

Serving the Needs of the Church

Acts #9 | 6:1-7

October 11, 2020

Pre-Sermon Remarks

- Jerusalem and Judea, about to turn the corner in ch. 8 to Samaria

PRAYER

Introduction

- Wouldn't it be great to be like the early church? Yes and no.
 - Rosy picture from Acts 2: community, shared possessions, converts, healing
 - Acts 5: theft and deceit, imprisonment and persecution
 - Acts 6: church organization problems | My favorite! (sarcasm)
- Metaphor of church as family: sometimes you have a family night, sometimes chores

Big idea: As we serve the family of God, we get to enjoy and display the love of Christ.

A Challenge Arises

Acts 6 ¹ In those days, as the disciples were increasing in number, there arose a complaint by the Hellenistic Jews against the Hebraic Jews that their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution.

- *Hellenistic* means Greek-speaking. Both are Jewish, this has to do with language & custom.
- Likely women who lived in other parts of the world, moved to Jerusalem after the death of a husband or some other economic hardship.

The Apostles' Decision

²The Twelve summoned the whole company of the disciples and said, "It would not be right for us to give up preaching the word of God to wait on tables.

- Don't hear that negatively! Look at the top-shelf people they want.
- This has less to do with the importance of the work, and more to do with gift/calling

³Brothers and sisters, select from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and wisdom, whom we can appoint to this duty. ⁴But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word."

The Apostles' Good Leadership

1. Good leaders don't do everything perfectly | *People were legitimately feeling left out*
2. Good leaders work in teams | *The twelve summoned the whole company*
3. Good leaders take responsibility | *the twelve summoned, *let's fix this!**
 - a. If anybody could have made excuses, it would be Peter
4. Good leaders address both spiritual and physical needs | *preaching, and meal trains*
5. Good leaders know where to focus their energy | *we will devote ourselves to prayer/word*
6. Good leaders empower other leaders | *appoint to this duty*

The Result

⁵This proposal pleased the whole company. So they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit, and Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolaus, a convert from Antioch. ⁶ They had them stand before the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them.

- The right men for the job
 - Non-Jewish names, likely Hellenistic Jews
 - Except Nicolaus, a “convert from Antioch” | Maybe Gentile? Maybe Hellenistic Jew?
- Some get notoriety:
 - Stephen becomes the focus of the next few weeks, first to die
 - Philip in Samaria, Ethiopian official, ends up in Caesarea (ch. 21), four daughters!
- The others are more obscure: but Jesus knows, as do these sisters in Christ

⁷ So the word of God spread, the disciples in Jerusalem increased greatly in number, and a large group of priests became obedient to the faith.

This passage is often referred to as the first selection of deacons. The main objection is that the term “deacon” isn’t really used in this passage, at least not as explicitly as in Philippians 1 or 1 Timothy 3.

- However, the verb is found in vs. 2, to “wait/serve tables.” *Diakoneo*
- Based on that textual connection, as well as thematic connections with 1 Timothy 3, I believe that we are on strong ground to say that this is a deacon passage.

Biblical Picture of Deacons

1. *Diakonos* means servant | Trans: servant, minister, attendant, deacon
2. A formal office of church leadership | Philippians 1:1
 - a. All Christians are called to serve, but some have a recognized office
3. Focused on practical matters | 1 Timothy 3:2,8
 - a. Requirements for overseer and deacon are largely the same
 - b. Overseers must be *able to teach*, not required of deacons
 - c. Overseers must not be *greedy*, deacons not *greedy for money*
4. Both men and women serve as deacons
 - a. Reason #1 | Text of 1 Timothy 3:8-13
 - i. ⁸ Deacons, likewise, should be worthy of respect, not hypocritical, not drinking a lot of wine, not greedy for money, ⁹ holding the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience. ¹⁰ They must also be tested first; if they prove blameless, then they can serve as deacons. ¹¹ Wives, likewise, should be worthy of respect, not slanderers, self-controlled, faithful in everything. ¹² Deacons are to be husbands of one wife, managing their children and their own households competently. ¹³ For those who have served well as deacons acquire a good standing for themselves and great boldness in the faith that is in Christ Jesus.
 - ii. Wives/women is the same Greek word, *gynēkos* | translators use context
 1. ESV says “their wives,” but not there. Just “women”
 - iii. Why would there be requirements for deacon’s wives but not overseers?

- b. Reason #2: the text of Romans 16:1-2 | ¹ I commend to you our sister Phoebe, who is a servant of the church in Cenchreae. ² So you should welcome her in the Lord in a manner worthy of the saints and assist her in whatever matter she may require your help. For indeed she has been a benefactor of many—and of me also.
- c. Reason #3: early church witness | article on website

Here is the point: deacons are a vital part of a healthy church.

- They serve the practical needs of the church
- They assist the overseers by enabling them to focus on word and prayer
- They inspire all of the members of the church to serve
- Most importantly, they show us the character of Jesus, the “servant/deacon” of us all

Christ, Our Lead Deacon

**John and James’ mom asking for a prominent place in the Messianic cabinet of officials*

Matthew 20 ²⁵ But Jesus called them to him and said, “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. ²⁶ It shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, ²⁷ and whoever would be first among you must be your slave, ²⁸ even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

- Yes, Jesus is a king, but he’s a certain type of king
- Washes feet, rides on a donkey, dies on a cross
- Now risen, ascended, ruling, reigning - and yet, he is still serving us (Hebrews language)
- **Gospel invitation | a lot of politicians trying to court your vote. None of them died for you, none of them live to serve you, to care for you.**

How Does This Relate to Our Church

1. Celebrate | deacons who serve well, culture of service
 - a. Alejandro Alvarez, Brittany Hackett, Myeong Hong, Dale Kaemingk, Jim Lagucik, Shelli Lagucik, Stephanie Patrick, Chris Vaughn, Pete Wilson
 - b. Not just them, but faithful volunteers and servants **Tom Jacobson**
2. Cultivate | new deacons, elders, faithful servants (*always* room to grow)
3. Separate | elders need to get better at getting out of the weeds