

2023 Theme - Focus On What Matters

Sermon Series - The Book of Acts/God's Plan for His Church

Sermon Title - The New Testament Church Has Issues

Sermon Text - Acts 6:1-7

Sermon Presenter - Pastor Larry

Introduction:

"Without You I fall apart, You're the one that guides my heart." Those words are so true of me personally and should be the cry of your heart as well, and those words are most definitely true when it comes to the Church! Without Jesus being the head of the Church, the leader of the Church, and the One who guides the church, then the church will fall apart! Don't get me wrong, we need Godly leaders whom God places in our lives, and in our church, but it is imperative that those leaders keep their eyes on Jesus and take their cues from Jesus! Again, if they don't, then these issues, which every church has, will rip it apart. But if we humbly keep our eyes on Jesus and allow Him to hold our hands and guide our steps by His precious Holy Spirit, then we can be victorious and effective!! Let's pray and ask God to teach us and help us learn some important lessons from the issues the New Testament Church faced in its infancy. Pray.

As we get started I want to remind you that we will observe the Lord's Supper at the end of our service. If you have children who have accepted Christ as their Savior and have painted the picture of their faith through baptism, you are welcome to get them from Shorekids towards the end of the service so they can participate with you. And know that if you are a follower of Jesus then you don't have to be a covenant member to participate, because it is faith in Christ and His sacrifice on the cross that allows us to become a part of the body of Christ, the family of God!

As we begin our message, I know that some of you have been concerned about my health issues, but I'm doing okay and they have me scheduled for a heart procedure January 5th that, Lord willing, will help me stop going into A-fib. So I appreciate your concern and your prayers! About 25 years ago when I lived outside of Birmingham Alabama, I went to see my doctor. He had done a physical and ran some tests on me. I was there to get my report. He said, "You have several issues we need to address!" Of course I was all ears! He said...

"Issue #1 – You have some scar tissue on your lungs – Have you been exposed to serious pollution?" I said, "Not that I know of." He said, "Well this could have been caused by an illness in the past like pneumonia." I asked, "Is this a major problem?" He replied, "No, not to worry, not a problem."

"Issue #2 – Your bad cholesterol is not too high, but your good cholesterol is not high enough. You need to work on this one. But, not to worry, it's not a big problem."

"Issue #3 – You have mitral valve prolapse. You have some regurgitation in one of your heart valves." I said, "Sounds bad, is that a major problem?" He said, "It's not a problem for now, just keep a check on it."

Issue #4 – No, I'm kidding, there was no issue #4! Thank you Lord!

The reason I bring up the subject of issues is that the New Testament had some issues! Yes, even with all the miracles of the New Testament, their rapid growth, and their determination to stay faithful to their mission even when persecuted, they still faced issues. And some of these issues came from within. Let's read our text and you'll see what I'm talking about.

Acts 6:1 In those days when the number of disciples was increasing, the Grecian Jews among them complained against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food.

Acts 6:2 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.

Acts 6:3 Brothers, 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

Acts 6:4 and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word."

Acts 6:5 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.

Acts 6:6 They presented these men to the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them.

Acts 6:7 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.

Those seven verses give us such amazing insights into the New Testament Church and also give us powerful insights and instructions for Northshore Church! Think about this:

The New Testament Church had issues and The New Testament Church came up with solutions!

And according to verse seven their solutions worked marvelously! So it is important for us not to over glamorize the New Testament Church and fail to realize that...

The New Testament Church had Issues

So what exactly were the issues they were having in our text? Here we go...

Issue #1 - Some of the widows were being overlooked in the distribution of food

Issue #2 - There were underlying issues of prejudice (Grecian vs Hebraic)

Issue #3 - The apostles were trying to meet all the needs and as a result they were neglecting other vital responsibilities

These kinds of issues may seem small at first, but left unattended can lead to massive problems, infighting, disillusionment, and a huge loss in effectiveness in achieving the mission. So it was imperative that the church find solutions to these problems. In fact, God's Word tells us that...

The New Testament Church had Solutions

They worked on a solution and continued to share the Gospel, the Good News of Jesus, with the world! They chose Godly men to help with the ministry duties of the church which allowed the apostles to spend a majority of their time in prayer and study of the word and as a result...

