

Message Date: 08-23-20

To the Ends of the Earth- ACTS Part 3: Things get real!

Message Title: Week 6, And so the Word of God Spread

- **Ever worked hard on a project- things were beginning to work really well... something happens that threatened to derail everything you were doing?**
- **Be it a business, relationship- challenging situation... especially if it involves conflict of relationships**
- **THIS was situation for the new and growing church in Jerusalem as we move into Acts chapter SIX.**
- **DESPITE the affair with Ananias and Sapphira, and despite the rise of persecution against the apostles, the community of Christ followers is increasing. Growing. THINGS ARE GOING WELL. THEN...**

† A new crisis emerges

- **But not external opposition- rather, internal problem. Problem if not addressed could do serious harm to the community of faith.**
- **BUT, instead of derailing the fledgling church, we see the Holy Spirit guide the apostles to adapt to this crisis in a way that not only solved the problem, also facilitated the continued growth of the community...**

The response the Holy Spirit leads the church to take reveals an essential attribute of the Body of Christ. The calling, that God gives to every believer in some way, of SERVANTHOOD

- **Okay.. our story today has four parts...**
 - **Problem**
 - **How NOT to respond to the problem**
 - **The solution**
 - **The result**
- **From this, what can we learn- as the church, and as believers who are part of God's church.**

† The problem

6:1 In those days when the number of disciples was increasing, the Hellenistic Jews among them complained against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food.

- **Remember dynamic of community- sharing possessions, caring for one another.**
- **This involved daily distribution of resources to those in need- food, but also clothing, other essential needs, and probably money.**
- **TWO GROUPS mentioned here.**

† The Hellenists and the Hebrews

- **HELLENISTS. Important group going forward**
 - **Jews whose primary language was Greek- not Hebrew, and who for a variety of reasons had adopted parts of Greek culture. "Hellenize" means to become like Greeks..**
 - **This was most likely expressed here in terms of social customs and religious practice, which when combined with their Greek language, produced a different cultural identity from the surrounding predominant Hebrew culture.**

- *Scholars think these Hellenistic Jews made up around 10-20 percent of entire Jewish community... so minority with different language, cultural, and religious distinctives.*
- *This groups widows- the most needy among them, were being overlooked to some degree in the benevolence provided by the entire community.*
- *ONE POINT HERE... The overall story gives sense that this oversight was not purposefully malicious... most likely not intentional neglect.*
- *RATHER, it was probably just organizational oversight. Needs missed as the community was rapidly growing to include multiple people groups from different cultural and ethnic backgrounds.*
- *But even then, you can see how this could have rapidly become a serious problem. It was a THREAT to UNITY of the believers.*
- *SO, you are one of the Apostles... this problem is brought before you.. WHAT DO YOU DO?*

✠ **What the apostles didn't do!**

² *So the Twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, "It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables.*

- *"Wait on tables"... to us, this sounds almost dismissive. But it's not. The apostles aren't minimizing the issue, they are recognizing their need to stay focused on the calling and responsibility God had given them.*
- *That responsibility was TEACHING, DISCIPLINSHIP, and EVANGELISM. Absolutely essential roles for growing church. If Apostles had decided to add to their plate job of overseeing matter of benevolence, they probably wouldn't have done a good job, and they would have neglected their own God given role.*

✠ **What the apostles DID do... led by the Holy Spirit, they chose to DELEGATE. They raised up new SERVANT LEADERS**

³ *Brothers and sisters, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them ⁴ and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word."*

- **FEW THINGS HERE.**
- *Apostles are not micromanagers! They are trusting the presence of the Holy Spirit to work in the lives of other believers, just as the H.S. was at work in them.*
- *Apostles proposed solution, but they didn't make the selection. Essentially said to the people.. this is a problem you identified, we want you to prayerfully choose who God is raising up to provide a solution.*
- *What Apostles DID direct was Character, the spiritual attributes, of the people who would be chosen.*
 - *Good repute. NIV omits this, but most English texts include it, and it is part of the ext. These men were to be of a good reputation, active and known in the community of faith.*
 - *Full of the Spirit. Clear evidence that the Holy Spirit was at work in their lives*
 - *Not only spiritual, but men of WISDOM. They were to be MATURE in their faith.*

