

CHURCH GROWTH BEGETS CHURCH PROBLEMS CHURCH PROBLEMS WHEN WEATHERED PROMOTE CHURCH GROWTH

Acts 6:1-7

In those days when the number of disciples was increasing, the Grecian 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, 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.

PRAYER

INTRODUCTION

A. DID YOU EVER WONDER HOW MODERN CHURCHES GROW?

Well I'm Going to tell you.

Surveys show that 85 percent of church membership growth is made up of people who church-hop.

George Gallop says, "A superficial view of the statistics on religious life in America would suggest that there is little church growth and lots of denominational shifting..."

According to a survey conducted by Group the number 2 reason why people hop to a particular church is their offering of a youth ministry

Number one reason because of the **PREACHING**

B. WE NEED GROWTH THAT OCCURS THROUGH SHIFTING.

We have had families move to Tucson, Florida, Havasu City,

These individuals have left gaps

I praise God for those individuals who would choose Grace to Be their Home Church...God sent you and we need you.

C. OF COURSE THERE IS ANOTHER SIDE TO THIS KIND OF CHURCH GROWTH

You see Many American Christians could be characterized as "FLOATING BELIEVERS."

These Christians, float from one church to another without any identity, accountability or commitment.

They would suggest that they are following the Lord's will

But really they are expressing the world's rampant surge toward individualism

The Bible teaches that we grow in Christ by being in relationship with other Christians.

Romans 12:10 says, "be devoted to one another in brotherly love."

D. WHAT ABOUT THE OTHER 15%

The other 15% of growth that takes place in a church happens when you or I reach out to the Lost, to our neighbors

According to the American Institute for Church Growth, over 75 percent of people who visit a **church and became Christians** say they came because a friend or a relative invited them.

I have here 72 visitor cards collected in the last 6 months. By names on those cards they represent about 140 people

That's one person per day – over the last 6 months that has had some sort of attention from me or the church office

But they represent little or no church growth

Why

Some of them were floaters

The Floaters will float until someone pops their bubble

Some of them were shifting

They will arrive unexpectedly

But their remains that group

That 15%

They are our prospects for church growth

At the close of this message I will draw some conclusions about our churches potential for growth based upon what we will see here in this text

TRANSITION

BUT FIRST I MUST PROCLAIM TO YOU THAT I WOULD LOVE TO SEE OUR CHURCH GROW

It is encouraging when the church is growing...

I. ONE OF LUKE'S PURPOSES IN WRITING THE BOOK OF ACTS IS TO TELL THE STORY OF THE REMARKABLE GROWTH OF THE CHURCH

Acts 2:41

Those who accepted his message were baptized, and **about three thousand were added to their number that day.**

Acts 2:47

praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And **the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.**

Acts 4:4

But **many who heard the message believed, and the number of men grew to about five thousand.**

Acts 5:14

Nevertheless, **more and more men and women believed in the Lord and were added to their number.**

Acts 9:31

Then the church throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria enjoyed a time of peace. It was strengthened; and encouraged by the Holy Spirit, **it grew in numbers, living in the fear of the Lord.**

Acts 13:49

Acts 16:5

Acts 19:20

A. LUKE WANTED TO SEE THE CHURCH GROW TOO

HE WAS EXCITED ABOUT THE CHURCH GROWING

But the growth he describes is only half the story

Because along with the growth Luke describes the problems/pain

You see, though it was growing - It was not pure.

There is this tendency to idealize the early church,

Everything was AOK

But Luke tells us that the church had it's problems

B. JESUS HIMSELF SAID WHAT THE CHURCH WOULD HAVE ITS PROBLEMS,

Matthew 13:47-50

"Once again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was let down into the lake and caught all kinds of fish. [48] When it was full, the fishermen pulled it up on the shore. Then they sat down and collected the good fish in baskets, but threw the bad away. [49] This is how it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come and separate the wicked from the righteous [50] and throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

What's he saying...

When you go fishing you may catch a huge load

Some are going to be righteous

But some, right along with you, are not

Someone put it this way – A genuine move of the Spirit in this fallen world will always sweep some debris into the church

C. ACTS TELLS US OF SOME OF THAT DEBRIS

Beginning with Acts 5:11 we have Ananias and Sapphira who were deceitful

Then Acts 8:13-24 that talks about a man named Simon a sorcerer from Samaria that tried to buy the power of the Holy Spirit

Acts 19:18 we read about professing Christians in Ephesus that had concealed their dabbling in black magic

“...came and openly confessed their evil deeds.”

In each case they were excited about supernatural power,
They even experienced supernatural power,

But their flesh had not been crucified
 They had no true brokenness for sin
 They had no passion for holiness

The Bible says in Matthew 5:3-6

"Blessed are the poor in spirit,
 for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

[4] Blessed are those who mourn,
 for they will be comforted.

[5] Blessed are the meek,
 for they will inherit the earth.

