

The Victory of Spirit Lead Speaking & Serving

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Preacher: Pastor Cal Morrison

[0 : 0 0] folks if you have a bible and please turn it to acts chapter 6 acts chapter 6 and we have been going through a series in acts since last year entitled the king and his kingdom today we're in acts chapter 6 verses 1 to 7 if you have a bible you've got that in front of you if not don't worry i'm going to be reading out and it is up on the screen as well but acts chapter 6 verses 1 to 7 and we're going to be looking at this with the title of the victory of spirit-led speaking and serving should probably add singing in there as well but let me pray quickly holy spirit would you guide our speaking and singing and serving always that we might do so with truth and love to the glory of god the father through jesus christ our lord amen okay acts chapter 6 now in these days when the disciples were increasing in number a complaint by the hellenists arose against the hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution and the 12 summoned the full number of the disciples and said it is not right that we should give up preaching the word of god to serve tables therefore brothers pick out from among you seven men of good repute full of the spirit and of wisdom whom we will appoint to this duty but we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word and what they said pleased the whole gathering and they chose stephen a man full of faith and of the holy spirit and philip and procorus and nicanor and timon and parmenas and nicholas a proselyte of antioch they sent them before the apostles and they prayed and laid their hands on them and the word of god continued to increase and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in jerusalem and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith this is the word of god may god bless the reading of his word amen well one of the questions that's often misunderstood both in the christian life and in the church is the question of what is success what is success in the christian life what does a successful christian life look like or what is success in the church some might say that it's when the church is growing in number that's success others might say it's when you see the church being persecuted that's success and others still might say it's when you see the church blessing the community that's success or is it having increasingly more money in the bank account or increasingly more bums on the seats or is it having increasingly more activity and ministry happening or is it having increasingly more profile in the town i'm sure the list goes on and some of that might partly be true growing in number is certainly not a bad thing if it's for the right reason and being persecuted persecuted doesn't mean that you're doing something wrong unless you're westboro baptist church perhaps it is but you know we certainly want to be light and salt to the community

we should we ought to be but what is success for the church and is that even a good word to use anyway in the book of acts luke records the account of the development of the church growing the community of jesus followers this body of christ the assembly of believers and the big thing throughout acts is what is going on with this group of people who belong to jesus see compared to and contrasted with everyone else what is going on with this particular group of people who are swearing allegiance to jesus as the lord jesus is still the active agent in acts having died and been risen he is now reigning from heaven building his church like he said he would and he's doing so through his spirit and his word specifically through his apostles as his governing earthly representatives they are those specifically chosen as witnesses but also having poured out his spirit on everyone who believes everyone who puts their faith in him so acts acts as the account of how people from jerusalem to the ends of the earth are swearing allegiance to jesus god's chosen king as the holy spirit empowers the church to proclaim the gospel to everyone everywhere that's why any of us today are swearing allegiance to the name of jesus as our lord and today in act 6 we're reaching this tipping point in jerusalem this tipping point of growth in the center and after this there is effectively a turning away from jerusalem and going out to the rest of the world this will in fact be the last or this will be the pattern actually happening the rest of the way on a smaller scale see this big big growth in jerusalem and israel for the jews reaching a tipping point and then it goes out to the gentiles this is going to be the pattern for the rest of rest of the mission isn't that what paul says to the jews first and then the gentiles in every place in every every town he went to to the synagogue and then when it reached tipping point out to the gentiles it's the pattern and what's going on in our passage is not not particularly unique neither is it unique to that point in history but it's perhaps what we might call growing pains remember we said the church often faces i don't know if you do remember but previously in acts we said the church often faces these kinds of persecution these kinds of opposition persecution corruption and distraction or division and two things to remember the church is not merely an earthly institute whether you feel like this today is the church is not merely an earthly institute the church only began and only exists and only continues and grows through jesus word by the power of his spirit and as a result of his work only ever the church isn't merely an earthly institution now you might say well it kind of looks like other religions and other groups what about other religions how did they begin and why did they grow well again it would be perhaps unhelpful to merely view these as earthly institutes there is a spiritual battle raging on that influences people and groups a battle of two kingdoms kingdom of darkness of which satan rules and the kingdom of light of which jesus rules and people on earth are

