

Acts 6 : v. 1-7.

Theme: "Then the word of God spread"

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."

⁵ And the saying pleased the whole multitude. And they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit, and Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, 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.

Introduction

In my introduction to the book of Acts a couple of months ago I said that Luke used **repetition** in his narrative to indicate what is important. Therefore we need to note these occasions.

Today we will come across the phrase "**Then the word of God spread**".

This appears three times in the book of Acts.

We will start by looking at the third time it appears.

Acts 19: v.20.

²⁰ So the word of the Lord grew mightily and prevailed.

This statement comes at the conclusion of Paul's pioneer church planting work.

It also comes after the burning of magic books by people who became believers in Jesus.

Acts 19: v.11-20 in N.L.T.

¹¹ God gave Paul the power to perform unusual miracles. ¹² When handkerchiefs or aprons that had merely touched his skin were placed on sick people, they were healed of their diseases, and evil spirits were expelled.

¹³ A group of Jews was traveling from town to town casting out evil spirits. They tried to use the name of the Lord Jesus in their incantation, saying, "I command you in the name of Jesus, whom Paul preaches, to come out!" ¹⁴ Seven sons of Sceva, a leading priest, were doing this. ¹⁵ But one time when they tried it, the evil spirit replied, "I know Jesus, and I know Paul, but who are you?" ¹⁶ Then the man with the evil spirit leaped on them, overpowered them, and attacked them with such violence that they fled from the house, naked and battered.

¹⁷ The story of what happened spread quickly all through Ephesus, to Jews and Greeks alike. A solemn fear descended on the city, and the name of the Lord Jesus was greatly honored. ¹⁸ Many who became believers confessed their sinful practices. ¹⁹ A number of them who had been practicing sorcery brought their incantation books and burned them at a public bonfire. The value of the books was several million dollars. ²⁰ So the message about the Lord spread widely and had a powerful effect.

There is a direct connection here between the burning of the magic books and the growth of the Church. When people completely turn away fully from their old religion or any evil influence that might have affected their lives in the past, then the Holy Spirit is able to work through the word of God for the Salvation of lost souls. The God of the Bible is a jealous God.

Exodus 34: v.10-14 in N.K.J.

¹⁰ And He said: "Behold, I make a covenant. Before all your people I will do marvels such as have not been done in all the earth, nor in any nation; and all the people among whom you *are* shall see the work of the LORD. For it *is* an awesome thing that I will do with you. ¹¹ Observe what I command you this day.

Behold, I am driving out from before you the Amorite and the Canaanite and the Hittite and the Perizzite and the Hivite and the Jebusite. ¹²Take heed to yourself, lest you make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land where you are going, lest it be a snare in your midst. ¹³But you shall destroy their altars, break their *sacred* pillars, and cut down their wooden images ¹⁴(for you shall worship no other god, for the LORD, whose name *is* Jealous, *is* a jealous God),

The second time the phrase occurs is in Acts Chapter 12: v. 24.

(Acts Chapter 12: v. 24 in N.K.J.)

²⁴But the word of God grew and multiplied.

Prior to this phrase, King Herod had taken his stand against the Church. He had killed James and had Peter arrested and put in prison.

Acts 12: v. 20-24 in N.K.J.

²⁰Now Herod had been very angry with the people of Tyre and Sidon; but they came to him with one accord, and having made Blastus the king's personal aide their friend, they asked for peace, because their country was supplied with food by the king's *country*.

²¹So on a set day Herod, arrayed in royal apparel, sat on his throne and gave an oration to them. ²²And the people kept shouting, "The voice of a god and not of a man!" ²³Then immediately an angel of the Lord struck him, because he did not give glory to God. And he was eaten by worms and died.

²⁴But the word of God grew and multiplied.

Political power tried to prevent God's word spreading, but God did something to show that His power was mightier than kings. Then God's word spread.

The first time the phrase appears is here in our text today in Acts Chapter 6: v. 7.

(Acts Chapter 6: v. 7 in N.K.J.)

⁷Then 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.

Therefore if we want the word of God to spread, through our ministry at O.I.C., we must take notice of the transferable principles contained in our text.

