

“Jerusalem, We Have A Problem”

Acts 6:1-7

Dr. Jarrett Stephens | October 10, 2021

Illus. Phone calls – I got a phone call this week that will have to go down as the coolest phone call I will ever receive in my entire life.

Now, I’ve received some great phone calls in my life. I remember getting the phone call after I had defended my dissertation for my Doctorate and the professors on the other end referring to me as “Dr. Stephens”. I was a “C” student from Bossier City, LA and people were calling me Dr. Stephens – I was like, “yes sir, you’re talking to him!”

I remember vividly, getting the phone call from Debbie when our second child, Kelsey was on the way. I was in the car with a friend of mine. It was a short phone call. “Jarrett, my water just broke. Meet me at the hospital.” I had my friend drive me to the hospital.

I told you I was going to get sentimental coming up on the year since I started working with your search committee. It was a year ago last week that I received the first phone call asking about my interest in Champion Forest and on Nov. 10, I’ll never forget getting the email and follow up phone call from Don Ingvardson telling me I was the # 1 candidate. I was standing outside a Starbucks in Plano, TX...will never forget getting that phone call.

And I’m sure my wife remembers getting my phone call right after I got off the phone saying, “Are you ready to go to Houston?”

I’ve received some awesome calls before. But nothing like this week. I was in my office meeting with my incredible asst. Ellen Forrester and she can attest to this. I get a call and it’s a Houston area code but no name with it. Now, typically if I get a phone call and it has no name with it, I’m not answering...that’s automatic voicemail.

Now, don’t look at me all pious, you do it too! And so, I don’t know why, but I told Ellen, “Hold on, I’ll take the call figuring it was someone trying to sell me something...some kind of Spam Call.

I answer it on the other end, I kid you not, I hear, “Jarrett, this is Shane Kimbrough, I’m calling from the International Space Station.” **(SHOW PIC)**

I couldn’t believe it! I was getting a call...on my cell phone...from outer space! I was mouthing to Ellen this is the Space Station! I couldn’t believe.

Astronaut Shane Kimbrough if you are not following him on Twitter and Instagram, you should be. His handle is astro_kimbrough and he is veteran of Space travel. He is currently on his third spaceflight and has been on the ISS since April. He’s got about 5 more weeks left in space.

I first met him earlier this year when he attended a service here when Levi Lusko was preaching back in February. We hit it off and developed a great friendship with he and his wife, Robbie.

I got off the phone with him...and you better believe I typed into my contacts NASA Space Station with the number he called me on! It was on awesome call to get and let's be praying for Shane. He and Robbie love Jesus and are such great witnesses for him.

We're in this series on Acts, Jesus told his disciples "you'll be my witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and the uttermost parts of the earth". I've got to imagine Jesus knowing all things knew about 2,000 years later "uttermost parts of the earth" included outermost parts of the earth!

The phone call from Shane that day reminded me of the now well-known call that came from outer space in 1970 during the Apollo 13 spaceflight. It was made really famous when used in the movie *Apollo 13* starring Tom Hanks, Bill Paxton and Kevin Bacon.

Hanks was playing astronaut, Jim Lovell who upon hearing a "loud bang" and a warning light coming on, called back to NASA mission control center (astronaut Jack Swigert in real life) and said, "Houston, we have a problem."

Inspired by my phone call this week and in looking at the text we're covering today, the title of my message instead of "Houston, we have a problem" is this: "**Jerusalem, we have a problem.**"

This is what the first six verses of Acts 6 is all about. It's about a problem that the early church in Jerusalem is forced to confront and it outlines how they responded to it and what the results were.

And this going to be the outline for the message today. It's the same outline as the passage. We'll see:

1. The Problem
2. The Solution
3. The Results

Let's get started by looking at: **The Problem**

Acts 6:1 – "Now in these days when the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint by the Hellenists arose against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution."

So, we have a problem here and the problem is that there are some widows in the church who are being overlooked...their needs aren't being met. And the problem is a bit deeper than it appears on the surface because the complaint is pitting the "Hellenists" against the "Hebrews".

