

DEEP IN SCRIPTURE

Verses & Notes January 10, 2007

Acts 2:41-47

- 41: So those who received his word were baptized,
and there were added that day about three thousand souls.
- 42: And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship,
to the breaking of bread
and the prayers.
- 43: And fear came upon every soul;
and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles.
- 44: And all who believed were together and had all things in common;
45: and they sold their possessions and goods
and distributed them to all, as any had need.
- 46: And day by day,
attending the temple together
and breaking bread in their homes,
they partook of food with glad and generous hearts,
47: praising God and having favor with all the people.
And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.

Discussion Notes:

Introduction:

- Imagine that when Henry Ford built his first Model A assembly line, he made daily visits to examine the progress. Whenever he saw something that needed correction, he would jot off a short note. If things were going fine, rather than take the time to write a note, he would merely smile, nod at the foreman, and move on. Suppose then that later after he died, all these notes were gathered into a book. Would this collection of notes, which only contain his corrections to daily problems and little mention of the things that were going right, be an adequate manual for building an automobile manufacturing plant? Would this random collection of notes give everything necessary to build a car? This is a little bit of what it is like when one uses only the documents of the New Testament to describe the structure, beliefs, and practices of the Early Church.
- This is what we will discuss today on **Deep In Scripture**.

Welcome to the second episode in the second year of *Deep in Scripture*:

- Hope you had a blessed Christmas & Epiphany... and thank you ...
- Website; phone numbers;
- RTB&CIY brochure & discussion forum; download PDF
- **1st year of DIS: Mt / Sermon on the Mount = Jesus core teachings**
 - Q: How were these teachings then understood, passed along, & lived out in the early Church? How are we to receive them & live them today?
- **2nd year of DIS: St. Paul's Ltr to the Ephesians:**
 - How did Paul pass on the teachings of Christ?
"In him you also, who have heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and have believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, which is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory" (Eph 1:13-14)

- A very important & popular NT epistle: 100s of commentaries!
 - Used by nearly every Christian tradition to defend its own theological perspective.
 - **Three important Criteria for interpreting Scripture: (CCC, 111-114)**
 1. Be especially attentive "to the content and unity of the whole Scripture."
 2. Read the Scripture within "the living tradition of the whole Church."
 3. Be attentive to the analogy of faith.
 - For this reason, we must not pull Ephesians, or the section from Acts we're studying today, out of context ... or read back into it our modern presumptions.
 - The Henry Ford analogy...the NT documents, though inspired by the HS, were mostly casual letters written by bishops (Paul, John, James, Peter) instigated by problems / concerns that could not be addressed in person.
- We'll begin our Intro to Eph in Feb, but first we'll spend January looking at the background of these churches to whom Paul was writing:
 - How did they first receive the faith? What were their particular struggles? What were the issues they struggled with as new & growing Christians? And why was it necessary for St. Paul to write this letter from prison?
 - Last week: Acts 2:37-40 ... the first seeds of faith;
 - This week: Acts 2:41-47 ... the First gathering of converts = the First new Church.
 - Warning: a different but similar danger exists with using Acts *alone* to define the structure, beliefs, and practices of the early church.
 - Though guided by the HS, most of what St. Luke records is thru 2nd hand knowledge;
 - Constricted by space & time, he condenses & especially focuses on the work of his mentor, Paul.
 - We must be careful not to read back into this condensed document our own prejudices! One answer to this is to only take the data at face value & add nothing; but this has too often led & continues to lead to radical, minimalist reconstructionalism: new independent churches focusing *only* on the literal data of Acts 2. But this ignores the data of history, especially that of the Early Church herself, and the continuity of the Early Church with the Church of the OT.

Ten (more) Things We Can learn about this earliest gathering of the Church:

0. "So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls." (41)

- Conversion, therefore, involved:
 - "receiving his word" = accepting / believing / surrender;
 - Baptism
 - "added" into the membership in the body of Christ / the Church.

1. "And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching" (42)

- Not just to the "Scriptures" (=OT) nor to "private interpretation" of the oral tradition,
- But to the authoritative teaching of the 12, who had received the promised HS! (Jn 14-16)
- More than evangelistic preaching, but catechetical formation of the new converts;

2. "and [the] fellowship," (42)

- Not merely coffee & donuts, but the profound unity of heart brought by the HS:
- Koinonia; communion; 1 John 1:3, "*That which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you may have fellowship with us; and our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ.*"

3. **"to the breaking of bread" (42)**
 - Not merely going out to lunch after worship or to their homes to eat together, though they did do this, but the Eucharist;
 - The Didache, IX all about the Eucharist = "the broken bread" (also, Did., XIV)
 - Acts 20:7,11, "*On the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread...and when Paul had gone up and had broken bread and eaten, he conversed with them a long while, until daybreak...*"
 - 1 Cor 10:16, "*The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not a participation* in the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not a participation* in the body of Christ?*"
 - Note: **koinonia* = fellowship = communion = participation; therefore causes the union mentioned earlier; reminds us of Jn 6:55-56, "*For my flesh is food indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him.*"
 - The only reason this text has come to mean, for some, merely a shared meal, is bec. of the Reformation rejection of the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist.

4. **"and the prayers." (42)**
 - Not merely prayer meetings of extemporaneous prayers & intercessions,
 - But a continuation of the Jewish daily ritual of praying the Psalms PLUS the Our Father. (Didache, VIII)

5. **"And fear came upon every soul;" (43)**
 - More than fear of persecution or loss of friends;
 - Rather the "beginning of wisdom", the "gift of the Spirit" = fear of God!

6. **"and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles." (43)**
 - God worked miraculously thru the Apostles to change hearts & lives;
 - Note: the Apostles were the channels of miracles; not just everyone!

7. **"And all who believed were together and had all things in common; and they sold their possessions and goods and distributed them to all, as any had need." (44-5)**
 - Trying to live out the *Sermon on the Mount* now as the *Body of Christ*!
 - Filling in the gaps from what they've left behind: new & broken relationships!

8. **"And day by day, attending the temple together" (46)**
 - Therefore, in the beginning there was no assumption of a break from Judaism.
 - Jesus had warned them of the impending battles (Mt 10:17f)
 - But they continued faithfully together worshipping in the Temple, day by day!
 - Key: At the time of the events of Acts 2, no separate church: Therefore, cannot be used as a template for the structure, beliefs, & practices of the early Church!

9. **"and breaking bread in their homes, they partook of food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people." (46-47)**
 - but with their Jewish tradition, they added the new "Christian" fellowship.
 - This witness proved favorable with "all the people."
 - Not individual, independent home churches, but the fellowship of likeminded Jews who have accepted Jesus as their Messiah.

10. **"And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved." (47)**
 - The process continued, repeating itself, as grace cut open more hearts!