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When Satan Attacks

Don't Lose Focus

ACTS 6:1-7

Introduction

1. Over the last few weeks, as we have moved through Luke's account of the early church in the book of Acts, we have been made aware of a truth that continues even to this day.
2. It is the fact that any church which is growing and doing God's will is either already facing or is about to face a ferocious attack by Satan.
3. This is also true of each one of us gathered here this morning — if you are doing God's will and growing in the faith, Satan is in the process of attacking you or will do so in the near future.
4. In Acts 4, following the healing of the lame man by the Beautiful Gate, the chief priests and rulers of the Jews had Peter and John arrested (Acts 4:3).
 - a. They commanded the two men "not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus" (Acts 4:18).
 - b. Peter and John responded, "Whether it is right in the sight of God to give heed to you rather than to God, you be the judge; for we cannot stop speaking about what we have seen and heard" (Acts 4:19-20).
5. In Acts 5, he used corruption from within the church:
 - a. Ananias and his wife, Sapphira, sold a piece of property and kept back a part of the proceeds for themselves, but told the apostles they were contributing the full amount (Acts 5:8).
 - b. This resulted in the loss of both their lives because "they lied to God" (Acts 5:4).
6. Later, in Acts 5, the high priest and the Sadducees had all the apostles arrested

because they were again teaching the people in the Temple.

- a. They reminded the apostles, “We gave you strict orders not to continue teaching in this name” (*Acts 5:28*).
- b. To this, Peter and the apostles responded, “We must obey God rather than men.” (*Acts 5:29*).
- c. Ultimately, they had the apostles beaten and again “ordered them not to speak in the name of Jesus” (*Acts 5:40*).
- d. However, the apostles “kept right on teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ” (*Acts 5:42*).

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- 7. In spite of the devil’s efforts, the church grew each time:
 - a. Following Peter’s first sermon on Pentecost, we read in *Acts 2:41*, “that day there were added about three thousand souls.”
 - b. With the arrest of Peter and John in *Acts 4*, Luke recorded, “But many of those who had heard the message believed; and the number of the men came to be about five thousand” (*Acts 4:4*).

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- c. Following the deaths of Ananias & Sapphira, we find “all the more believers in the Lord, multitudes of men and women, were constantly added to their number” (*Acts 5:14*).
 - d. After the arrest, beating and additional warning from the Sanhedrin to all the apostles, Luke declares “they kept right on teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ” (*Acts 5:42*).
- 8. Having failed in each of his efforts, Satan utilized another tactic — distraction.
 - a. He knew that if he could preoccupy the apostles with social administration, which even though it was essential, was not what the Lord had charged them to do, they would neglect their God-given responsibilities to pray and preach.
 - b. This would leave the young church without any defense against false

doctrine.

9. The question for us to consider this morning is "How did the apostles, through the guidance of the Holy Spirit, keep Satan from accomplishing his goal?"
10. Secondly, "What does this mean for each of us here today?"

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I. The Problem

A. "A COMPLAINT AROSE"

1. Luke begins by telling us "the disciples were increasing in number" (*Acts 6:1*).
2. But then he adds, "a complaint arose on the part of the Hellenistic Jews against the native Hebrews" (*Acts 6:1*).
3. The nature of the complaint: "The Hellenistic Jews" were complaining that "their widows were being overlooked in the daily serving of food" (*Acts 6:1c*).
 - a. Widows naturally formed a considerable proportion of the poorer members of the church.
 - b. These women were being provided with a daily allocation of food made possible by the common pool which the wealthier members had contributed through the selling of their lands and houses (cf. *Acts 4:34*).
 - c. In the minds of the Hellenistic Jews, the widows from among the Hebrews were being favored at the expense of their widows.
4. Since the giving of the law at Mt. Sinai, God had demonstrated concern for the widows in Israel (*Exodus 22:22f.*; *Deuteronomy 10:18*).

"You shall not afflict any widow or orphan. "If you afflict him at all, and if he does cry out to Me, I will surely hear his cry;" (*Exodus 22:22–23*, NASB95)

"He executes justice for the orphan and the widow, and shows His love for the alien by giving him food and clothing." (*Deuteronomy 10:18*, NASB95)
5. Based upon what Paul would later write in his first letter to Timothy (1 Timothy 5:3-16) it would seem that these widows were unable to earn a

living and had no relatives to support them.

6. Because of this, the church had accepted the responsibility and a daily distribution of food was made to them.

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B. WHO WERE THESE WIDOWS?

1. There were two groups of widows in the Jerusalem church:
 - a. “Hebrews” — Aramaic-speaking Jews, most of them were natives of Palestine.
 - 1) These were Jews who spoke only Aramaic, the native language of the Jews in the first century.
 - 2) Most of them were natives of Palestine who were deeply committed to their Hebrew culture.
 - b. The “Hellenistic Jews” who were also known as “Grecian Jews”
 - 1) Jews whose habitual language was Greek.
 - 2) Many of them were descendants of those resettled by the Assyrians and Babylonians over 700 years earlier in the lands outside of Palestine where the Greek and Roman influence was strong.
 - 3) They not only spoke Greek, but thought and behaved like Greeks.
 - ❑ These were the women who were being neglected.
2. In truth, there had always been a rivalry between these two groups in Jewish culture.
3. It was a problem that the apostle Paul would later address in his letter to the churches of Galatia (Galatians 3:28).

“There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” (Galatians 3:28, NASB95)

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C. EVIDENCE OF A DEEPER PROBLEM

1. The issue at hand was more than one of cultural tension.
2. It was a problem of social administration (i.e. organizing the distribution

and thereby settling the complaint).

