

Team Players

Acts 8:1-4

8 And Saul was consenting unto his death. And at that time there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judaea and Samaria, except the apostles.

2 And devout men carried Stephen to his burial, and made great lamentation over him.

3 As for Saul, he made havock of the church, entering into every house, and haling men and women committed them to prison.

4 Therefore they that were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the word.

My Subject tonight is Team Players!

They say that sharks are one of the most popular aquarium fish in the world.

- If you catch a small shark and confine it, it will stay a size proportionate to the aquarium you put it in.
- Sharks can be only six inches long yet fully matured.
- But if you turn them loose in the ocean, they grow to their natural length of eight feet.

The same is true in our walk with God, if we stay in our own little aquarium where everything is comfortable and predictable, we will only grow to a size proportionate to that.

But if we are put into a larger arena, if we open ourselves up to everything God places in our life, we will grow into that person that Christ wants us to be.

Up until Acts chapter eight, the church was pretty much confined to the area in and around the city of Jerusalem.

- The church was experiencing phenomenal growth.
- People were experiencing the New Birth.

- A lot of good things were happening.

But the church was pretty much in its own little aquarium.

- Jews were ministering to Jews.
- The Gospel had not yet gone beyond their walls.
- The Gospel not yet reached the Gentile people.

Jesus had intended that the Gospel go beyond Jerusalem.

Acts 1:8

8 But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.

Matt 24:14

14 And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come.

His plan was that the Gospel go to the entire world!

I read to you the account of the burial of Stephen...Stephen was the first Martyr of the church.

- It was only after Stephen's death that the church went outside of their comfort zone.

The bible says that it was during this time that the church was scattered abroad...throughout Samaria and beyond...they began to preach the Gospel everywhere they went.

- It was almost as though it was forced upon them.
- They scattered because of persecution....yet during their persecution they grew more than they ever did before.

In fact the church always grew more when they encountered persecution.

- Their persecution caused them to examine their priorities.
- Their struggle caused them to hold on to what was valuable.

Sometimes God allows us to go through some things because in adversity we prioritize properly.

How many know that is true?

I want to share Stephen's story with you tonight.

We seldom look at chapter six of the book of Acts, but I want to take you there tonight...this story really applies to where we are right now;

Acts 6:1-5

6 And in those days, when the **number of the disciples was multiplied, there arose a murmuring** of the Grecians against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministration.

The early church was a growing church....we are a growing church!
The first century church ran into problems....we will have problems!

- If we want to continue to grow.
- If we want to grow more than we ever have before.

Then we must understand that we are going to have some problems.

How many of you want to grow more than we ever have before?

During this time there were two classes of Jews.

- The Hebrew speaking Jews.
- The Greek speaking Jews.

The Greek speaking Jews were often in Jerusalem for business purposes or to attend the great festivals.

When it speaks of the Grecians and the Hebrews in this context it is not referring to Greeks and Jews, but to Greek speaking Jews and Hebrew speaking Jews.

It states in the first verse that when their number was multiplied, there arose murmuring.

- In other words, when they experienced growth, they had a problem.
- The problem did not exist when they were small.
- The problem did not exist when a few were added.

But when their number was **multiplied**, there arose murmuring.

Isn't that just like the old devil...when things start going right, something always comes up?

So we understand tonight, that as we grow, there are going to be some problems!

- There are going to be problems in our church body.
- There are going to be problems in our individual lives and relationships.
- I should rephrase that, the problems are not going to be, they already are!

**We broke the seventy number three out of our last six Sundays!
Somebody shout!**

(But some have already come to me asking what are we going to do with all of these people, they are everywhere, they are in the hallways, they are in the classrooms, they are in the sanctuary, the guys are using the girls bathroom and vice versa)

We already have problems!

But to me it is just one more sign that we are on the right track.

As we grow our problems will increase!

- Anybody ever experience growing pains?

- Growth has challenges.
- When your kids grow, they eat more food.
 - They need more clothes.
 - They need more space.
 - They become more opinionated...or mouthy!
 - They cost more money.
- Growth has challenges.

Somebody say amen!

As we grow... we are going to have some challenges!

- We are going to have some growing pains.
- We need more space.
- More rooms...more seats....more bathrooms....more money.
- There are going to be some people with opinions....some of them may spout off their opinions....they may get mouthy!

That is what happened in Acts, chapter six...the Grecians and the Hebrews started mouthing off...the bible called it murmuring!

- The church had grown to a point where there were a number of widows that needed help.
- The church was doing what they could to feed these widows.
- But there were Greek speaking widows and Hebrew speaking widows.

Apparently the Greek speaking Jews felt that their widows were being neglected in this ministry!

This is what caused the murmuring between the two.

Notice what happens next;

2 Then the twelve called the multitude of the disciples unto them, and said, It is not reason that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables.

The disciples were unable to deal with the problem!

Why? They needed to preach the word.
They needed to teach the word.
They were teaching bible studies!

They saw no reason why they should stop teaching and preaching to wait tables.

Let me stop here for a minute and talk about this...this really relates to us right now!

- In the last couple of months there have been numerous bible studies started.
- There are numerous people that have been baptized.
- There are many that need solid teaching.
- We have a few ministers that can handle the teaching and preaching.

But as we grow there are going to be many problems that come up that will pull us away from the main thing....The word of God!

- The devil will try to get pastor to divide his time.
- Bro. Mike, the devil will try to pull you away from teaching.
- Bro. Smith the devil will try to get you to divide your time.

But we are not going to let that happen!

- There should be very few reasons for a minister to cancel a bible study!
- There should be very few reasons to not have preaching!
- None of us will ever make it without the Word!

