

## Acts 6:1-7

### The Church Can Be A Messy Place!

**Intro: One of my favorite verses in the Bible is found in Proverbs 14:4 NLT without oxen the stable stays clean.**

A)The flip side of that is - where there are Oxen - there are going to be Oxen dodo in the stable

B)Oxen leave messes!

C)Same thing could be said about the church - if a church has no people - **clean - no problems**

1)Tidy - functions like a charm - but there is no fruit or very little fruit

D)But a church that is growing is going to have people and people make messes - leave messes

**The church is a messy place -**

A)No one arrived here - no one is perfect

B)Broken people who are in the process ....

C)We all have our baggage - our messes - we bring into this place!

D)Question is are we going to focus on the mess - or JESUS OUR redeemer?

**E)Mentor - Carnal man - body - spiritual - the head**

1)The church is the bride of Christ - body or head?

**Here is Acts 6 - we see that even a vibrant church- impactful church - culture changing church -**

A)Dealt with messes - People get their eyes off of Jesus - focus on the body - Read V.1-7

Now in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplying, there arose a complaint against the Hebrews by the Hellenists, because their widows were neglected in the daily distribution. 2 Then the twelve summoned the multitude of the disciples and said, "It is not desirable that we should leave the word of God and serve tables. 3 Therefore, brethren, seek out from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business; 4 but we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word."

6 And the saying pleased the whole multitude. And they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit, and Philip, Prochorus, {Pra/ko/ross} Nicanor, {Na/ku/nor} Timoan, Parme/nas, and Nicolas, a proselyte from Antioch, 6 whom they set before the apostles; and when they had prayed, they laid hands on them.

7 Then the word of God spread, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith.

**Now at this point scholars believe we are 2-3 years into the life of the early church**

A)Notice how this chapter begins Now in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplying

B)So God is continuing to grow his church - more people are getting saved - **Becoming disciples**

**C)The number of disciples was multiplying - the commission from Jesus to the apostles**

1)Go into all the world - **MAKE DISCIPLES**

D)Notice the next line: There is a problem - **there arose a complaint**

**The word complaint here is Murmur - Say murmur!**

A)Arose is a good way to describe what happened

B)Murmur **to speak privately in a low tone**

C)Murmur – Usually Starts as–something going in your heart - a deep seeded displeasure

**Here is how it grows like a weed in the church**

A)You share that displeasure with a friend over coffee –

B)**You know there is something that has really been bothering me.....**

C)**Or I don't really understand why this is happening or why they are doing that**

D)Then you share it with someone else a few days later and those people share it with someone

1)Pretty soon the low tone becomes a roar

**E)Like a weed that is out of control - Murmur - murmur - murmur**

## **WE all can be prone to Murmuring**

**A) You murmur marriage - your family - a group of people/ - company you work for**

**B) And it can happen amongst God's people in God's church**

**C) We have seen in the book of Acts God's mathematics**

1) We have seen God add to the church - **God is into addition -**

**D) We have seen God multiply his church - he is into multiplication**

**E) We have seen God's subtraction in his church - he removed two hypocrites - Ananias and Saphira**

1) God adds - subtracts - multiplies but the one thing he never does is DIVIDE.

**F) God is not into division and that is why he doesn't like descension in his church**

**These six things the Lord hates, Yes, seven are an abomination to Him:**

- #1 A proud look,
- #2 A lying tongue,
- #3 Hands that shed innocent blood,
- #4 A heart that devises wicked plans,
- #5 Feet that are swift in running to evil,
- #6 A false witness who speaks lies,
- #7 And one who sows discord among brethren.

Proverbs 6:16-19

**Murmuring is always wrong. Always unhealthy.**

**A) Murmuring brought the judgment of God upon the children of Israel in the wilderness, in OT days.**

**B) Murmuring is usually the mark of cantankerous, discontented, unhappy spirit**

1) It is the indication that there is a problem with the heart of the person doing it

One hot day a family traveling down the highway between Johnstown PA and Jamestown PA stopped at Farmer Jones's place to ask for a drink of water, which he gladly gave them. **"Where are you headed?"** he asked them

They told him, **"We are moving from Johnstown to Jamestown to live,"**

"Can you tell us what the people there are like?"

Farmer Jones asked, "Well, what kind of people did you find where you lived before?"

To which they replied, "Oh, they were the very worst kind!" "They were gossipy and unkind and indifferent. We are glad to move away."

**Farmer Jones replied, "Well, I am afraid you will find the same type of people in Jamestown."**

**The next day another car stopped, and the same conversation took place.** These people were moving to Jamestown, too.

They asked, "What kind of neighbors will we find there?"

