

THE BOOK OF ACTS: THE WORK AND GROWTH OF THE CHURCH

April 7, 2013

14. The Choosing of the Seven

Acts 6:1-7

1. As we continue with the sermon series entitled “THE WORK AND GROWTH OF THE CHURCH” using the Book of Acts the language for describing the growth of the early Church changed in Acts Chapter six (6) from believers being added to the Church to the number of believers being multiplied. In other words, the growth of the church changed dramatically from arithmetic to geometric growth. Also, there was a change in the leadership organization from a simple one, where the apostles were the leaders, to a more diversified form that included the chosen of the seven to help diffuse the grumbling arising from the sharing of food to the widows. This was because the unity that the church had which caused it to have things in common had eroded and favoritism had surfaced. Favoritism causes factions in the body of Christ. Consequently it hinders and hampers ministry of the word of God and growth of the church. This is why it is expedient and imperative for all believers to strive to know the heart and mind of God. Knowing the heart and mind of God creates oneness of heart and mind as well as genuine unity among the believers. Hence, there will be no cliques and/or schisms. For God is no respecter of persons and He does not play favoritism such that anyone who calls on the Name of the Lord is saved and departs from iniquity. Leaders to be chosen to direct the affairs of the church must not therefore have personal agenda but Christ’s agenda for building His kingdom. Hence, it is very critical that such leaders must be persons full of the Holy Spirit, wisdom and faith.
2. Thus our text for today reads, “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” (Acts 6:1-7).
3. Mt Traveler members, as we conclude this sermon on today please allow me to summarize it as follows. The work and healthy growth of the church involves:
 - Knowing and accepting Jesus Christ as Lord and savior; and becoming part of the household of God.
 - Knowing the heart and mind of God to understand how to foster genuine unity among the believers and dissipate favoritism which hinders and hampers ministry of the word of God and growth of the church.
 - Choosing leaders who do not have personal agenda but Christ’s agenda of building His kingdom. Such leaders must be full of the Holy Spirit, wisdom and faith.

- This is what the work and growth of the church is all about. And let the church say, “Amen!”
4. To become a leader full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, and do the work of the church to cause healthy church growth, you must first know Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and savior. If you have not, we invite you to come, repent, and humbly accept Jesus Christ into your heart and life by faith. I hope He will find room in your heart today! Then confess with your mouth your faith in Him that He died and rose again to save you from your sin through the shedding of His blood on Calvary, and you will be saved as well as become part of God’s family and kingdom. Then ask Him in prayers to empower you through the Holy Spirit with courage and boldness to do the work of the Church to cause it to grow. May God bless you as you humbly open your heart to provide room for Him as the choir leads us in a song!

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Mt. Traveler Missionary Baptist Church, Waverly, Alabama
Synopsis of Sermon Preached by Rev. B. C. Datiri, Pastor

THE BOOK OF ACTS: THE WORK AND GROWTH OF THE CHURCH

April 14, 2013

15. Stephen Seized and Brought Before the Sanhedrin

Acts 6:8-15

1. As we continue with the sermon series entitled “THE WORK AND GROWTH OF THE CHURCH” using the Book of Acts the descriptive language for the growth of the early Church changed in Acts Chapter six (6) from believers being added to the Church to the number of believers being multiplied - meaning the growth of the church changed dramatically from an arithmetic to a geometric growth. Such magnitudes of change in the growth and the work of the Church demanded a change in the leadership organization from a simple one, where the apostles were the leaders, to a more diversified form that warranted different kinds of leadership to meet the complexity of the congregation of greater members. Therefore it is practical and necessary for all believers to strive to know the heart and mind of God to have genuine unity that eliminates cliques and/or schisms. Consequently, leaders chosen to direct the affairs of the church must only pursue Christ’s and not personal agendas for the sake of building His kingdom. Such leaders are usually men full of the Holy Spirit, wisdom and faith. Stephen was one of such leaders. Albeit, leaders of great integrity are not immune to opposition and/or persecutions from those who are not on the Lord’s side. In fact such leaders of integrity are often brought before magistrates because of faithfulness to their callings.
2. Thus our text for today reads, “Now Stephen, a man full of God’s grace and power performed great wonders and signs among the people. 9 Opposition arose, however, from members of the Synagogue of the Freedmen (as it was called)—Jews of Cyrene and Alexandria as well as the provinces of Cilicia and Asia—who began to argue with Stephen. 10 But they could not stand up against the wisdom the Spirit gave him as he spoke. 11 Then they secretly persuaded some men to say, “We have heard Stephen speak blasphemous words against Moses and against God.” 12 So they stirred up the people and

the elders and the teachers of the law. They seized Stephen and brought him before the Sanhedrin. 13 They produced false witnesses, who testified, “This fellow never stops speaking against this holy place and against the law. 14 For we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and change the customs Moses handed down to us.” 15 All who were sitting in the Sanhedrin looked intently at Stephen, and they saw that his face was like the face of an angel” (Acts 6:8-15).

