

## Acts 6:1-15

“Don’t Get Distracted”

Perhaps you’ve heard the phrase something to the extent, “If you find the perfect church be sure not to join it because you *can* be sure you’ll ruin it.” and The idea there is that since there are no perfect people there is no group of believers that comprise a “perfect church.” There will be some fault, some frailty and some degree of frustration at some point in any church you graze in, if you’re there long enough. Because we’re all a bunch of sinners saved by grace, and as if our own sin nature doesn’t create enough potential problems, our *foremost* fight isn’t even against flesh and blood, but against powers, principalities, the rulers of darkness in this age, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. and When you combine those 2 elements, (our flesh, and a spiritual enemy) you can count on a crisis; it’s only a matter of time.

When Jesus was talking about the Kingdom of God and how it would develop on the earth throughout the years in the form of His church He said, *“The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and sowed in his field, which indeed is the least of all the seeds; but when it is grown it is greater than the herbs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and nest in its branches.”* Matt 13:31-32

So it starts out incredibly small, and as you probably know the mustard plant doesn’t generally grow to the extent that birds could actually nest in it so we’re speaking here about unusually large growth. So in essence He’s saying the church is going to start out a seemingly insignificant seed, but it’s going to experience unusual explosive growth (which is what we’ve been noting throughout the book of Acts). But He says it’s actually going to get to the point where the birds of the air come and nest in its branches. What does that mean? You’re familiar with the parable of the sower? (Some seed on stony ground, others choked out by weeds etc) when Jesus was explaining that parable He gave us the insight on unlocking the truth in the rest of the parables when He said, *“Do you not understand this parable? How then will you understand all the parables?”* Mark 4:13 Which is to say that that parable *in particular* was a basic standard of truisms that could be applied to the rest of them; it was a key that was able to unlock our understanding of the rest. Like when you develop a code, and you also have a key that shows the people who have it how to decode what appears to most people to be mindless confusion.

In that parable Jesus spoke of the birds of the air swooping down and immediately snatching up some of the seed that was sown by the way side. and When Jesus explained the parable He said, *“...these are the ones by the wayside where the word is sown. When they hear, Satan comes immediately and takes away the word that was sown in their hearts.”* Mark 4:15

So Jesus told us straight up that the birds of the air speak of Satan and his cohorts, the demonic forces. So when Jesus speaks of the birds of the air nesting in the branches of the mustard tree, He's actually saying that as the church grows larger and larger, Satan will infiltrate and permeate the church, seeking to corrupt it with his evil influence from the inside out.

If you look at the church today, you can see that overall he's done a pretty good job, but he didn't wait for hundreds of years to try and get in, he began in just a few short weeks, or a couple of months from the inception of the church. We often hear people speak of the power of the early church, and how we need to get back to the way things were in the early church, and fundamentally I understand what they're saying. Because the early church functioned with in that realm of the power of the Holy Spirit that seems to be so lacking in the church today, but we have a tendency to sort of idealize the early church. But don't be deceived, even though they operated in *power*, they also had their fair share of *problems*.

Vs1

You're beginning to see what I mean with regard to the combination of our flesh, and the instigation of spiritual warfare making for the perfect setting for a time of crisis. Here we have 2 different Jewish cultures (The Hellenists and the Hebrews) sort of "colliding" in Christ. You see there was already a bit of natural suspicion between the 2 groups in that one sect (The Hellenists) were those who weren't necessarily from Jerusalem and had been inundated with the Greek culture that stemmed from Alexander the Great when he conquered the known world. So they didn't speak Hebrew, or Aramaic, they spoke Greek, they dressed with a Grecian demeanor and the whole bit. The Hebrews (on the other hand) were the Jews who embraced and maintained the traditional Jewish culture being mainly from Judea. and The Hebrews had a tendency (in their natural flesh) to consider the Hellenists sort of compromising sell outs, while the Hellenists had a natural inclination to see the Hebrews as "holier than thou" traditionalists. Which combines to make the perfect concoction for Satanic type attack in taking advantage of people's natural suspicions towards one another.

Satan knows no bounds when it comes to what he's willing to do to bring ruin to your life and wreak havoc in the church. In the world we have what's supposedly known when it comes to warfare as "rules of engagement," standards that are to make for a "fair fight." Ethics regarding civilians and innocent bystanders, the upholding of the Geneva convention with regard to the treatment of p.o.w.s and all the rest, Satan adheres to none of that stuff and he will stop at nothing in seeking to accomplish his agenda. Already we've seen him seek to *stop*, or at the very least *stunt* the growth and going forth of the church through intimidation, opposition, and persecution on the outside, and corruption on the inside (via Ananias and Sapphira).

