

Battle for the Bible

by Nigel Lee

The sermon emphasizes the importance of spiritual leaders caring for their flock and the consequences of a famine of the word, which leads to weakening of faith, misunderstanding of personal experience, and Christ being hidden from view.

Scripture: Joshua 1:7, Acts 20:32-33, Acts 20:35

Topics: "Bible"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of guarding oneself and taking care of the flock. He compares the spiritual feeding of others to a mother feeding her baby, highlighting the significance of being spiritually nourished in order to pass on meaningful teachings. The speaker also emphasizes the importance of worshiping God after having a glimpse of His greatness and promises. Additionally, the speaker warns against the dangers of false teachings and the need to protect the church from those who may try to harm it. Overall, the sermon emphasizes the responsibility of pastors and leaders to prioritize their own spiritual well-being and the well-being of their congregation.

Transcript

Spiritual leadership. Now, the Biblical news regarding spiritual leaders, I'm afraid, is rather gloomy. Frequently, when Scripture speaks of spiritual leaders, it has some rather tough things to say about them.

A lot of condemnation. Turn, if you will, to Ezekiel, chapter 34. Ezekiel 34.

And the prophet says, The word of the Lord came to me, Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel. Prophesy and say to them, This is what the sovereign Lord says. Woe to the shepherds of Israel.

You know, it's so specific. The Spirit of God is going to say some very specific things about the spiritual leaders in Israel. So, I heard last night someone was, I think, reporting something that Gerald Coates once said.

He was taking off a prophecy in some church, which God says, I, the Lord, am omniscient. And as far as I know, I've nothing against you, my people, at the moment. How different from Biblical prophecy.

The Lord has something here to say, but it's very sharp and pointed. Woe to the shepherds of Israel, who only take care of themselves. Should not shepherds take care of the flock? Obvious question.

You eat the curds, you clothe yourselves with the wool, and slaughter the choice animals, but you do not take care of the flock. You have not strengthened the weak, or healed the sick, or bound up the injured. You have not brought back the strays, or searched for the lost.

You have ruled them harshly and brutally. So they were scattered. Because there was no shepherd, and they became food for all the wild animals.

My sheep wandered all over the mountains. My sheep, says the Lord, they're mine. How dare you do this? Leave them to be scattered, wandering on every high hill.

They were scattered over the whole earth, and no one searched or looked for them. What's wrong with the shepherds, the spiritual leaders? They look after themselves, at the expense of the flock. I put that that way, very deliberately.

It's not that they look after themselves first, and then the flock. It is this. They look after themselves, at the expense of those whom God has given to them to care for.

Turn over to the book of Amos. Amos. Hosea, Joel, Amos.

Chapter 8. And Amos has a very similar thing to say. He speaks of the kind of famine that doesn't show up on slides, on compassionate advertising, that doesn't appear in photographs. Amos chapter 8, verse 11.

The days are coming, declares the Sovereign Lord, when I will send a famine through the land. Not a famine of food or a thirst for water, but a famine of hearing the words of the Lord. And God says He will send it.

I find that very searching. God will put His people in a situation where they find it more and more difficult to hear His word. Men will stagger from sea to sea, and wander from north to east, searching for the word of the Lord, but they will not find it.

In that day, the lovely young women and strong young men will faint because of thirst. Amos speaks of a famine that's coming, and he pictures desperate, frantic souls going from one end of the country to another, maybe from one great big convention to another conference, north and south, east and west, trying to hear God's voice. And God says, in the end, they will faint through thirst.

Now why? Why should God say such a thing is coming? Is this judgment in any way related to things that have gone before in the nation's experience? Well, I believe God explains His ways through the prophets, and if you turn back to Amos 2, Amos 2, verse 10, we see the reason for what's coming. And it's very specific, because God's judgments fit the crime, if you like. His disciplines are always appropriate.

Amos 2, verse 10, I brought you up out of Egypt, and I led you for 40 years in the desert to give you the land of the Amorites. I also raised up prophets from among your sons. I gave them a word, you see.

I taught them. I took them away to where they could hear my voice, perhaps in the wilderness. I raised up prophets from among your sons and Nazarites from among your young men.

