

MISSION NEGLECT, MISSION DANGER, MISSION FRUIT!
ACTS CH6:1-7

RE-CAP!

Peter has preached on five occasions up to this point:

1. Ch1:15-26
2. Ch2:14-36
3. Ch3:12-26
4. Ch4:8-12
5. Ch5:29-42

(There will be 8 sermons by Peter - Ch1:15-22; 2:14-41; 3:6-26; 4:8-22; 5:29-42; 10:34-48; 11:4-18; + 15:7-11)

The apostles are filled and continue to speak boldly! Ch4:31

ILLUSTRATION

Neglected! J.K Rowling at her lowest ebb, **was unemployed, a single mother and in a depression so severe that at times she contemplated suicide**. Coupled with her dire financial situation, Rowling had to rely on welfare benefits to survive. Why were her writings dismissed, among the reasons for rejection were **too conventional, too long, too weird or too old-fashioned**. However, by 2012, not having money was no longer an issue, Forbes concluded she was no longer a billionaire due to her charitable donations and high UK taxes. ***She was named the world's highest paid author by Forbes in 2008, 2017 and 2019.***

CONFLICT BETWEEN THE HELLENISTS AND THE HEBREWS! V1-2

One of Luke's purposes in writing the Book of Acts is to tell the story of the remarkable growth of the Church in the years after Jesus left the earth and sent His Spirit to empower His people (Acts Ch1:8). You can see this if you notice how frequently he highlights the growth of the Church. For example, in:

The Church in Jerusalem was initially:

- 120 people - **Ch1:15**
- then 3120 people - **Ch2:41**
- then 3120+ people - **Ch2:47**
- then 5000 men probably anything from 5000 - 10,000 people – **Ch4:4**
- then people becoming Christians daily, in an unprecedented way – **Ch5:14!**
15,000+ perhaps! (In Jerusalem and Judea)
- then "So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace and was being built up. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it multiplied." (In Judea, Galilee and Samaria) - **Ch9:31**
- then "And the word of the Lord was spreading throughout the whole region." (In the region of Pisidia) - **Ch13:49**
- then "So the churches were strengthened in the faith, and they increased in

numbers daily." (In the region of Galatia) - **Ch16:5**

- then "So the word of the Lord continued to increase and prevail mightily." (In Ephesus) - **Ch19:20**

It was an amazing movement, full of supernatural vigour. But it was not pure! **Besides documenting the growth of the Christian movement in the early years, Luke's purpose is also to show us how it was happening and how various threats to the Church and obstacles to growth were overcome. So for example,**

Acts Ch5:1-11 - There were the likes of deceitful Ananias and Sapphira in the Jerusalem movement

Acts Ch8:13-24 - power-hungry Simon the magician in the Samaritan movement

Acts Ch13:13; Ch15:38 - fearful, retreating John Mark in the missionary band

Acts Ch18:24-28 - doctrinally confused Apollos in the Asian movement

Acts Ch19:18 - professing Christians in Ephesus who for some time concealed their black magic.

That's what this passage is about! It begins and ends with a reference to growth. "Now in these days when the disciples were increasing in number(Acts Ch6:1)." "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" (Acts Ch6:7).

What we have sandwiched between these two statements is a threat to the Christian growth and the story of how it was overcome. So the point of the text is to teach us how the growth of the Church is threatened and how to overcome the threat.

The first part is the conflict between the Hellenists (the Greek - speaking Jews) and the Hebrews (the Hebrew - or Aramaic-speaking Jews), and the resulting failure of the Church to take care of the widows of the Hellenists. You see this in verse 1: "A complaint by the Hellenists arose against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution."

