

Life Church Sunday June 21, 2020

Pastor Eva

Acts Chapter 6 New International Version (NIV)

6 In those days when the number of disciples was increasing, the Hellenistic Jews^[a] 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.

⁸ 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 Chapter 6 – Part 3

- Prayer and the ministry of the word are key. – Acts 6:2
- Prayer and the word are key at Life Church – invitation to Morning Prayer.

- There is a time for everything - Ecclesiastes 3:1
- There is a time to be silent and a time to speak - Ecclesiastes 3:7
- Who knows but that you have come to your royal position for such a time as this – Esther 4:14
- Prayer and the word are key at Life Church – example of our pastor.
- The early church chose leaders that were full of the Spirit and wisdom – Acts 6:3
- Expanding on the role of the Spirit - We are not to become weary in doing good. Doing good is sowing to the Spirit. Galatians 6:7-10
- We are to sow to the Spirit: 1) live life by the Spirit, led by the Spirit, in step with the Spirit 2) invest our time, talent and resources into the work of ministry, expanding the family of believers and the kingdom of God.
- We are also to do good to all people: investing time, talent and resources into people and communities.
- Living by the Spirit we exhibit the fruit of the Spirit – Galatians 5:22-23
- Love is one of the qualities of the fruit. We need to operate in love – this is what it looks like: 1 Corinthians 13:4-7
- The early church seized a moment in time to address a challenge and lay a firm foundation of obedience to the word of God on which to build: Acts 6:5-7
- The early church 1) cared for the disenfranchised; 2) chose those that would represent them, 3) elevated to leadership people who belonged to the oppressed group, 4) accepted the responsibility of leadership to love and serve their own people, building unity with all members of the body.
- On this Father's day we can examine the role of father figures who know the Lord, to lead and to provide instruction. 1 Timothy 5:1, 1 John 2:13, Proverbs 4:1
- We need everyone to be willing to serve, to offer their gifts. To allow those who should be focused primarily on the word and prayer to keep their focus there. Practical help is needed in logistics and administration to keep the family of believers functioning well. Don't discount your role as a potential leader even if you don't see yourself that way.

- The group that had been overlooked could see a problem that the group in power could not see.
- We are uniquely equipped to be a voice for oppressed people when we share a common heritage and love our own people.
- We should love God, love ourselves, love our people group, and love the larger body of Christ. Sometimes we fail to love our own people.
- For African Americans in particular, there are things we can do to make a difference by being a voice, by speaking up, by accepting responsibility for leadership and the need is great in areas such as housing, education, health care, criminal justice, unemployment and wealth as we are led by the Spirit.

Homeownership rate as of the first quarter 2020:

Whites: 73.7%

Asians/Pacific Islanders: 59.1%

Blacks: 44%

<https://www.census.gov/housing/hvs/files/currenthvspress.pdf>

Unemployment rate rose to 16.8% for blacks and fell to 12.4% for whites: <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2020-06-05/black-unemployment-rate-rises-while-white-joblessness-falls>

Blacks at higher risk for COVID-19. Blacks make up about 12% of the population but 17% of front-line workers. <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/black-workers-lives-essential-frontline-jobs-risk-coronavirus-reopening/>

African Americans have 5 times the incarceration rate of whites. The increase in the rate of spending for prisons is 3 times the increase in the rate of spending for Pre-K - 12 education: <https://www.naacp.org/criminal-justice-fact-sheet/>

Black students are suspended at higher rates and have lower access to advanced placement classes: <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/brown-center-chalkboard/2020/02/21/categorical-inequalities-between-black-and-white-students-are-common-in-us-schools-but-they-dont-have-to-be/>