whether you believe it or not influenced by one or the other influenced by light or darkness people either belong to one kingdom or the other and perhaps ignorantly so but as we are learning through the book of acts the kingdoms and their rulers are not equal opponents see all of jesus enemies are being put under his foot and that's seen in the constant victory of the holy spirit over the opposition against his church so let's remind ourselves of the victory of the holy spirit over opposition in the church so i'll give you a brief a brief overview of where we've been very very brief chapter one we've got a group of fearful and mourning disciples and they become confident as they witness the risen jesus they replace judas to complete the twelve again and then there are 120 disciples devoting themselves to prayer in chapter two we see the holy spirit poured out on that group which results in both amazement and mocking and then peter delivers this spirit filled sermon proclaiming christ as the risen lord and three thousand people are added to the church and there's great unity and devotion among the believers the holy spirit is winning here but then in chapter three we see a healing by the hands of the apostles the spirit again releasing a man from a lifelong disability and people rush to see in amazement peter again delivers a spirit filled sermon explaining that it was the power of jesus that set this man free and the church grows again by thousands then in chapter four we see opposition we see external persecution as the apostles are arrested and they're prohibited from speaking the name of jesus stop speaking the name of jesus or else prohibited and threatened yet when they're released they pray for boldness and filled with the spirit they continue to speak about jesus and there's great unity and care among the believers then in chapter five we see internal corruption as satan fills the heart of a couple in the church yet satan is exposed as the holy spirit exposes satan the apostles expose this couple and there's great fear and power in the church and more than ever look says more than ever believers were added to the lord the apostles are arrested again but an angel of the lord releases them from prison and tells them to go into the temple grounds and preach jesus so they do so and then they get arrested again no surprise and they're arrested again and they're prohibited again from speaking the name of jesus and then they're beaten and then released but again luke says they continued every single day in the temple and from house to house to teach and preach that the christ is jesus and then we get to this point in acts chapter six and the first line again again tells us that the disciples were increasing in number despite every form of opposition up to this point the spirit has kept us moving the church has been persecuted from the outside tried to prohibit the word from being preached but the holy spirit kept the word increasing and the church growing and then satan tried to corrupt the church from the inside and make the word ineffective with lies but the holy spirit exposed it kept the word of truth increasing and the

church pure and growing and now when we get to this point now the opposition is trying to distract the church from preaching the word and introduce division it's like when the Pharisees would try and trap Jesus in his words with a question they might only have two bad answers see there's a problem here in this passage and perhaps there's only two bad solutions as the church grows there's a complaint between the Hebrew Jews and the Greek speaking Jews that's heading towards a potential cultural divide what do they do does the church deal with the division at the expense of focusing on the word or does it focus on the word and potentially let divisions escalate now we know if we know the story we know that these aren't the only two options but do you see how subtle the opposition there is how subtle the threat is to both the mission and the unity of the church see it's not just one problem it's two distraction and division and the complaint itself the problem and complaint itself isn't really the issue the issue of being neglected and the distribution isn't really the problem these things need dealt with yes but the bigger problem is the potential for both distraction and division so the solution the solution can't just be to simply solve the complaint the solution needs to be a solution to distraction and division and likewise this is true of any church any church there's the potential of many things not just distribution for widows but many things can potentially cause both distraction and division so for instance think about this past year think about 2020 2020 this past year has had massive potential to cause both distraction and division not only is there a wide variety of opinions about how individuals and groups should respond to a pandemic and how they should respond to government restrictions and rules there's a wide variety of opinions about what the church should be doing in the midst of this and how the church should be doing that how the church should function there's massive potential for distraction and division so what's the answer how do we prevent this how do we navigate this today well it's clear from our passage that we ought to both keep the word the gospel preaching

Jesus as the central and main activity but also we must ensure that the church remains in unity and how on earth do we do that well only with the help of the holy spirit and a great deal of wisdom so here's the moment the church has growing pains remember there are things that are that naturally happen naturally happen like the the widows unfortunately being neglected I don't think that was deliberate but these things happen when the church is growing things get out of hand things that are organic now need to be organised and that's not the problem that's not where the opposition necessarily is it's where you go from that that's where the opposition is found church has been constantly growing sometimes thousands were added on momentous occasions other times it's just day by day little by little and here we have another period of gradual growth and this this is this problem is not the first complaint that's arisen

