

Acts 6

Good morning again church. So very good to be with each of you this morning for those here in person and those watching online due to COVID. Welcome again. Today we are continuing in this series through the book of Acts where we are seeing the Unstoppable nature of the Spirit, Mission, Gospel and Church. I love the book of Acts. The story of how the Gospel spread from this small group of people and started to spread all over the world. I hope and trust that this time has already been productive for you in your faith, and will continue to be.

If you have a Bible, I invite you to turn to Acts chapter 6:1-7. If you have a device, go ahead and turn it on, dial up your favorite Bible app, however you can get the word of God in front of you this morning. As always, I will be in the CSB today.

READ Acts 6:1-7

In those days, as the disciples were increasing in number, there arose a complaint by the Hellenistic Jews against the Hebraic Jews that their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution.² The Twelve summoned the whole company of the disciples and said, "It would not be right for us to give up preaching the word of God to wait on tables.

³ Brothers and sisters, select from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and wisdom, whom we can appoint to this duty. ⁴ But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word." ⁵ This proposal pleased the whole company. So they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit, and Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolaus, a convert from Antioch. ⁶ They had them stand before the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them.

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

PRAY.

Ok, so what we've seen over the last 2 weeks specifically, is the start of persecution against the church. Remember, in Acts 4, the temple leaders get mad because Pete and John heal a guy that couldn't walk and use that as an opportunity to preach the Gospel – and what happens when the Gospel is boldly preached? People repent, turn from their sin and trust in Jesus alone and are saved.

The temple leaders really didn't like Pete and John and the apostles. From last week, they eventually would throw them in jail – but kids, any of you remember what happened? Right, an angel came and let them out of jail. Kids again – did the apostles run away to a beach somewhere? Of course not. Where did they go? Right back to the temple and what were they doing? They were preaching. Now kids, last one – do you think Peter and John felt it was more

important to listen to God or the people? Right. Twice now in consecutive chapters in the book of Acts Peter boldly says that he will listen to God and not people.

Peter's not going to back down. Not now. No chance. It says in Acts 5:33 that "When they heard this they were enraged and wanted to kill them."

Persecution is just getting started. Fortunately, there was this guy named Gamaliel, a guy they respected, and he tells them "Leave them alone. For if this plan or this work is of human origin it will fail; but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them. You may even be found fighting against God."

You see – Gamaliel – knew that God's mission was UNSTOPPABLE. Gamaliel persuaded the temple leaders NOT to kill the apostles. He wasn't yet convinced in what they were doing, but he knew that if God was behind them, they'd be unstoppable.

Interestingly, rather than kill them, they just beat them. One of the most inhumane ways to treat someone – taking either a rod, or a whip, and just wearing them out by beating them. But see Jesus had prepared them for this, in Matthew 10, he tells them not to worry, but to be aware that they will be turned over to the local courts, and be beaten in the synagogues. And rather than having a pity party, the Scripture tells us that they left "rejoicing that they were counted worthy to be treated shamefully on behalf of the Name."

And they continued teaching and preaching the good news that Jesus is the Messiah. Bringing us to our text today.

The first thing I want us to see from today's text in Acts 6 is that, as Jesus is preached, people will respond.

I. As Jesus is preached, people will respond

V1A – In those days, as the disciples were increasing in number...

All throughout the book of Acts, we see the apostles preach and people respond. All throughout church history, we see that when Jesus's name is preached, people respond. And as people respond, the church grows through evangelism (sharing and showing Jesus to people and seeing Jesus save people). And for anyone that's ever led an organization, whether it's a family, a small group, a big business, a church, a department, or whatever – as organizations grow, problems arise.

Up until now, the biggest issue the church was dealing with was persecution out there. But now, as the church grows there's a problem in here.

II. The Problem Within

V1B there arose a complaint.

So, Satan tried to use the temple leaders to stop the apostles but that didn't work. Now he tries to complaints from within. Because the more time and energy that church people spend

complaining, it's that much less time and energy that they can use to share and show Jesus with people in their neighborhoods and workplaces. Here me – if Satan can distract us with things, often good and important things, but nonetheless distracting things, then the church won't be as effective as God intends for us to be.

The complaint was real – says the Hellenistic Jews widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food.

Hellenistic Jews → would have lived abroad, wouldn't have spoken Aramaic or Hebrew, but would have been Greek speakers and would have been heavily influenced by Greek culture. And hear me, in Judaism, there was a general dislike of the Hellenistic Jews and were basically considered 2nd class citizens.

And whether or not the complaint was based on perception or reality, it was an issue that needed to be addressed. But the apostles had a choice. They could handle it all themselves, taking away time from what God had already declared as their priorities, or they could enlist others to help.

II. The Priority

The Lord had called the apostles, the Lord had given them their marching orders, had set out their priorities – but here they have a decision to make.

READ V2

The matter is brought to the whole congregation – and the apostles can choose to (1) focus on what God had called them to or (2) handle every need, issue and complaint themselves.

