

# DEEP IN SCRIPTURE

*Verses & Notes March 14, 2007*

*Acts 20:15-27*

- 15: And sailing from there we came the following day opposite Chi'os;  
the next day we touched at Samos;  
and the day after that we came to Mile'tus.
- 16: For Paul had decided to sail past Ephesus,  
so that he might not have to spend time in Asia;  
for he was hastening to be at Jerusalem,  
if possible, on the day of Pentecost.
- 17: And from Mile'tus he sent to Ephesus and called to him the elders of the church.
- 18: And when they came to him, he said to them:  
"You yourselves know how I lived among you  
all the time from the first day that I set foot in Asia,  
19: serving the Lord with all humility and with tears  
and with trials which befell me through the plots of the Jews;  
20: how I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable,  
and teaching you in public and from house to house,  
21: testifying both to Jews and to Greeks  
of repentance to God and of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.
- 22: And now, behold, I am going to Jerusalem, bound in the Spirit,  
not knowing what shall befall me there;  
23: except that the Holy Spirit testifies to me in every city  
that imprisonment and afflictions await me.
- 24: But I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself,  
if only I may accomplish my course  
and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus,  
to testify to the gospel of the grace of God.
- 25: And now, behold, I know that all you  
among whom I have gone preaching the kingdom  
will see my face no more.
- 26: Therefore I testify to you this day  
that I am innocent of the blood of all of you,  
27: for I did not shrink from declaring to you  
the whole counsel of God.

## **Introduction:**

- How many of you parents & grandparents, like me, when trying to help our children through taught times, resort to retelling stories from our youth. "Back when I was in school..." and then we go to explain how we did things with less resources and under considerably more treacherous circumstances. I suppose some of us do this out of nostalgia and some of us out of anger: "Kids today are spoiled!" But usually we do this because we hope our children can learn from our successes and failures. This is part of what we will be discussing today on **Deep In Scripture**.

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- Welcome ... website / phone numbers / special:
- Preparing for our study of Ephesians:
  - Looking at the background in the book of Acts to understand why Paul wrote this letter to the believers in and around Ephesus.
  - The last several weeks, we have examined the spiritual development of the Ephesians:

1. (Acts 19:23-29, 33-35) The Ephesians began as pagans;
  2. (Acts 18:18-21) They received some seeds from Paul's first visit;
  3. (Acts 18:24-28) They then received accurate but inadequate teaching from Apollos;
  4. (Acts 19:1-7) Their faith was corrected by St. Paul;
  5. (Acts 19:8-20) The fruits of St. Paul's ministry.
  6. (Acts 19:20-41) Resistance from the community
- We also reflected on how this illustrates our own spiritual development:
    1. Many of us begin far from God;
    2. We may have had seed planted tho un-nurtured;
    3. We may have received inaccurate or incomplete teaching;
    4. Hopefully, we have discovered the fullness of the faith;
    5. Hopefully, we have seen fruit in our lives & those around us.
    6. Does our faith bring resistance & how do we deal with it?
- **Today we will begin looking at St. Paul's final message to the Ephesian elders:**
    - He is returning to Jerusalem from his missionary journeys ...
    - (read text)
    - When we return, we'll examine this strange account, in which St. Paul lets down his guard and says some things that he may not have wanted published for posterity!

#### **BREAK---**

- Why did I label this account as strange? Well, in a moment we'll see that Paul says some things about himself that don't fit the usual image of a selfless, holy saint.

#### ***15: And sailing from there we came the following day opposite Chi'os; the next day we touched at Samos; and the day after that we came to Mile'tus.***

- Notice the "we": what does this signify?
  - St. Luke is giving a personal running account, probably from a diary.
- [discuss the journey...]

#### ***16: For Paul had decided to sail past Ephesus, so that he might not have to spend time in Asia; for he was hastening to be at Jerusalem, if possible, on the day of Pentecost.***

- Luke notes that Paul was purposely avoiding stopping in Asia? Why?
  - The expressed reasons: He was anxious to get to Jerusalem, and was trying to get there by Pentecost (for Jewish & Christian reasons);
  - But possibly for more personal reasons, which come out in his statement.

#### ***17: And from Mile'tus he sent to Ephesus and called to him the elders of the church.***

- What is telling about this? Miletus is a long way from Ephesus?
  - He does not want to meet with the masses of Christians:
    - Partly because this will delay him too much;
    - But also because he is not in the "mood."
- He does, however, call the elders of the church to meet with him:
  - The word is "presbyters" but probably means bishops & presbyters...
  - These are his closest friends, who have stood beside him...