So there are some cultural or ethnic tensions in the Gospel Community in Jerusalem. It may be that already in Jerusalem there were two movements separated along language lines (just as there were Hellenistic synagogues in Jerusalem and Hebraic synagogues (Acts Ch6:9). And one of the results of this cultural and ethnic division was that the system developed back in **Acts Ch2:45 + Ch4:35 to take care of the poor was not working for the minority group in the Church.** If that were to continue, then Christians would come into disrepute and the glory of Christ would be dimmed in the eyes of the world and the movement would experience a serious setback. **That's the first part of the threat to the spread of the "Word."**

The other part of the threat to the movement is what would happen if the first part were solved in the wrong way. You can see this clearly in verse 2. "And the twelve 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.'" Luke gives us a clear indication that the temptation to do this is a major threat to the movement. The way he gives us that indication is the link he forges between "the word of God" in verse 2 and "the word of God" in verse 7. In verse 2 he quotes the apostles as saying that leaving "the word of God" would be a grave mistake. And in verse 7 he reports the effect of not leaving the Word of God: "And the word of God (notice the link) increased and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly."

In other words, his point is that the ***“Word of God”*** kept spreading and bearing fruit because the apostles did not make the strategic mistake of leaving their focus on the ***“Word”*** to fix a pressing problem. ***The major threat to the movement, Luke teaches us, is whatever threatens the ministry of the Word.*** And in this case it would have been something very good that was threatening it, not something bad!

So there were two parts to the threat:

1. The conflict that resulted in neglecting the widows
2. The danger of solving that problem in a short-sighted way that would have diverted the apostles from the ministry of the Word of God and prayer.

CONFLICT BETWEEN THE HELLENISTS AND THE HEBREWS WORKED OUT! V3-6

God led the apostles to overcome both parts of the threat by not playing them off against each other. In verse 3 the apostles instructed the Church to appoint seven Hellenistic leaders (we know they were Hellenists from their Greek names), who were full of the Spirit and wisdom, to take care of this need. They delegated. And the apostles kept on devoting themselves to the ministry of the Word and prayer (v. 4). Look carefully at the strategy of the apostles, they organised:

- v2 a gathering! Church Meeting!
- v3 you pick! Members involved (congregational!) picking from their own!
- v3 good repute (an opinion) – tested!
- v3 full of the Spirit (born again!)
- v3 full of wisdom (gift led!)
- v3 we will appoint (approved and overseen by the elders!)
- v5 this pleased the whole Church (unity!)
- v6 laying on of hands for service! (prayerful!)

CONFLICT BETWEEN THE HELLENISTS AND THE HEBREWS CELEBRATED! V7

There was conflict between the Christians and the Priests, according to the “New Bible Dictionary” (pg961) “At root this conflict sprang from the Christian conviction and the Jewish suspicion that Jesus' life, death, resurrection and ascension spelt the eclipse if not, the destruction of the old priestly structures. Jesus' own teaching had placed him at the heart of a new sacerdotal (relating to priests) structure: `something greater than the temple is here' (Matt Ch12:6). `Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up' (John Ch2:19); `For the Son of Man also came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many' (Mark Ch10:45).”

Of the NT writers, it is the author of Hebrews who picks up these threads and weaves them into a many coloured fabric. In its passion to prove that the Christian faith is superior to, indeed has replaced, the OT patterns of worship, Hebrews presses persistently its claim that Jesus has been appointed by God (Ch5:5-10) to be the new, the true high priest who can finally deal with human sin.

Luke celebrates this solution. The widows' were cared for, and the ministry of the Word of God was not forsaken. Both were utterly crucial. Either could have undermined the Church and ended its amazing growth. The solution was the diversity of gifts and calling. The solution was a new kind of teamwork in the body of Christ. The way Luke celebrates the triumph of the Church over this threat is by showing its effect in verse 7: "And the word of God (that had not been forsaken) 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." What Luke is celebrating is that the triumph over this in-house problem resulted in a new breakthrough in evangelistic power. Now, even priests, who had been so hostile (Acts Ch4:1), are responding to the Word of God and obeying the faith. ***The Church had been tested. She had passed the test by caring for the widows and guarding the Word. And God honoured this triumph with new power and fruitfulness.***

APPLICATION

How can we apply this to our context?

How well do we see and react to the poor in our own Gospel community?

Is there anything threatening the ***“ministry of the Word?”***