The Word of God spread!

The number of disciples increased rapidly!

They were so effective that even a large number of Jewish priests became obedient to the faith!

That's such a wonderful testimony of God's work in the life of the New Testament Church! Even with their issues God used them and showed them how to overcome the problems they had!

And look at the two qualifications for the men they chose to help with the ministry...

Acts 6:3 Brothers, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom!

Notice: Talent was not listed, powerful leadership skill was not listed, popularity was not listed, being successful was not listed, social position was not listed, financial status was not listed, nor was intelligence or knowledge. You see, people can be really super smart and intelligent, but lack wisdom and common sense, and they may be full of themselves rather than full of the Spirit! You might remember the instructions that Paul the Apostle wrote to all Christians which says...

Ephesians 5:18 Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit,

Ephesians 5:19 speaking to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit. Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord,

Ephesians 5:20 always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Being filled with the Spirit gives us access to the wisdom of God! Paul tells us this...

Romans 8:26 In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans.

Romans 8:27 And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for God's people in accordance with the will of God.

Now we have to understand that for the solution to work, those in positions of authority and leadership had to allow others to do the work of the ministry. They could give instructions and lead by example, but they had to humble themselves and give up some control. They had to be willing to let God work through others and not micro-manage them, and also to share the credit for the ministry that was accomplished! Such an important thing and something many leaders today struggle with! But the leaders of the New Testament Church did the right thing and allowed others to be a part of the powerful and even miraculous work that God was doing in the

New Testament Church. In fact, on Sunday December 31st, I'm planning on sharing a message with you called "Preach It" that will show you how the people of the New Testament church played one of the biggest roles in the spreading of the gospel to the world when the dispersion happened.

Okay, that was then, but this is now and some of you may not believe what I'm about to say, but it's true...

Northshore Church has Issues

Yep, we're not a perfect church. I'll never forget what one of my professors at the seminary said years ago to one of my classes. He said, "I know you preacher boys can't wait to get out of seminary and find that perfect church. The only problem is this: Once you become their pastor they won't be a perfect church anymore, because there's no such thing as a perfect preacher!" That is so true! If a church has a preacher that thinks he's got it all together, knows everything, then that's a very dangerous situation! Even cultish! Northshore Church is certainly not perfect and I'm certainly not a perfect preacher! So you might ask what kind of issues is Northshore Church having? Well, for one thing, people are not getting plugged into the family like they need to. Simple as that. Now I'm not trying to guilt trip anyone here today, that's not my place and never my intent. But a part of my responsibility as your pastor is to speak truth into your life. And here's something I've had to learn and that we all need to understand: If I'm preaching in a mean spirited, judgemental or condemning way and people are offended then that's on me! But if I'm preaching the truth of the Bible in a Christ-like manner and spirit, and someone takes offense then that's on them! The gospel is the gospel and the truth is the truth! So let me share this truth with you: We've had numerous people who have come for months, and maybe even years, yet have never gotten connected. Again, I'm not trying to make anybody here feel bad, but it makes me sad when I know there's people who are not connecting in a deeper way than just on Sunday mornings. I'll explain my sadness in just a moment, but first let me say this...I'm glad you're here on Sundays! But folks we need so much more than Sunday mornings. Trust me, I do understand that we are all such busy people even with all of our time saving electronics, devices and technology! In fact, I think we've been tricked. Now that I can carry my phone around with me and it is a personal computer right in my hand, I'm constantly reminded of everything I'm supposed to be doing and I've never been more busy! I have alarms and notifications going off all the time. Can you relate? And just the other day, I was feeling really tired because of all this heart stuff and I told my wife I was going to take a quick nap before I went back to my study to work on my sermon some more. She said, I'll babysit your phone! I reluctantly complied. But guess what, about ten minutes later, my smart watch started buzzing telling me my phone was receiving a call! And for you young families with kids who are involved in so many extra activities, I know you all are sometimes running ragged! So I get it, it's hard to find time for anything else! I also understand that a huge part of what we need besides Sunday mornings is found in our personal walk with God and our personal study and devotion time. And that takes what? Time! However, I also know that in the New Testament Church they met together much more than on Sunday mornings to worship, to pray, to encourage one another

and to learn and grow in their faith. In fact you might remember that Luke tells us in Acts 2:46-47 this...