[16:07] I'm sure see we shouldn't romanticise the church in the past but look as highlighting this particular complaint because it's a turning point in the church it's a turning point although the complaint is about food and perhaps we've read about grumbings in the Old Testament and Exodus about food where that's a serious sin the complaint in Acts isn't positioned as sin there's no rebuke for such complaint and the cause of it is probably not deliberate there isn't any indication that the Hellenist widows were being deliberately left out by the Hebrews there's no rebuke either for that but it's more positioned as organisational oversight in a growing church and this can happen in any church especially as the church grows the things that might have been considered organic begin to need more organisation now you might know that this passage mentions the deacon word so you might think that it's the definitive introduction to deacons but let me show you just where the deacon words are in this it's very interesting in verse one the daily distribution that's the deacon word the word distribution is the deacon word diakonia basically the daily ministration also this is used in verse four of what the apostles are doing with the word they are ministering or serving the word then in verse two a slightly different form diakoneto meaning more serving or attending tables as you can see the deacon word is used in the daily distribution the tables and the word and the seven are appointed as deacons of tables whereas the apostles are the deacons of the word the deacon word is often used more in the new testament in relation to the service than the person a person is fulfilling a service a need their serving something whether tables or the word and later in Acts we'll see how these two of these men at least go on to be involved in very significant opportunities of serving the word see what is really interesting in this passage is the middle use of the deacon word and the only other time that Luke mentions in that form there's only two times Luke mentions the the diacon word in that form only two times in Luke and Acts once in Luke once in Acts and you know whether it's intentional or not is pretty interesting but we'll circle back to that shortly before that let's notice what the apostles do they include the whole body in the process of choosing men see they were probably more than likely capable of choosing someone themselves but they allow the whole number of candidates to put forward and more importantly they allow the Hellenists to be involved in the process see the wisdom there this was the first step to regaining unity they are leading from the front if the apostles included the Hellenists in making the decision would any other Hebrew now go against the example of the apostles and perpetuate division very unlikely the apostles first bring them all together then they include them in the choosing process not only do they intend to find a solution that keeps the church in unity but even their process is one of unity isn't this just a wonderful example of how they have grown these apostles how they've grown since their own struggles as Jesus disciples see they now know full well the importance of unity they would remember Jesus praying that his disciples would be one as he and his father is one they would remember Jesus saying that by their love for one another the world would know they are his disciples they would now know what kind of people belong to

Jesus those who are united as one yet even more importantly they know that such unity should never be sought at the expense of truth so the word must be kept central lest their mission fail and their unity be in vain see they will have remembered as well that when Jesus prayed for his people to be one he also prayed that they would be set apart in the truth saying to his father your word is truth a people united and united and set apart by the word so the apostles bring the full number of disciples together and they give them responsibility and ownership and picking out seven men who will oversee the distribution now not every matter needs a group to decide but it's clear that when it comes to a matter of unity and responsibility and oversight of the church the persons must be of good repute they must be known and thought well of from everyone and they add that they must be full of the

Holy Spirit and of wisdom again this is something that should be evident to the whole church not just the apostles but the apostles will be the ones to appoint them and they will continue likewise in their own appointment which is to prayer and as servants of the word and all of this was pleasing to the whole gathering as they choose seven men the first of which is Stephen a man described as a man full of this is perhaps almost what you could imagine being a business meeting in the church not that it necessarily took place over one sitting but bringing the whole number of disciples together deciding the matter as a group and appointing men to serve it's like a business meeting but what do you think of when you think of a business meeting what kind of things are discussed what kind of things ought to be discussed what kind of things are measured see quite often one of the things we deliberately measure is money now

[22 : 43] I know that it's right to do so that is right to do so we're a registered charity we want to be diligent in these things but what is sometimes unfortunate is not what is measured but what is not measured we might not spend as much time or energy or diligence and measuring finding and reporting other things for instance here in this passage here we have a measurement Luke says full full of what full of the Holy Spirit you ought to pick out men who are full of the Holy Spirit and of wisdom that's what the apostles are looking for and is that the bar that we set for serving tables that one must be full of the Holy Spirit and of wisdom and this instance in here I know is a little more sensitive than merely a church lunch this is widows and potential division and distraction so it needs wisdom it needs the spirit but equally it's a matter of unity a matter of serving with wisdom spirit led serving so the first chap is a guy called

Stephen we have one of those don't we he's going to hide behind the we have a Stephen tick he's a deacon tick he is a man full of the holy spirit and of wisdom I would say so he might not think that himself but he is he can see it in the way that he serves it is a spirit led serving from the heart Stephanos it means crown it's a great name crown we have a crown he's a servant of the church they measured him and found that he was full it's not the usual way we think of being full at church lunch is it I wonder if at times our first approach to tasks is whether a person is skilled whether a person has the skills needed but it's a completely different matter to