Now, before we dive into what all that means, let me just begin by saying the early church has had its fair share of challenges and has had to deal with a number of problems in their short time of existence.

- They have dealt with opposition.

When the Holy Spirit came upon them at Pentecost and people started making fun of them, they didn't back down or cower, but instead, Peter stood up and told them exactly what was taking place and preached the gospel to them.

- They have dealt with persecution.

That was a problem they faced. They are threatened by the religious authorities and commanded to no longer speak in the name of Jesus, but we have seen how they rose to the occasion, confronted the issue head on and moved forward in obedience.

- They dealt with corruption.

Remember the hypocrisy of Ananias and Sapphira? These two believers lied to the Holy Spirit and attempted to deceive the early church. The leaders called them out and Ananias and Sapphira were disciplined in the most severe way for their lie in that it cost them their life.

At every turn, from the formation of the church all the way to here to Acts 6, whenever a problem, difficulty or issue arises, the early church has stepped up and dealt with it in a forthright way. They have confronted it and in doing so, the gospel has continued to advance the Church move forward.

It's a lesson for us today: As the Church of the living Christ, we are to meet problems, issues and conflicts whether from outside the church or inside the church head-on.

- We are not to run from them...
- We are not to ignore them...
- We are not to blow them up and make them bigger than they need to be...

We deal with whatever confronts us...whatever problem arises in a bold, honest and loving way.

This problem that arises in Acts 6 is not one of opposition, persecution or corruption, but it's something just as BIG...maybe even bigger! The problem this early church is facing is dissent.

In fact, what I have observed through the years is often times, problems like opposition, persecution and corruption bring the church closer together...those type of issues and problems force the church to come together as one and can bring strength to the church.

Dissent on the other hand...it can splinter a church right down the middle. Because the problem is internal. You don't have a common enemy that brings you together to fight against. Instead, dissent causes you to become enemies and you fight against one another!

This is the problem facing the early church in Acts 6. You have a group of people known as (v. 1) "Hellenists" and a group of people known as "Hebrews".

Now, those terms are kind of deceiving because “Hellenists” were just as much Jewish as the “Hebrews” were. Hellenists were both by birth and bloodline Jewish. What separated them from the “Hebrews” as it is coined here is that their lifestyle was a bit more liberal than the said Hebrews.

Hellenists were mostly “Greek-speaking” because they had come to Jerusalem from the Dispersion. They tended to dress like Gentiles, didn’t mind associating and socializing with Gentiles. This is the world they grew up in so they had more-less adopted their customs and way of life. Still Jewish, but not near as strict as the Hebrews.

The Hebrews...they were the conservative crew. Most of them spoke Aramaic or Hebrew. They followed and adhered to the Law and their religious life was of utmost importance.

- How they dressed...
- What they ate...
- Who they associated with...

It fell among “party lines” so to speak – it was all Jewish, all the time and so you can see how they could start to look down on these “Hellenists” who weren’t so pure...they weren’t so committed to the Jewish faith and traditions.

John Phillips – “The tension between Hebrews and Hellenists went back a long time, to the very beginning of the Hellenist Period, when the brilliant world of Greek thought and culture burst upon the Jews and threatened to destroy Judaism, both with its philosophy and by its persecution.”

And so, just think about it. You have these two groups, who when they hear the gospel BOTH respond and get saved. And they are BOTH a part of the early church. Saved by the same grace and now brought together and one “in Christ”, it’s natural though with their background to understand why there would be some issues.

Illus. Texas – Think of it like a Texan. Okay, some of you were born here in Texas are and it’s “Come and take it!” mentality, right? This is the Republic of Texas.

Others are like me...we’re not native to Texas, but we got here as fast as we can. Then you have the influx of people coming in from the outside that are moving to Texas and they don’t understand how Texans go about doing things...the mentality associated with it. They live here though. They are now Texans.

Some of you are thinking, “they are not Texans and they better not mess this up!” Okay, if that’s you, you understand the mindset! That’s EXACTLY what this early church is facing.

A complaint is brought forth by the Hellenists...a problem rises to the surface and the problem is as stated in (v. 1) – the Hellenists notice that their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution of food and care. The Hebrew widows seem to be taken care of, but the Hellenists widows are not.