Acts 2:46 Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts,

Acts 2:47 praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

Now I'm not saying we need to meet together 7 days a week, but we sure need to be in contact, fellowship and ministry with one another way more than just on Sundays! Is there anyone in this room that sometimes needs a word of encouragement on a day other than Sunday? That's what I thought. And here's the way Paul puts it in his letter of encouragement to the Church at Thessalonica...

1 Thessalonians 5:10 He died for us so that, whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with him.

1 Thessalonians 5:11 Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.

Here's the problem with Sunday morning only attendance: You can't really encourage one another and build each other up when you're only here once a week for just a little over an hour. Let me put it to you like this: We need each other. Your church needs you to help us share the good news with a lost world and we need you to help us minister to people within the church family when there's a need and if we can minister to someone who is not even a part of the church that may in fact be the very thing that helps them see the reality of the love of Christ! But we are never going to be as effective reaching those outside the church until we are doing right by those inside the church! Think of it this way: while we will never be perfect, this side of heaven, we need to get our house in order as a church so when we do reach people in the world and invite them into the family that we have a good place for them to grow in their faith and to become fully devoted followers of Jesus! I love the way the Christian Rock Band Pillar put it in their song "Turn It Up!" By the way, the song was a collaboration of 15 people. It says...

I can only imagine, All of the magic that would happen
If we all come together
I could sing of your love forever, Tell me I'm never alone,
And that I'm going home
I can hear sounds of melodies, And the remedy,
That comes when you Lift me up
From the flood in the sea of faces
And I promise you we'll make it, 'Cause In the healing rain
There is beauty from pain

Paul tells us this...

Galatians 5:22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,

Galatians 5:23 gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.

Galatians 5:24 Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

Galatians 5:25 Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.

Galatians 5:26 Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other.

Galatians 6:1 Brothers and sisters, if someone is caught in a sin, you who live by the Spirit should restore that person gently. But watch yourselves, or you also may be tempted.

Galatians 6:2 Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.

And what was the law of Christ? We've talked about it recently. Jesus said...

John 13:34 "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.

John 13:35 By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

Notice, Jesus didn't say everyone will know that you are my disciples if you faithfully attend church on Sunday mornings! He said they will know us as disciples of Christ if they see us living lives of loving one another in the family of God! Listen, I know that I can't connect with everyone personally on Sunday mornings and I wish I could, but it's not possible. There are times I see some of you out there but then at the end of the service "poof," you're all gone and I just can't catch everyone! And there have been numerous times in my 22 plus years as your pastor that I've realized I've missed some very big events in some of your lives because I just didn't know about things. Some families have lost loved ones and I didn't know until way afterwards and that breaks my heart! That's one of the reasons we want you to get connected with others in the church so our church can minister to you when there's a need in your life and so you can help us minister to others when there's a need in their life! We have small groups and Andrew is doing a great job of staffing those and providing leadership for that ministry but we need more small groups and more leaders to get everyone plugged in! Again, people have ministry needs that are not being met either because we don't know about the needs or we can't get to everyone who has a need. Like I said, when I find out about a need that went unmet, which I didn't know anything about, I feel terrible that we weren't there during your time of need. And while we are blessed with a great staff, we could never hire enough staff members to meet all the needs that exist in our church and community. In fact the Bible tells us clearly that it's not the job of professional staff to do all the ministry. Let me say this...Your pastor and staff are certainly supposed to do ministry, because we can't teach others to do what we don't know how to do or what we don't do! But there's not enough of me or we (staff) to go around. And sometimes I'll realize that I've not seen someone at church for a long time and when I call them they might say, "Yes, I haven't been in several months." When they tell me what's been going on, it just breaks my heart and I feel terrible about that. But here's the truth, if the senior pastor is your only connection to the church that's not good for you or me! If the senior pastor tries to meet all the needs, then there won't be any time left for prayer and study of the Word. Same issue the Apostles were having. Ministry is what God calls a senior pastor to do, and he should always seek to minister to the needs of the congregation, but he cannot, and should not feel like he's the only one who can minister to people. That's dangerous for several reasons. He might begin to think he's better than everyone else when it comes to ministry and he's the only one that can