3. Mt Traveler members, as we conclude this sermon on today please allow me to summarize it as follows. The work and healthy growth of the church involves:
- Knowing and accepting Jesus Christ as Lord and savior; and becoming part of the household of God.
 - Knowing the heart and mind of God to become leaders of integrity.
 - Being prepared to face opposition and/or persecution for your faithfulness to the calling of leadership with integrity because you are full of the Holy Spirit, wisdom and faith. Therefore you must be prepared to face false accusations by false witnesses who oppose the faith and the agenda of Jesus for building His Kingdom
 - You representing Christ so that the unbelievers can see Him through you.
 - This is what the work and growth of the church is all about. And let the church say, “Amen!”
4. To become a leader full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, and do the work of the church to cause healthy church growth, you must first know Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and savior. If you have not, we invite you to come, repent, and humbly accept Jesus Christ into your heart and life by faith. I hope He will find room in your heart today! Then confess with your mouth your faith in Him that He died and rose again to save you from your sin through the shedding of His blood on Calvary, and you will be saved as well as become part of God’s family and kingdom. Then ask Him in prayers to empower you through the Holy Spirit with courage and boldness to do the work of the Church to cause it to grow. May God bless you as you humbly open your heart to provide room for Him as the choir leads us in a song!

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Mt. Traveler Missionary Baptist Church, Waverly, Alabama
Synopsis of Sermon Preached by Rev. B. C. Datiri, Pastor

THE BOOK OF ACTS: THE WORK AND GROWTH OF THE CHURCH

April 21, 2013

16. Stephen Addresses the Sanhedrin

Acts 7:1-53

1. As we continue with the sermon series entitled “THE WORK AND GROWTH OF THE CHURCH” using the Book of Acts we are now in Chapter 7 where the events that lead to the explosion of the growth of the Church into Samaria begin to unfold. The descriptive language for the growth of the early Church changed in Acts Chapter six (6) from believers being added to the Church to the number of believers being multiplied - meaning the growth of the church changed dramatically from an arithmetic to a geometric growth. Along with this change in the growth of the Church was a change in the leadership

organization from a simple one, where the apostles were the leaders, to a more diversified form that warranted different kinds of leadership to meet the complexity of the changing congregation of greater membership. Consequently, leaders chosen to direct the affairs of the church must endeavor only pursue Christ's and not personal agendas for the sake of building His kingdom. Such leaders are usually men full of the Holy Spirit, wisdom and faith. Stephen was one of such leaders. Albeit, leaders of great integrity are not immune to opposition and/or persecutions from those who are not on the Lord's side. In fact such leaders of integrity are often brought before magistrates because of faithfulness to their callings. The oppositions or persecution by your adversaries is not a physical but spiritual warfare. Peter advises believers to "Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy (adversary) the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. 9 Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that the family of believers throughout the world is undergoing the same kind of sufferings (1Peter 5:8-9). Stephen understood this and knew that his adversary was not the Sanhedrin but the devil. So as he addresses the Sanhedrin, not even once did he mention his accusers. Also, he did not defend himself but the gospel. When men accuse you falsely, remember to defend the gospel and not yourself. Learn to distinguish the intangibles from the tangibles. You as well as your accusers are temporary but the gospel is eternal! In defending the truth, God will vindicate you, for when the Son sets you free, you shall be free indeed. Therefore it is imperative then to know the Truth. And the Truth is revealed to you when you strive to know the heart and mind of God. Stephen knew the word of God and that was what he used to defend the Gospel.

