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Date: 11 December 2022

- [0 : 0 0] So we're going to go ahead and get into the word, church. We're going to be in Acts chapter 6. You'll be praying for us, please. We go back. We land on the 16th.
- And then I think two weeks later, we're going to have our first ever camp. And so we're excited. The guys are all getting it ready and putting things together. And the church is all excited.
- We got people coming. That's really good, right? It's really good to have campers when you have camp. And so we got some campers coming. And so you'll be praying for us. So we'll be hitting the ground running in January in Argentina.
- It's nice and hot. Praise the Lord for that. And so it'll be good. We're going to be in Acts chapter 6. I'm going to read a little bit. And then we'll get right into the message. And in those days, verse 1.
- And in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied, there rose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews because their widows were neglected in the daily ministration.
- [0 : 5 6] Now, I'm going to stop because I want to explain what's going on here. Give a little bit of context. I do think this is interesting. We have the Grecians and we have the Hebrews. Both of them were of Jewish descent. They were both Hebrew people.
- When we say Grecians, we're talking about those who were, although they were Jewish Christians, they dressed and acted and lived like everyone else. Have you ever had a neighbor that maybe was Jewish, but they didn't have, like, the curls coming down?
- They didn't have, maybe they didn't wear the, I don't know the word, yarmulke, is that what it is? They maybe didn't have that, and you may not have known they were Jewish, but there are other folks that you see that are, I don't know, I'm going to put my foot in my mouth, so I'm going to be very careful.
- And Brother Sam's here, and he's going to get me if I don't say it right. So, there are others that are Hebrews that would be much more obvious when you see them, that guy's Jewish, right, because of the way they're dressed, because of their hair, whatever it may be.
- And that's the situation going on here. And so what happens is, is you have a problem because some folks were getting neglected in the daily ministration. We've got to understand what's going on here.
- [2 : 0 0] When Jesus ascended from the earth and went up to heaven, there were 120 people in the church. And then we have Acts chapter 2, and we have 3,000 people join the church.
- So we went from 120 to 3,000. And then in Acts chapter 4, I believe we have another 5,000, excuse me. And so by the time we get to chapter 6, we really don't know how many people there are, that 5,000 or 5,000 men.
- We really don't know how many women and children were saved. I have to assume there were some, right? So we're talking about a church that went from 120 in a very relatively short amount of time to untold thousands of people.

What do you think is going to happen when a church, no matter how good it is, sees that kind of explosive growth in a little bit of time? Balls are going to get dropped. Things are going to fall through the cracks.

That's what's going to happen. I was an assistant pastor at Victory Baptist Church under my pastor, Derek Lawrence. And every once in a while, something would happen in our church. We didn't have thousands.

[3 : 02] We never have. When I was on staff there, I want to say we probably had 350 or so, which is a lot of people. And every once in a while, something would happen. And someone would have surgery, and no one was there to pray for them.

Can I tell you, not in one staff meeting did my pastor ever say, Brother Bill's going to have surgery. We need to all not go just to hurt them as bad as we can. But boy, you would have thought Brother Bill really thought that happened.

Because Brother Bill was upset, man. He was really upset that no one came to pray for him. And can I tell you what happened? What happened is, Brother Bill, I'm just naming the name, I don't know, somebody, whoever you want to name, Brother, Sister Betsy, if it's Brother Betsy, we've got a problem.

If Sister Betsy, if Sister Betsy says, well, no one came and prayed for me, and my dad passed away, and no one even called me, and the answer for Sister Betsy is, no one knew.

We didn't know. I'm so sorry that happened. But in our church of 300 and something people, there were things that fell through the cracks. Could you understand how in the church in Acts chapter 6, things fell through the cracks?

[4 : 11] Could you see how that would happen? I think the same thing probably happens here, where maybe someone tells a staff member, or someone tells a deacon, hey, this is what's going on, and the poor brother or the sister forgets what it was that was going on.

They forget to notify pastor. And no one has ever said, I'm assuming, at this church, let's try to do damage to this family. It's just that they forgot. And if that happens in our churches, how much more would it happen in Acts chapter 6?

And so what happens when this happens? Well, this proves we're biblical. They were Baptists because they started complaining. Right? Isn't that a Baptist? That was a joke. You don't got to get offended. They start complaining in Acts chapter 6.

And in those days when the number of disciples were multiplied, there arose a murmuring. They started complaining because people were being neglected. So what happens? The 12 apostles called the multitude of the disciples unto them and said, it is not reason that we should leave the word of God and serve tables.

Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you, seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost, and what? And wisdom whom we may appoint over this business. We have three qualifications for these men.

[5 : 22] And most would say they're deacons. I have read a book that believed that they were pastors. It doesn't really say either way. I kind of think they're deacons, though, in my personal opinion. But if Pastor Trent says whatever, he's right and I'm wrong. Verse 4.

But we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word. And when the saying pleased the whole multitude, they chose Stephen, a man full of faith unto the Holy Ghost, and Philip, and Procurus, and Nicanor, and Teman, and Parmenas, and Nicholas, a proselyte of Antioch, whom they set before the apostles.

And when they had prayed, they laid their hands on them. And then the result, verse 7. And the word of God increased, and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly, and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith.

So what happens is they choose these seven men. These seven men had qualifications. They couldn't just be any seven men. Full of wisdom, full of the Holy Spirit, right? And let's see here. What was it now?

Full of the Holy Spirit, of honest report, and full of wisdom. And when they laid their hands on them, prayed over them, they went to work. And what happened? The result is the church blew up even more.

[6 : 26] More people got saved. More people got excited about serving the Lord. Things really started growing. And so what I want to really call our attention to this evening is something I think is super special.

We need to remember something we do in Argentina a lot. I talk about this book, and we say that this is the word of who? It's the word of God. It's not the word of man, right? It's not the word of Paul. It's not the word of Luke, who wrote this book, by the way.

It's the word of God. And that means that everything in here was put in here for a purpose. It's not coincidence. It's in here for a purpose. And I think it's interesting that when we read verse 5, we've got the list, and every one of these men, from what we see, had or met all of these qualifications.

In other words, we don't, at least we don't read about a Judas amongst them. But when we get to the list, as Luke was writing the list, it's interesting when it says, and the saying pleased the whole multitude, and they chose Stephen.

And he stops. And he puts a man full of faith under the Holy Ghost. And Philip. But there's nothing by Philip's name.

[7 : 40] And Prochorus. And Nicanor. And Tiemann and Pardonsen. And it goes on, and we have a list. We do have information about Nicholas being a proselyte of Antioch. But it's interesting to me that when we have this list, that when he writes the name Stephen, Luke, the human author, the human penman who wrote the book, he writes the name, and God wants him to stop and put a little bit more information about him.

We go down to verse 8, and it says this. And Stephen, comma, what? Full of faith and power did wonders and miracles among the people.

That little parenthesis part there in between the two commas is not needed grammatically. I'll read it to you. It says this. And Stephen did great wonders and miracles among the people.

But for some reason, the Holy Spirit stopped Luke. And when he wrote the name Stephen, he stopped and put full of faith and power.

When we go to chapter 7, and we get to verse, they're going to kill him. They're going to kill Stephen. They're going to martyr him. He's the first martyr. We're going to be in verse 54.

[8 : 46] And when they heard these things, they were cut to the heart after hearing Stephen really preach and give a defense, although it wasn't much of a defense. And they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed on him with their teeth.

But he, the antecedent of that pronoun is Stephen, so I'm going to throw it in there. But Stephen, what? Being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up steadfastly into heaven and saw the glory of God and Jesus standing on the right hand of God.

It's interesting to me that we have three different places where when Stephen is mentioned, God stops Luke to give a description of him. Wouldn't it be wonderful, church, if every one of us had that type of testimony?

That when we're talking about Greg, we say, man, that Greg, man, he sure does walk with God. Can you remember a time where you've met somebody, and you knew after spending time with them, that guy walks with Jesus?

Jesus, that lady, you can tell she's been with the Lord today. Wouldn't that be wonderful if we, each of us, every one of us, had that testimony? And it's one thing if we say that about somebody, right?

[9 : 54] This isn't a person talking about another person. This is God himself talking about one of his servants. And he says he's a man full of faith, full of power.

I want to have that testimony. More than with anybody else, I want to have that testimony with my Lord. Wouldn't that be wonderful if when God sees you, he thinks, man, he's full of my power.

Man, he's a man full of faith. I'm going to show you some things very quickly. I've got just a few minutes that I see in Stephen's life that I think are pretty important in his life. You know what?

We're just going to go to one. I've got a few things, but we're going to go to one. We're going to go to chapter 7 at the end of his life. Stephen gets up. It's very interesting. He's brought before the high priest. It's like a court type of situation.