do it. It's kind of like having the "Chief medicine man complex!" By the way, that will have health impacts on him and consequences for his family down the road! A senior pastor, along with the staff must minister to people with a passion but they must also realize that others can be effective in ministry and sometimes others may even be more effective because they've built a friendship and close relationship with that person in their small group! And pastors and ministers must not neglect the fact that a huge part of their job is to teach you to do ministry. To teach you to meet needs. This takes us to the solution part of our message for today...

Northshore Church Solutions = The New Testament Way

Solution: Let us Equip You!

This is the part we do! Your pastor and staff are supposed to equip you to do ministry! We seek to teach you and to give you opportunities to learn how to do ministry! We also do our best to show you by doing ministry and allowing others to see us practicing what we preach! That's a huge part of our job description and it is a huge part of the solution to the issues we face as a church. God's Word says it plainly in Ephesians...

Ephesians 4:11 So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers,

Ephesians 4:12 to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up

Ephesians 4:13 until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

Ephesians 4:14 Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming.

Ephesians 4:15 Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ.

Ephesians 4:16 From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.

So we are to equip you with by teaching you good doctrine, giving you a good example to follow, and by creating environments where you can worship, learn, and grow! And then we are to give you opportunities and encourage you to do ministry not only in church and through the church, but to help you do ministry where you work, where you go to school, where you do recreation and within your family! But remember, that a huge part of the encouragement and strength you will find to do these things will only be found in fellowship with fellow believers!

Solution: Worship, Fellowship and Learn Together in large groups and small groups!

The writer of Hebrews wrote this...

Hebrews 10:23 Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful.

Hebrews 10:24 And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds,

Hebrews 10:25 not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

Let's not overlook anyone! Let's let everyone know they are welcome in this family! Let's make it our goal that every single person who comes to worship at Northshore Church will eventually get connected to the family and that these connections will not just be on Sunday mornings.

Solution: Commit to Personal Spiritual Growth

Don't wait for us, take personal responsibility for your spiritual growth! Don't wait for Sundays! Worship a little everyday! Spend a little time each day in prayer and in the Word! Attend a small group during the week for extra special fellowship and discussion on how to apply the principles you learned on Sunday to your daily life! We are committed to providing personal growth opportunities for each of you in worship on Sunday mornings, and in small groups throughout the week. We also have Disciple groups, which are In-depth Bible studies that will begin again in January! Pastor Jay provides mission opportunities to do ministry together both locally and internationally! But you must remember that one of the most important things you can do to be a part of the solution at Northshore Church is by focusing on and not neglecting your personal walk with God! Paul prayed for the members of the church at Ephesus this prayer...

Ephesians 1:17 I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better.

Ephesians 1:18 I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people,

Ephesians 1:19 and his incomparably great power for us who believe...

And this leads us to this very important solution...

Solution: Commit to Personal Involvement

Continue in your personal growth to the point that you are personally involved in ministry at some level. And that may mean that you volunteer here at the church for something, but it very much could mean that you might start something off campus at home, at school, or maybe at your workplace! Let me tell you a little story that happened to my wife when she was in high school. Debbie's public school had morning devotions over the intercom. But those were stopped. At first it seemed like a terrible thing, but what happened was that the students started meeting at the flag pole for devotion in the mornings. And believe it or not, that was more effective than something coming out over a loudspeaker in the room that people had no choice to hear, but many times ignored. When they started meeting at the flagpole people were curious and came to see what it was all about! Satan's attempt to stop the gospel actually caused it to spread even more! Such a cool thing how God does that! Amen! So think about it, maybe you

could start something in your school, or in the social group you're a part of, your car club, pickle ball group, or with your golf buddies. It doesn't have to be an hour long study, maybe just a 3 - 5 minute devotion or a simple Scripture verse and prayer. Maybe just asking if anyone has anything they want you to pray with them about. If that leads to something more, that's not a bad thing. It's okay to start small. Or you might even get some of your friends together to do a community project and simply say a prayer for safety and success when you do. You never know what that might turn into! There's so many ways you might get something started.