2. Thus our text for today reads, "Then the high priest asked Stephen, "Are these charges true?"² To this he replied: "Brothers and fathers, listen to me! The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham while he was still in Mesopotamia, before he lived in Harran. 3 'Leave your country and your people,' God said, 'and go to the land I will show you.' 4 "So he left the land of the Chaldeans and settled in Harran. After the death of his father, God sent him to this land where you are now living. 5 He gave him no inheritance here, not even enough ground to set his foot on. But God promised him that he and his descendants after him would possess the land, even though at that time Abraham had no child. 6 God spoke to him in this way: 'For four hundred years your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own, and they will be enslaved and mistreated. 7 But I will punish the nation they serve as slaves,' God said, 'and afterward they will come out of that country and worship me in this place.' 8 Then he gave Abraham the covenant of circumcision. And Abraham became the father of Isaac and circumcised him eight days after his birth. Later Isaac became the father of Jacob, and Jacob became the father of the twelve patriarchs. 9 "Because the patriarchs were jealous of Joseph, they sold him as a slave into Egypt. But God was with him 10 and rescued him from all his troubles. He gave Joseph wisdom and enabled him to gain the goodwill of Pharaoh king of Egypt. So Pharaoh made him ruler over Egypt and all his palace. 11 "Then a famine struck all Egypt and Canaan, bringing great suffering, and our ancestors could not find food. 12 When Jacob heard that there was grain in Egypt, he sent our forefathers on their first visit. 13 On their second visit, Joseph told his brothers who he was, and Pharaoh learned about Joseph's family. 14 After this, Joseph sent for his father Jacob and his whole family, seventy-five in all. 15 Then Jacob went down to Egypt, where he and our ancestors died. 16 Their bodies were brought back to Shechem and placed in the tomb that Abraham had bought from the sons of Hamor at Shechem for a certain sum of money. 17 "As the time drew near for God to fulfill his promise to Abraham, the number of our people in Egypt had greatly increased.

18 Then ‘a new king, to whom Joseph meant nothing, came to power in Egypt.’[c] 19 He dealt treacherously with our people and oppressed our ancestors by forcing them to throw out their newborn babies so that they would die. 20 “At that time Moses was born, and he was no ordinary child. For three months he was cared for by his family. 21 When he was placed outside, Pharaoh’s daughter took him and brought him up as her own son. 22 Moses was educated in all the wisdom of the Egyptians and was powerful in speech and action. 23 “When Moses was forty years old, he decided to visit his own people, the Israelites. 24 He saw one of them being mistreated by an Egyptian, so he went to his defense and avenged him by killing the Egyptian. 25 Moses thought that his own people would realize that God was using him to rescue them, but they did not. 26 The next day Moses came upon two Israelites who were fighting. He tried to reconcile them by saying, ‘Men, you are brothers; why do you want to hurt each other?’ 27 “But the man who was mistreating the other pushed Moses aside and said, ‘Who made you ruler and judge over us? 28 Are you thinking of killing me as you killed the Egyptian yesterday?’ 29 When Moses heard this, he fled to Midian, where he settled as a foreigner and had two sons. 30 “After forty years had passed, an angel appeared to Moses in the flames of a burning bush in the desert near Mount Sinai. 31 When he saw this, he was amazed at the sight. As he went over to get a closer look, he heard the Lord say: 32 ‘I am the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.’ Moses trembled with fear and did not dare to look. 33 “Then the Lord said to him, ‘Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground. 34 I have indeed seen the oppression of my people in Egypt. I have heard their groaning and have come down to set them free. Now come, I will send you back to Egypt.’ 35 “This is the same Moses they had rejected with the words, ‘Who made you ruler and judge?’ He was sent to be their ruler and deliverer by God himself, through the angel who appeared to him in the bush. 36 He led them out of Egypt and performed wonders and signs in Egypt, at the Red Sea and for forty years in the wilderness. 37 “This is the Moses who told the Israelites, ‘God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your own people.’ 38 He was in the assembly in the wilderness, with the angel who spoke to him on Mount Sinai, and with our ancestors; and he received living words to pass on to us. 39 “But our ancestors refused to obey him. Instead, they rejected him and in their hearts turned back to Egypt. 40 They told Aaron, ‘Make us gods who will go before us. As for this fellow Moses who led us out of Egypt—we don’t know what has happened to him!’ 41 That was the time they made an idol in the form of a calf. They brought sacrifices to it and reveled in what their own hands had made. 42 But God turned away from them and gave them over to the worship of the sun, moon and stars. This agrees with what is written in the book of the prophets: “‘Did you bring me sacrifices and offerings forty years in the wilderness, people of Israel? 43 You have taken up the tabernacle of Molek and the star of your god Rephan, the idols you made to worship. Therefore I will send you into exile’ beyond Babylon. 44 “Our ancestors had the tabernacle of the covenant law with them in the wilderness. It had been made as God directed Moses, according to the pattern he had seen. 45 After receiving the tabernacle, our ancestors under Joshua brought it with them when they took the land from the nations God drove out before them. It remained in the land until the time of David, 46 who enjoyed God’s favor and asked that he might provide a dwelling place for the God of Jacob. 47 But it was Solomon who built a house for him. 48 “However, the Most High does not live in houses made by human hands. As the prophet says: 49 “‘Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool. What kind of house will you build for me? says the Lord. Or where will my resting place be? 50 Has not my hand made all these things?’ 51 “You stiff-necked people! Your hearts and ears are still

uncircumcised. You are just like your ancestors: You always resist the Holy Spirit! 52 Was there ever a prophet your ancestors did not persecute? They even killed those who predicted the coming of the Righteous One. And now you have betrayed and murdered him— 53 you who have received the law that was given through angels but have not obeyed it.”” (Acts 7:1-53).

