all paid attention to him, from the least of them to the greatest, and they said, "This man is called the Great Power of God."**
    - Right around 10% of US adults identify themselves as agnostic and/or atheist, but it is a growing minority.
      - The largest statistical moves have been the shrinking numbers of "spiritual and religious" and the growing number of "spiritual not religious," about a straight 25% shift from one to the other.
        - We have seen some big name celebrity Christians do the same in the last 5 years.
          - Most of us probably personally know someone who has gone through a process of "deconstruction" in their faith and emerged as kind of a weird blend of Christian but not.
      - I have some depth of experience personally here:
        - Sobriety
        - California
          - I am fairly confident I know almost everyone in that 25%
- There is a sexiness to making this claim.
  - So open to things. So progressive. So non-exclusive.
    - As a culture, we HATE exclusivity.
      - Tell us we can't have something, and we will either use it as motivation earn enough money to buy it or as a reason to campaign for some politician who will give it to us for free.
      - Tell us we can't access something, and we will find a way to break in, buy in, or get it closed down so no one gets access to it at all.
      - Tell us that there is one truth and we will find a way to undermine the claim or get it declared hate speech.
        - We want options or we want nothing.
    - You can see this in our culture's response to the 10 commandments:
      - Which commandments do people really have a problem with?

- Don't murder, don't steal, don't lie, be respectful to parents... everyone pretty much agrees that's cool.
- Rest one day of the week (heck, we will do you one better we will rest like ALL the days of the week)
- Be satisfied with what you have and don't be bitter about your neighbor having more? We are all just trying to be happy with what we've got, right?
- Don't make idols... cool... I'm not really into crafting anyway.
- Don't have sex with anyone who isn't your spouse and listen to and obey only Yaweh?
  - Dude... you are so stinking strict with people... don't you know it is 2020... how can you be so closed minded and bigoted... I don't want to worship a God like that.
- But when you reject the God of the bible, you don't get a neutral "unique to you" spirituality...
  - You get syncretism.
    - In fact, the Samaritans from our story had a weird syncretic culture and religion.
      - No longer purely ethnically Jewish.
      - Adopted foreign practices and places of worship.
        - You can see that things had gotten twisted, because they had started calling Simon "The Great Power of God" ...
          - Loaded term in Samaria... because of the way the Samaritan Pentateuch was translated, this phrase was an association of Simon with God Himself...
      - They believed they had arrived at some sort of enlightenment about the way things worked spiritually, that the Great Power of God was dwelling with them, and they had it made in the shade.
- So most people will say that they have come to some point of enlightenment which leads to this rejection of exclusivity and adoption of these new beliefs.
  - The interesting thing is, rather than having come to a place of transcendent awareness, they have really just devolved back to the default state of humanity.
    - Look at Romans 1
- Romans 1
 

18 For God's wrath is revealed from heaven against all godlessness and unrighteousness of people who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth, 19 since what can be known about God is evident among them, because God has shown it to them. 20 For his invisible attributes, that is, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen since the creation of the world, being understood through what he has made. As a result, people are without excuse. 21 For though they knew God, they did not glorify him as God or show gratitude. Instead, their thinking became worthless, and their senseless hearts were darkened. 22 Claiming to be wise, they became fools 23 and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man, birds, four-footed animals, and reptiles. 24 Therefore God delivered them over in the desires of their hearts to sexual impurity, so that their bodies were degraded among themselves. 25 They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served what has been created instead of the Creator, who is praised forever.

  - So you can see that those who move away from what God has revealed about Himself aren't moving towards enlightenment, rather they are moving toward darkness...
    - The Samaritans were giving glory to a magician rather than God
    - Romans says that is the default setting... not some newly discovered transcendence...