Is this not true, people of Israel, declares the Lord? But you made the Nazarites drink wine and commanded the prophets not to prophesy. You wouldn't listen to them. You gradually put pressure on them so that their message became blunted and dulled.

Many of them actually became so casual about what they drink that the Lord was not able to get through with the sharpness and clarity which the people needed. I gave you prophets. You made them drink wine and then you told them not to speak.

Now, the prophecies of Amos come at a time when there was a real triumphant sense of God in the midst of the nation. Trade was booming. Money was rolling in.

Our true moral standards were collapsing and there wasn't very much honesty in business. Eighth century yuppies were on the make and the standards of moral life at the top level of society, well, you didn't need to look too closely, the debauchery among the princes of the nation, the moral standard that was set at the top level of politicians and royal family and so on, that was pretty bad. But the people themselves felt a tremendous sense of confidence.

But, says Amos, thus says the Lord, you're living off the spiritual capital of a bygone era and in fact you are not continuing to so listen to the word of the Lord that you will be safe and preserved and healthy in the future. Now, actually, you can find again and again and again in scripture, God's heart cry is the same. You're not listening, he says.

Wake up. I have things to say. I often find in my own experience, in a little small way, it's exactly the same.

God will warn me, speak to me, perhaps in my own regular reading and then something will happen and maybe I get into a crisis and I sit and think and, oh Lord, you spoke to me about that this morning, didn't you? Or yesterday. I had a situation in my own church a couple of years ago where there was a married woman, mother of five kids, I think, and she got involved with a man much younger than herself who was not her husband and there was a lot of very draining counseling and talk involved in that situation and she was one day sitting in my room and I said to her tell me, before this ever started or just at the moment it was about to begin did Jesus say to you, hey, stop, be careful don't go any further down this road down this road lies only sorrow and tears and she actually cried there and then her head went down and she said, yes, the Lord did, I have to confess speak to me. The Lord does and yet we don't listen think of those times in scripture where there is a handover of the baton, as it were where there is a change in leadership or a shift in what's going on, what can you think of? Moses dies and Joshua takes over what does the Lord say to Joshua? Joshua chapter 1 be strong, courageous and day and night meditate on the word, give your mind to the scripture.

When Solomon takes over from David is it not the same message? Be courageous be strong and set your heart to obey the commandments of your God when Israel, Jerusalem, its walls and temple are built back up again after the captivity Nehemiah and Ezra are standing there the people are gathered before them, what do they do? they spend hours reading out the scriptures the foundations, not just of the walls and the temple but of the very lives of the people and the community of God, scripture now, what happens when you get into a famine like Amos predicts, a famine as we've said that doesn't show up in the photographs, well there comes to be a gradual weakening of faith, at the individual level, the ordinary God fearing believer, gradually finds that his faith is getting weaker now, we sometimes try in our day to whip up faith feelings Bible says very plainly that faith arises out of the word of God God speaks, we believe it, faith grows because of scripture, that's Romans 10, or I can give you a less well known verse, but it says exactly the same in 1 Thessalonians 2 and verse 13, 1 Thessalonians 2 13, I'll read it for you because many of you are now taking notes and you haven't got time to turn up the pages, I can tell when there's no longer a rustling either people have gone to sleep or they're licking their pencils fast and writing Paul says,

we also thank God continually because when you receive the word of God which you heard from us you accepted it, not as the word of men but as it actually is, the word of God which is at work in you who believe God's word actually does work clearing out the old manure inside our hearts energizing us now when people get into a situation of spiritual famine, God's word is not dwelling richly within them, they react in a number of different ways and I suspect that sometimes they try to whip up certain kind of religious adrenaline type of feelings it's sad really growth doesn't come about just through trying to grow do you remember who said that? by taking thought, can you add one cubit to your stature? who said that? ah, Jesus, yes it's the authorized version which you obviously know better the NIV puts it a little bit differently in other words, you cannot grow just by concentrating on growing or trying very hard to grow you know, you sit in your front room and you really concentrate on growing, nothing happens supposing you gather your children around at breakfast time everyday you give them no food, but you put them through a brief 20 minute positive thought process about growing stronger you could even sing songs about growing you could pray about growing in the end, the best way to help them to grow is to give them the breakfast and stop hanging about feed them and Jesus says that you need to make sure that the factors for growth are present and then the young Christian will grow by taking thought merely you add nothing what do you need for growth?