Bro. T.F. Tenney says, we have to keep the main thing the main thing!

Can I get a witness?

That doesn't mean we leave the other needs of the church unmet.

That is not what happened here.

Let's continue reading...

3 Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost 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.

The disciples delegated this responsibility to some people who were able so that they could continue to do the work of the ministry!

Our challenge as we continue growing will be in finding people willing to play their part....finding team players!

It is going to take the entire body working together in unity to win our community to Christ!

Everybody must be willing to play a part!

38 years ago, the Miami Dolphins embarked on an unforgettable season. 14-0 in the regular season, then a 3-0 run through the playoffs culminating with a Super Bowl victory.

- No other team has matched their perfect record since.
- Every year, 30-some odd teams try, but for almost 4 decades now, it stands alone.

Sports critics all have their opinion about who might be the “Greatest Team of All Time”, but one of the 72 Dolphin team members put it best: “Perfection has a way of shutting people up.”

The opposing coach going into the 72 Super Bowl was asked 2 comments about the stellar Miami defense. "I can't recall any of their names," he said, "but they are a matter of great concern to us."

The defense of the 72 Dolphin's had a nickname? The "No-Name Defense."

What made that team special was not the handful of superstars – but it was the dedication of every team member.

- The willingness of every player to execute what his position called for.
- Something special happens when everybody plays their position.

The whole becomes greater than the sum of its parts.

They had some great players, no doubt. But plenty of other teams over history have had better players.

- More Pro-Bowl players.
- More superstars.
- More Hall of Famers.

Yet no team has reached the level of achievement the 72 Dolphins did.

In the same way we all have a part to play.
We all have a position.

- You may not all teach bible studies...but I would like you to.
- You might not all teach a class.
- But you do have a part!
- You are a part of the team.
- We need you to play a position!

God is calling you today!

Can I get a witness?

Let's continue reading;

Acts 6:3-5

3 Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost 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 of the Holy Ghost**, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolas a proselyte of Antioch:

The disciples select seven men headed by Stephen to oversee this ministry.

- We know of the Apostle Peter.
- We know of the Apostle Paul.
- We know of the Apostle John.
- We have heard of Phillip.

These guys were the big guns...these were the big names.

But how many know of the Apostle Stephen?

- Peter preached the keynote message at Pentecost and 3,000 people received the Holy Ghost.
- John was the disciple closest to Jesus...He was the one Jesus loved the most.
 - The moment he laid his hands on somebody, they spoke in tongues and received the Holy Ghost.
- Paul raised the dead to life, survived shipwrecks, stonings, imprisonment and won more people to the Lord than any person in the bible.
- Phillip baptized the Ethiopian Eunuch then teleported to another city to preach the Gospel.
 - I mean he disappeared right out of the water, and the Eunuch couldn't figure it out. (Read it for yourself Acts 8:39)

These guys are the superstars of the book of Acts!

But then you have Stephen.....What did the Apostle Stephen do?

He waited tables.

- Doesn't seem very noteworthy.
- It's not something that would make the headlines.
- Doesn't seem very important.

Stephen was just as full of the Holy Ghost as the rest of the Apostles, but he waited tables.

Stephen was a team player!

Did that make him any less important?

Maybe in man's eyes...but not in God's eyes!

In fact God sometimes uses the small, seemingly insignificant assignments to set the stage for the miraculous.

- If you read on in chapter six, Stephen begins doing great wonders amongst the people.
- But there's no indication that he's vacated his post of waiting tables.
- We can assume he's doing miracles in the midst of his mundane duties.
- Apparently he becomes so powerful that the local officials need to shut him up.
- So they bring up false charges and make him defend himself in front of the high priest.

So what does this waiter have to say to the Jewish scholars and powerbrokers of his day?

A lot....He ends up preaching one of the most powerful sermons in the book of Acts.

- Not Peter. Not Paul. Not John...But Stephen the waiter.

- Stephen preaches a message that is so powerful and convicting that they stone him to death...He becomes the first Martyr of the church.

A tragic ending for Stephen, but by far his most significant moment.

The ensuing persecution that comes from Stephen's sermon and death forces the church out of Jerusalem and Judea and into Samaria and eventually into the uttermost parts of the earth.

- This is where the Gospel really takes off and becomes a worldwide movement.

Is anybody hearing me today?

The Gospel was preached to the known Gentile world because there was a man who was willing to wait tables for the cause of Christ.

- He was willing to do his part!
- He was willing to do what seemed insignificant!
- He was a team player!

What tables are you waiting on right now?

What position are you willing to play?

Don't ever feel like your assignment from God is beneath the destiny that God has for you!

- God is just checking you out.
- God is seeing what you are made of.

For he that is faithful in the least, will also be faithful in that which is much.

If Life Church is going to grow like God truly desires it to grow....

- We are going to need people to wait tables.
 - We are going to need people to pick up leaves.
 - We are going to need people offer their cars for transportation.

- We are going to need people donate food.

We are going to need a lot of team players.....a lot of Stephens!

- When you become a team player...God will multiply your talents.
- When you get off the stands and into the field...God will multiply your talents.

If it is all left up to one or two, we will fail.

If it is all left up to the ministry, we will fail.

- When we work together and get outside the four walls of this church....God will multiply our talents and our efforts!.

A team becomes much greater than the total sum of its parts! (repeat)

God turns addition into multiplication!

What starts as an insignificant assignment will often lead to your most significant moment.

1 Corinthians 15:58

58 Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord.

- What you do for Christ will last!
- Your labor is not in vain!
- You are laying up treasures in heaven!