

Power Hour Lesson for August 6, 2017

“Called to Witness”

Lesson Text: Acts 6:1-8

Background Scripture: Acts 1, 6, 7

Devotional Reading: Acts 2:14-28

Acts 6:1-8 (NIV)

1 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. **2** So the Twelve gathered 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. **3** 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 **4** and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word.” **5** This proposal pleased the whole group. They chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit; also Philip, Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas from Antioch, a convert to Judaism. **6** They presented these men to the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them. **7** 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.

TODAY’S LESSON AIMS

- **Learning Facts:** To summarize how the twelve apostles addressed the issue of food distribution in terms of ministry priorities.
- **Biblical Principle:** To sense the ministry challenges of evangelism and benevolence in the twenty-first-century church.
- **Daily Application:** To make a plan to recruit, train, and commission new workers for ministries in his or her church.


INTRODUCTION

Waiting On ... What?

When dining at restaurants in Los Angeles, I would often hear a young server say, “I’m an actor. I’m just waiting tables between acting gigs.”

Some of them made good livings by serving tables, but they did not see themselves as waiters. The outer self waited tables while the inner self waited for a big break into stardom. By contrast, I never met a person who had a successful acting career but was biding his time until he got his “big break” to get into waiting tables! This reveals something about cultural values.

Today’s lesson is also about values. The apostles, the primary leaders of the first-century church, had been taught a value of the kingdom of God:



How Do I Say?....

Grecians *Gree-shunz.*

Nicanor *Nye-cay-nor.*

Nicolas *Nick-uh-lus.*

Parmenas *Par-meh-nas.*

Prochorus *Prock-uh-rus.*

Proselyte *Prahss-uh-light.*

Sadducees *Sad-you-seez.*

Timon *Ty-mon.*

that serving others was not beneath them (Mark 9:33-35; 10:35-45; John 13:14; compare Philippians 2:5-8; etc.). But there was more than one value at issue in the situation addressed by today's text. The apostles' handling of it has been seen as marvelously insightful through the centuries, and still is.

LESSON BACKGROUND

Time: A.D. 32

Place: Jerusalem

Today's lesson focuses on the earliest days of the Jerusalem church, when the memory of Jesus was still vividly strong. Acts 6, from which our text is drawn, reflects a time when the church consisted of Christians from a Jewish background only, since the gospel had yet to be extended to Gentiles (compare Acts 10:1-11:18).

A common religious background did not mean uniformity in doctrine and practice, however. The Judaism of Jesus' day had divided itself into four sects: Pharisees, Sadducees, Essenes, and Zealots. As Jews accepted Jesus as the promised Messiah, they brought into the church their various (and sometimes contradictory) expectations. Some had to be modified or abandoned altogether.

For example, the Scriptures clearly stated God's desire that widows and other needy people be cared for (Isaiah 1:17; etc.). But there was not a uniform understanding on how benevolence programs were to be funded and who was eligible to receive aid. Jesus had harsh words for a tradition that allowed one to redirect a gift to avoid supporting a needy parent (Mark 7:9-13). The lack of consensus on eligibility could have been one aspect of Paul's need to address the topic later (1 Timothy 5:3-16).

The first-century church in Jerusalem recognized its obligation to provide food daily to its widows. That was quite an undertaking for a church that numbered in the thousands (Acts 4:4), and direct oversight of this complex ministry was shouldered by the leaders of the congregation, the apostles. But complaints were being heard, and the nature of this important task consumed their time. Something had to be done.

What Do You Think?

- What are some ways for church leaders to keep a volatile issue from becoming more so?
- How do we know how many people should be appointed to a given ministry task?

POINTS TO PONDER

1. God does not neglect any of His children. (Acts 6:1)
2. Wise leaders know the importance of delegating (compare Exodus 18:13-26; Acts 6:2).
3. Leaders of the Church must be set apart for God's use. (vs. 3-8)

CONCLUSION

Needed: A Culture of Change

A growing church is like a living organism in that difficulties encountered must be addressed before they become crippling. Adaptation may result in unforeseen consequences, both good and bad. People may be given chances to serve in modest roles, and some (like Stephen) rise to this challenge and go beyond. But this also implies meeting the challenge of filling the modest role that is vacated as a result. There are always problems to address, but also potential new leaders whom God is preparing to help do so.

Within scriptural boundaries, methods for ministry are subject to change. Consider how the benevolence ministry of the first-century church changed as we trace it from Acts 2:45 to Acts 4:34, 35 to Acts 6:1-6 to 2 Corinthians 8:13-9:15 to 1 Timothy 5:3-16. A church willing to change may be a church poised for growth.

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, grant us wisdom to see when changes in methods are necessary and courage to implement them so our church can fulfill the Great Commission. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

THOUGHT TO REMEMBER

A successful church cannot be a one-person endeavor.

ANTICIPATING THE NEXT LESSON

Next week's lesson is "[Called to Break Down Barriers,](#)" where we learn that we should always be prepared to tell others about Jesus Christ and His sacrifice for us. Study Acts 8:1-40.