There are four things in our passage that we need to notice today.

These are, the problem, the solution, the principle, and the result.

1. The Problem - Acts 6: v.1.

The number of disciples were growing and this growth included Jews who spoke different languages and were immersed in different cultures.

Through persecution Jews were dispersed to every part of the Greek empire.

This resulted in them taking on some of the culture and language of that region. Although they were still Jews, they were not regarded well by the Hebrew speaking Jews who had remained in and around Jerusalem.

The Greek speaking Jews had made a complaint that they were not receiving food in the daily distribution that was managed by the Apostles.

At this time Christians were very poor, and widows who had no other means of support were given food every day.

I don't think it was done deliberately, but somehow the Greek speaking widows did not receive their daily allowance of food.

God had promised in the Old Testament to support the widows.

Exodus 22: v.22, In N.K.J.

²²"You shall not afflict any widow or fatherless child.

Deut.10: v. 17-19. In N.K.J.

¹⁷ For the LORD your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality nor takes a bribe. ¹⁸ He administers justice for the fatherless and the widow, and loves the stranger, giving him food and clothing. ¹⁹ Therefore love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.

The Apostles were well aware of their Biblical responsibilities.

Once the problem had been brought to the attention of the Apostles, they tried to find a solution.

2. **The Solution to the problem. – v. 2-6.**

The 12 Apostles didn't impose a solution on the Church. They gathered the disciples together in order to share the problem with them.

This is what they said, "**It is not desirable that we should leave the word of God and serve tables**" (N.K.J.)

In the N.L.T. it says "**We Apostles should spend our time teaching the word of God, not running a food programme.**"

The Apostles didn't diminish the importance of caring for the Greek Jewish widows. They realised that if they got involved in this project, then they wouldn't have time to teach God's word.

The devil (Satan) would have been very pleased if the Apostles got involved in this food programme, because Satan knew that God's word, taught correctly, in the power of the Holy Spirit, resulted in the conversion of souls for Jesus.

One of the devil's subtle schemes is distraction. This is usually diverting you to do something that might be needed, or that is good in itself, but it is not what God is wanting you to do.

The priority task of the Apostles was to preach and teach God's word.

The Apostles solution to the problem is taught to us in v. 3.

The Apostles told the disciples to do several things.

Firstly they had to "**seek out**" from among the disciples 7 men."

The Greek word that is used here for "**seek out**" means to be careful and diligent in their search for suitable people.

They were not just to choose people who were willing to do the job.

They were not just to engage a pair of hands to do a job of feeding widows. The job was much more than that.

Secondly these men had to be of a "**good reputation**".

This means that these men had to have a reputation for being a good witness for Jesus.

These witnesses needed to have been recognised by others around them.

Thirdly, these men also had to be "**full of the Holy Spirit**" and "**wisdom.**"

It is interesting to note that Luke adds wisdom to the qualification of being filled with the Holy Spirit.

I have noticed over the last 30 years that many Christians who claim to be filled with the Holy Spirit, and guided by the Holy Spirit are not very wise.

Godly wisdom is something that only God can provide.

In James Chapter 3: v. 13-18 we have good teaching about wisdom from God.

James Chapter 3: v. 13-18 in the N.L.T. for clarity.

¹³ If you are wise and understand God's ways, prove it by living an honorable life, doing good works with the humility that comes from wisdom. ¹⁴ But if you are bitterly jealous and there is selfish ambition in your heart, don't cover up the truth with boasting and lying. ¹⁵ For jealousy and selfishness are not God's kind of wisdom. Such things are earthly, unspiritual, and demonic. ¹⁶ For wherever there is jealousy and selfish ambition, there you will find disorder and evil of every kind.

¹⁷ But the wisdom from above is first of all pure. It is also peace loving, gentle at all times, and willing to yield to others. It is full of mercy and the fruit of good deeds. It shows no favoritism and is always sincere. ¹⁸ And those who are peacemakers will plant seeds of peace and reap a harvest of righteousness.

We notice from the proposal by the Apostles that the work of God serving food to widows required the right people with the right qualifications.