And so, we have a little dissention taking place among the ranks...a little division. That word “complaint” here, it means to “murmur or whisper”. There was a “whispering campaign” going on.

Illus. Whispering campaign – Murmuring is never looked upon well in scripture. Never. The Israelites got 40 years in the desert for murmuring and complaining against God (Num. 14).

It seems in the Old Testament after idolatry nothing quite kindles his anger more! The wilderness experience for the Israelites is Exhibit A of this.

Exhibit B? **Numbers 11:1-2** – “**And the people complained in the hearing of the Lord about their misfortunes, and when the Lord heard it, his anger was kindled, and the fire of the Lord burned among them and consumed some outlying parts of the camp. ² Then the people cried out to Moses, and Moses prayed to the Lord, and the fire died down.**”

Exhibit C - **Numbers 21:4-6** – “**From Mount Hor they set out by the way to the Red Sea, to go around the land of Edom. And the people became impatient on the way. ⁵ And the people spoke against God and against Moses, “Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and we loathe this worthless food.” ⁶ Then the Lord sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people, so that many people of Israel died.**”

Read that at bedtime to your kids...know how you were complaining today?” Ha! The people repented really fast.

Look, bottom line – God hates complaining...murmuring...you know why? One of the reasons is, it spreads like Covid! It’s VERY contagious.

And I just want to encourage you, if you hear a complaint, don’t breathe wind on that fire...don’t pour gasoline on it, instead pour water on it!

Listen, we’re a big church and so was this church in Jerusalem. We’re going to have issues...we’re going to have problems that arise. With as many people as we have in our congregation, it brings a certain amount of complexity.

If something goes wrong or upsets you, bring it to leadership and make us aware of it. Don’t be a part of a whispering campaign! Get in on the solution side of things and that means getting in the game and getting to work.

We see the problem. “Jerusalem, we have a problem.” Needs aren’t being met. The Hellenists widows are not being cared for...they are being neglected. So, what’s the solution? It’s NOT to just bicker and complain.

Here’s: **The Solution**

Acts 6:2-6 – “And the twelve summoned the full number of the disciples and said, “It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables.³ Therefore, brothers, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty. ⁴ But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word.” ⁵ And what they said pleased the whole gathering, and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolaus, a proselyte of Antioch. ⁶ These they set before the apostles, and they prayed and laid their hands on them.”

The solution to the problem is...are you ready for this? It’s a pretty simple concept, but it really is brilliant. It’s called shared ministry.

The apostles...the early church leaders they don’t put up a fight when they hear this need isn’t being met. They don’t get defensive. Instead, they say let’s get to work.

The (v. 2) “summon the full number of disciples” – don’t know how many that is, but according to (Acts 5:14) there are multitudes following Jesus now. They call them together and essentially say, “Let’s solve this problem together. And btw- YOU are the answer to the problem!”

Now, just a little church governance insight for you. And you will learn what I am about to tell you when/if you attend our New Members class, which according to our by-laws you have to attend in order to become a member of Champion Forest.

Illus. New Member Class - If you are wondering when the next one is, I’m glad you asked! It’s on Oct. 31st. You can sign up at championforest.org/membership

In this class, you will meet some of our pastors, have an opportunity to learn about our Life Group ministry and the class helps you understand how we are governed and set up.

A simple way to understand it is this. I heard Adrian Rogers say this years ago about Bellevue Baptist Church. Like many Baptist churches, this is how we are governed. You could say it like this:

Champion Forest Baptist Church is pastor-led, deacon-served, committee-organized and congregationally-approved.

So, let’s work this out. “Pastor-led” is not just me in a corner office making decisions. We view the Pastors on our staff as elders in the church. We have a senior team here of eight pastors that meet every week to pray over our church and discuss strategy and leadership. We would be what is commonly referred to as the overseers of the church.

We say “deacon-served”. Now, this passage we are looking at today no question sets the stage for the office of deacon in the church. Deacons were not established in this passage, but this is where it finds its root, no doubt!