God it really is see remember Samuel the prophet in the Old Testament remember when Samuel was looking for a new king to replace Saul and he was sent God sent him to Jesse the Bethlehemite Jesse from Bethlehem Samuel was sent to him to anoint one of his sons as king and how many sons did he go through seven sons surely this is the one I mean look at him this guy's made to be a king surely him God said no he passed by seven of them every one of them in the house what's going on God I went through them all he had to ask Jesse is there someone else that's hiding in a cupboard Jesse said aye there's a there's a kid he's out in the field surely it's not him the kid brother who's left out looking after sheep but that was exactly what God was looking for a shepherd a shepherd who's full of heart who would tend and protect the flock of God and listen to the voice of God that's exactly who God was looking for didn't look like a king the Bible says that he was ruddy he was handsome that doesn't it's not saying that he was just good looking for the sake of saying he was good looking that's saying he's young he's young his skin doesn't have any any wrinkles or marks he's not had a hard life he's still young that's what it means when it says he's ruddy and handsome he's a kid nobody would think that this was the one but God says man looks on the outside but I see the inside and we might think you know that God might use our skills which he does but God isn't necessarily looking for skills he's looking for heart and faith and spirit and that's what it says in Hebrews 11 doesn't it you cannot please

God without faith see God will use our skills God will use our talents he gave us them in the first place but make no mistake he is not impressed by them it's like when a popular musician dies young the world says what a shame wasted talent but to God wasted talent is any talent that isn't used for the glory of God furthermore God isn't impressed by your abilities he certainly doesn't need them to accomplish his will but a man or woman lacking in talent but full of faith and of the Holy Spirit is someone who will be used greatly by God and so what would our business meetings be like if it was a key concern to measure how much of the Holy Spirit our people had again not that money or resources as bad or unimportant later on in Acts we'll read that the Jerusalem church became very poor and the church was upheld by the generosity of many Gentile churches but I imagine

I imagine that God could do more with a church that's full of the Holy Spirit than a church full of money or resources there's a commentator and Baptist lay preacher called Alexander McLaren he was born in Glasgow around 200 years ago and he was twice president of the Baptist Union of Great Britain and he made some very helpful observations on this passage what does it mean to be full of the Holy Spirit has not every believer received the Holy Spirit yes indeed all believers have been given the Holy Spirit but evidently there is a degree by which one is in tune with the Spirit that one resonates and vibrates at the same tune or that the more a man possesses and uses the life of God the more he is capable of possessing and the more he will receive and so although McLaren goes on to expand much on these he captures it really beautifully in three simple points number one we may all if we will be full of the Spirit all of us if we will be full of the Holy Spirit see if you're a believer we mustn't assign ourselves to any lesser category as though only a special few can be full of the Spirit and used by God any of us may be if we are willing we may all if we will be full of the Spirit and number two if we are full of faith we shall be filled with the Spirit see we cannot please God without faith and indeed it will be one of our greatest contributions that we simply trust the Lord Jesus that we believe what he said regarding his Spirit within us that every day we lean not on our own understanding and rely not on our own skills or abilities but that our focus is first and foremost every day believing in Jesus and trusting him he is our Lord

[30 : 27] Jesus is risen and ascended he is seated at the right hand of God and is reigning right now he is present with us in our gathering today through his Spirit he will build his church and the gates of Hades won't prevail against it he will come back on the clouds with glory and we have been joined to him if we believe we have been joined to him our lives are hidden with Christ in God when Jesus who is our life appears so we also will appear with him in glory and until then we live by faith and not by sight if we are full of faith we will be filled with the Spirit and thirdly if we are filled with the Spirit we shall be full of wisdom grace and power for these things belong to the Holy Spirit you see this passage shows that the solution to both the growing pains and the potential opposition in the church is found in the Holy Spirit

Jesus can say that the gates of hell won't prevail against his church precisely because he has given his church his Spirit so what things in the daily life of our little church ought we think should be requiring the great help of the Holy Spirit there's no task too low too small too menial don't know if you remember when they were going through the wilderness Moses was given 70 elders to help him funnily enough it's to do with a complaint about food but they were given the share they were given a share of the Spirit that was in him but two of them two of these 70 didn't turn up to the meeting where they would be appointed I don't know if they were perhaps like me and just forgot to put it in their diary maybe they slept in but two of them didn't turn up but nevertheless they were part of the 70 so they were given the Spirit and they were prophesying in the camp and it was reported and Joshua came to Moses and said stop them stop them from prophesying in the camp because they weren't among those who were at the meeting they weren't properly appointed stop them doing that yet Moses' response was striking