3. It threatened to occupy all of the apostles time and thus hinder them from carrying out the work that Christ had specifically entrusted to them — preaching and teaching.

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II. The Solution

A. SPEAKING TO THE CONGREGATION

1. The Twelve spoke to the congregation concerning the problem, but did not impose a solution on the congregation.
2. Instead, they gathered the congregation and shared the problem with them.

“It is not desirable (reason, KJV; right, ESV, NIV) for us to neglect the word of God in order to serve tables.” (Acts 6:2, NASB95)

3. It wasn't that the apostles regarded social work as inferior to that of preaching and teaching, or even that it was beneath their dignity.
4. No, it was the fact that they were not at liberty to distract themselves from those tasks with which the Lord had charged them.
5. Thus, they made a proposal to the congregation (Acts 6:3-4).

“Select from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may put in charge of this task. But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word.” (Acts 6:3-4, NASB95)

6. The men set forth by the congregation were to be men who were . . .
 - a. Of honorable reputation — this would allow the congregation to have complete confidence in them.
 - b. Wise — They were qualified to handle the administrative responsibilities and the delicate nature of the situation before them.
 - c. Filled with the Holy Spirit
7. If such men were appointed to take charge of the distribution and see that no further cause for complaint arose, it would leave the apostles free to devote their attention to . . .

- a. "Prayer" (wisdom, guidance, the saints, the work itself, etc.)
- b. "Ministry of the word" (teaching and preaching)

Slide 8**B. LISTENING TO THE CONGREGATION**

"The statement found approval with the whole congregation; and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas and Nicolas, a proselyte from Antioch." (*Acts 6:5, NASB95*)

1. The congregation recognized the importance of what the apostles were saying and put it into effect.
2. "They chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas and Nicolas, a proselyte from Antioch." (*Acts 6:5, NASB95*)
3. All of these men had Greek names which suggests that they too were Hellenists — this would naturally help to alleviate some of the complaining.

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III. Two Principle Truths

A. GOD CALLS ALL OF US TO MINISTRY

1. Whether it is "the ministry of the word" or "the ministry of tables" both are Christian ministries.
2. Both of these ways of serving God and His people are important.
3. We do a great disservice to our Lord's church when we think only of those who preach, as ministers or servants.
4. All of us who are Christians are ministers because we are followers of Him who came "not to be served, but to serve" (*Mark 10:45*).
5. We must not limit Christian ministry to full-time church work and missionary service.
6. In his first letter, the apostle Peter spoke about how we are to serve one another (*1 Peter 4:10-11*).

“As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. Whoever speaks, is to do so as one who is speaking the utterances of God; whoever serves is to do so as one who is serving by the strength which God supplies; so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belongs the glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.” (1 Peter 4:10–11, NASB95)

6. We need to regain this vision of the wide diversity of ministries to which God calls us as His people.

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B. WE MUST NOT NEGLECT THE MINISTRY OF THE WORD

1. The apostles were not too busy for ministry, but they were in danger of becoming preoccupied with the wrong ministry.
2. If we are not careful, we can do the same today to those among us who serve as elders and preachers.
 - a. Those who shepherd God's flock have a responsibility to God's Word.
 - 1) Paul told Timothy that they must be “able to teach” (1 Timothy 3:2).
 - 2) In 1 Timothy 5:17, he wrote, “The elders who rule well are to be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching.” (1 Timothy 5:17, NASB95)
 - 3) He instructed Titus that they must hold “fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching, so that they will be able to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict” (Titus 1:9).
 - b. The primary responsibility which our Lord has assigned to those who preach is the communication of God's Word:

“Preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction.” (2 Timothy 4:2, NASB95)
3. We do a great disservice to our elders when we overwhelm them with social administration.

- a. How the contribution is spent.
 - b. How the building and grounds are maintained.
4. We do the same to our preachers when we pull them away from preaching and evangelizing to do those things of which others are better equipped.
5. When we do this, we lose our focus and bring upon ourselves disastrous results.
6. The standards and quality of preaching and teaching decline since these men have little time to study and pray.
7. The result is a congregation which is hindered from growing to maturity in Christ.
8. Paul said that it is only when elders, preachers and teachers are allowed to exercise their God-given roles that the rest of the congregation can be equipped for “the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ” (Ephesians 4:12).

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IV. The Result

A. THE WORD OF GOD WILL KEEP ON SPREADING

1. This is what happened with the church in Jerusalem — “The word of God kept on spreading” (Acts 6:7).
2. The same will happen here as we each make a conscious effort to see that the “ministry of the word” is not neglected.

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B. THE NUMBER OF DISCIPLES WILL CONTINUE TO INCREASE

1. In the last part of verse 7, Luke wrote, “the number of the disciples continued to increase greatly in Jerusalem.”
2. So much so that as he adds, “a great many of the priests were becoming obedient to the faith” (Acts 6:7c).
3. This verse is the first of six summaries of the church’s growth which Luke inserts throughout the rest of Acts (Acts 9:31; 12:24; 16:5; 19:20; 28:30-31).

4. Each time the Word was spreading, we learn that the church was growing.
5. The reason for such growth: God was at work and neither humans nor demons could stand in his way.

Conclusion

1. As a congregation of God's people, we will grow and thrive in direct proportion to the effort we put into teaching and preaching the Word of God.

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2. Peter knew this all too well:

“Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord;” (2 Peter 1:2, NASB95)

“but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory, both now and to the day of eternity. Amen.” (2 Peter 3:18, NASB95)

3. “For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.” (Hebrews 4:12, NASB95)
4. God, through His word, convicts each of us of our sin and calls us to Himself through His Son, Jesus Christ.

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5. As Peter said to the Sanhedrin, “there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12).