Here we see the movement from corruption (for the moment) to what? “Contention,” this complaint speaks of a contention, we might say that Satan is seeking to capitalize on the old “divide and conquer” routine. Listen, I can think of little to nothing that can become more dangerous for a body of believers than *self-absorption*, becoming so introverted and self-focused that we get distracted and lose sight totally of why it is that God has called us out of darkness and into light. and We start nit-picking one another, and rather than *reaching out* to the lost, we’re *turning in* on one another, becoming fault finders, and sin sniffers, and we completely paralyze ourselves, and sterilize ourselves from becoming at all effective for the Kingdom of God. We’ve said it a lot lately but it’s worth repeating, “...*all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ But if you bite and devour one another, beware lest you be consumed by one another!*” Gal 5:14-15 Jesus said, “*Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation, and every city or house divided against itself will not stand.*” Matt 12:25 We’re probably more familiar with it put like this, “United we stand, Divided we fall.” Now there’s nothing to say that there any substantiating an intentional neglect here, but Satan loves to snare us through natural suspicion, unwarranted though it may be.

We have to understand that there were people o’ plenty in the church of Jerusalem, massive multitudes, I’m not denying an oversight, the text states there was, but I have little to no doubt that it was an honest one. We’ve already seen how the Lord issued the warning regarding purity in His church, and how those with out right motives were being held in check. But how in the world could *anyone* adequately administrate the needs that were represented in the upwards of possibly 25,000 people day in and day out? There’s going to be people slipping through the cracks unintentionally, but nonetheless Satan’s objective is to what; rob, kill and destroy, and if something is going on that’s conducive to that end, you better believe that he’s going to take advantage of that opportunity whether *your* motive is pure or not.

But I think we can safely assume that the Hebrews had right *hearts*, the text does nothing to indicate otherwise. But the Hellenists had right *facts*, and the enemy just loves to make a sticky situation, and church splitting problem out of just such circumstances. But what’s going to make the pivoting point of the whole things is how we handle it. When there’s a problem in a particular area of ministry, its only right that we examine that area and see if things need to be changed. Status Quo won’t always cut it, especially as the Lord is adding, we have to be flexible, willing to change, not just keep things the way they are because it’s the way they’ve always been, and that’s what the apostles do here, notice.

Vs2

(Pause) I want to point something out very carefully to you guys; they didn’t say it wasn’t *doable*, they said it wasn’t *desirable*, there’s a big difference. My point is this, they were in no way indicating that the task was beneath them, there’s no task that’s to base, or not doable for any of us as believers because we’ve *all* been called to serve, right?

Jesus Himself being the prime example for us all, Whom the night before He was crucified, girded Himself; took up a towel and washed the disciple's feet. A task so base in that culture that it was reserved for the lowest servant of the house. He said, "*Do you know what I have done to you? You call Me Teacher and Lord, and you say well, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you.*" John 13:12-15 What was the example? That there was no one that they were to good to serve, and no task *regarding service* that was beneath them. So lets be careful that we don't read into this so as to think that they had a problem with serving in this capacity because they were "apostles" after all.

The idea here is that God has placed respective callings on each of our lives and we do well to maintain that focus and not to get distracted from that lest the area He's called *you to* – be neglected and diminished. It's that "Robbing Peter to pay Paul" kind of a thing, they're simply saying that tending to the physical needs of the people is not their primary calling, tending to the *spiritual* needs of the people *is*. So if I'm consumed with making sure you're fed physically, but in so doing I inadvertently starve you spiritually, in reality I'm doing you a disservice and not being true to the call God has placed on my life, I'm compromising being distracted from what God desires of me. This is why corporately we comprise a spiritual body, some are the hands, some are the feet, others are eyes or ears, and still others are mouths. (When I was a boy and in trouble, my mom would often call me a mouth, perhaps she seen God's calling upon my life before I did, I'm not sure). But the point here is that every one of us *individually* make up the body of Christ *collectively* and we all need each other if we're to function *appropriately* and meet needs *effectively*. (Leave the book of Acts and turn to 1<sup>st</sup> Cor Ch 12:12-27).