3. Mt Traveler members, as we conclude this sermon on today please allow me to summarize it as follows. The work and healthy growth of the church involves:
- Knowing and accepting Jesus Christ as Lord and savior; and becoming part of the household of God.
 - Knowing the heart and mind of God to become leaders of integrity.
 - Being prepared to face opposition and/or persecution for your faithfulness to the calling of leadership with integrity because you are full of the Holy Spirit, wisdom and faith. Therefore you must be prepared to face false accusations by false witnesses who oppose the faith and the agenda of Jesus for the building His Kingdom
 - You representing Christ so that the unbelievers can see Him through you as you:
 - give a panorama of the scriptures and the truth
 - proclaim the truth about Jesus in a way people could understand
 - perceived like Stephen that the old order of things is passing away and a new order is coming
 - challenge people to repent like Stephen did and become obedient to the word of God.
 - This is what the work and growth of the church is all about. And let the church say, “Amen!”
4. To become a leader full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, and do the work of the church to cause healthy church growth, you must first know Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and savior. If you have not, we invite you to come, repent, and humbly accept Jesus Christ into your heart and life by faith. I hope He will find room in your heart today! Then confess with your mouth your faith in Him that He died and rose again to save you from your sin through the shedding of His blood on Calvary, and you will be saved as well as become part of God’s family and kingdom. Then ask Him in prayers to empower you through the Holy Spirit with courage and boldness to do the work of the Church to cause it to grow. May God bless you as you humbly open your heart to provide room for Him as the choir leads us in a song!

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THE BOOK OF ACTS: THE WORK AND GROWTH OF THE CHURCH

April 28, 2013

17. The Stoning of Stephen

Acts 7:54-60

We have been traveling through the New Testament examining the Early Church's Work and Growth in the Book of Acts. We have examined all that the Church has done and how they have grown. We have seen their work as Witnesses of Jesus Christ as bold witnesses of the Risen Savior with many Great Signs and Wonders. From their witness the Bible says that many were saved, and in great numbers. With their work as witnesses the Church grew. The Church saw two types of Growth –Outward Growth and Inward Growth. They grew outwardly with new believers added to the Church daily. Then they experienced an inward Growth, as Leaders were needed to deal with various issues that arose among the large congregation of Believers. So leaders were selected that were of good report, full of wisdom and full of the Holy Spirit. (Acts 6:3).

One leader selected was Stephen, who was full of Faith and Power. (Acts 6:5) In Stephen's life we can see that being a Leader involves suffering. We see that Stephen was suffering for doing right. He suffered for doing many Great Miracles and Wonders among the people. (Acts 6:3) He was taken before the Magistrates and now was being judged unjustly for doing right. It is a reminder that doing right may cause us to suffer as Leaders for Jesus Christ.

Stephen, for his witness of Jesus, was stoned. Stoning was a cruel means of death. But, even in Death Stephen witnessed for Christ. In his suffering he helps us to see that there are a few things that we need to focus on. We first need to focus on God. Here was Stephen, being accused and about to be stoned, looking up to Heaven and he saw the glory of God and Jesus standing on the right hand of God. (Acts 7:55) So we see that in our own sufferings, we need to focus on God and not people or the situation. We need to have a Heart and Mind after God's own Heart and Mind. That we may see from His perspective in our suffering. We must look to God for He is our Strength and Power to go through these situations.

We should also understand that People are not our enemies. As Stephen was being stoned, he looked up to heaven and said, "Lord lay not this sin to their charge". (Acts 7:60) If Stephen saw these accusers as his enemy, in death, he would not be praying for them. He understood that people were not his enemy, but that they were only used by our real enemy-Satan. If we know this, then we can pray for others who may cause us to suffer. We may even need to humble ourselves as Stephen did (Acts 7:60) and forgive those who may have caused us to suffer. We may have been hurt by someone and still suffering from the hurt but they may not even be aware that they hurt us. By forgiving them we can get healing, realizing that they are not our real enemies.

Finally we need to know that we will suffer, because even Jesus suffered. Stephen made it aware to us that the prophets and even Jesus was persecuted and slain. (Acts 7:53) So we cannot expect to be secluded from suffering. If the world could find fault, accuse, persecute and even kill Jesus, than we can expect the same. We need to do as Stephen, look to the Lord Jesus, and commit our lives and soul to him. We need to know that even in suffering or death He is the Risen Savior who sits on heaven's throne. It is our faith in Him that allows us to face suffering and death knowing that we have Hope in him. Through Believing in Him, and confessing Him as Lord and savior we will be saved and Heaven will be our Home.

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