

ACTS 20:28-32
THE FLOCK PURCHASED WITH HIS BLOOD

Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves. Therefore watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears. So now, brethren, I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified.

How many “pastors” are here this morning? Well, what does the word “pastor” mean? “Pastor” means “shepherd.” How many “shepherds” are here this morning? I don’t mean “shepherds” in the agricultural sense, in the sense of the *ovine industry*, sheep raising. I mean shepherds in the sense of caring for the *spiritual* lives and souls of people belonging to God. Jesus, THE Good Shepherd who gave up His life for the sheep, is here. The “pastor” of St. Luke’s is here. How many other shepherds are here who care for the spiritual needs of sheep and lambs of God entrusted to their care? There are the Sunday School teachers, the members of the church council, the organists, the voters assembly, each and all entrusted with the spiritual care of the members. There are dads and moms with young children, Grandpas and Grandmas, uncles and aunts, caring for the spiritual needs of family. Each person here this morning has a realm of people they touch and with whom they have opportunity to help shepherd in spiritual matters—helping them to know that they are sinners, but sinners forgiven in the crucified and risen Jesus, redeemed sinners serving the Lord with new and willing hearts. Every one here is a shepherd, a pastor, in one degree or another. The words of this text apply to us all.

Paul was on his way to Jerusalem at the close of his third missionary journey. He proclaimed Jesus, as Savior of all. He stopped at Miletus near Ephesus, where he summoned the elders / the leaders / the pastors of the congregation in Ephesus. He had spent more than three years there earlier. He knew they would never see each other again. He spoke to these pastors from the depths of his heart. He is speaking also to you and to me.

Therefore take heed to yourselves, his words to the pastors. Consider, would you go to a dentist whose mouth was full of rotten teeth? Pastors need to keep up their own spiritual health. You, as the “pastors” and shepherds that you are, need to care for your own spiritual health. If sin means nothing to you, if forgiveness in Jesus means nothing to you—“Ho-hum, same old business”—what effect will that have on your caring for the spiritual needs of those around you? Half-hearted? Only a job? A burden? A duty obligated to be fulfilled. *Take heed to yourselves*. Realize that God, who is displeased with your conduct, is also the God who in His mercy forgives you in Jesus. That is something to share!

Take heed also to all the flock. Serve the flock in Jesus. Be concerned about them—not how they can serve you, but how you can serve them. Pity the pastor who comes to a congregation to see what he can get out of them. Pity the congregation. The shepherd serves Jesus’ sheep and lambs. Does a parent see what he or she can get out of the children? A parent’s role is to love, train, and lead the children—to lead them to Jesus above all! Note the word “all.” Take heed to *all* the flock, each one—not just your favorites, or those similar to you, not just those who are quick learners, or super cooperative. Serve all those in your sphere and flock of influence.

Among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers The Holy Spirit has put you into the particular shepherd role that you have. Have any of the pastors at St. Luke’s come to you by luck? by their own scheming? or by your own scheming? Have your children come to you, parents, by your own “shopping”? The Holy Spirit directs all these things. The councilmen, the Sunday School teachers, the organists, the voters, and the members at large are not here by accident or luck, but by the Holy Spirit’s directing. Likewise He entrusts each with the privilege to serve in whatever capacity to He gives them. *Shepherd the church of God*. Take care of the sheep and lambs of God—of God’s “church.” The “church” is the assembly of those “called out” to be His family. They are His family and flock. In your role be a faithful shepherd and “pastor” to them.

He purchased them with His own blood. These sheep and lambs are loved dearly by the Lord. He gave His life for them. He suffered shame and pain, so that the flock would be safe. He gave His own blood. Here is a deep theological truth. Jesus was and is a man. Jesus was and is God. God is a spirit. He has not flesh and bones. Jesus said, “*I and the Father are one. . . . The Father is in Me and I in Him*” (John 10:30, 38). Yet in the person of Jesus, who is God, God paid the deep sacrifice for you. *He purchased the church with His own blood*. In the person of Jesus, God bled for you. This passage makes it very clear Jesus is God and man, the Savior who loves you dearly.