Well, Farmer Jones, asked, **"What kind of neighbors did you have where you lived before?"**

The couple responded, "Oh, they were the very best! **They were so kind and considerate that it almost broke our hearts to have to move away."**

**FJ replied, "Well, you will find exactly the same kind again."**

**What is going on in your own heart will play a part in how you see others**

**A) Now in this situation here in Acts 6 there seems to be a legitimate problem happening**

**B) It Concerned the Widows in the church.**

**C) Remember at this point the church is still living communally out of necessity**

**Saw back in Acts 2 People were in Jerusalem for the feast of Pentecost - come from all over the Middle East**

**A) They get saved - they don't want to go home - so people in Jerusalem are opening their homes**

**B) Massive feast - where people are coming together to eat -**

**1) There is a food distribution program in place**

**C) And They were taking care of the widows in the church - Which was very important**

**There were no pension programs in those days - there wasn't social security**

**A) So it fell upon family to take care of the widows**

B) But some of these widows didn't have any family/ and others were ostracized from family

1) for turning to Jesus - and leaving Judaism

C) So the church stepped up - and that is where the problem arose. There arose a complaint against the Hebrews by the Hellenists, because their widows were neglected in the daily distribution.

There were in the early church in Jerusalem two kinds of Jews who had become Christians.

A) Grecian or Hellenist and Hebrews – Difference?

B) During the many years in the History of the people of Israel - they faced many invasions

1) Babylon, Persia, Greece, - and many of the Jews people were taken from or fled their homeland

C) They became Known as Jews of the Dispersion

1) Dispersed all over the middle east

When the Grecian empire took control of the known world under the reign of Alexander the great

A) The Greek language and culture and ways - permeated much of the middle east

B) Greek influence was very much alive - Roman time

The Jews who were dispersed into these other regions had adopted Grecian ways. Progressive

A) They dressed like the Greeks - Spoke Greek - adopted some of the Grecian culture of the times

B) They would have been the Hipsters – of their day.

C) They even had their synagogues - where everything was done in the Greek language

1) They were known as the Hellenist

The Other Jews, referred to as Hebrews,

A) They were the Traditionalist – who had stayed in or around Jerusalem

B) They stayed true to the old ways and traditions of Judaism.

C) Over time “The Hebrew Jews” the traditionalist looked down on the Grecian Jews- the progressives

1) The Hebrews looked at the Hellenist as compromising, “second-class” Jews.

Now it seems that at least a perception of that attitude had crept into the early Church.

A) The Hellenistic Jews had felt that their Widows were being slighted or neglected in the daily .....

B) What started as a small complaint - amongst a few has grown to a ROAR!

1) came to the attention of the apostles

C) The early church is suddenly not unified – no longer together in One accord –

1) With all things in Common

D) Crazy -Something so simple as an extra piece of bread or a larger helping of mash potatoes

1) had the possibility to destroy something so sweet and precious that God had begun. - PAUSE

Know this if You see a problem in the church

A) Chances are it has been revealed to you because God wants you to be a part of the Solution.

B) See a problem/ what Should you do first ? – Pray!

C) Before you talk to another person about the perceived problem - PRAY - talk to God!

D) Ask the Lord – what can I do to make this situation better? How can I be used to fix IT?

1) See a hole – How can I be used to be a plug?

E) YOU See a person struggling – DON'T IGNORE God is revealing that need to you.

1) Ask How can I be used to come alongside of them.

Now if you are praying and God is not showing you what he wants you to do to help.

A) Come to the Leaders in the church - in this way - I see a problem or potential problem - how can I help

B) That is how the church stays healthy - that is how the church stays unified

1) That is how a healthy church deals with the messes that arise

C) Well the early church didn't do either of those things - people just began to complain murmur

1) The Murmuring AROSE!!!!

D) Finally came to the attention of the apostles

Here we see the mark of good leadership! They don't ignore it - they don't say oh well too bad so sad.

A) They deal with it!

2 Then the twelve summoned the multitude of the disciples {Get everyone together family meeting} and said, "It is not desirable that we should leave the word of God and serve tables. 3 Therefore, brethren, seek out from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business; 4 but we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word."

The Church gets organized

A) The problem that existed was fixed by the Holy Spirit leading the leaders to organize the church in a different format so as to solve the problem.

B) Important to note- because sometimes in the church people think that organization is bad.

1) Any Organization somehow quenches the Holy Spirit

But God is a God of order!

A) I read my Bible, I discover my God is a very organized God.

B) He instructed Paul to write in the book of 1 Corinthians about the gifts of the Holy Spirit - let everything be done decently and in order, in an organized fashion.