I want to talk about feeding people and feeding yourself well obviously, to start very basically you need food, you need health and you need rest where these things are not present, there comes to be a gradual weakening of faith I sometimes wonder at the way we do things even this morning even this morning now, I hope I'm alone on the platform, I can say what I like the order in our services we sometimes have worship and then we follow it with the word, that seems to me to be a cockeye way of going on, I think we ought to have the word first, show people God in the scriptures, as we saw this morning, and then we respond worship is a response you can't come into a meeting, sit down and go click into worship mode and out it all pours, just naturally flowing forth from you like some geezer worship is response, in that sense it's like humour I suppose I could get you to laugh in two ways I could say, now my friend, sit up straight now, bend your mouth open like this and start to get your stomach muscles going in and out and from deep down, start to make sort of noises well, some of you are trying it's a bit feeble I could do that and I could produce in the end something approximating to laughter or I could just say something funny and the moment you see the joke, you laugh because you've seen something worship is the same it's far easier to worship a God when you've seen something about it, a simple thing maybe, and then you respond were you not left after our brother George Hoffman's message this morning wanting to respond to the Lord of Compassion you'd seen something in scripture and in his account of those principles in his own experience and therefore, where the word is not being preached where people are not having a glimpse of Christ faith is weakened, worship is weakened we also begin to misunderstand our personal experience you know, even the apostles didn't always understand accurately everything that happened to them you needn't look it up, but you can recall you want to write the reference down, Mark chapter 9 verse 5 and 6, it's the story of the transfiguration and the three have an experience, mind-blowing which they misunderstand Jesus and Moses and Elijah separated by centuries and yet together in glory, chatting together and Peter wakes up and he says, wow let us build three tabernacles and then you three can carry on chatting together and Mark puts it very sort of tongue in cheek he didn't understand what he was saying I like it when the apostles are said not to understand what they're talking about sometimes the gospel writers say he had been asleep asleep in one of the greatest moments on earth when he woke up, he got it wrong he totally fouled up the understanding of it didn't understand what he was saying, says the gospel writer and so what happened?

God spoke very briefly and simply and said two things oy, he said well, near enough that's my beloved son don't mix him up with those other two understand the uniqueness of Jesus in this situation my son, and secondly, what are you going to do about it? make it the practice of your life to listen to him sometimes God has to explain our experiences and if we allow ourselves to get somehow cut off from scripture what we will do is misunderstand the experiences that we go through in life God has spoken in ways that help us to understand suffering and triumph and glory and misery and loneliness practically every emotion or experience you could go through God has said some things about it to steer you in your understanding and interpretation what happens very often, particularly in these days

when there are so many books flying around that are based largely on experience is that we are in danger if we get away from scripture in danger of misunderstanding that experience another tragic thing that happens third result of this famine of the word of God for us is that Christ is hidden from view hidden from view we no longer see him with the eyes of our understanding how can you follow someone whom you never see you know less and less about my sheep, hear my voice, John 10, 27 Jesus said in John 14, 23 that if you love me and keep my commandments my father and I, we will come and make our home with you we will manifest ourselves to you but it depends on hearing and obeying his word Jesus himself said so now I've given you some little glimpse of the results of this famine of the

word of God which we are in danger of suffering from in churches, in Christian unions, in our marriages in our own private lives and scripture is quite consistent all the way through in speaking of these things in this way now I want to take you into the New Testament and to a specific passage Paul the Apostle knew his Old Testament he'd been brought up to it he was a Pharisee ever since he'd met the Lord and been filled with his spirit his understanding of these passages, like Ezekiel 34 like the prophet Amos like the Lord's words to Solomon and Joshua and so on his understanding had sharpened in its focus and been made relevant to those churches that he was trying to plant in city after city around the Middle East turn with me, will you, to Acts chapter 20 Acts chapter 20 we're going to