Do not be misled in your thoughts about this “purchasing”—literally “to put a border around you to make you His, that is, to acquire you.” Jesus acquired you at the expense of His blood. But why? It was BECAUSE HE LOVED, AND LOVES, YOU. It is His marvelous grace, His undeserved love for your pardon and for mine. Before God we are disobedient sinners, criminals of the worst kind. For you and for me God sent Him to bleed and die. He did NOT do it because you of yourself are so valuable, and “really something” on your own. Never forget, you are a sinner. “We are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags” (Isaiah 64:6). Without the righteousness of Jesus given to you by God through faith in His Son (faith alone), you have no value before God. It sounds harsh, but it’s plain and simple. “He that believeth not shall be damned” (Mark 16:16)—even though Jesus died for unbelievers too. Condemned! Not much value there!

In His love, Jesus paid the exorbitant (“out of this world”) price for you. But the devil does not want you to profit from Jesus’ undeserved salvation for you. Paul writes, *For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock.* Jesus Himself said, *Beware of false prophets who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves! (Matthew 7:15).* The devil works from the outside to get inside the church, the assembly of believers—to destroy it. His goal is to spare none, to leave none alive and well. Don’t think his goal is to get half, and you’ll be in the half that is spared. All are in the devil’s sights. None will get a pass. From the outside forces such as Hinduism, Buddhism, Christless Judaism, eastern Mysticism, Christless Communism, are agents of Satan seeking by force or trickery to overpower the church and destroy it, both you and the flock under your care. It’s not just a game! It’s Satan vs the Savior. It’s condemnation and eternal separation from God vs. forgiveness and eternal life in Jesus. You cannot be too careful.

There’s more. Paul further says, *Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves.* Lies and untruth from Satan will also arise from within—from within your own heart which all too easily wants to follow the golden road of Satan, from within our own congregation—it’s bombarded by so many modern “appealing” ideas, from within our church body needing quick ways to fix sagging numbers, and from within the entire visible Christian church—so as to draw away disciples. Have not voices arisen within visible Christianity that deceive and confuse the childlike faith of Jesus’ sheep and lambs? It’s like weeds in a garden, First they look non-descript and harmless, then they persistently hide among the beans, or the carrots, or the tomatoes, then they stand tall, upright, and proud, without shame, seeking to take over the whole plot—if not this year, next year, or in five years—kochia, pigweed, thistles. Voices have already arisen within the visible Christian church distorting God’s message of grace. For example: Voices say a believer has to suffer in a purgatory to be purged from remaining sins—as if Christ has not paid the price in full. Baptism is only an ordinance by which believers show they align with Jesus; as if it is not a means by which God washes away sins. Communion is but an outward display that shows one aligns with Jesus—as if it is not a means by which the Lord personally assures the sinner of forgiveness in His innocent suffering and death. Voices say God has chosen some individuals for hell no matter what. Others say, one must make a willful decision and open the heart to Jesus or one cannot be a believer—although the Bible says “No one can say Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit” (I Corinthians 12:3). Voices with the church say, The miracles of the Bible did not happen that way, Jesus did not biologically rise from the grave. Etc. From within the Christian church, men and voices have risen up—whether maliciously or naively with sincerest of intentions, but nonetheless incorrect —,to speaking perverse things—distorted things—to draw away the disciples after themselves and away from Jesus.

Therefore watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears. Paul knew what was coming. He warned them to “watch!” to be alert, lest the untruths of Satan distort and mangle the truths of God. Therefore, you also be alert to stand for the Truth of Scripture. Do not give open approval or unwitting approval to those who teach otherwise. “I am against the prophets who use their tongues and say, He saith” (Jeremiah 23:31). “A little leaven leavens the whole lump” (I Corinthians 5:6). The devil’s long term goal is to destroy the Truth of God with lies. Am I saying that it is our congregation or the CLC alone that are the only ways to heaven? No. But the Bible tells us to beware of false prophets and that what we feed our soul, to alert as to what we confess before men. Do not hold hands with Untruth. It only serves long term harm.

How will you stay faithful to the Lord and His Truth? *So now, brethren, I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified.* Paul commends and entrusts the believers to God and to God’s Word. The only way to recognize that which is false and of the devil is to stop analyzing and rationalizing everything with your own mind, thinking how “right” it must be. Rather study the Bible to learn the Truth. Jesus alone is the Savior. In Him you have a great inheritance, the inheritance of heaven forever! It’s the Word and the Holy Spirit in the Word that point you to Him. Keep yourself and your flock safe in The Word of Jesus alone!

Amen! So be it!

Pastor Kanzenbach---