

An Incarnational Ministry (Acts 6:1-7)

Introduction: *The significance of Christ's incarnation for our lives together*
Sundar Singh was asked what he had found in Christianity that he hadn't in Sikhism or Hinduism. Singh replied, "I have Christ." "Yes, I know," the professor said impatiently, "but what particular principle or doctrine have you found that you did not have before?" "The particular thing I have found," replied Sundar Singh, "is Christ" (Stott, *The Incomparable Christ*, p. 16). He has no rivals because he is God and man. He strides across history because human history, the history of the world, is for him. In it, God's own divine plan and purpose are unfolding for him. And he came among us, he forever joined himself to our human nature to care for us in our needs and to love us while we were yet sinners, because he is God and God is love.

Review

Luke is recording the early history of the church by alternating between a picture of the church alone and the church in relation to the world (James Boice, *Acts*, pp. 103-104). He's showing us the proper balance we're to have. Some churches are so outwardly focused that they can't attend to problems within. Other churches are so inwardly focused that they forget their mission and witness in the world. Here is the proper balance.

Exposition

John Stott, writes, "[This attack of the devil] was the cleverest of the three [we've seen so far]. Having failed to overcome the church by either persecution or corruption, he now tried distraction. If he could preoccupy the apostles with social administration ... they would neglect their God-given responsibilities to pray and to preach, and so leave the church without any defense against false doctrine" (*Acts*, p. 120). This is a magnificent church, but it is not a perfect church. We've already read of the sense of unity and community and love in this early church. They had the best leaders in the twelve apostles; they were growing rapidly; and yet they had this problem. Yes, spiritual people have problems too. Deacons come about in the early church in the same way the elders first came about in the days of Moses (see Num 11:17, Deut 1:12-13). People say the church isn't about procedures and committees and keeping the books properly. Well, those aren't the most important things, but you can't have a healthy, well-functioning church without them. Administration is listed as one of the gifts of the Spirit in the book of Romans. Wise administration and Biblical structure is essential to the wellbeing of the people of God. And that is how the problem is solved in Acts chapter 6.

Lessons

1. The church must be the embodiment of Christ's love

"A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you" (John 13:34, see 15:12). In the church, we are to love one another, our brothers and sisters in Christ, as he loved us, with the same self-sacrificial love that we see in Jesus.

2. Love demonstrated wins the world

Jesus goes on, "By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:34-35, see Acts 2:44-47, 5:14, 6:6-7). When this fails, it's not just the church that suffers; the perishing world suffers. "A church that cares for its own members is the only kind of church that is capable of caring for new people. To live the gospel is to love the lost. [It] reflects that our Lord himself 'went around doing good' and teaches us to do the same" (G. Keddie, *You Are My Witnesses*, p. 94).

Personal Reformation by the Word (1 Peter 1:22—2:3)

Introduction: *The essential Word*

This word unites our hearts and lives with Christ's, our purposes with his, our loves with his, our hopes and dreams with his. We are taught to be his brethren, his servants, his soldiers, his subjects, and the children of his Father in heaven. This word of God is obviously not a peripheral interest in any Christian life. It governs us! Our entire lives are redefined, redirected, indeed, recreated, by what we read.

1. God gives us birth through the Word (1:23-25)

What *man* brings forth in this world is corruptible and decaying. But what *God* brings forth through his imperishable word is living and enduring forever. "He chose to give us birth through the word of truth" (Jas 1:18). Compare our eternal life in 1 Peter 1:3-4, "He has begotten us again to a *living* hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance *incorruptible* and *undefiled* and that *does not fade away*." The word of God is like seed. It appears small and insignificant, but it's wonderful, amazing, life-giving in its operation. Though it may lie hidden for a time, yet it grows up and produces not only life but excellent fruit which remains forever.

Illustration: *The Pitcairn Bible and the crew of the HMS Bounty*

"The islanders have prayers twice on the Sabbath; after which Mr. Nobbs reads sermons from Burder, Watts, Blair, or Whitefield. There is also a Sabbath-school, a Bible-class is held on the Wednesday, and a day-school every morning and afternoon."

2. God gives us growth through the Word (2:1-3)

The gospel "comes, not in word only, but also in power" (1Th 1:5). And John writes that it makes those strong in whom it abides (1John 2:14). This seed of God's word not only gives life, it produces growth. Therefore, like good farmers, the ground of our hearts must be prepared to receive it (1 Pet 2:1-3). Our hearts mustn't be hardened, and give the enemy the opportunity to trample on it or take it away. The word mustn't be choked with the cares of this life, the pleasures of the world.

The command is to *desire* (or *crave*, NIV) that spiritual food, a word of intense desire, the same word in Psalm 42, "As the deer *pants* for the water brooks, so *pants* my soul for You, O God" (Ps 42:1, LXX). The very same might be said of that drinking of the nourishing milk of the word in the hearing of sermons. You might have come here *desiring* a sermon. But you probably didn't come *panting* for a sermon, *craving* a sermon. Come eager, expectant, wanting to hear the voice of the Lord in your own soul. Don't just *listen* to the reading. *Attend upon* the reading of the word of God, as it's read. Don't just *sing along* with the word of God in these psalms. As Paul says, sing with your spirit and with your mind (1 Cor 14). Come to the Word of God desiring its living, life-giving, nourishing power.

Illustration: *Dawson Trotman born again and nourished by Scripture*

"My promise to God, made that night when the policeman was taking me to jail, did not change my life. Going to young people's meeting on Sunday did not change me either. I was the same guy. ... [But] the Word of God was working. ... That was one of the first lessons I learned at the beginning of the Christian life. That is one of the reasons why I love to see a brand-new Christian begin to get the Word of God down into his heart. If it had not been for those 20 verses, I would have been back in the dance hall and the beer joints" ("Testimony").