Picture that kind of thing. And they ask him. They have all kind of accusations against him. And they say, Stephen, is this true? And Stephen begins to, he doesn't answer very well. He doesn't give the no, it's not true.

[10 : 55] It's all lies. He just starts preaching the Bible, right? We don't do that. I don't do that. So if we came out of the service tonight and the police were all waiting on you and said, we have evidence that you robbed the bank 30 minutes ago, what would you say?

You wouldn't say, well, John 3.16 says, you wouldn't do that. You would say, no, I was in the church service. I was sitting next to Greg. Greg saw me. He was with him the whole time. He's going to tell you. I'm using you because you're right here.

I'm sorry. And so, but that's what you'd say, right? That's what we'd all do. Stephen didn't do that when he was accused. Those serious accusations, he just went straight to the word and used the word. That's one thing.

That's beside the point. But when it's all done, they're going to kill him. And look what he does in verse 55. But he being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up steadfastly into heaven and saw the glory of God and Jesus standing on the right hand of God.

Chapter 7, verse 56. And said, behold, I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing on the right hand of God. Then they cried out with a loud voice. That was even worse.

[11 : 55] And stopped their ears and ran upon him with one accord. And they cast him out of the city and stoned him. And the witnesses laid down their clothes at a young man's feet whose name was Saul.

And listen to this. And they stoned Stephen, calling upon God, saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. And that would probably be the end, excuse me, probably be the end of the passage for most of us if we were Stephen.

But that's not where Stephen stopped. He had one more thing to say. And this is what he said. And he kneeled down and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge.

That's called forgiveness. Can I tell you probably perhaps the greatest characteristic one could have is forgiveness. Being willing to forgive those who have hurt us.

And this wasn't a thing where someone was being slandered or someone was spoken poorly about. Because when someone speaks poor about us, what do we want to do? We want to lash out, right? Or at least I do for sure. He was literally, his life was being taken from him.

[13 : 02] He wasn't being slandered. He wasn't being talked poor about. He was literally dying. And with his last words, he asked the Lord to forgive them. What a beautiful picture.

What do we need in our lives? We need to practice that forgiveness. Maybe the Lord's dealing with you right now about this very subject. Maybe the Holy Spirit is bringing someone up in your mind right now where you haven't given forgiveness to that person.

And it's easy for me to justify my own self and say, yeah, but you don't know the story. I really know what went on there. He doesn't deserve my forgiveness. But then I think about Stephen. A man full of faith and power.

Perhaps he was full of faith and power because he was a man that forgave. Forgive them. And he died. I think one of the greatest things that God wants us to have in John chapter 17 is the longest recorded prayer in the New Testament.

And Jesus is praying there. And you know what he prayed for? He prayed for several different things. One of the things he really prayed for and harped on was unity. He wanted us to be one. And he wants unity.

[14 : 12] And do you know what the devil wants? Division. And we're going to hurt each other. And you're going to hurt your brother. And you're going to hurt your sister. And they're going to hurt you.

And that's unfortunately that's what happens in our lives. Can I tell you your best answer is? Forgiveness. We could be that guy. We can be that lady that's full of faith and power.

Because we're willing to say, you know what? Forgive them. Forgive them. Yeah, but it hurts. Forgive them. Yeah, but you don't know what they did to me. We can have the power to forgive.

I really don't have time to talk about it. I was reading in a book about it. I thought it is worth mentioning. And then I'll be praying and we'll be done. Saul was there who's going to become the apostle Paul.

And Paul sees the whole thing. And then in Acts chapter 9, the Holy Spirit, Jesus speaks to Paul. Paul's conversion in Acts chapter 9. And he says, it's hard for thee to kick against the pricks.

[15 : 12] I mean, something was bothering him. Some believe, I don't know. Sounds good. Some believe what may have been bothering him on that road as he continued to try to do his thing is that when he watched a guy be killed, instead of him saying, you're all going to burn, which probably would have been right, he said, forgive them.

And that guy walked around with that over his shoulders and in his heart, thinking, how can you answer the pain with forgiveness? An unbelieving in the world needs to see in believers of Jesus the practice of forgiveness.

Let's pray. Heavenly Father, thank you for this time we've gotten to have together. Lord, please work in our hearts that there be somebody here that's harboring some type of bitterness or not willing to forgive. Lord, I don't know who it is and it's none of my business, but you do.

I ask that you work in our hearts. I ask that you work in me, Lord. Help me to continually forgive, to let go, to love, to forgive. Do the same in all of us, your children, in Jesus' name.