

DEEP IN SCRIPTURE

Verses & Notes April 4, 2007

Acts 20:28-38

- 28: Take heed to yourselves and to all the flock,
in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers,
to care for the Church of God
which he obtained with the blood of his own Son.
- 29: I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you,
not sparing the flock;
- 30: and from among your own selves will arise men speaking perverse things,
to draw away the disciples after them.
- 31: Therefore be alert,
remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day
to admonish every one with tears.
- 32: And now I commend you to God and to the word of his grace,
which is able to build you up
and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified.
- 33: I coveted no one's silver or gold or apparel.
- 34: You yourselves know that these hands ministered to my necessities,
and to those who were with me.
- 35: In all things I have shown you that by so toiling one must help the weak,
remembering the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said,
`It is more blessed to give than to receive.'"
- 36: And when he had spoken thus, he knelt down and prayed with them all.
- 37: And they all wept and embraced Paul and kissed him,
- 38: sorrowing most of all because of the word he had spoken,
that they should see his face no more.
And they brought him to the ship.

Introduction:

- The Church teaches that "the books of Scripture firmly, faithfully, and without error teach that truth which God, for the sake of our salvation, wishes to see confided to the Sacred Scripture." He did this not in the form of a theological systematic textbook, but rather through the recording of wise proverbs, inspirational psalms, the teachings and actions of Jesus, the encouraging and corrective words of apostolic bishops like Sts. Paul and Peter, but most often through the drama of biblical history. This is what we will be discussing today on **Deep In Scripture**.

- Welcome ... website / phone numbers / special:
- Preparing for our study of Ephesians:
 - Looking at the historical biblical background to understand why Paul wrote his letter to the believers in and around Ephesus.
 - So far, we have examined the spiritual development of the believers in Ephesus, and how this compares to our own spiritual development;
 - Several weeks ago we examined the opening of St. Paul's final message to the

- Ephesian elders as he met with them on his journey back to Jerusalem...
- The drama of biblical history encourages us to take a wider perspective: The NT epistles were not written in a vacuum; there is an historical context, though sometimes elusive, behind every letter, which helps us better understand the inspired author's original intent and ultimately the meaning for us today, even though we live 2000 years later in a radically different context. How does what St. Paul said to a group of elders on the coast of Asia 2000 years ago directly touch our lives today? This emerges from the beauty of biblical drama.
 - The last two weeks, we took a slight detour to examine the writings of two ECFs: Sts. Clement & Ignatius of Antioch. We did this partially as a follow up to my Journey Home program presentation on "The ECFs I Never saw" ... But we also did this because the study of the ECFs helps us have a better understanding of biblical drama. Many Christians who want to understand the faith and practice of the earliest Christians only study the book of Acts, apart from the wealth of extra-biblical writings that help us better understand the context and trajectory of the Book of Acts ...
 - This week, we'll examine St. Paul's departing words of encouragement & exhortation.
 - Behind these words are the wisdom of an inspired apostolic bishop, St. Paul; Jesus promised his apostles that he would give them the Holy Spirit. In the Gospel of John, we learn that He said the Holy Spirit would remain in them, teach them everything, remind them of all He had told them, guide them to all truth, and declare to them the things that are coming. In other words, His apostles would possess an inspiration that helps them understand, from God's perspective, the past, the present, and the future. In this account from Acts, we witness St. Paul's response to this knowledge: he makes a special trip to prepare these bishops for their leadership through difficult times.
 - Read text ...

BREAK---

**28: *Take heed to yourselves and to all the flock,
in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers,
to care for the Church of God
which he obtained with the blood of his own Son.***

- In this short sentence, we find six important points for these bishops:
 - First, they must take care of themselves, then the flock!
 - Like on the airlines...
 - Must not neglect their own salvation! (1 Cor 9:27)
 - Not channels...Reservoirs!
 - Then they can more adequately meet the needs of their flock
 - ***In what ways is this true for us?***
 - Second, yet, they must not get caught up in themselves: the flock!
 - Use of "Flock" connects the Church with the biblical history (pastoral metaphor) (Ps 100:3; Isa 40:11; Jer 13:17; Jn 10)
 - Third, not just their favorites: "All" is a special added emphasis!
 - Fourth, the phrase "In which" reminds them from which they came and remain: they are a part of and from the flock;
 - Fifth, the phrase "the Holy Spirit has made you" reminds them that they did not achieve their leadership position on their own; it was given; they were made bishops!
 - "overseers" = episkopus = bishops
 - Sixth, their calling: "to care for the Church of God "
 - From same word as "flock", i.e., "shepherd."
 - "the Church of God": becomes one of the main themes of his later

