

## **Bold Prayers: False Prophets** by Pastor Kurt Hoover

### **Bold Litany adapted from Psalm 138**

**Leader:** I will praise you, Lord, with all my heart;

**All: before the “gods” I will sing your praise.**

**Leader:** I will bow down toward your holy temple and will praise your name

**All: for your unfailing love and your faithfulness**

**Leader:** When I called, you answered me;

**All: you greatly emboldened me.**

**Leader:** Though the Lord is exalted, he looks kindly on the lowly;

**All: though lofty, he sees them from afar.**

**Leader:** We worship You Lord in the name of the Father and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

**All: Amen**

**Acts 8:14-25** <sup>14</sup> Now when the apostles at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent to them Peter and John, <sup>15</sup> who came down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit, <sup>16</sup> for he had not yet fallen on any of them, but they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. <sup>17</sup> Then they laid their hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit. <sup>18</sup> Now when Simon saw that the Spirit was given through the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money, <sup>19</sup> saying, "Give me this power also, so that anyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit." <sup>20</sup> But Peter said to him, "May your silver perish with you, because you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money! <sup>21</sup> You have neither part nor lot in this matter, for your heart is not right before God. <sup>22</sup> Repent, therefore, of this wickedness of yours, and pray to the Lord that, if possible, the intent of your heart may be forgiven you. <sup>23</sup> For I see that you are in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity." <sup>24</sup> And Simon answered, "Pray for me to the Lord, that nothing of what you have said may come upon me."

<sup>25</sup> Now when they had testified and spoken the word of the Lord, they returned to Jerusalem, preaching the gospel to many villages of the Samaritans.

**Acts 13:4-12** <sup>4</sup> So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia, and from there they sailed to Cyprus. <sup>5</sup> When they arrived at Salamis, they

proclaimed the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews. And they had John to assist them. <sup>6</sup>When they had gone through the whole island as far as Paphos, they came upon a certain magician, a Jewish false prophet named Bar-Jesus. <sup>7</sup>He was with the proconsul, Sergius Paulus, a man of intelligence, who summoned Barnabas and Saul and sought to hear the word of God. <sup>8</sup>But Elymas the magician (for that is the meaning of his name) opposed them, seeking to turn the proconsul away from the faith. <sup>9</sup>But Saul, who was also called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked intently at him <sup>10</sup>and said, "You son of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness, full of all deceit and villainy, will you not stop making crooked the straight paths of the Lord? <sup>11</sup>And now, behold, the hand of the Lord is upon you, and you will be blind and unable to see the sun for a time." Immediately mist and darkness fell upon him, and he went about seeking people to lead him by the hand. <sup>12</sup>Then the proconsul believed, when he saw what had occurred, for he was astonished at the teaching of the Lord.

**Have you ever tried to bargain for or earn God's love or healing?**

**I have. There are voices in my life that encourage me to do so.**

**Have you ever tried to manipulate God? I have. There are voices in my life that say it is appropriate and right to hold before God my good works and demand He fix the problems of my life and the world in a certain way.**

***<sup>24</sup> And Simon answered, "Pray for me to the Lord, that nothing of what you have said may come upon me." - Acts 8:24***

**These are the words of Simon the Magician. It is fascinating to me! Intriguing that when the news of Jesus spread from town to town throughout the Mediterranean - that those listening to this new way of connecting with God were not just the children of Isreal, in their local synagogues, but also gentiles –**

**soldiers, common folk, and ... Magicians. Gentile Magicians, like those that Moses and Daniel had to deal with in the courts of Pharaoh and Nebuchadnezzar. People who use deception to control and earn the rust of others.**

**Two Magicians to be clear. And the stories of how they heard this good news could not be more different. Acts 13 brings us into Paul's Missionary journeys. We see Paul's powerful rebuke of a Magician, a false prophet of the worst kind seeking to control the beliefs and hopes of the local people through the mayor of the town... the proconsul – an appointed ruler by Rome.**

**Which invokes the memory of Peter's encounter with Simon, the Magician back in chapter 8 of Acts. Very similar experiences of the influence of the early church movement. As they went from town to town the people were captivated by the story of God's work through Jesus Christ. And as Acts unfolds we see to our amazement it is the gentiles, who don't even have the hope for a Messiah as a part of their DNA... It is the gentiles who are being connected to God through the name of Jesus, Baptism and the Holy Spirit. (3 words used more in Acts than any other book of the Bible: Name, Baptism, and Holy Spirit).**

**The movement could not be stopped. People in a lost and distracted world longed to be connected to God. But as we will find out next week the further you move through Acts the more resistance the early church's message ran into.**

**Two Magicians. Both rebuked for their desire to control, earn, buy, manipulate the presence of God. Simon rebuked by Peter in Acts 8 and Bar-Jesus rebuked by Paul in Acts 13. We don't know what happens to Bar-Jesus but in Simon we see the**