C) God wants order in his church - order in the church services - not chaos

We see the organizational nature of God in the fact that there is a precise order to how the Earth revolves around the sun each day!

A) We can chart a sunrise and sunset every day!

B) There is a precise order to the universe!

C) Any study on human anatomy quickly reveals that God designed the body in an organized way.

D) The body of Christ is no different - there has to be order.

The church is a BODY - a living organism

A) It's living, moving, expanding. it is a living Organism made up of many different parts - people

B) And the more people you have, making up that living organism - the more organization is necessary.

Now you can organize things to the point where you do quench the Holy Spirit. So wisdom is needed

A) Balance is needed - example of that here.

B) The apostles came up with a solution- 2 things

1st They established a Priority

A) You need to choose 7 men who can be over this situation

B) Because we need to continue to give ourselves to the study of the word and of prayer

Now, it would be very easy to read that as though the apostles were saying, "We are too good or important to wait on tables"

A) So Choose 7 guys who are not as important as us

B) That was not the case at all.

1) Remember: Jesus had washed their dirty stinky feet - told them do likewise

C) Jesus taught them - Greatest among you must become the servant of all.

1) Jesus had modeled for them - Servant leadership.

D) They were not, in any sense, downgrading the ministry of serving tables

E) The apostles made a decision had nothing to do with Preference - Everything to do with PRIORITY

A) It is interesting that the same word used in v.2 for serve is the same word used in V.4 for ministry.

1) So in essence the Apostles were saying: We will serve the word the spiritual food. - our priority

**B) You appoint men who can serve the physical food!**

1) That will be their PRIORITY

**C) The Apostles wisely understood – we can't do everything –**

1) we **must give** our priority to Preaching and prayer.

**Now as the Lead Pastor here at CV and the primary teacher in our adult services**

**A) This has to be my priority. My priority has to be the study of God's word and prayer for the church**

**B) So I spend about 20 hrs a week preparing and praying for our Sunday services**

1) **Better sermons - I am trying my best 😊**

**C) 20 hrs given to Sunday - 10 hrs to Wednesday**

1) So that leaves me about 20 hrs a week to meet with People - meet with staff - deal with situations/ **Pastors**

**D) That is why sometimes people call - I want to meet with Pastor Rob - told might be 2-3 weeks -**

**E) Listen it is not a matter of Preference - I love meeting with people - I love counseling**

1) It is a matter of **Priority**

**I have to give priority to the study of God's word and prayer**

**A) Homiletics professor Dr. Nathaniel Van Cleave – “if you preach for 1 hour to 100 people and you are ill prepared – you just wasted 100 hrs of God's time.”**

**B) SO MY PRIORITY has to be the word and prayer**

**C) So It might take 2 weeks to get an appointment with me**

1) But there are other pastors on our staff - who's priority is to meet with People

**D) You can see them Tomorrow**

**E) So the first thing the Apostles did was they established a priority**

**The 2<sup>nd</sup> thing they did was instruct the church to choose Proven men who could be put over this.**

**A) Notice V. 3 Seven men were to be chosen**

**B) Why seven: Maybe because 7 is the number of completion -**

1) Now I think there's a more fundamental answer than that.

**C) See It was the custom in Judaism, that in any community,**

1) all of the public affairs were overseen by a group of seven elders.

**Seven men were selected, from the community, who had integrity and were notable and noteworthy.**

**A) And they were in charge of overseeing affairs**

**B) and settling disputes and settling issues within the community.**

**C) So it is highly possible - the early church leaders are following that model - normal custom in Judaism**

**The Criteria or Characteristics of the Seven men**

**A) #1 Among you - Don't go outside**

**B) As the believers were growing and maturing - there should be - 7 capable men - among them**

**C) All our Elders - Leadership team - are from this church - capable men**

**#2 Good reputation - Proven character**

**A) They were to be who had a good witness in the congregation.**

**B) The men who serve in leadership here are Vetted**

1) The body should never be surprised - that guy?

**C) No the response - should be of course - makes sense - that Guy Loves Jesus**

1) Loves his wife - good Dad - Loves the body

**D) He has a servant's heart -**

**#3 They were to be men full of the Holy Spirit.**

**A) In Scripture, to be “full of” means “to be controlled by.”**

**B) These were to be men who were controlled by the Holy Spirit.**

C)Men who were spirit led - They were not controlled by their passions

1)They were not controlled by ambition – want of Power

D)These were men who reflected and radiated the Holy Spirit – the fruit of the Holy Spirit

1)Primary is Love - characteristics of joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control

Being Full of the Holy Spirit also would refer to men who were empowered by the Holy Spirit

A)In other words they were not doing the work in their own strength!