You might be able to walk on your hands, its doable, but not desirable for any real segment of time. Why? It disrupts/distracts the design, it hinders your body as a whole from functioning as it's intended to, everything is upside down, disoriented and awkward, you just won't be of much benefit to anyone that way. Especially if your job is to work with your hands, if you're a construction worker, or receptionist, whatever; it's not desirable that you put down your hammer, or set the dictation aside to walk around the office on your hands. It just doesn't accomplish the purpose for which you've been placed there, now if you're a gymnast or perhaps a part of the circus, walking on your hands may be a tremendous asset. So the idea here is that we're to function in the capacity to which we've been called and be on guard against getting distracted from it, even if it appears to be for a good cause.

The apostles were called to administer the Word of God, the foundation of the church was laid upon the doctrine of the apostles. Therefore I think its fair to say that it'd be important that they have the necessary time to study the word that they might share it effectively wouldn't you say?

Today it seems that too many churches don't really want a pastor, they want a glorified errand boy. (Now that's not the case here), but the Pastor is so busy doing this, and taking care

of that that his studies suffer, which in turn causes that particular body to suffer. and It ripples out from there because the people aren't equipped the word, ineffective in their witness and on and on it goes.

### Vs3

Notice the delegation, often times people see something they don't like and they want to know what I'm going to do about. But more than not what I'm going to do is delegate the task to you that God's made you aware of that's in need. Then you can facilitate the necessary means to remedy the situation, and if it bears witness on my heart, then have at it. The apostles told those who came to them to with a problem to facilitate the remedy themselves. and Don't look at this like a congregational vote, that wasn't the deal, the people were active in the nomination, but they had nothing to do with the ratification. They said, "Find 7 men (perhaps an overseer for each day of the week) and if the one's you present are found to truly have the necessary qualifications, we'll take care of the ratification."

Take note of the necessary qualifications because these are key attributes that we want to look for in those what are serving in the body of Christ. Many people say these are the 1<sup>st</sup> deacons in the church, and that may be so, but I don't think these qualities are outside the realm of expectation for really anyone who wants to represent and serve in the body of Christ. We're looking for a minimum of 3 things in you, or in me right? #1 Of Good Reputation, #2 Full Of The Holy Spirit, and #3 Full Of Wisdom, and I think the order is right as well. Because God may've done a radical work in your life recently, but prior to that you couldn't be trusted or relied upon farther than anyone could throw you. Which means people aren't really going to be receiving from you because they think everything you do and everything you say is a wash. That trust, and that reputation needs to be built up and established over time. and This concept of good reputation means just that, that you have a good testimony among people, you're a person of your word, an individual of integrity, and people know it. and If that describes you, than from the onset you're a good candidate for service in the body of Christ. But not quite yet, we need to search out a couple more things. Are you filled, that is under the control and direction of the Holy Spirit's unction in your life. A good reputation is great, but if you don't know the Lord, or don't really seek to lead your life led by the Spirit, than I sure don't want you serving *here*. We're looking for people who are spiritually minded, filtering things through the heart and mind of God. But there's more yet, leadership, and service demands a good reputation, a life led by the Holy Spirit, but what seals the deal is on top of those things, a life exercised in wisdom. Or to understand it another way, someone who can implement practically, the principles they take in spiritually. We need that balance, one who is able to implement the mind of Christ in everyday affairs. I'm not so concerned with the outer appearance of a person as I am the inward quality of the person, they didn't say, "Pick out 7 men dress like this, hair like that..." They were looking for godly individuals who could be trusted to carry out spiritual principles in practical ways.

### Vs4

In that order by the way, prayer 1<sup>st</sup>, the Word of God 2<sup>nd</sup>. Because there's just no power in seeking to administer the *word* of God, with out 1<sup>st</sup> taking time to be at the *feet* of God searching out the *heart* and *mind* of God through His Word for His people. It's just not right that I should stand here seeking to represent to you the *heart* of God with out 1<sup>st</sup> spending time *with* God. Prayer 1<sup>st</sup>, then God's Word.

Remember when Samuel was admonishing the nation of Israel, and he made this statement. "...as for me, far be it from me that I should sin against the LORD in ceasing to pray for you; but I will teach you the good and the right way." 1 Sam 12:23 Before preparing a message, before standing in the pulpit, always comes prayer. Prayer for you, for insight, illumination and application to God's Word, prayer for what God wants to say to us individually and collectively through the text, it's impossible that I should over emphasize this point, it's that important. Far be it from me, that I should sin against the Lord in ceasing to pray for you, but that God would grace me to teach you the good and the right way.