read together from verse 22 down to verse 35 the situation is simple to understand but I find it very moving Paul has been in Ephesus for a good while three years or so so he's really established deep relationships you've made one or two friendships during this weekend and this is only a 48 hour job you imagine being with people in suffering in prayer, in evangelism for three years I spent about that time in India and I still carry on my heart some of the things that I did together with some of those brothers on the team all those years ago too long to even tell you because I would be embarrassed but I can remember what it felt like when we got stoned together I can remember how they ministered to me when I was desperately sick I would love to see some of those men again but I never go

out there we have been bonded together through the experience of Christian life and Christian warfare now Paul has been with this group in Ephesus and he has seen God raise up the leaders the shepherds and his meditations on scripture and his love for these people is beginning to produce fruit in his final message to them when you know that you are not going to see anybody ever again and you have one final opportunity to speak to them you don't talk of trivial things, do you? my mother was facing an operation which the surgeons were kind enough to say that she might well die from it was a real 50-50 job and so the night before she went under the surgeon's knife she wrote a letter to my father now she didn't chat about trivial things, the nice grapes by the bedside and the pigeons on the

window ledge and so on she spoke about their life and their love and their marriage she spoke about the kids myself and my sister a real heartfelt letter because it was potentially the last for all she knew my

father was just going to get back from the hospital a coffin, a few things, and a letter in the end she survived and she is alive to this day riding a horse around Yorkshire and behaving in her normal eccentric way but you get the point here's Paul, probably with tears in his eyes and a lump in his throat, talking to these shepherds who are going to have to look after the flock from now on, and he draws out three principles from his own experience maybe they felt a bit like they were suffering from overload too and couldn't take too much and now, compelled by the Spirit I am going

to Jerusalem not knowing what will happen to me there I only know that in every city the Holy Spirit warns me that prison and hardships are facing me however I consider my life worth nothing to me if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me the task of testifying the Gospel of God's grace now I know that none of you among whom I have gone about preaching the Kingdom will ever see me again not one therefore I declare to you today that I am innocent of the blood of all men for I have not hesitated to proclaim to you the whole will of God he's like the man who's been running with the baton and when he passes it over that's his job done as far as that race is concerned nothing to be gained by keeping running alongside the man who's now got it done verse 28

guard yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers be shepherds of the church of God which he bought with his own blood I know that after I leave savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them so be on your guard remember that for three years I never stopped warning each of you night and day with tears now I commit you to Timothy who's staying on behind and to the apostle John who's about to come and to any other apostle that may happen to be visiting no I commit you he says to God and the word of his grace which can build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified I have not coveted anyone's silver or

gold or clothing you yourselves know that these hands of mine supplied my own needs and the needs of my companions in everything I did I showed you that by this kind of hard work we must help the weak remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said it's more blessed to give than to receive same thing that I've already showed you new era new leadership new leadership and he urges them to absorb and feed themselves on the word of God's grace three principles then, number one verse 28, very interesting this guard yourselves that's the first thing you leaders have to do look after number one it sounds extraordinarily selfish doesn't it I mean we get used to thinking well Jesus first and others second and me last and there is a sense in which that's true but if you constantly without change

put that into operation I wouldn't give you six months you won't last the Holy Spirit inspires Paul to say something very different first look after yourself what use is a starved shepherd who can't even keep up with his sheep what use is a lame or broken shepherd how then will he do his job 1 Timothy 4, 16 Paul writing to Timothy in the same place in Ephesus he says watch your life and doctrine closely your life and doctrine persevere in them because if you do you will save both yourself and your hearers guard yourself, feed yourself sometimes you see the demands of spiritual leadership are very great how much courage is required facing certain difficult situations with people or maybe changes coming in a fellowship in a family in your own life or ministry perhaps risks suddenly being

set before you or you may have to deal with some very very difficult people now these kind of challenges we sometimes shy away from because we feel weak inside the spiritual leader needs to be strong inside in modern day terms you've got to have the bottle for it you need feeding up and building up within to face the demands that will come upon you in your ministry guard yourself first and if you just give, give, give,