- But that does not mean that the taking of heroin is good, simply because it is tremendously effective in producing a seemingly desirable effect.
- Now, we were made to dwell in the presence of God. We were created to see, and be overwhelmed by, His splendor and majesty and **power**.
  - It is what we were designed for.
    - So we are always searching for that...
      - MARVEL MOVIES.
- The Samaritans weren't special in being awed and paying attention to someone who could wield some measure of spiritual power.
  - We can look back through the biblical story and see all kinds of potent spiritual powers that vied for the attention of people.
    - Pharaoh's magicians
    - Saul seeking help from the Witch of En-Dor
    - The people of Israel consistently turning towards idolatry and erecting Ashera poles
  - The New Testament affirms the same
    - Satan tempting Jesus in the wilderness
    - Spiritual forces working to oppress and oppose the work of God
    - 1 Corinthians 10
 

19 What am I saying then? That food sacrificed to idols is anything, or that an idol is anything? 20 No, but I do say that what they sacrifice, they sacrifice to demons and not to God. I do not want you to be participants with demons! 21 You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons. You cannot share in the Lord's table and the table of demons.
    - The implication of that verse is you can very well be participants with demonic forces.
      - We tend to think that demonic stuff is all sinister and dark... but remember:
        - Satan presents Himself as an Angel of Light... he looks and tempts our flesh with what appears good.
          - WHITE vs. OFF WHITE....
      - So instead of obedience to the revelation of God (which demonic forces will oppose), Satan encourages and sets about to prosper something just so subtly different, something with most of the morality and the perceived benefits of obedience to God.
        - And we will see in the next point that it is in the effort to do something far more destructive.

- Point 3: **Spiritualism without Christ attempts to deify humanity.**
  - In contrast to the way Naturalistic Secularism seek to demean humanity by stealing from them their pinnacle role as the image bearers of God, this Christless spirituality seeks to demean God by deify humanity.
    - Verses 17-23

17 Then Peter and John laid their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit. 18 When Simon saw that the Spirit was given through the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money, 19 saying, "Give me this power also so that anyone I lay hands on may receive the Holy Spirit." 20 But Peter told him, "May your silver be destroyed with you, because you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money! 21 You have no part or share in this matter, because your heart is not right before God. 22 Therefore repent of this wickedness of yours, and pray to the Lord that, if possible, your heart's intent may be forgiven. 23 For I see you are poisoned by bitterness and bound by wickedness."

- What is Simon asking for here?
  - He isn't asking for the Holy Spirit... which Jesus says God will give to those who ask of Him...
    - He is asking for the power to WEILD the Holy Spirit...
    - But WHO is the One who gives the Holy Spirit? Where does Holy Spirit fall?
      - Well the answer can be a little messy, but let's focus on what is plain from scripture
        - God is the one who gives the Holy Spirit, not man
        - Holy Spirit blows where it wills...
    - Simon is literally asking if he can pay money to become like... God...
      - Remember, Simon had lived amongst a people who were consistently telling him that he was like unto God... they called Him the Great Power of God.
        - Then he saw Peter and John laying hands on people, two men who God sovereignly selected and used as instruments of His will,
        - Simon assumed that God the Holy Spirit was just some type of spiritual instrument that these two men used according to their own will.
          - He got things totally backward...
        - And Peter and John rebuked Him harshly for it going so far as to say his conversion may well have been illegitimate.

- But before we hate on Simon too quickly... remember, this was our original sin.

- Genesis 3

3 Now the serpent was the most cunning of all the wild animals that the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God really say, 'You can't eat from any tree in the garden?'" 2 The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat the fruit from the trees in the garden. 3 But about the fruit of the tree in the middle of the garden, God said, 'You must not eat it or touch it, or you will die.'" 4 "No! You will certainly not die," the serpent said to the woman. 5 "In fact, God knows that when[a] you eat it your eyes will be opened and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." 6 The woman saw that the tree was good for food and delightful to look at, and that it was desirable for obtaining wisdom. (FOR BECOMING LIKE GOD) So she took some of its fruit and ate it; she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it.

- Satan used bitterness towards God, bitterness that God was keeping something from them... to tempt Eve and Adam to try to become like the Most High...
  - And what does Peter say Simon the sorcerer is poisoned by? Bitterness...
    - Bitterness that he didn't get to wield the power of God the way he perceived Peter and John did.
    - Bitterness that God didn't bend to his will that way.

- Spiritualism without Christ is simply that original sin played out in a thousand ways:

- Attempting to become God...
- Attempting to wield the power of God apart from God...
- Attempting to define righteousness... and justifying ourselves according to it...
- Rejection of God's command because of the bitterness that He did or didn't do something

- Ultimately it is the rejection of the first commandment...