B)They were chosen men who were spirit led and spirit empowered.

1)Men who were characterized by their Dependence upon God more than anything else.

**Men Full of Wisdom:**

A)Wisdom is knowledge applied –

B)Someone who is full of wisdom is one who knows the word of God

1)and knows how to apply it to practical situations.

C)I like this – they had to be men who were Proven – Spirit filled and who had scriptural knowledge.

D)Now you might be thinking - Why such serious qualifications for guys essential table waiters ?

1)Just serving food

Reason: They were not just serving food - they were serving PEOPLE - DEALING WITH PEOPLE

A)Full of the Spirit – Men who would have a spiritual sensitivity to see needs

B)MEN of integrity to handle matters fairly - no partiality

C)And Men who knew the word enough to bring counsel & wisdom to meet those needs with the word.

D)So that was the plan that was put into place

Acts 6:5-6And the saying pleased the whole multitude. And they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit, and Philip, Prochorus,

{Pra/ko/ross} Nicanor, {Na/ku/nor} Timoan, Parme/nas, and Nicolas, a proselyte from Antioch, 6 whom they set before the apostles; and when they had prayed, they laid hands on them.

There is something noteworthy in this list: All of these names are Greek names.

A)That means they were probably chosen from among the complaining party,

B)They were part of the Hellenistic - Greek-speaking community

C)The church body said - the problem is Greek - their widows feel like they are being neglected

D)Lets choose 7 Greek guys who will be extra sensitive to the needs of those widows!

E)Indication - the church returned back to functioning in Love and grace toward each other

1)Beautiful - The Dissension was nipped in the bud – UNITY PREVAILED

Three Powerful Results Acts 6:7

1<sup>st</sup> V.7a Then the word of God spread,

A)What does it mean when it says "the word of God spread or increased"?

B)This phrase is used several times in Scripture and every time it means that the word of God abounded more, and more

C)It was more Widely proclaimed as the Apostles were able to focus on their priority

The Second result has a direct connection to that - as the word of God spread, V.7b the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem

A)Note Disciples – not believers – people going deeper – becoming more committed

B)That is always the effect of the abounding of the word of God.

1)Believers become disciples

C)So People growing in their faith!

3<sup>rd</sup> result may come as a Surprise 7c- and a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith.

A)Why were there Priests turning to Jesus at this point?

B)Speculation - in the OT the priest were responsible for taking care of the poor

C)Here in the early church you have a whole group of people who are now acting like priest -

1)They were doing what priest did

D)Those who were the actual priest - took notice and their hearts were moved -

E)What was at times a DUTY to them - they were watching the church do out of DEVOTION

1)TO JESUS AND to EACH OTHER -

**F)The hearts of the priest were moved.....Jesus**

This was part of the plan of God - Peter put it this way his epistle **you yourselves.....are being built up to be a holy priesthood to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ 1 Peter 2:5**

A)Part of those spiritual sacrifices are doing good deeds which includes taking care of the poor/ needy

B)So what could have been used to rip the church apart - is handled wisely - spiritually -

1)The church gets stronger

C)It's impact grows more and more - that is the way it is supposed to be

**Now as we close - this is what God put on my heart for today.**

A)His goal for our church -is He is wanting to raise up a Priesthood of believers

B)He wants us to grow in our maturity - grow in our ministry taking care of each other

1)Taking care of the needs around us / community

C)But in order for that to happen - he has to deal with the critical spirit that can rise within us

**Murmuring - Wives about Husbands - Husbands about wives**

A)Murmuring about where we work and the people we work with

**B)Murmuring about the GOVT**

**C)AND YES - Murmuring about the church - it happens - messy people - bring messes**

D)It is a problem all of us can be and have been guilty of -

1)FOR some it has become a weed in your heart

E)A deterrent to what God wants to do IN you what God wants to do THROUGH you.

**It is really a matter of what do you want to be full of?**

A)**Full of Self** - partly why complaining all the time - your desires are NOT being MET

B)Full of complaining murmuring - critical spirit

C)Or do you want to be Full of the HS and of Wisdom

**Choice Today is a critical moment - Some of you are going to choose to resist this - might even leave...**

A)Or Choose -to repent - Change our mind/ cry out

**B)Fill me Lord - Full of the HS - less of me more of you!**

C)God wants to meet us - today - bring break through -

1)You respond - I am going to meet you

D)Rewarder - those who diligently seek me

1)Significant change - break through

**Starts with confession of the sin**

A)Forgive of my murmuring - Wife / Husband - the church - whatever murmuring about

B)God I am dissatisfied with you and where you have me.

C)Not on the Throne -

**Forgive me - Changing my mind**

**Fill me – Full of YOU!**