give you eventually finish up so weak that you cannot face the kind of challenge and decision, questions, people that you inevitably must deal with in your life and your ministry and there are too, we've noticed, it was coming up in the question time yesterday certain common attacks on Christian leaders you were thinking just briefly about those tele-evangelists in the

states but there are many other kinds of attack dryness, family tension discouragement, this has been on my heart so much recently, how many men and women, because they're not in a team situation maybe, because the demands of the job are just wearing them down they're actually living with tremendous weight of discouragement, settled down like a slab I travel around from place to place, I meet not only student leaders church leaders, mission leaders how many of them are fighting a daily hand to hand combat with discouragement is it any wonder that Paul says guard yourself first, don't be ashamed to do it, in fact be ashamed if you don't do it this is your God given number one first priority guard yourself feed yourself, build yourself up how do you think Paul would have done himself this

self-guarding well I don't know really, to be quite frank I have one or two notions, but he doesn't say a great deal about it, that itself it seems to me is significant because people will probably find their own different ways I know how the elders of my own church, and I amongst them take time out in regular retreats during the year go away somewhere for a whole day, and we spend the morning time just ministering to each other kind of a spiritual check-up time and we'll ask each other about how we're feeling, about our marriages about our prayer lives about what God has been saying to us recently so often we find that there are conflicts of priorities, there may be feelings of near exhaustion very very common among those in spiritual leadership and we pray for each other we care for

each other, if we have something to share that we feel is for the other we pass it on, we hold nothing back you need people that can look you in the eye and challenge you and encourage you and feed you it's part of guarding yourself I get another hint about Paul from this same chapter if you were to look back to verse 13 we see Luke, the writer making a very interesting point we, he says, that's Luke and the other group of men that were travelling, a whole bunch of them are mentioned in verse 4, people who delight under the names of Sopater, Aristarchus, Secundus Tychicus, Trophimus and so on those guys, and Luke verse 13, we went on ahead to the ship and sailed for Assos, where we were going to take Paul aboard he had made this arrangement because he was going there on foot, Paul was

going to walk about 50 miles down the coast of what we now know as Turkey, the boat would undoubtedly get there first Paul was going to walk that bit on his own how long do you think 50 miles would take it could take some few days why do you think he did it, well he doesn't explain but I wonder, you know, the Holy Spirit has said to me in every city that suffering awaits me I am warned that prison and hardships are facing me I wonder was he just spending a few days on his own preparing his heart and soul for the battles that lay ahead, giving the Lord Jesus time to give him those anchors that he was going to need when the storm would rise, just getting alone with the Lord, he believes in teamwork he doesn't spend every moment of every week every working day with the team he's got his

group together, he believes in training faithful men, but there comes a moment when he's going to send them ahead on the ship, you go on ahead I'll be there in a few days, I'll catch you up enjoy the rest while you're there, I have other business I wonder was he guarding himself just making sure that he had his defenses in place because you know, Satan is a very malicious and perceptive enemy and maybe he just wanted to be quite sure about some things, alone with the Lord I can't prove that to you, there's no explanation given by Luke but I pass it on for your consideration I can tell you other ways in which I find it

helpful to feed myself I keep a little notebook, because I believe in the value as I read scripture, in putting down the things that it seems to me God is saying, now these

are not sermon notes these are things that may never come out, may never see the light of day, but there's value in sharpening up sometimes when you read the Bible you get nice religious feelings but because you don't crystallize them, they just remain as rather vague squashy, candy floss type feelings and it really helps to put words to them I hope you read your Bible with pencil and pen there beside you or get a notebook, I've got a little blue notebook, buy them from WH Smiths go through various ones, scribble down and the Lord doesn't give me something fresh and sharp every day by any manner of means but I can put down some of the things that I've been given recently, and I keep that quite separate from a set of files in which I want to write down what I feel certain books of

scripture are about.

I've got a file on Isaiah and a file on Hebrews, and a file on Philippians and a file on Ephesians and so on but I don't believe in these books of scripture that God is just repeating himself again and again and again I think each book is written for a specific purpose in our lives and in the experience of the church and of world missions if you were dealing with someone, say, who came from a background of religious rituals and they were coming out of that background and they come to know the Lord and they were beginning to learn how to live in the new covenant do you think there is one particular book of scripture that would most help someone from that background what would you want to sit down with them and explain to them which book?

