

DEEP IN SCRIPTURE

Verses & Notes April 18, 2007

Acts 20:31-38

- 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:

- In the book of Acts we read about the sacrificial ministry of the Apostle Paul, carrying the Gospel message to the Jews and gentiles living in the countries along the shores of the Mediterranean sea. Every where he went he prepared leaders, appointing bishops and elders, to carry on after him, and one thing he was sure would happen: the devil would do everything he could to stop the proclamation of the good news. No matter what Paul did or said, there would be someone who would try to find fault with him and his message. Such has been true throughout the history of the Church and this is part of 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 began looking at St. Paul's final message to the Ephesian elders in Acts 20 as he met with them on his journey back to Jerusalem...
- In verse 28, St. Paul gave six points of instruction to the bishops he had appointed to watch over the flock in Ephesus, and we considered how these apply not just to bishops but to us;
- Last week, we examined vss. 29-32: St. Paul's warning to be vigilant for false teachers in the Church!
 - The "fierce wolves" would come among them, from outside & from within, twisting the truth of the Gospel to their own advantage, causing schism, pulling disciples out of the Church.
 - We considered how this has happened throughout the history of the Church:
 - Psalm 11:3, "If the foundations are destroyed, what are the righteous to do?"
 - Expresses the opinion used by "fierce wolves" throughout history to justify schism:

- They sometimes redefine / shift the “foundations”;
 - They declare the Church “destroyed” / apostate;
 - They declare themselves the “righteous” / the true leaders who now will correct what has been “destroyed”
- This all denies the promise of Christ:
 - Mt 16: 17-19

And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jona! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the powers of death shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven."
 - John 14-16, where Jesus promises to his hand-chosen apostles that he would send the Holy Spirit who would remain in them, teach them everything, remind them of all He had told them, guide them into all truth, and declare to them the things that were to come.
 - Mt 28:18-20

And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age."
- Certainly there have been “fierce wolves” within the leadership of the Church!
- But as St. Augustine said in his Treatise on Baptism against the Donatists, *"There is nothing more serious than the sacrilege of schism because there is no just cause for severing the unity of the Church."*
- In today’s text, vss. 31-38, we hear St. Paul’s final words of encouragement, handing over the baton of leadership.
- [Read text...]

BREAK

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 alert”
 - Do not become complacent!!! Expect the Spiritual battle!
 - St. Peter gave similar advice: 1 Peter 5:1-11

1: So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ as well as a partaker in the glory that is to be revealed.

2: Tend the flock of God that is your charge, not by constraint but willingly, not for shameful gain but eagerly,

3: not as domineering over those in your charge but being examples to the flock...

8: Be sober, be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking some one to devour.

9: Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same experience of suffering is required of your brotherhood throughout the world.

10: And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, establish, and strengthen you.
 2. “Remember”
 - One of the most common things St. Paul tells his disciples is to remember and hold onto what they had heard or received from him:
 - 2 Thes 2:15

So then, brethren, stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught by us, either by word of mouth or by letter.

- 2 Tim 3:14-15
But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings which are able to instruct you for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.
 - This is exactly what the Church has always understood as it's responsibility. The first sentence in Pope John Paul II's Apostolic Letter introducing the new Catechism, he wrote: *"Guarding the deposit of faith is the mission which the Lord entrusted to his Church, and which she fulfills in every age."*
 - In this case, Paul is telling these bishops to "remember & imitate me!" I have prepared you, not once, but many times: "for three years I did not cease night or day..."
- 3. "my tearful admonition": Why? He knew all along this day would come!
- 4. (Like Jesus) Remember, you are not left alone:
 - Commends them into God's care (banking on the promise of Jesus in Mt 28);
 - & the apostolic message of Grace, which is able to build them up ; give them the strength they need;
 - 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.

- Why does St. Paul turn their attention to this?
 - Common attack: preaching for money! He often had to defend himself!
 - 1 Thes 2:9-12
"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."
 - 1 Cor 9:1-23...
 - vs. 3-4, "This is my defense to those who would examine me. Do we not have the right to our food and drink?"
 - vs 14: "...the Lord commanded that those who proclaim the gospel should get their living by the gospel."
 - Yet vs. 15: "But I have made no use of any of these rights, nor am I writing this to secure any such provision."
 - Why? Vs 12: "...we endure anything rather than put an obstacle in the way of the Gospel of Christ."
 - Why mention 'Apparel'? Clothing was a significant part of wealth (Mt 6:19).
 - Sign of status!

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

- St. Paul continued his tent-making business while preaching;
- He gave them an example to follow.

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)
 - A leader must not abuse his congregation's generosity for self gain!
- "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!

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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)
“For I wrote you out of much affliction and anguish of heart and with many tears, not to cause you pain but to let you know the abundant love that I have for you.”
- 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!