**18: And when they came to him, he said to them:**

***"You yourselves know how I lived among you  
all the time from the first day that I set foot in Asia,***

**19: *servicing the Lord with all humility and with tears  
and with trials which befell me through the plots of the Jews;***

- Here begins the strangeness!
  - St. Paul begins & then spends most of this message talking about himself!
  - Strange because (1) unlike other speeches, & (2) not becoming a saint!
- Many commentators, hampered by hagiography, make the best of this...
- But what I see here is the real human struggle between head & heart:
  - Paul's convictions are strong, solid, and sound;
  - But right now he is under great stress & anxiety!
  - So, he calls together his closest friends, not to preach to them, but for mutual encouragement & support.
  - He is saying things that he would not normally have said in public;
  - He is speaking to friends whom he presumes appreciate his turmoil.
- But what is his struggle?
  - He will admit this himself in a moment, but essentially he admits to an internal struggle with fear of his future!
  - His friends may notice that he is acting strange, & may wonder; but he waits to tell them.
- ***"You yourselves know how I lived among you  
all the time from the first day that I set foot in Asia,  
servicing the Lord with all humility and with tears  
and with trials which befell me through the plots of the Jews;***
  - His first step into Asia was a brief one ...
  - These are the men who have walked beside him from the beginning;
  - They have always been strengthened by his presence, in person or in spirit.
- What is strange about saying, *"servicing the Lord with all humility"*?
  - "Humility" is the ultimate virtue /fruit of a holy follower of Jesus;
    - The key expression of humility is muteness on the point!
  - This claim might sound boastful / self-serving, to strangers.
  - But to his close compatriots, who themselves had experienced most of this with him, this was nothing more than admitting the facts to friends whom he trusted understood.
- *"with tears & trials"*:
  - Again, his close compatriots had experienced this with him.
- *And the point that these were "trials which befell me through the plots of the Jews"*,
  - Was not an anti-Semitic remark;
  - Together for 2 years they had battled with their unbelieving countrymen;
    - And not just resistance...but "plots":
    - Unbelieving Jews had schemed against Paul & The Way.

**20: *how I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable,  
and teaching you in public and from house to house,***

**21: *testifying both to Jews and to Greeks  
of repentance to God and of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.***

- Again what is strange about mentioning "that he did not shrink..."?
  - Again, this might sound boastful / self-serving, to strangers.
  - But to his close compatriots, who themselves had experienced most of this with him, this was nothing more than confirming facts.
- Paul had proclaimed the Gospel with boldness, ignoring personal safety;
  - Both in public & in private: he hadn't opted for a safe, secret mission;

- Both to Jews & Greeks: he hadn't focused on a safe audience!
- A message of repentance to God & of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ:
  - This must not be interpreted as the complete substance of his Gospel;
  - Rather these were also the two things that were most controversial:
    - Both were offensive to his audience!
    - But he didn't water-down his message to avoid attack!

**22: *And now, behold, I am going to Jerusalem, bound in the Spirit, not knowing what shall befall me there;***

**23: *except that the Holy Spirit testifies to me in every city that imprisonment and afflictions await me.***

- Here Paul tells his friends his struggles;
  - All realize how dangerous it might be for Paul to go to Jerusalem;
    - Some, like Peter to Jesus, tried to prevent him from going.
  - But he shares with his closest friends:
    - He IS going;
    - Bound by the Spirit (the full conviction & affirmation of prayer);
    - Not knowing what will happen (the Spirit has left this blank)
    - Except that the Spirit makes it clear that he will face imprisonment & afflictions.
- This is very much like Jesus' final night with his apostles!

**24: *But I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may accomplish my course and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God.***

- Again, to strangers this may sound like a self-serving boast!
- But to his friends, he lays himself bare, letting them see his personal struggle:
  - These are his convictions...(Phil 1:19-23)
  - his life & safety are not as important as completing the mission he received personally by revelation from Jesus himself!
  - He knows this, but this doesn't necessarily prevent his heart from anxiety!

**25: *And now, behold, I know that all you among whom I have gone preaching the kingdom will see my face no more.***

- He may have said this with great emotion & pause, looking at each with affection;
- The combination of his convictions & fear...

**26: *Therefore I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all of you,***

**27: *for I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God.***

- Why, in this setting, does he say this?
- The last time it is recorded he said something like this was at Corinth: Acts 18: 6, *"And when they opposed and reviled him, he shook out his garments and said to them, "Your blood be upon your heads! I am innocent. From now on I will go to the Gentiles."*
- Paul's mission from Jesus was to preach the Gospel of the kingdom;
  - As he reminds them, he in no way shrank back from doing this;
  - They therefore had heard & received the message.
  - What they do with it, how they respond, is their responsibility:
    - Their future with God is not Paul's responsibility!
- This is another way of Paul saying, my task here is complete! Not it's up to you!

When we return, will consider what this says for us today.

## **BREAK**

### **We can glean several things from this passage:**

1. It helps us appreciate the plight of all those throughout history who have brought us the faith:
  - Not merely the preserving, protecting, copying & passing on of a book,  
*Though this is part of it;*
  - Rather, they imitated St. Paul in every way!
2. It helps us appreciate the struggles of our spiritual leaders: bishops & priests;
3. Three things for ourselves:
  - a. Like Paul & Jesus, if we refuse to shirk from our calling, we will encounter resistance;
  - b. Like Paul & Jesus, sometimes our heart doesn't match our head;
  - c. Like these Ephesian elders, our spiritual future is in our own hands.