[6] Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,
 for they will be filled.

D. THERE ARE A LOT OF PEOPLE OUT THERE LIKE THIS

E. IN FACT - EVERYWHERE THE CHURCH IS GROWING THERE ARE PROBLEMS.

Let me give you an example...

The church is growing in Cuba

In 1990 the Protestant church in Cuba had about 100,000 adherents.

Because of communism 80% of Cuba's population was not associated with the church at all.

Today, after a decade of revival, characterized by healings and other miraculous signs, hundreds of thousands have been drawn into the church and attendance in churches grows by about 3000 every week.

Estimates suggest that today there are 10,000 churches in Cuba

When we read about church growth like this we might be tempted to think that they are having no problems

There not having

- pastoral failures
- Church splits
- Back biting
- Sinful pride
- Moral failures

The truth is we should assume that they are having all of those problems and more, --

Problems does not mean what's happening is not of God

It's just that when the kingdom of God sweeps through a region it is like a net thrown into the sea that gathers fish of every kind which are sorted out later.

IT IS NORMAL.

TRANSITION

Besides documenting the growth of the Christian church in the early years, Luke's purpose is also to show us

II. HOW OBSTACLES TO GROWTH WERE OVERCOME.

THAT'S WHAT THIS PASSAGE IS ABOUT.

It is a church growth sandwich
It begins with a statement about church growth

Acts 6:1

In those days when the number of disciples was increasing,...

And ends with a statement about church growth

Acts 6:7

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.

What we have sandwiched between these two statements **IS A THREAT** to the church and the story of how it was overcome.

THE THREAT HAS TWO PARTS.

THE FIRST PART CONCERNS

A. FAILURE OF THE CHURCH TO TAKE CARE OF THE WIDOWS

The Greek speaking Jewish Christians were upset with the Hebrew speaking Jewish Christians because they felt that their widows were not getting their fair share of food

What is the problem?

One might believe it is **about food**

But it is really ethnic tensions

Acts 4:34 tells us that a system had been developed to take care of the poor

“ There were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned lands or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales”

This passage tells us that this system was not working
WHY?

Because a minority group in the church was being neglected

THE SITUATION WAS SERIOUS TOO

If it continued these Christians could have brought the church into disrepute before the whole community in Jerusalem

You might say pastor they never would have done such a thing

They loved God and were good Christians

They were fish – in a net together
 Some of them were righteous
 Some of them were unrighteous

And if the situation had not been settled properly it would have been destructive to the church's testimony

TRANSITION

That's the first part of the threat.

The other part of the threat to the church is

B. THE CALLING OF THOSE CALLED TO THE MINISTRY OF THE WORD TO LEAVE THAT CALLING AND SERVE TABLES.

You can see this clearly in Acts 6:2

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.

Somebody must have made the suggestion

“You know what WE NEED, we need those apostles to get off their butts and start waiting tables”

WHY WOULD THAT HAVE BEEN BAD?

If you think about it

It would have been OK for the apostles to express their humility by serving tables and getting involved in the nitty-gritty of caring for the widows' physical needs.

James, the Lord's brother, who was no doubt in the church at that time, wrote some years later

James 1:27

Pure and lasting religion in the sight of God our Father means that we must care for orphans and widows in their troubles, and refuse to let the world corrupt us.

It would have been a good thing, in and of itself, for the apostles to do.

BUT IT WOULD HAVE BEEN A MISTAKE FOR THE KINGDOM OF GOD

Luke gives us a clear indication that the temptation to do this is a major threat to the CHURCH.

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:

Which was...

"And the word of God 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 mistake of leaving their focus on the word to start waiting tables.

What Luke is teaching us is that whatever threatens the ministry of the word.

Is a threat to the moving forward of the Kingdom of God.

TRANSITION

So there were two parts to the threat:

- 1) the neglected widows
- 2) the danger of solving that problem in a shortsighted way

God led the apostles to overcome both parts

Acts 6:3

Brothers, 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

Luke celebrates this solution.

In this way

The widows' were cared for,

And the ministry of the word of God was not forsaken.

You see

Both were utterly crucial.

Either could have undermined the church and ended its amazing growth.

But instead

Acts 6:7

... the word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith.

The result was that Even those who had been at onetime hostile to the faith

Responded to the word of God and came to faith in Jesus.

They had weathered the test of the growth they were experiencing

And they experienced even greater growth after that

CONCLUSION

I would like to see the church Grow

What's it going to take?

1. an understanding that with growth comes problems
2. a willingness to solve problems when they come for the sake of the good testimony of the church
3. a realization that when growth occurs it brings people who are righteous and ones that have unrighteous ulterior motives
4. A recognition that some problems are solved only by the nitty gritty effort of the faithful
5. The preaching of the Word must be maintained
6. It takes power...

Unless the Lord builds the house they that labor, labor in vain...