I mean, is it Obadiah? is it 2 Timothy?

Whisper, whisper, whisper, I can hear you Hebrews, yes that's what I would do if you had someone who had real problems suddenly come over them to do with the assurance of their salvation they've been a Christian apparently for a while and suddenly they don't know things, things seem to become uncertain is there a book? has 1 John been written for that reason? again and again and again talking about certainty, knowing I throw out the idea to you I want to know the revelation of God in each book of the Bible because I think there are some differences God is so multi-faceted and multi-personal when you read the book of Daniel there is a characteristic title given for God He is the Lord Most High who rules over the affairs of men and that phrase will come more than once in Daniel read it for

yourself if you read Philippians, God is never called the Lord Most High you don't get a picture of a great mighty God who is sovereign over people's affairs in Philippians you get instead a picture of Jesus who humbled himself became a man went to the cross now why? why doesn't Paul tell the Philippians all about the mighty God who reigns over everything? for that matter, why doesn't Daniel write down all about how humble God is? well maybe it is because those people for whom Daniel was writing people away in exile Jews whose whole concept of what God is like seems to have been shaken by the events of the captivity maybe they particularly need to be reminded through these visions that God is in charge He does reign the Babylonian Empire will come to an end before long and shortly after

it does and it will happen within many of your lifetimes, Daniel the people will begin to go back to Jerusalem that's what they need to be reminded of so the picture of God and the ways and the work of God are appropriate to that situation Philippians, on the other hand, isn't a very doctrinal epistle at all the problems in Philippians don't seem to be great heresies creeping in amongst the people it seems to be instead that the Christians in Philippi just don't like each other they're active in gospel work they just can't

stand each other and it's not a very good thing, you know when you're standing on a street corner preaching the gospel alongside someone and you hate their guts there are two individuals mentioned in particular both ladies, but don't draw any conclusions from that

because in fact, almost always through the gospels, it's only men that argue with Jesus you never find a woman arguing with Jesus in the gospels these two ladies aren't very keen on each other and so Paul wants to picture God himself the one about whom they're preaching in their evangelism he humbled himself, he made himself of no reputation got the idea? look in book after book of scripture for what God wants to show you about himself truths and principles that are characteristic of that book I've begun to think of late that if I wanted to really know what God had to say about government and leadership, spiritual leadership I would look in 1 and 2 Samuel you'll find in a number of books of scripture that the Holy Spirit himself gives you the key to understand look out, particularly in

the New Testament for where the Lord says, now this is why I have written you'll find that in Peter you'll find it in 1 Timothy 3 Paul says to Timothy, I hope to come to you shortly but in case I'm delayed, I've written these things that you might, well, look it up for yourselves 1 Timothy 3, 14 to the end of the chapter so I don't want to just read the Bible devotionally and get little bits and pieces in my notebook devotional sweeties to suck I want also to have a different way of recording what God is saying that my own understanding of him might be fed and let me add one final thing when you do Bible study, you know what people do they're so funny, they get the Bible open and then they get commentaries and they open the commentary oh, a big nice big commentary here and gradually the

Bible gets pushed over to one side and they start to write down what the different commentators say leave the commentators out for a bit until you've given God time to speak himself through his word guard yourself, all that was the first point I have to speed up a little bit in a minute guard yourself, number 1 2, also verse 28 take care of the flock guard all the flock which the Holy Spirit has made you shepherd of you know a mother feeds her baby in those early days of life from her own body the quality of what she gives depends on her own feeding and lifestyle you've all seen and you've had recalled for you today tragic pictures of nursing mothers who have no food left for their little infants now the same principle is true spiritually you pass on to people what has fed you, touched

you it comes out of your own spiritual blood stream as it were, that's why it's so important in nurturing up young Christians to be able to pass on to them that which has helped you, that has been digested and food that's appropriate to the age and condition of those that you're trying to encourage and feed no good taking a 6 month old baby and sticking a whacking great steak and chips in front of it and getting annoyed and frustrated because it can't actually manage it, sometimes you need to pass on really chewed down stuff, stuff that wouldn't satisfy you, have you ever tasted some of that Gerber baby food it is foul kidneys and prunes kippers and strawberry jam, all sort of mashed up into a kind of horrible paste the kids love it and we need to get used to passing on food, quality food