Vs5-7

You may or may not have noticed there in vs 5, every name in the list is a Greek name. What's that mean? It means it was Hellenists appointed to the task, and what we see in that is the sensitivity with which the apostles approached the situation. They were offended so they encouraged them choose people from their own cultural background whom they felt would give them a fair shake to remedy the situation, and balance out the scales. That's wisdom, what does the bible say? "...the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy. Now the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace." James 3:17-18 This whole situation held with in it the propensity to incite the 1<sup>st</sup> church split. But things were handled right on every level, so the wiles of the wicked one were thwarted.

The Hellenists did the right thing in making the situation known to the apostles rather than stewing on it storing up bitterness and starting the gossip chain. The Hebrews did the right thing in recognizing a legitimate need and not being offended regarding the accusation but simply seeking a godly solution and being comfortable with what God placed on the hearts of the leadership (the apostles). The 7 did the right thing in stepping up to the plate of responsibility even though it may not have been an incredibly glamorous task they were called to. and The apostles did the right thing in not allowing the need to distract them from what it was that God had called *them* to do.

What was the result? (Vs7) The Word of God spread, God's Word was magnified and so the # of disciples multiplied greatly. That vs should be underlined in your bible, healthy sheep, well fed sheep multiply, it's inevitable.

Have you noticed the mathematics of the book of Acts? 1<sup>st</sup> The Lord was adding daily, then the # of men came to be about 5,000, then the Lord subtracted a couple (no pun intended),

then believers were *increasingly added*. In vs 1 of Ch 6 the # of disciples were multiplying, and here in vs 7 they *multiplied greatly*. Though the enemy was trying to divide, God opted that the church should be multiplied.

What's interesting about this entire portion of ch 6 (Vs1-7), is that as rich as it is, its primary purpose in the narrative serves to introduce us to Stephen who comes to the forefront here in vs 8 who was one of the 7 selected in vs 5. But God is just gracious that way in that even the portion of His Word that seems to serve as a backdrop for a particular situation transpiring in the text, it can be of the foremost importance to *our* lives.

#### Vs8-10

The bible teaches that promotion doesn't come from the east or from the west, but from the Lord, He's the One who raises one up and lowers the other down. So many people seek positions of influence and high public profile. Stephen was called to serve tables, and he was faithful in the days of seemingly small things, and look how God is raising him up. It's amazing how many people want to teach the word from the pulpit but they're not willing to be apart of the children's ministry. Stephen was just serving the Lord by serving His people and God began to use his life radically.

Then as usual when God begins to use your life, opposition enters the picture. This ch shows us Satan's attack both on the inside and from the outside of the church. and It's kind of interesting that Cilicia is mentioned here in vs 9 because that's where Paul was from originally, so it's quite possible that Stephen was out gunning Saul of Tarsus here in these debates/disputes over the word of God. No matter what they threw at him, he just mowed over them with rightly divided truth. Remember how they were to look for men full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom? There's no evidence that Stephen was smarter or better educated than these other guys, the Holy Spirit was just moving in his life. He was a man of the word, faithful in his service, and God is using him.

#### Vs11-15

This kind of has the earmarks of the trial of Jesus doesn't it? We'll want to digress into this a bit before we press on next time so we'll stop here for now, but notice the peace that God gave him in the midst of this, well, what will become a deadly situation. He just had a perfect peace and they had anything but. His face was just a glow (proverbially speaking) remember when Moses spent time with the Lord and his face literally glowed, it's as if God is saying, "He's not against Moses, he's My servant *like* Moses, can't you tell from his countenance, it just radiates with the reality of the countenance of one who's been in My presence."

But what I want you to glean today is how that God will use you in overwhelming ways for His Kingdom if you don't get distracted from His call upon your life. Its' not in being spread out everywhere like buckshot, it's in being like that swat team sharp shooter, focused

and intent upon the one thing that He's called you to do. Sure He'll use you in multiple ways at multiple times in your life, but He's got a primary calling for you that you do well to be mindful *of* and not get distracted *from*. and The Lesson here is that no matter how base it may seem, or how mundane it may be, if you're faithful *to it* as unto the Lord *in it*, He will be *magnified* in you, and His Kingdom will be *multiplied* through you.

We've talked about not getting distracted from God's calling on your life, but the most important calling you can ever focus on and not be distracted from is God's calling you to receive the forgiveness of sin through the blood of Jesus Christ and If God is calling out to you today don't be distracted, He wants to deliver you from the power of darkness and convey you into the kingdom of the Son of His love, in whom you can have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins. But that's a choice you have to make for yourself, He won't force Himself on you, you can choose to accept or to reject Jesus Christ Why don't you accept Him today?