**picture of Repentance. What it looks like for God to take you through your sin to the other side. How God creates Faith. The faith you and I share with the saints of the church who have gone before us for the last 2,000 years.**

**Jesus warns throughout His ministry that there will be false prophets. This warning is just as real for us today as it was for the early church. This morning God gives us the ability to pray for the false prophets in our lives. A bold prayer. ‘Lord, change my heart - that the voices of others may not crowd out yours. Lord, repent my unbelief. Take away my trust in self. Place my faith in you and you alone.’ Because there are so many other voices clamoring for my attention, fear, trust and love.**

**False prophets. Magicians/Influencers, yes to be sure, but also fellow Christians seeking to add something to the name of Jesus. A false prophet is not always the blatant cynic suspicious of God and Spiritual things. A false prophet can be deeply Spiritual asking you to believe in superstitions: the movement of the stars, prayers for the harvest or fertility, secret knowledge of cosmic existential timelines for the end of the world. Be deeply suspicious of any talking head who tells you the war in Iran is a sign from Ezekiel or Revelation.**

**There are the obvious false prophets and then there are those Christians who would seek to add something to the name of Jesus. To be Christian is to be Baptized, into the experience of the Father, the Son and Holy Spirit. However there has always been a legalism that says you must be Christian and something else. The false belief that God needs you to trust Him and do something else. ‘Christian and’... On our Celebration service – Palm Sunday we will dive deeper into the legalism of adding something to the name of Jesus. Suffice it to say – Jesus**

**warned this will happen and it still happens today. False prophets seeking to bend your ear to trust what they have to say.**

**Can you think of false prophets in your life? Any voice that says trust me over God.**

**Can you think of any talking heads that consume you. Talking heads on your phone, in a podcast, on the news or in your life that have convinced you there is a way to fix the world if only we could all be this type of person or adopt the same set of rules.**

**These are false prophets. The greatest trick of the devil is to speak lies into our ears that keep us from hearing the voice and the presence of God. And as C.S. Lewis demonstrates in the Screwtape Letters, often the voice take a kernel of truth about God's creation and twist it. If the devil can keep you looking at your own belly button, your responsibility, your obligation to God ... anything even good things – so long as you are focused on you and what you can do, rather than on God and what He has done and promises to do.**

**Who are the false prophets in your life offering prosperity, responsibility, the answers that will fix you or your neighbor?**

**Simon was one such false prophet. He was a Magician. He made his living deceiving people with magic tricks, timely predictions and empty promises for the hardships of life and the problems that plague the world. In acts chapter 8 Simon is redeemed, set free.**

**Simon's story is our story... repentance. We have all tried to earn or buy or bargain for the grace or presence or healing works of our creator. Someone other than God has convinced**

**us to put our hope and trust, our faith, in something... anything other than God.**

**Acts chapter 8:18-24 is a description of how God changes our hearts. It is not a story of Simon's repentance; it is the story of Simon being acted upon by God through Peter's rebuke. God has and is doing the same thing in your life through worship, your spouse, trusted friends who point you back to God. What God has done in you He will do again! Even now.**

***18 Now when Simon saw that the Spirit was given through the laying on of the apostles' hands, [There were word's and Baptism too, but what Simon saw was the power of the touch.] he offered them money, 19 saying, "Give me this power also, so that anyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit." 20 But Peter said to him, "May your silver perish with you, because you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money! [And God is saying the same thing to us today. May your good deeds perish with you because you though you could obtain the gifts of God by your own deeds.] 21 You have neither part nor lot in this matter, for your heart is not right before God. 22 Repent, therefore, of this wickedness of yours, and pray to the Lord that, if possible, the intent of your heart may be forgiven you. 23 For I see that you are in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity." [What Simon says next is key, He doesn't pray himself, but he asks Peter to pray. The healing of repentance is something that happens to him, not something he changes in his life.] 24 And Simon answered, "Pray for me to the Lord, that nothing of what you have said may come upon me." [And from that point on Simon's life would never be the same. He was taken through his sin to redemption.]***

**We are Simon. We have listened to the false prophets and echoed their empty words. We have put our trust in worldly**

**things and our own ability to make them happen. Our intentions are selfish and inward focused. We have sought to buy and earn the healing and forgiving presence of God.**

**And so we join Simon in asking for each other's prayers.**

***"Pray for me to the Lord, that ... [none of my false hopes and intentions] may come upon me. (Acts 8:24)***

**00 0There is only one answer to the problems of this world and your own personal dilemmas. That is the promise of God's living Spirit which is involved in every step of your life. The certainty that God is at work in you is the only hope we have for our issues and the problems of the world. The hope that the same Spirit is at work in others. Because of Jesus, God has even now taken you through your sin and doubt, placing your trust back in Him and Him alone.**



**\*Peter's Conflict with Simon Magus - Avanzino Nucci 1620**