Northshore Church Results

And here's my prayer! I pray that like the New Testament Church...

The Word of God will spread!

The number of disciples will grow rapidly!

And that folks we never thought would come to know Jesus will be transformed!

Let me remind you that you don't have to have a degree from seminary or be an ordained minister to do ministry. If you are a follower of Jesus, then you have a calling on your life to do ministry in some form or fashion. And you don't have to have our permission to do what God has called you to do in your life when it comes to sharing the gospel with the world. Now, we do ask that the people who become teachers and lead small groups or ministries in our church attend our Northshore Orientation and become a covenant member. The reason why is simple. That lets you know what our major doctrinal beliefs are and helps us avoid any potential division in our purpose, mission, vision and core values. But, again, let me just say this: If you have accepted Jesus Christ as your Savior and you are following Him, then He has called you to share your story and to help point others to faith in Christ! I want to end with something that J. Sidlow Baxter stated in his book *Awake My Heart*, back in 1960...

"The first thing which makes a true Christian minister or missionary or evangelist or preacher or Sunday School teacher, or leader or Christian worker of any kind, is not learning, not eloquence, not wisdom, not organizing ability, not pleasing personality, not even a 'passion for souls,' but a love-passion for Jesus Himself. Nothing, nothing, nothing, can take the place of that. All else without that is like withered flowers. The second thing which makes a true servant of the Lord is a sense of ordination by Christ. Three times our Lord responded to Peter's avowal of love: 'Feed my lambs; tend my sheep, feed my sheep.'"

So folks it's like this: If you truly love Jesus with a passion, then you will love what He loves with a passion and that is the souls of humankind. Jesus Himself said that He came to seek and to save that which is lost! And Jesus is in the saving business. Once again I want to refer to J. Sidlow Baxter's devotional. He shared this testimony from a man by the name of Sam Hadley who became a well known evangelist in the New York area. Sam had been a severe alcoholic and a criminal with enough outstanding troubles with the law to land him in jail for life. He went to the Water Street Rescue Mission in New York, drunk and desperate. He was gloriously saved that night and would later lead that very mission. God used him to bring many hundreds of

people to Jesus who were in the same condition he had been in. Here's what Sam said about his conversion to Jesus that night in the mission...

"I went out into the street, and looked up to the sky. I don't believe I had looked up for ten years. A drunken man never looks up; he always looks down. It was a glorious, star-lit night, and it seemed to me that I could see Jesus looking at me out of a million eyes... That night, right on the corner of Broadway and Thirty-Second Street, I was ordained to preach the everlasting Gospel, and have never doubted it for an instant. I have never stood before an audience without that vision inspiring me."

J. Sidlow Baxter then writes...

"It is a great thing to have a sense of direct commission from Christ Himself, to have 'the ordination of the pierced Hand.'"

I'm going to ask the Praise Band to come back up now. We are going to remember the pierced hands and feet of Jesus this morning as we observe the Lord's Supper. If you have children that you would like to participate in this you are welcome to go get them now. Folks, it's the pierced hand of Jesus that ordains us and motions us to go out into the world with the gospel story of what Jesus did on the cross to save lost souls and to give them purpose in this life and hope of eternal life when this life is over! Would you stand and make your way to one of the tables to get the bread and the juice. Just take it back to your seat and I'll instruct you in just a moment. And if you need to pray with one of our counselors you can go right out those back doors to my left and someone would be happy to talk with you. The writer of Hebrews said...

Hebrews 10:19 Therefore, brothers and sisters, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus,

Hebrews 10:20 by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body,

Hebrews 10:21 and since we have a great priest over the house of God,

Hebrews 10:22 let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water.

Andrew, lead us...

We know that the waters of baptism and the juice and bread we take today, are beautiful symbols of the precious blood of Jesus which cleanses us from sin and makes us right with God! Paul said this...

1 Corinthians 11:23 For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread,

1 Corinthians 11:24 and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me."

1 Corinthians 11:25 In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me."

1 Corinthians 11:26 For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

Let's pray!