- letter;
- "which he obtained ... blood..."
 - Ignatius, Ephesians 1:1
 - Clement 2, 13-16.
- Therefore, the seriousness of their calling & responsibility!
- Lumen Gentium, 6

29: *I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock;*

30: *and from among your own selves will arise men speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them.*

- "I know": A certainty from his experience, observations, and insight;
- "after my departure": His presence is a barrier to the oncoming evil; therefore his melancholy!
- From without and within!
- "Not sparing the flock" ... not really caring about their welfare!
- "speaking perverse things" ... literally distortions; twisting the truth to cause schism.
- Proven to come true in biblical drama:
 - 1 Jn 2:19
 - thru the writings of St. John, Apocalypse, 2:1-7
 1. *"To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: 'The words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand, who walks among the seven golden lampstands.*
 2. *"I know your works, your toil and your patient endurance, and how you cannot bear evil men but have tested those who call themselves apostles but are not, and found them to be false;*
 3. *I know you are enduring patiently and bearing up for my name's sake, and you have not grown weary.*
 4. *But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first.*
 5. *Remember then from what you have fallen, repent and do the works you did at first. If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent.*
 6. *Yet this you have, you hate the works of the Nicola'itans, which I also hate.*
 7. *He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who conquers I will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.'*
 - The witness of the ECF quotes on schism ...)

Letter to the Philadelphians, 3.2

"For as many as are of God and of Jesus Christ are also with the bishop. And as many as shall, in the exercise of repentance, return into the unity of the Church, these, too, shall belong to God, that they may live according to Jesus Christ. Do not err, my brethren. If any man follows him that makes a schism in the Church, he shall not inherit the kingdom of God. If any one walks according to a strange opinion, he agrees not with the passion of Christ."

31: *Therefore be alert, remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to admonish every one with tears.*

32: *And now I commend you to God and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified.*

- Given what he has forewarned, he concludes:
 1. Be watchful, alert; do not become complacent!!!
 2. Remember & imitate me! I have prepared you, not once but many times!
 3. Remember my tearful admonition: Why? He knew all along this day would come!
 4. (Like Jesus) Remember, you are not left alone (Jn 14-16):

- Commends them into God's care
- & the apostolic message of Grace, which is able to:
 - build them up ; give them the strength they need; (1 Thes 2:13)
"And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers."
 - Give them an inheritance!
 1. A gift of grace
 2. (pf ptc pass) made holy amongst the holy.

33: *I coveted no one's silver or gold or apparel.*

34: *You yourselves know that these hands ministered to my necessities, and to those who were with me.*

- Why is it important for him to remind them of this? The Accusers!
- Paul often in his letters makes the same point: (1 Thes 2:9-12)
9: For you remember our labor and toil, brethren; we worked night and day, that we might not burden any of you, while we preached to you the gospel of God.
10: You are witnesses, and God also, how holy and righteous and blameless was our behavior to you believers;
11: for you know how, like a father with his children, we exhorted each one of you and encouraged you and charged you
12: to lead a life worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory.
- 'Apparel' ... clothing was a significant part of wealth (Mt 6:19).

35: *In all things I have shown you that by so toiling one must help the weak, remembering the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'*

- One's life is a sacrifice for others! (Rom 12:1; Col 1:24;
- "I have shown you..." ... the continuing responsibility of all bishops to pass on the apostolic model; this is why when a bishop fails, it is a grave matter!
- "remembering the words of the Lord Jesus..." ... no where in NT!!!
 - Did he make this up? Like "God helps those who help themselves."
 - NO; oral tradition! (2 Thes 2:15; 1 Cor 15:1-2)
- "It is more blessed..." ~ Sirach 4:31; core of Sermon on the Mount!

36: *And when he had spoken thus, he knelt down and prayed with them all.*

37: *And they all wept and embraced Paul and kissed him,*

38: *sorrowing most of all because of the word he had spoken, that they should see his face no more.*

- "knelt down and prayed with them all" ... glimpse of their prayer practice!
- Mixed emotions! Sorrow & joy (2 Cor 2:4; Rom 12:15)
- Since other epistles suggest that St. Paul eventually returned, Luke wrote this earlier!

And they brought him to the ship.

- A long walk to the harbor!
- Reminds me of the apostles watching Jesus ascend! Hesitant to let him go!