in a way that can be received I want to say too that exhortation is not the same as feeding people there are preachers who are exhorted sometimes they don't feed people very much you need someone else to come along and do the feeding to strengthen the believer so that they may then respond to the exhortation there are shepherds who are concerned to move people move flocks from one point to another there are other shepherds whose concern is that they stop being harried and hassled around and actually have time to eat if a shepherd got into a field and he spent his entire time driving the flock from one end of the field to the other backwards and forwards, the sheep would before long die you need to feed before you can drive

we feed people by showing them the Lord and his ways and sometimes

the apostles and how God was expressing himself and revealing himself through them and their ways showing something of the promises of God and feeding babies is a very messy business I've done it, I know you take a spoonful of food and you know, it goes all down the face more comes out seemingly than goes in they turn their head sideways as you're about to poke it in it goes straight in the ear, while you're trying to get the stuff in their mouth, they actually grab the bowl and put it on their head upside down now don't worry enough goes in to do the trick you may feel you prepare enormous amounts of food for people and what folk get from your message is the tiniest little bit well, fine, that's what they needed a couple of spoonfuls got in so long as it was good quality food but have

you noticed parents when they're trying to spoon food into their babies you can learn so much from these practical things they sometimes have to catch the attention of the child first come along then, watch the food on the airplane and the child how many of you have had meals that have been specially delivered direct into your mouth on a choo-choo train is it not true? choo-choo train coming and your eyes go in it goes, because the kid is thinking about what they were doing before the meal or they want to know what their brother or sister is eating or there's something outside the window or they're concerned about the television so many distractions now, I travel around and I meet groups of students I came back from a group just last week in Switzerland and in the early days of the week

because of what had been going on in their lives in that college some deep disturbances and troubles which I won't tell you about they were just not concentrating on the food I could sense very little was getting in you need to be so quiet and down in your spirit and concentrating, sometimes it happens in the middle of a worship meeting maybe for you, something like this happened this morning you suddenly start to pay attention and the songs that had been flowing over you and past you, suddenly begin to touch you is it not true? and if you want to feed people you need to first get their attention sometimes if you're talking to someone and you want their attention, you reach out a hand and you just touch them I've watched husbands and wives doing this, you know supposing one or the other

is going on and on and on and the other one can see it's a little bit embarrassing or something a bit off the mark is about to happen they put out their hand just like that and they know they get their attention have to get people's attention it could be in preaching or sharing with some real honest stuff about yourself sometimes stories folk love stories, that's why Jesus in so much of his preaching isn't just giving sermons, he's either asking questions or he's telling stories getting people's attention how many times does he begin with a question? have to get people's attention before they can take in what you want to give Paul says guard yourself work out ways of keeping your own inner soul refreshed and fed necessarily for the challenges that you will face, that's your first

priority, you forget that often enough and eventually you won't be able to help anybody else don't be ashamed of it secondly, take care of the flock because the Holy Spirit has appointed you it is the church of God, says Paul, he owns them and thirdly Jesus bought them with his blood all three persons of the Trinity are involved and then Paul thirdly gives them warnings against two kinds of danger verse 29 I know after I leave savage wolves will come in verse 30, even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth and so on there are two dangers to be faced, says Paul in your ministry of shepherding and feeding one is the danger from outside, the other is the danger from in, from where you might not have expected it from amongst your own selves will arise a particular kind of

problem he calls the danger from outside savage wolves, wolves will frequently attack in the dark or in twilight as the darkness is beginning to gather if you allow darkness to grow in your own relationships in your own heart you won't even see the wolves coming you won't spot those people or those influences in your particular fellowship or youth group that are going to cause so much trouble in the days ahead the wolves will usually attack the weak first dear friends, have a heart for the weak watch what is going on among the weak of your fellowship are the wolves picking them off at the edge, destroying them the wolves will attack the exhausted the separated, I mean those that are lagging behind the herd wolves will get in amongst them, the unresistant that is why in a moment or two

