

# First Complaint

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[ 0 : 00 ] Acts chapter 6 verses 1 through 7. 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.

So the twelve guarded 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. Brothers and sisters, choose seven men among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom, and we will turn this responsibility over them, and we will give our attention to prayer and ministry of the Word.

This proposal pleased the whole group. They chose Stephan, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, also Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicholas of Antioch, a convert to Judaism.

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

Amen. Well, thank you, Danny. Well, someone said that we are never too far from two things in life, rats and complaints.

[ 1 : 39 ] A lovely quote to start with this morning. We are never too far from two things in life, rats and complaints. And I think there is probably an element of truth in this.

In fact, I am currently aware of several people in the church right now who are trying to deal with a rat problem. Rats in the garden or rats in the shed or rats eating the bird food or rats coming up into the car at night looking for crumbs.

I am aware of several people who are at the house. I am aware of several people who are at the moment trying to deal with rats. There seems to be no shortage of rats in this life.

And there is also, at times, no shortage of complaints. And it is the latter that we encounter at the beginning of our passage this morning.

Our passage this morning starts with a complaint. And from what we can see, this is the first recorded complaint in the early church that we see in the book of Acts.

[ 2 : 54 ] In our study of Acts so far, we have seen, of course, several firsts. I'll mention just a few. Acts chapter 2, the first sermon.

Acts chapter 3, the first healing. Acts chapter 4, the first persecution. Acts chapter 5, which Tom shared on a couple weeks ago. If you like, the first recorded sin.

And now in our passage this morning, in Acts chapter 6, we have, if you like, the first recorded internal complaint in the early church.

Now, I'm sure that there was a lot more complaints than just this one. You know, at this time, there is thousands and thousands and thousands of believers, part of the early church.

And God was moving in incredible ways, but none of them were perfect. So I'm sure that there was lots of issues and lots of complaints.

[ 3 : 55 ] These people were not perfect, just like all of us. But this is the first recorded complaint that we see in the early church.

And we see in verse 1 that the complaint arose between the Hellenistic Jews and the Hebraic Jews. Now, who were these two groups of people? Well, the Hellenistic Jews were Greek-speaking Jewish believers that were part of the early church.

And the Hebraic Jews were Hebrew-speaking Jewish believers that were part of the early church.

The Hellenistic Greek-speaking Jews were from somewhere outside of Jerusalem.

They have probably come to Jerusalem for Passover, where in some way we assume that they heard the gospel and they responded to Christ, and now they are believers and they're part of the

early church.

[ 5 : 05 ] Well, then the Hebraic, Hebrew-speaking Jews are the local to Jerusalem locals, we call them. The local to Jerusalem locals.

They have also, in some way, heard the gospel and have responded to Christ. And they are part of the early church. So, after coming believers, these two groups that are mentioned here, they're both part of the early church.

They're all believers. But one group in the early church had a complaint against the other. And what was that complaint?

Well, verse 1 tells us that the Hellenistic Jews complained against the Hebronic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food.

In some way, the Hellenistic widows were being overlooked. And for some reason, the Hellenistic believers felt that the Hebronic Jewish believers were responsible for this overlooking.

[ 6 : 20 ] Because, you know, we see the complaint was directed against them. Now, we're not told for sure, but it seems like, at this time, the Hebronic Jews were kind of unofficially in charge of giving out of the daily distribution of food.

And whether they meant it or not, it seems that they overlooked the Hellenistic widows. Now, there is a lot written about this, and it seems that these two groups had a lot of history.

Before they became believers, it seems that they grated on each other. I think the Hebronic Jews felt that they were more kind of pure and more kind of true than the Hellenistic Jews. So it seems like they might have had some history that they might have brought into the church with them.

So they might have been grating on each other a little bit. But whether it was meant or not, the Hellenistic widows were being overlooked, and the Hellenistic Jews felt it was the fault of the Hebronic Jews.

Basically, to sum all that up, one group in the church had a complaint against the other. Now, in life, I think that it's fair to say that not all complaints are legitimate.

[ 7 : 48 ] I think, especially in the context of church, all complaints need to be listened to and hopefully carefully and graciously considered. But not all complaints are legitimate.

In that not all complaints are right or true. So I think sometimes, hopefully after graciously considering and listening, sometimes we need to put complaints to one side and kind of move forward.