Numbers 11 29 Moses said this would that all the Lord's people were prophets that the Lord would put his Spirit on them would that all the Lord's people would speak the Word of God is there not a wonderful potential for the church to be like that all have been given the Spirit of the Lord would that all would speak the Word of God in whatever capacity the Spirit gives them would that all would share the truth of the Gospel by His Spirit would that we would all be moved by the Holy Spirit to speak words of Spirit and life to the world see just because you're not a pastor or elder or preacher doesn't mean you cannot speak and the Spirit will move just because you're a deacon doesn't mean that God can't use you in great ways if you're full of faith and full of the Holy Spirit see I thank the Lord Jesus for the likes of Stephanos up the back there and Robert thank the Lord

Jesus for them what wonderful and humble servants they are to the church they do really well they're both very capable at what they do I've actually been quite amazed at how well this church is doing you might not realise it many other churches are struggling far more than you I've been quite amazed at how well this church has been doing through not this pandemic but through a rollercoaster of vacancy much of that has to do with the likes of Stephen and Robert up there but I also pray that they may grow in confidence to see that whether or not they feel they have the ability it's more to do with whether they have the heart and the spirit see they could well speak to great effect by the power of the spirit any of us could it's not to say that we will always do it on the pulpit or that everyone should but as we will see in a few weeks Stephen in our passage will go on to speak with great power and effect but not in the pulpit against his opponents and finally in court giving his final testimony but look around who among you are full of faith and of the holy spirit likewise many of you many of you have given thanks for the likes of bill and david both have been in the pastorate both very capable and although not by title pretty much are functional elders of this church again a great deal of the strength of this church as a result of their work but I know that they would be the first to tell you that it was not their doing but the holy spirit

I know that but then you get people like and I've got this in black and white so I'm not saying this because of something that happened earlier but something that happened earlier is evidence of this that's in black and white then you get people like Jeanette Kerr no doubt many others like her but whatever the list of skill sets would be it would not compare to the measure of the spirit that you have Jeanette full of faith in the holy spirit evidence today and I'm not saying that because of today I'm saying that because it's in black and white full of faith in the holy spirit praise god now I said that we would circle back to the middle use of the word deacon where the apostles say that it's not right that they should give up preaching to deacon tables or to serve tables and the form of this word Luke only uses twice once here and the other time in Luke 1040 and this is what he says in

[36 : 52] Luke 1040 you'll know it as soon as I say it but Martha was distracted by much deaconing by much serving the only two times that Luke uses this form of the word and both times are relating to serving becoming a distraction to the word with Martha it distracted her from Jesus teaching which Mary sat to listen choosing the good portion and in Acts 6 the apostles want to ensure that they're not distracted from preaching the word remember it's not serving that's the problem not at all it's the distraction distraction from the word the word must go on serving as good as that is and as spirit empowered as that is is not going to save anyone the word must go on it takes the Holy Spirit and wisdom to ensure that you can serve people in important ways keeping unity but also ensure that the word goes on undistracted the result of Acts 6 is threefold verse 7 the word continues to increase the word of

God continues to increase only that's going to save people if the word of God did not continue to increase we would not be here today and this results in a number of disciples multiplying greatly in Jerusalem and the whole thing results in a great many priests becoming obedient to the faith and I'm sure I'm sure it's because the word continued without distraction while at the same time the servant continued without division see the priests came to obedience of the faith because the church is doing the temple thing it's both the place of the word of God and the place where God cares for his people in the serving both these things this is how we're salt and light one without the other and you've got a mismatch if we want to see people coming to faith and receiving forgiveness and eternal life just like we have if we want to see people's needs being met then we must ensure that the word continues without distraction and that the serving continues without division the only way we can ensure that is we are full of faith in the Holy

Spirit of which we all can be so brothers and sisters or if you're new or if you don't know Jesus have faith have faith in Jesus and if you have been continue in that don't let anything distract you from trusting in Jesus if you are filled with faith you will be filled with the Holy Spirit if we are full of faith we will be filled with the Holy Spirit and see what God can do this church is a great encouragement to me to Caldwell to many people people in India people in Israel people all over the place because you get people among you like Jeanette full of faith and full of the Holy Spirit more than skills more than money more than resources more than abilities that's how God works let me pray

God our Father would you fill us with your Holy Spirit and fill your church with your Holy Spirit so that any opposition against your church might come to nothing may we be full of your Holy Spirit that we would avoid distraction from your word and that we might serve with wisdom we praise you Father that you have given your spirit to those who believe in your Son Jesus and we ask you Lord that by your spirit you would give us the boldness to proclaim your word so that it might increase and so that you may multiply your disciples and bring a great many more into the obedience of faith to receive forgiveness and eternal life in Jesus name may we be full of faith Lord and of your Holy Spirit and of wisdom regardless of what role we have or where we may serve for the power belongs to you and we give you all the praise and glory through

Jesus Christ our Lord Amen