Often, what we see in a lot of churches is the pastors are paid to do the work, and the church is asked to in essence “pray, pay, and stay out of the way.” Sometimes it's verbalized, sometimes it's not. But you'll find in those situations is a distracted pastoral team, and a church filled with religious consumers wanting to be served.

For some of you that have been with us since the very beginning at RCM, you might remember we talked at one of our planning sessions about the difference between a cruise ship and a ferry boat. Now, I've been on a couple of cruises – great time. Eat a lot. You want fake lobster at 4AM, you can get it. Ice cream and cookies round the clock. The last cruise we took, they actually served Krispy Kreme donuts on it. Wow. And there's a temptation for every pastor to see their church as a cruise ship. Keep our customers happy (and coming back, and giving an offering).

BUT...the priorities of the church are laid out by Jesus, and we don't have any time to waste. We need to think of our church as a ferry boat. We have a job to do. Might not get a seat today. Might not have the type of coffee you like. But we know we're on the ship, going from point A to point B. And because we know where we're going, and we know what God has called us to do, we absolutely must maintain our priorities in line with the Word of God.

The priority of the apostles, and the priority of every pastor, is the ministry of the Word of God and prayer. The preaching and teaching → pastors are called to equip the saints for the work of the ministry – and we equip people through the word of God and through prayer. And hear me, as your pastor, I do a lot. I spend a lot of time doing other things, but understand that my priority is studying the Word of God and shepherding/leading this group of people through it. Churches can't survive without faithful men pastoring people through the Word of God. Furthermore, Churches will never, ever accomplish their God-given mission apart from unless they are led faithfully through the Word of God by God-qualified and God-called pastors.

The apostles refused to be distracted from the priorities that God through Christ had given them. They didn't ignore the complaint, but they refused to let it distract them → and their solution was to enlist others to help.

III. The Solution – enlist a team of qualified and Godly servants to help

READ V3

- Select from among you – the assumption is that these servants were known by the church and were already invested in the work of the church
 - We need people that are willing to go ALL-IN for the ministry of the local church.
 - We need people that BELIEVE that the CHURCH is God's plan for the Great Commission → the making disciples of all nations. That THE plan of God is His church, and His church and Mission are UNSTOPPABLE.
- Good Reputation – just think this through practically. Who do you want handling the distribution of food? Crooks or men of good reputation? They were known, their reputations were solid, they were trustworthy. We will see later in 1 Timothy and again in Titus the importance of character in church leaders. Public servants of God, through the local church, must be respectable, good reputation, above reproach.
- Full of the Spirit and wisdom → Absolutely essential. The church needed men committed to the Word of God to preach and pray, and needed others filled with the holy spirit (allowing the Spirit to lead, not their own interests and desires to lead) and wisdom to serve alongside them.

The apostles knew what they'd been called to do, and refused to allow a very real issue to distract them or pull them away from their priorities. They weren't ignoring the issue of equitable food distribution, they just refused to sacrifice their priorities to handle it.

Eventually, every organization shifts to focus on maintenance – and often we feel like we either choose to focus on maintenance OR mission. But why not focus on both? Why not enlist people that are qualified by their character, filled with the Spirit (where we actually see the fruit of the Spirit growing in their lives) and enlist them to help with the maintenance, freeing up others to blaze the trail of mission. We don't have to see this as an Either/Or proposition → instead it should be a Both/And proposition.

V4 – But we will devote ourselves...Ministry of prayer and the Word isn't just an add on to a pastor's schedule. These things are the things that the pastor's schedule should be built around. We don't fit in our sermon writing and prayer time when we can free up space – we protect space in our calendars for these MOST essential activities in the role of pastor/elder.

The apostles refused to be sidelined by an important issue, that would have sidelined them for their most important priority. And their commitment to the ministry of the Word and prayer, gave incredible results

IV. The Results

Re-Read V5-7

The word spread, the disciples increased in number, many priests became obedient to the faith.

Here's the takeaway – when churches, and church leaders, are committed to God's priorities, they will have an impact in advancing the Gospel. But hear me now, the only way we will do this is to :

1. Trust the Bible – both the sufficiency and the authority of the Bible. Now, we have to be really clear to define our words though. When I say **sufficiency** – here's what I mean – that all of the Bible is our guide for life and faith. That it really is enough to point us to Christ, to lead us to honoring Christ and bringing glory to God. So that's sufficiency, but we also have **authority**. Again, needing to define our words – especially in a culture that prioritizes experience and feelings over absolute authority – I actually believe that the Bible is God's Word, breathed by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, and where it directs my life and calls me to obedience – it has the authority to do so. It is unchanging, perfect, and always right.

***If we trust the Bible like this, we will maintain a PRIORITY of preaching the Word at RCM. We don't need a TED talk, we don't need a halftime motivational pep rally, and we certainly don't need a political campaign → we do need the word of God rightly understood, explained and then applied.

2. Trust God's plans for growing His church → preach the word, pray like our lives depend on it, enlist others to help in the task (those that are spiritually qualified), share and show Jesus with every person to whom God gives us the opportunity, and trust God with the results.