Acts 6:2 – “And the twelve summoned the full number of the disciples and said, “It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables.”

The idea behind this word “serve tables” is where we get our word deacon from...it’s just in its verb form here. The word picture is one of a waiter. It literally means to “kick up dust” or “to run an errand.”

You go into a busy restaurant and see a waiter getting after it - (btw – as a Christian, let’s be generous tippers – even if they don’t do a good job! My goodness, no idea what they are dealing with and when Christians go to eat after church, waiters and waitresses shouldn’t be giving an eye roll or drawing for straws on who gets to wait on the church goers!

It’s that picture though of a waiter or waitress that is getting after it that’s in mind here.

Notice this shared ministry that is implemented here. It’s as one commentary I read this week said, a combination of “apostolic authority and congregational activity”.

It’s not that waiting tables is some lesser ministry...it’s not! It’s just for the apostles, their priority was to go to preaching or as (v. 4) states to “prayer and to the word of God”. To do this well takes time!

They knew they could not do both equally well or at the same time, so the solution is let’s pick seven men from among yourselves and we can appoint them to this duty. And look at what happened?

Acts 6:5a – “And what they said pleased the whole gathering...”

These deacons...when you study this whole idea of deacon, it’s NOT what they “do” that is most important...it’s who they are to be!

Notice the focus – **Acts 6:3 – “Therefore, brothers, pick out from among you (these weren’t volunteers! This wasn’t pick a few warm bodies) seven men of good repute, full of the Holy Spirit and of wisdom...”**

The criteria to fulfill this duty (obligation, responsibility) was:

- These men had to have a good reputation...there was integrity...there was honesty...
- These men had to have evidence that they were FULL of the Holy Spirit...the word full is a picture of being dominated by...totally yielded to...

- These men had to be FULL of wisdom...

I have a whole sermon on the ministry of the deacon taken from here in Acts 6 and 1 Timothy 3 where I challenge the men who are deacons to be.

1 Tim. 3:8-12 – “Deacons likewise must be dignified, not double-tongued, not addicted to much wine, not greedy for dishonest gain. ⁹They must hold the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience. ¹⁰And let them also be tested first; then let them serve as deacons if they prove themselves blameless. ¹¹Their wives likewise must be dignified, not slanderers, but sober-minded, faithful in all things. ¹²Let deacons each be the husband of one wife, managing their children and their own households well. ¹³For those who serve well as deacons gain a good standing for themselves and also great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus.”

Notice the focus of deacon is not so much on what they do as who they are! They are to be:

- Men of Character – that’s first and foremost – we see that in Acts 6 and in 1 Tim. 3
- Men of Conviction – 1 Tim 3:9 – “hold to the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience.”
- Men of Courage – wait till we see Steven and his testimony next week!

Illus. Deacon ordination – This past Wednesday at our prayer service...it was so great! We had the opportunity to ordain three new deacons (**Show pics**). Men we believe that fit the mold of Acts 6 and 1 Timothy 3.

We laid our hands on them commissioning them for service just as the apostles laid their hands on them. It was a beautiful service and a wonderful time of setting these men apart to do what...to serve!

To serve in any capacity the church needs. And I challenged them on Wednesday evening to:

- Serve eagerly...
- Serve faithfully...
- Serve joyfully...

This is what deacons do! They serve...and boy do our deacons serve!

- They serve by going to hospitals.
- They serve our widows each month...each deacon has a widow in the church they are assigned to in order to help meet needs.
- They serve in our new member class.
- They serve in our connection room.

They do so much! But listen...it's not just deacons that serve the church. Everyone is to serve!
We ALL have a part to play!

Illus. Football fable - The big animals and the little animals were having a football game. As the first half went along, the big animals were scoring at will. Every time they got the ball they would run it in for a touchdown. It was 84-0 at halftime.

Then came the second half. On the kick-off the Gorilla that handled it was tackled on the 10 yard line for the big animals worst field position of the day.

FIRST PLAY: The elephant runs the ball up the middle. BANG!! Tackled for a five-yard loss.

