

NOTES AND QUESTIONS FOR INDIVIDUAL OR GROUP STUDY OF THE GOSPEL OF LUKE – PART TWENTY-ONE

When Jesus reclaimed the temple, His house in Jerusalem, He was challenging the authority of the chief priests who considered themselves to be the owners who should decide what happened within its boundaries. For the moment He was able to continue teaching in the temple unhindered because of the huge popular support He received from ordinary people. It was only a matter of time before the priests confronted Him with the inevitable question about the source of His authority. In their minds they were the only legitimate authority. He answered a question with another question which put them on the spot. What had been John the Baptist's authority? They had hated John because his message convicted them of their hypocrisy but among the masses he had strong support.(Matt.3:5-7) If they had agreed with the majority, why had they not listened to him? If on the other hand they now said what they really thought, the mob would howl them down. They chose the safe answer. 'We do not know.' 'I am not answering your question either.' said Jesus. The clash which has continued throughout history between religion and real Christianity is about authority. Who is in charge of our lives, beliefs, and decisions, Jesus or the representatives of some religious hierarchy?(20:1-8)

Jesus told the priests a story to try to show them the crime against God which they were committing. In the parable, God planted the vineyard, a picture often used in scripture.(Isa.5:1,2) On another occasion the Lord claimed to be the vine, of which we should be the branches.(Jn.15:1-8) His life appearing in us should be the fruit.(Gal.5:22,23) The vine-growers were the priests, those entrusted with the spiritual care of God's people at that time. The slaves sent by the owner represented the prophets sent by the Lord in the Old Testament, to warn the leaders of the consequence of their misuse of their positions,(Hos.5:1: Joel 1:13) but who were frequently mistreated by those who should have welcomed them.(Mt.23:34,35) The son was clearly the Son of God, promised throughout the Old Testament who ought to have been honoured when He arrived in His Father's temple. Abuse of our position as leaders, because we see our role as primarily for our own benefit, leads inevitably to confrontation over the issue of authority. What then is the owner of the vineyard, the Creator of the universe, to do about His Son being rejected? Tolerate it helplessly, or act in judgement? Quoting again from Psalm 118:22, the Psalm which had been used by the welcoming crowd as He entered the city, the Lord reminded them of how God's purpose in Christ, though despised by the leaders, would happen anyway. He would be the only foundation of His church,(Eph.2:20; I Cor.3:11) and the judge of the world.(Isa.8:14,15) The priest had a simple choice, to be part of the plan, or suffer judgement.(20:9-18)

The priests made their choice and looked for the opportunity to arrest Jesus but they were still restrained by public support for the Lord. They needed a pretext to use when He was out of public view. The first group of undercover agents were an unlikely mix of Pharisees and Herodians who normally could agree on almost nothing.(Matt.22:15,16) They began with flattery, expecting to trap Him into an unwise answer. The Pharisees would have been totally opposed to paying taxes to a heathen Emperor. The Herodians favoured cooperation with Rome, for their own benefit. There was no way Jesus could win. His answer was brilliant. As the coin bore the likeness of Caesar, so their lives were to bear the image of Jesus. Let the government take our money, but not our hearts. His critics were lost for words.(20:19-26)

The next group of troublemakers were the third major force in Jewish thinking, the Sadducees, who ran the temple for their own profit but did not even believe in life after death.(Acts 23:8) Their question was the unlikely scenario of a woman who had married 7 brothers in turn, as required in the Law,(Deut.25:5) and outlived all of them. Would they all be lined up to greet

their sometime bride when she finally arrived in heaven? Firstly Jesus corrected their false assumption. There will be no marriage in heaven. Secondly He went beyond their question to their ignorance of resurrection. How could Moses greet the Lord who appeared to him at the burning bush as the God of the various characters in Genesis who had trusted the Lord, if they no longer existed? If Moses believed in resurrection life surely as his descendants they should do the same. The scribes, who were presumably Pharisees, were impressed with the way He had dealt with their rivals. For the moment no-one could think of another clever question.(20:27-40)

Jesus took the initiative. They had too small a picture of the Messiah, the Christ. According to Psalm 110:1, He would not only be David's son but his Lord, the one who would eventually rule the world. All the promises of the coming of the Messiah anticipated not just the arrival of a great man and king, but of God Himself coming in human form to earth. If Christ is too small in our thinking, our faith will struggle, and we will be easily misled by wrong teaching.(20:41-44)

The Lord warned the crowd of the danger of being sucked in by the teaching of their self-appointed teachers who were motivated by power and popular recognition but who robbed the needy in the name of religion, and prayed just to impress men. Like the vine-growers of the earlier story they were deservedly facing judgement.(20:45-47)

QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY AND DISCUSSION

1. In what ways is the story of the rich donors and the poor widow similar to the one in 18:9-14? How does it sum up the message Jesus has been presenting in the last 4 chapters? Should we really do what she did?(II Cor.8:1-15; Lk.18:29,30) What happens to Christians who behave like this?(21:1-4)
2. What future did Jesus foresee for the temple building? How did people react then to such prophecies? How did Jesus say they would miss the point in future?(21:5-9)
3. What did Jesus say would happen in future in terms of international affairs, natural disasters and persecution of Christians? How are we to respond at such times? What can we expect of God if we trust Him in adversity?(21:10-19)
4. What did the Lord anticipate would be the fate of Jerusalem? How might His words have helped when the time came? How do they help us now?(21:20-24)
5. How well does this description of our planet being threatened fit in modern times? How are people reacting today? How should we respond?(21:25-28)
6. What according to this next section should be our approach to observing events in our world? Did Jesus intend to give the impression that such occurrences were imminent? If not what was His purpose?(21:29-33)
7. How do most of the world respond to warnings of disaster? How on the other hand should we prepare ourselves for Christ's coming?(21:34-36)
8. Where did Jesus go at night time? Why did He not stay in the temple? How were ordinary people receiving His ministry? What can we learn from His example?(21:37-38)