But what we see here is a legitimate complaint. Especially looking at how the apostles actually did something about that complaint, that helps us to see that the widows were, in fact, being overlooked.

If they weren't, then nothing further needed to be done. But the apostles did something about it. Helps us to see that this was a legitimate complaint. It seems that the Hellenistic widows were being overlooked, which is something that was not suitable to be happening in the church in any way, shape, or form.

And if we just think for a moment, and we remember what James said about widows and orphans, but widows kind of is what we're looking at in this passage, I think we really see God's heart for widows and orphans.

[ 9 : 24 ] James said in chapter 1, verse 27, religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless as this, to look after orphans and widows in their distress.

I think any church, any community, has a certain amount of widows among them.

And even just as I look at just who is here this morning, I can see right here this morning that there are a number of widows that the Lord has entrusted to us as a church to care for and to look after. And I suppose just thinking about that, just thinking about widows and how it's come up in this passage, I just want to say to the widows that are among us, you know, we love you and may the Lord help us to grow more and more in our care for you.

God does not want his people to overlook widows. He doesn't want us to overlook orphans. He doesn't want us to overlook anyone. So, this was a legitimate complaint that the apostles simply had to do something about.

[ 10 : 59 ] And I think that is obviously what they did. They considered the complaint like I think we should do with all things. And after considering the complaint and after obviously seeing that this was something that needed to be dealt with, they suggested a solution.

As I said, if this truly wasn't happening, then respectfully, you know, nothing further needed to be done, but this was happening. So, they suggested a solution.

And we see in verses 2 to 4 what that solution was. The 12 gathered all of the believers, all of the early church, and said to them, it would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables.

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 and we'll give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word.

I think that the 12 knew that this needed to be dealt with, but they knew that they themselves weren't going to be able to directly deal with this problem each day.

[12:12] They couldn't watch every table each day, so to speak, to make sure that everything was fair and no one was being overlooked. They, at this time, needed to focus on preaching and prayer.

That's what the Lord had for them at this time. So, they suggested that seven should be picked by the church and these seven would be responsible for waiting the tables and for essentially making sure that this problem of the widows being overlooked did not happen again.

So, they suggested this solution to the early church, that seven people should be picked and to allow them to serve the Lord with this important task of making sure that no one was neglected again and especially the widows.

So, that's what they suggested. Well, verse five, I think words that every eldership team and every leadership team just love to hear, words that I think are worthy of putting on the screen.

This proposal pleased the whole group. Can you imagine how pleased the 12 apostles, how thankful they must have been?

[13:33] Even those who made the complaint were pleased with this proposal. The whole group were pleased with this proposal.

What a beautiful picture of leaders and the congregation, if you like, the early church. What a beautiful picture this is of leaders and the congregation deciding on and working on things together. I think it's interesting to note that the apostles here, the 12, didn't just run off and make the decision themselves and didn't come back and tell everyone this is what we're doing and everyone just had to kind of put up with their decision whether they liked it or not.

No, what we see here is the apostles, they drew in and they involved the early church. in making decisions. I think we as a church think that this is very important and that's what we seek to try to do as a church, to make decisions together so we don't have the leaders just running off deciding things and everyone else just has to put up with it.

This is a glimpse of that here, of how they worked together. So in verses 5 and 6, you know, with some sort of a system of deciding and voting, they had to in some way decide and vote who the seven were going to be, whatever that would be.

[15:11] You know, it could be lots are written, lots is written about that. You know, was it stones put into a bag? That seemed to be something that was done at that time or was it hands being raised or whatever it was, with some sort of system of deciding and voting, the whole early church chose, if you like, seven upright people who were full of the spirit and wisdom and they were now responsible for not allowing this problem of folks being overlooked to happen again.

And interestingly, Daniela, you did a great job in reading these names. I'm not going to read them, but these are the seven who were chosen. Now, I think that it is interesting just to note that it seems many scholars, or at least all the ones I looked at, highlight that all of these names are Greek names.

Now, with that being the case, in many ways, I think that that is an absolutely beautiful thing. And it's beautiful if we remember who was it that had the complaint.

It was the Greek-speaking Jewish Christians that had the complaint. So it seems like, it seems like, that in the mix of all of this, the early church decided to pick seven, it seems, from the group who made the complaint to make sure that this wouldn't happen again.

