Acts 6:1-7 “The (Real) Magnificent Seven”

*The Goal of This Sermon:*

*I want for you to see in this passage and from it’s context how the Holy Spirit moved to set the stage for the worldwide spread of the gospel, and that He uses people who are willing to serve the Lord to do it. I want you to see the grander plan in these events, and perhaps in your own walk with the Lord.*

But First...

Review of Acts 5:27-42 “Apostolic Boldness and Gamaliel’s Wise Counsel

**“And when they had brought them, they set *them* before the council. And the high priest asked them, 28saying, “Did we not strictly command you not to teach in this name? And look, you have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this Man’s blood on us!”**

**29But Peter and the *other* apostles answered and said: “We ought to obey God rather than men. 30The God of our fathers raised up Jesus whom you murdered by hanging on a tree. 31Him God has exalted to His right hand *to be* Prince and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. 32And we are His witnesses to these things, and *so* also *is* the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey Him.”**

**33When they heard *this,* they were furious and plotted to kill them. 34Then one in the council stood up, a Pharisee named Gamaliel, a teacher of the law held in respect by all the people, and commanded them to put the apostles outside for a little while. 35And he said to them: “Men of Israel, take heed to yourselves what you intend to do regarding these men. 36For some time ago Theudas rose up, claiming to be somebody. A number of men, about four hundred, joined him. He was slain, and all who obeyed him were scattered and came to nothing. 37After this man, Judas of Galilee rose up in the days of the census, and drew away many people after him. He also perished, and all who obeyed him were dispersed. 38And now I say to you, keep away from these men and let them alone; for if this plan or this work is of men, it will come to nothing; 39but if it is of God, you cannot overthrow it—lest you even be found to fight against God.” 40****And they agreed with him, and when they had called for the apostles and beaten *them,* they commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. 41So they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name. 42And daily in the temple, and in every house, they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus *as* the Christ.”**

**SLIDE 1**

Passage Outline

1. The Confrontation (vs. 27-28)

2. The Counter (vs. 29-32)

3. The Council (vs. 33-39)

4. The Command (v. 40)

5. The Continuation (vs. 41-42)

SLIDE 2

Application From Last Week

1. Be Courageous – Hebrews 13:6

2. Be Discerning - 1 John 4:1

3. Be Joyful - Philippians 4:4

4. Be Bold - Romans 8:31-32

Introduction to Acts 6:1-7 “The (Real) Magnificent Seven”

SLIDE 3

**“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.”**

**Context:**

**Acts 1:8 – The Plan**

**“But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”**

- So far so good, except that no one wants to leave Jerusalem. The Apostles are focused on the Jerusalem and the Nation of Israel.

- Remember, Acts chronicles a transition in focus from Israel and Jews to the entire world.

**Hellenists – Who are they and why do they matter here?**

- Hellenism = “Greek culture”

- Hellenism began in 331 B.C. with Alexander the Great. By the time of his death at age 31, he conquered virtually the entire known world (in only 11 years).

- He forced everyone to speak koine Greek so that there would be a common language – this became the language of the NT

- Two hundred years later, Antiochus Epiphanes, a Seleucid King in charge over Israel, attempted to force Greek culture on the Jews.

- that didn’t go over too well so you had the Maccabean revolt. Then Rome came on the scene, and they began to dominate politically but they inherited Greek culture and there were Jews who lived out in those Roman cities, they’d been dispersed in 722 and 586BC and a lot of them never went back to the land. They just settled outside the land and so they had lived out in the Greek and Roman world, both of which had been influenced by Greek culture. So the Hellenists were the more the Jews of the dispersion, they were more cosmopolitan, more liberated and well-traveled Jews.

- Can you see what God did here? He prepared the world for the spread of the Gospel message!

SLIDE 4

A quick four point look at how God worked to bring about His Church:

1. Alexander forced Greek to be spoken throughout the empire.

2. The Romans build roads all over the empire

3. God works miracles to establish the gospel in Jerusalem

4. God uses a dispute within the new church to spread the gospel

(Later on, God will use Paul. What made him the perfect man for the job God gave him? Jewish, Tarsus, saw both sides (Jew and Gentile) etc.)

The stage is now set. Keep this in mind as we work through today’s passage.

SLIDE 5

Outline of Acts 6:1-7

1. Dispute (Acts 6:1-2)

**“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.”**

- Notes:

- Factions (Hebrews and Hellenists) within the church threaten to divide it

- Satan is working through human relations to destroy the church from within (e.g. home schoolers vs. public schoolers)

- The apostles could have been distracted by this, but they refused

- Preaching the word of God should be the main objective of any church

2. Resolution (Acts 6:3-4)

**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.”**

Notes:

- Leadership is spread out beyond apostolic authority

- Service required men who were seasoned believers/filled with the Holy Spirit and wisdom

- Their job was to take care of the needs of the church, freeing up the apostles to teach and preach

- A difficult and delicate job

- Meanwhile, the apostles will “give themselves continuously” to prayer and the ministry of the word. This stresses the importance of studying the word – equipping the saints

3. The Choosing (Acts 6:5-6)

**“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.”**

Notes:

- This was a pleasing solution

- All the selectees were Hellenic Jews – They knew the cultural problem, and they knew the correct emphasis (the word)

- The selection was led by the Holy Spirit. Let’s look at those we know something of...

- Stephen:

He was the first martyr

A skilled apologist and evangelist – He knew scripture and was yielded to the Holy Spirit

Philip:

His daughters had the gift of prophecy

He was a strong Bible scholar

An excellent evangelist – led the Ethiopian Treasurer (a powerful man) to Christ

Prochorus:

According to church tradition, he was a scribe for the apostle John and went into exile with him. He most likely enjoyed the incredible blessing of writing the Book of Revelation and the fourth Gospel as they were dictated to him. He was later martyred in Antioch.

- The only other Deacon we know anything about was Nicolas. He was a proselyte (explain) of Antioch. Isn’t that interesting? Later, Antioch would become the center of missionary effort to the Gentiles. It was also the place where the term “Christian” was first used.

- Interesting how God used seven Hellenistic Jews to solve the problem in the new church. These were men of the dispersed Jews, who were bound to take the gospel out of Jerusalem to the world.

4. The Church and the Gospel Thrives (Acts 6:7)

**“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.”**

Notes:

- Notice what spread, “The word of God.”

- The church survived a potential split.

SLIDE 6

Application

1. Trust God that He has a plan and that His plan will come to be.

Jeremiah 29:11 – “For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the Lord, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope.”

Romans 8:28 – “And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to *His* purpose.”

2. Trust God that you have a role in fulfilling His plan

Ephesians 2:10 – “For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.”

3. Let go and rest in God

Matthew 11:28-30 – “Come to Me, all *you* who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. **29**Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. **30**For My yoke *is* easy and My burden is light.”