- *(SHORT SIDE NOTE.. these attributes suggest that it had now been some time, probably several years, since Pentecost and the birth of the Christian community. Luke doesn't tell us how long it has been, but it would take time for the community to grow to include these different cultural and ethnic groups and for these men to become known and respected within the community)*
- *In any case, here's a key observation*
- *If you were to hear these attributes as part of a role in the church- separate from this story- what would you think that role to be? Wise, Filled with Holy Spirit, Good reputation, respected... what role in the church are you calling that person to fill? PROBABLY would think.. Pastor... teacher... church leader, person with spiritual authority, elder, deacon...*
- *THAT IS NOT ROLE HERE. These men being raised up are NOT in a place of authority... they are being called into a place of SERVICE. They are receiving the high calling of CHRISTIAN SERVANTHOOD.*
- *Church culture-easy to create a 'spiritual hierarchy'*
 - *At top are pastors, preachers, missionaries... the REALLY spiritual people, the really righteous...*
 - *Then you have 'associate pastors', or program directors.. children, youth...*
 - *THEN, below that, you have the 'laity'... which, by the way, is NOT a biblically supported concept... basically everyone else that does everything not done by the 'professionals' or 'clergy class'.*
 - *If you are cooking a meal, delivering food, driving a van full of kids, greeting people- HEY, no special qualifications to do that... not too spiritual.*
- *Perspective is NOT biblical. The NT clearly describes how in Body of Christ, we all have different roles, but every one of these roles is ESSENTIAL...*
- *ALL are callings of God, ALL work of Holy Spirit through our lives, ALL expressions of God's transforming presence in our lives...AND ALL- in one way or another, a form of SERVANTHOOD. We are ALL called to be servants of one another within the Body of Christ... the church.*

✠ If we ask... "Has God called me into a place of servanthood, of participation, in His Body?" The answer is YES!

– **1 Corinthians 12:12... excerpts**

¹² Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ. ¹³ For we were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form one body—whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free (Gal 3:28.. male or female) —and we were all given the one Spirit to drink. ¹⁴ Even so the body is not made up of one part but of many.

¹⁸ But in fact God has placed the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. ¹⁹ If they were all one part, where would the body be? ²⁰ As it is, there are many parts, but one body. ²⁴ But God has put the body together, giving greater honor to the parts that lacked it, ²⁵ so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. ²⁶ If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it. ²⁷ Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.

– **And so, the apostles proposal is what happened.**

✠ When we are led by the Spirit, we respond with UNITY

⁵ This proposal pleased the whole group. They chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit; also Philip, Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas from Antioch, a convert to Judaism.

- **‘Pleased the whole group’- picture of how the Holy Spirit works to bring unity to the believers.**
- **Of these seven men, we will only learn more about Stephen and Phillip. Their stories will become important very soon. The remaining five men we know nothing about... OTHER THAN THE CERTAINTY that they were called by God, and an essential part of His work within the Body of Christ.**
- **If Luke were writing this history today of YOUR CHURCH, these men could be YOU. Both men and women.**
- **Another interesting detail. All seven of these names are Greek in origin, meaning they were very likely part of the Hellenistic Jewish community. This is really significant, and I’m going to quote directly from BOCK as to why... page 261**
- **And so these seven are commissioned into this new servant leadership role.**

⁶ They presented these men to the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them.

- **This is a picture... a recognition... that GOD is calling these men into this task, no less than how God calls pastors and teachers**
- **This scene is also a reminder to us- as students of scripture- not to take our own traditions and try to read them back into scripture. Over the generations this entire story, and this verse in particular, has been used to support the traditions of ordination and how people are called into church leadership. I’m turning to BOCK once again... page 262**
- **SO, TO SUM UP... We have seen a need arise within the Body of Christ, and how the Holy Spirit worked through the leadership of the apostles to raise up NEW SERVANTS from within the Body of Christ.**

† The result... the Word of God **SPREAD**

⁷ So the word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith.

- **The word of God spread. This is a recurring theme in Acts... multiple times Luke will describe an event of some kind... a time when the believers FOLLOW THE LEADERSHIP OF THE HOLY SPIRIT... And the result is that the WORD OF GOD SPREAD... The church grew... God added to the number of those being saved...**
- **Here, Luke tells us that the number of DISCIPLES was increasing rapidly, EVEN INCLUDING a large number of priests. VERY SIGNIFICANT... the Priests were part of the group we saw launching the persecution against the apostles, and in Gamaliel’s words, fighting against God.**
- **INTERESTING that this is first time in Acts we see the term DISCIPLES. Before, members of the community of faith have been called BELIEVERS... but now Luke begins to call them disciples. Picture of the growing spiritual maturity of the church... they no longer just believed in the gospel, they were DISCIPLES, maturing, trusting, active followers of Christ.**
- **THIS STORY is a picture of God doing what ONLY God can do. Growing his kingdom, making the world a better place, bringing people from death to life.... And He did this**

through the simple and yet incredibly powerful choice of these DISCIPLES to follow the leadership of the Holy Spirit.

- *By raising up new people into a needed place of servanthood... AND the obedient hearts of these people to follow God's call into this place of service.*

✠ In the many different ways God works to grow His Kingdom, the common thread is that He does this through US.

- *EACH ONE OF US, as he calls us to respond to his call for to express his love, his goodness... as SERVANT within His Body.*
- *Friends... How is God calling you to be a part of His love, his goodness, his work? Because he is. Don't take it from me... as His disciple, take it from him.*

NOW WE ARE THE BODY OF CHRIST, AND EACH ONE OF US IS A PART OF IT