- We get so offended by “Thou shalt have no other God’s before me” because our Adamic nature is always attempting to say “No, no, no... Thou shalt have no other god’s before ME.”
  - But in our attempt to attain divinity, to become these powerful, unshakeable forces in our own life...look at the ensuing consequences
- **Consequences are the opposite of unshakeable faith**
  - After witnessing the actual power of God and trying to buy it, and receiving Peter’s stiff response, look what happens to the man that was once called The Great Power of God...
    - He shrinks back in fear...
      - **Acts 8:23**  
24 “Pray to the Lord for me,” Simon replied, “so that nothing you have said may happen to me.”
        - Not even, I will pray to the Lord and confess and ask for forgiveness so that nothing you have said may happen to me...
          - He begs Peter and John to be his salvation, the perceived more powerful men, to mediate with God on His behalf...
            - He knew he needed a mediator... but he still hadn’t embrace Christ for that mediation...
              - He continues on in his Christless trajectory...
    - It was the same with Adam and Eve:
      - **Genesis 3:7-8**  
7 Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves. 8 Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden at the time of the evening breeze, and they hid from the Lord God among the trees of the garden.
        - Rather than run to Lord and confess what had happened, they hid... behind leaves and trees...
          - Because without Christ... we are left as our own mediator... with our own righteousness... and it shakes us and makes us afraid..
            - At the end of time, when Christ returns, it says in revelation that the mightiest of all people won’t try and hide behind leaves and branches, rather they will cry out for the mountains to bury them to hide them from the face of the Lamb...
  - **Dangers outside the church:**
    - **All religions are the same**
      - Which is just another way of saying all religions are meaningless.
        - So we can ignore religion. Marginalize it. Relegate it to a place of unimportance in our life and culture.
    - **Spirituality is a matter of private experience**
      - Rather than doing the hard work of analyzing spiritual truth claims, we subjectify truth... which is usually just another way of saying we suppress the truth... and encourage people to build their lives off of whatever feels like truth to them.

- **Dangers within the church:**
  - **Christ is just the on-ramp to spirituality**
    - We believe and get baptized, jump into the whole Christian thing, and then we can be tempted to move on into “more” stuff.
      - We can start to incorporate Hindu meditation practices, or astrology, or Kabbalah-esque numerology, etc. but it is all sanctified now because we are Christian...
        - There is a whole movement in the church now saying that we need to reclaim Occultic New Age practices like Tarot card reading because they are effective ways of practicing spirituality. We just need to baptize them into Christianity...
      - I can’t tell you how many people I know who have run off into the weeds because the historical Christ and His Gospel wasn’t deep enough for them...
        - Or it wasn’t immediately effective in dealing with on-going emotional pain... which leads to frustration and bitterness... and so we search for something to help us...
  - **Internal Experience/Emotionalism as our mediator with God**
    - Now, before we go to far, I am all about an emotional response to God. I want to hear you all singing at the very top of your lungs, raising your hands in emotionally connected worship of the God of the Universe who is worthy of our highest and loudest praises.
      - But... our emotions are pretty subjective...
        - Our emotions don’t determine the worthiness of Christ.
        - Our emotions don’t determine the state of our salvation.
        - Our emotions don’t determine our security in God.
      - Those are all objectively determined... by CHRIST and what he has done for us...
        - He is OBJECTIVELY worthy of all praise
        - He is OBJECTIVELY our Great High Priest and Mediator
        - He is OBJECTIVELY our righteousness before God
- **Application**
  - **Embrace exclusivity**
    - Do not be apologetic or hesitant about the exclusive claims of the Christian faith.
    - Thou shalt have no other God’s before me is PART OF THE GOOD NEWS OF THE GOSPEL...
  - **Focus on Jesus (as revealed in the scriptures)**
    - There are plenty of voices out there promoting false Christs... false saviors...
      - Plenty of them use the name of Christ, but pervert and twist its meaning to suit their purposes...
        - We must focus on the actual article to be able to identify the fraudulent.
  - **Know the voice of your Shepherd**
    - All worldviews are competing for our allegiance, and they all make some compelling, tempting arguments.

- We must know the voice of our shepherd that we might embrace the TRUE worldview... determined by the One who spoke the Cosmos into existence.
- This comes from meditating upon the word.