I think that's a beautiful picture if that is the case of how the whole early church really respected this complaint. You know, I think that the church wanted to show that they did care about the Greek-speaking Jews and they did care about their widows.

[17:10] And I think that they showed them that they did care by choosing them and giving them the privilege of making sure that the widows won't be neglected again.

I think that if that is the case, I think there's something lovely about that. Those who made the complaint, those who were feeling neglected, would now be given the privilege of making sure that this would not happen again.

Seems to be, if that is the case, a really gracious move by the early church that I think really reflects the heart of Jesus. They chose those who were feeling neglected and gave them the privilege of making sure that this wouldn't happen again.

And I suppose, I think this also kind of speaks into this, and I suppose it's something for us all to consider. When we have an issue about something, let us be willing ourselves to be part of the solution.

Because it seems that the Hellenistic widows certainly were. It seems that they were willing to be part of the solution. So folks, the apostles considered this complaint.

[18:30] The apostles suggested a solution. And I think importantly, the church graciously decided together. I mean, in many ways, if the church decided no, then that still would be just as positive.

Because it's important to decide things together. together. They decided together and they kept pressing forward together. Not a bad model at all, I think, to work with.

And what was the result of all of this? Well, verse 7, the final verse in our passage this morning. 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.

So the apostles, they continued to preach and to pray. The 12 were given the task, sorry, the 7 were given the task of helping and making sure no one was neglected again.

and the early church kept moving forward together and there was continued growth and blessing. Really incredible verses when we see how the Lord helped them to move forward together.

[19:49] And I think that this passage does highlight that the church working together on issues and complaints in a healthy way, it can only lead to growth and blessing.

It can only lead to being more of a light in the community that we are in when we're working together, working on issues together and driving forward together as a unit, as a body.

You know, any church will have different issues and complaints that will come up and not all of them by any means are bad.

Unlike rats, not all complaints are bad. And a lot of the time kind of complaints are issues, they help us to grow and they help us to learn and they help us to be better.

So when things do come up, when different kind of complaints do come up, I think the big key is to not to panic, you know, not to panic and just to seek to graciously work through things together and with the Lord's help to come up with a solution and as I said, to move forward together together.

[21:12] And with different solutions, we are all so desperately needed. I think that this passage touches on that, you know, the elders or the apostles or the leaders or whatever they are, they can't do everything, they don't have the capacity to do everything, they don't have the gifts to do everything.

So we are all so desperately needed in the life of the local church. I really believe that. We are all so needed in the life of the local church because we're all needed in that process of working things out together, of being part of that working things out together.

together. Because in order for things to grow and to go well and to be outward looking in the community that we're in, I think we need to seek to serve each other, to love each other, to help each other, to work things out together as we press on.

And again, I'm just so thankful, I really am, just to see so much of this happening among us. I mean, we are not perfect and we don't always get it right and we won't always get it right, but I am so thankful to the Lord just to see so much of this desire to serve each other.

You know, it's a very simple thing, I think, just being for each other, seeking to be for each other, seeking to see others flourish, to see others working in their giftings, just to be for each other is such a gift as we seek to work through things together.

[23:02] You know, when different issues come up and different complaints come up, you know, we don't need to panic, we just need to look to the Lord together and move forward together. So I think we can be so thankful for what the Lord is doing among us, but as we say, there is always room to grow.

We can be thankful for where the Lord has brought us, but there's always room to grow. So just to finish, with the Lord's help, and he will help us, may we continue to grow more and more in being for

each other, in loving each other, in serving each other, in working things out together, and that will only lead to growth and blessing, that will only lead to us being a brighter light in the community that we are in.

and may the Lord help us as we move forward together for his glory. Well, let's pray together and then Tom and Amy will come and close our time.

Lord, we thank you for your word and I just thank you so much for what we see in these verses and we just see this example of a community of believers working together, serving each other, caring for each other, and Lord, I just pray that you would help us to take all of that and Lord, that you would impress it on our hearts and as we move forward as a church, Lord, that you would help us to move forward together, help us to press on together so that we can be a brighter light in the community that we are in and we pray you'd help us with this and we know that you will.

So help us to be encouraged. We thank you for all that you're doing among us. We thank you for where you have brought us to and we know that you'll continue to bring us forward.

[ 25 : 05 ] So Lord, thank you now that we can sing praises to you and just thank you for all of your goodness and we thank you for each other as we look to you together. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.