SECOND PLAY: The rhinoceros tried a sweep around the end led by the hippo throwing a lead block. BAM! Tackled for another five-yard loss.

THIRD PLAY: They tried a screen pass to the Zebra and it went nowhere! Taken down for a 10-yard loss.

The defensive unit ran off the field for the little animal team and the punt team came on...they were so excited. The gopher coach of the small animals asked, "Who was it that made that stop against the Gorilla on the kick-off. The centipede responded, "It was me coach!"

Well, who stopped the elephant in the middle? Again, the centipede said, "It was me, coach!"

"What about the sweep around the end and the screen pass. Who in the world made those plays?" Again, the centipede, "I did, Coach!"

The gopher coach was amazed and screamed, "Well, where were you in the first half?" To which the centipede replied, "In the locker-room getting my ankles taped."

Now, look...silly story, but illustrates a point. We're ALL to be in the game ALL the time. None of us should be in the locker room getting our ankles taped!

It's NOT just the pastors and deacons that serve, it's ALL of us on the team together moving the gospel forward.

Just go back to how I said we were organized as a church: **Champion Forest Baptist Church is pastor-led, deacon-served, committee-organized and congregationally-approved.**

You see this here in Acts 6. Pastor-led, deacon-served, committee-organized – the scripture says here "pick out from among you".

We have three "working committees" in our church. I prefer the name "ministry action teams" – words matter. Each are made up of men and women in this church that receives names that are approved by you, the congregation.

- Budget and Finance team (explain)
- Personnel Team (explain)
- Missions Team (explain)

When a decision is made...certainly a big decision and one that our by-laws states that we need to, we bring before the congregation for you to approve. We've done that recently with the approving of the budget and the hiring of Jeff Young, our Executive Pastor.

I highlight all this to say right here in Acts 6, we see the church growing...the church is an organism (living and breathing!), but it needed some organization. And the same is true today.

We are an organism, but as we continue to grow we need some organization and we try to model our government much like we see here in Acts 6.

Interestingly, all these men listed here in Acts 6 have Greek names. It just goes to show that the Hebrews had no issue allowing Hellenists to be leaders in the church...seems here they wanted it that way.

When you are "one in Christ" and want the best for the church, it doesn't really matter whose name gets called, as long as the job gets done. I love that.

- There was a problem – needs weren't being met...and there was some dissention because of it.
- There was a solution – let's create some shared ministry and involve the WHOLE congregation in it.

Here we see: **The Result**

Acts 6:7 – “And the word of God continued to increase, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith.”

What was the result of confronting this problem head on and coming up with a God-honoring solution?

The gospel continued to advance and the Church continued to move forward – so much so that some priests in the temple gave their life to Jesus.

What an incredible passage of scripture. And in closing can I just share with you from my heart a closing challenge. I want to give you two closing phrases that I pray will be imprinted on our hearts:

- 1. Come Together**
- 2. Work Together**

There is NOTHING like the Church when the Church is working right. And the Enemy...he hates this...especially hates a church like ours that is an example for so many in this culture as it relates to our diversity and our focus on reaching ALL people regardless of skin color, ethnicity, what we have, what we don't have.

The challenge and warning is, I don't think the Enemy is going to separate us with persecution and opposition from the outside...I just don't.

My gut tells me...maybe I should say where I sense in my Spirit we are most susceptible from the Enemy's attack is from within. And through dissention the purity of our fellowship threatened...through dissention our moving forward the gospel thwarted.

And the warning is and maybe this is just a word for us for some time down the line, in the future. There is NOTHING we can't get through if we will do like this church – and COME together and WORK together.

So, let's commit now that if and when we ever hear, "Champion Forest, we have a problem (and we will!). We're NOT going to complain and murmur...we're not going to point fingers or pour gasoline on the fire.

Instead, we're going to come together and we're going to work together so that we don't lose sight of the MAIN THING, which is (v. 7) the word of God increasing and the number of disciples multiplied.

Let's pray.

Please Note: This document is not meant to be a published, cited, annotated research paper. It is simply a transcript of a spoken message, provided as a resource. Many commentaries, articles, and other sermon helps were likely studied and contributed to the forming of this message.