Paul is going to say, be particularly concerned to help the weak it all ties together, this is the shepherd's responsibility he will actually lift some of those lambs and carry them under his coat where they can be warmed from time to time you hear of Christian leaders who will take people waves and strays into their own home just for a while, to carry the lamb under their own coat watch out for those wolves from outside but then some of you yourselves, this must have been a searing word of prophecy it's no wonder you know that when you read the Lord's words to this same church in Ephesus in Revelation 2 the thing almost to the point of imbalance that marks this church is a concern for right doctrine they're really locked on to this word of Paul they become so concerned with truth that

they've actually forgotten how to love gone too far one way Paul says here, some of you yourselves will arise wolves may come in, they won't spare the flock wolves don't just kill in order to eat they kill for the sheer ghoulish fun of it they can wipe out a whole flock and eat bits off a number of the sheep that are dead and leave others hardly touched but still dead watch out for them but then watch yourselves guard yourselves as a group and there will be two marks of something going wrong the two marks are these verse 30 these men who will arise will distort the truth the truth that I gave you in order to draw away disciples after them when you find people beginning to edge folk away from Paul, strangely enough from the New Testament and creating a personal loyalty to themselves

they're like this authoritative guru thing, somehow those are two marks edging you away from the New Testament and creating unbiblical personal followings and loyalties watch out for that especially and finally my last point, just to show you these elements of personal example that Paul is not afraid to point to in those verses towards the end of our passage so be on your guard, he says, verse 31 in summary remember that for three years I never stopped warning each of you with tears, I was compassionate and persistent in my trying to feed you and teach you night and day, didn't let up never stopped, and at the same time I worked hard among you do you think Paul had a fairly easy life he would spend a lot of the daytime meditating on the scriptures and then people would gather around his

feet in the evening and he would share with them what wonderful things he had been digging up during the day that man worked hard trying to earn his living not only for himself, but for his dependents his team and in the midst of all that he was getting food for those he was to feed and teach, I was particularly concerned for the week, he says in verse 35, and then as he goes they finally see him go to the ship they stand, I mean, they say they they wept, they embraced him, they kissed him they were grieving they stood there on the shore feeling probably terribly inadequate they waved goodbye and that man was on his way, continuing to be concerned for world mission he lived as a shepherd as an example he was going to Jerusalem, from Jerusalem he'd go to Rome we believe he went to Spain,

then back to Rome there he was executed perhaps round about the year 64, they never saw him again what a tremendous example, though, he did leave with them ceaseless teaching, hard work concern for

the week and world mission born out of his very life now I hope that you have found in that some practical help and a bit of encouragement in your own priorities in life in long distance service for the Lord and that consistent concern throughout Scripture that people be fed with real soul food and it crops up so often I cannot escape it and I share with you my concern that there are people nowadays in our churches who are just not, they're still beggars old Mother Hubbard, you know, the cupboard was bare they feel empty inside, there's nothing in their larder the poor man comes to the door,

they've got nothing to give them they're not taking that time to make sure that their lives are enriched and well fed as they should be now this has been not really a seminar, it's been more of a sermon because of the huge crowd, if we were just 20 in a room where we could have interacted a little bit, I could have talked less and we could have had more sharing and feedback, but what I'm going to do is just end now with prayer and give you the 15 minutes that remain before lunch, you may sit and ponder quietly, you can talk amongst yourselves but I think it's very difficult to set up any seminar type discussion but I hope the Lord has said something, and when he speaks usually we know what to do we don't then need to start a great long discussion let us pray Lord you are our shepherd we

will not want forgive us for those times when we drift to the back of the flock or even sometimes in our hearts go join another flock you lead us beside the still waters you make us to become quiet and not hassled in green pastures where we may feed Lord we thank you for your crook and your staff that comfort us you spread a table before us we praise you, in the presence of our enemies oh God I pray that the men and the women here in their families in their Christian fellowship responsibilities in their work and their service might be particularly marked by this thing whatever secondaries you grant to them in the way of ministry their root be deep deep down in yourself and they win this battle for scripture and for yourself in present living experience according to the way you have chosen

that is all there is of this recording

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