The reason for this is that they were representatives appointed by God for this task.

If these men did anything wrong, perhaps by keeping back some of the food for themselves, then it would be a bad testimony for the Church, and for the God that they represented.

It doesn't matter what specific ministry you do within O.I.C., what matters is that you **do it for the Glory of God**.

What does matter is that our life-style reflects that of the Holy Spirit living with Godly wisdom.

Fourthly, we notice that it was an "**official appointment**".

We are told that the Apostles would officially appoint these suitable people to the task of the daily distribution of food to the widows.

No doubt it would have been a public appointment so that everybody would be able to recognise the people who were responsible for this task.

The Apostles then told the disciples that they would be able to give themselves continually to prayer and the ministry of the word of God, if they could find the right people to do the distribution of food to the widows.

The Apostles had to say **NO** to a good thing, so that they could do the **BEST THING**, and that was to **pray and minister God's word**.

Fortunately the suggestion by the Apostles pleased the whole multitude and various appointments were made for the responsibility of distribution of food to the widows and perhaps other related duties.

Luke actually names the 7 people who were appointed to these positions.

We wouldn't normally recognise the significance of these names, however they were all **Greek names**. They may well have been **Jewish Greeks** specially selected to meet the needs of the Jewish Greek widows.

This is definitely God's wisdom because there would be **no cultural or language problems in the interaction of their ministry**.

Before the men were appointed officially, the Apostles prayed for them and then laid hands upon them to set them apart for their ministry.

We have looked at the problem and the solution. We now need to look at the transferable principle behind this narrative.

3. The Transferable principle

Although I believe that the ministry of Elders and Deacons grew out of this situation, it is not the transferable principle that we need to note.

What we need to realise is that God calls different people to different ministries.

Elders and Pastors in the New Testament were called to **prayer and the ministry of the word**.

If they were distracted from their ministries, not only would the Church be poorer spiritually and not edified through God's word, but the Elders would not be doing what God had gifted and called them to do.

David Cook says this in his book entitled "unlocking the book of Acts for the Bible Teacher".

"A great pressure on pastoral leadership is to be responsive to the unrealistic expectations of our people and not to do the very thing God has set us apart to do."

One major cause of drop – out from the office of Pastor in Churches is the pressure felt by Pastors to conform to people's unrealistic expectations of what they should do."

Although this is not the case at O.I.C. I do know it is the case in many Churches today.

I spend 60% of my working week preparing the word of God to preach and teach, and to prayer.

From the text, I am challenged to spend a little more time.

If I am to do that then others at O.I.C., would need to take responsibility for things that I do, that do not form part of this prayer and teaching ministry.

This would take time to identify and train people for these ministries.

This is one reason why we had an introduction to Biblical Counselling on the 25th May.

There is a need for people to be trained in Biblical Counselling, not just to meet the need for Counselling people correctly, but to take some of the responsibility from the Pastor, in order that he can spend the correct time in prayer and the ministry of teaching the Bible and prayer. Please sign up if you feel that you would be willing to start the Biblical Counselling Course this November.

This Autumn at our retreat we have a guest speaker, and our subject will be Christian service. Perhaps this will be an opportunity for everybody to evaluate and check that you are in the right ministry that God has called you to.

It might be that you are actually not doing anything in terms of a given ministry responsibility?

This retreat might give you an opportunity to discover what God has for you in the future.

It will certainly involve training and preparing for that ministry.

4. The result of sorting out the problem. – v. 7.

As a direct result of the apostles delegating the social work, the word of God spread.

It didn't spread automatically. The Apostles still had to pray and preach the word of God. However at least they had the time to do this.

We also note in v.7 that a great many of the Priests became obedient to the faith.

This is quite significant because religious people are normally very hard to reach with the Gospel.

Challenge

Are you willing to serve God in a ministry of His choosing?

If you are, then it will take a full surrender of your life to discover what it might be.

Why not do that today?

The second challenge is for people who are already engaged in the ministry that God has for them. The advice is not to be **distracted or diverted** to other good things, but to concentrate on the **BEST THING**, which is what God wants you to do.