

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

Jesus had reclaimed His city, Jerusalem, when He rode in to the cheers of the crowd. He had repossessed His house, the temple, when He threw out the traders who had brought commercialism into worship. Sheer compelling wisdom had won the mob for the moment but the religious opposition were waiting for their moment to counterattack. He took one last opportunity to lay out the plan for the future. His final message to the public was prompted by watching the striking contrast between those who came with their gifts to the temple treasury. On the one hand were the ‘corporate sponsors’, the successful business men, who needed to be seen giving generously to receive public approval.(Matt.6:2-4) On the other hand was the poor widow who gave her last few cents to impress no-one – but God saw her loving heart. She, like the Macedonians who responded to the needs of their starving brothers and sisters in Jerusalem, gave from the heart out of her poverty.(II Cor.8:1-5) She demonstrated grace in action. Jesus was thrilled.(21:1-4)

The temple in Jerusalem was the architectural wonder of the city, the place for tourists as well as worshippers. Jesus’ disciples who had come with Him from the provinces were admiring its beauty, enhanced by some of the wealthy donors. Its days however were almost over. In 68AD the Romans would besiege the city to crush the rebellion of 66AD. After two terrible years in which some Jews would be expecting their Messiah to rescue them, the city walls were finally breached, the temple destroyed and over 600,000 people were massacred. When Jesus hinted of what was to come, there was the usual reaction. When will this happen? What will be the signs it is imminent? Jesus’ response aroused their interest without answering their question. People will come claiming to be Christ returned. Do not believe them. Wars will come and go and some will assume that this is the moment. Do not jump to conclusions about such events in our own times.(21:5-9)

Not only will there be international conflict and civil wars which will seem like the world is ending but there will be huge natural disasters, earthquakes, tsunamis, floods, famines and dire warnings of global catastrophe. Worse still for Christians will be persecution from state and church which will seem like history is ending. These times will be our greatest opportunities to depend on Christ to speak through us with wisdom, grace and authority which will shock our persecutors. Hardest of all to bear may be the betrayal of friends and family who will take the easy way out to save their own skins. Being hated for the name of Christ can seem unspeakably lonely. We may die for our faith but eternally we will be unscathed. So do not look at the circumstances but at Him.(21:10-19)

In His glimpse of the future, Jesus wove in together the two themes of worldwide crises over the following millennia, and the soon to be fulfilled fate of Jerusalem. He now returned to the coming threat to the city and offered hope for those who listened to Him. When in the near future the besieging armies started to take up position around the city, He urged His followers to head for the hills. History records that much of the Christian community in Jerusalem did exactly that in 68AD and so survived. Even in the worst times we are not passively to resign ourselves to our fate but to look for God’s imaginative and sometimes miraculous escape routes.(21:20-24)

Returning to the subject of world history, Jesus spoke of two opposite reactions to natural disaster or the threat of it. The unbeliever’s response will be of dismay, perplexity and fear which causes people to faint or at least to freeze in paralysed inaction. The other response is to look confidently to God in expectation of the coming of Christ in such a clear and worldwide way that no-one can be in any doubt as to who He is. The believer’s confidence is not based on knowing

when He will come but on the glorious certainty of His return in His good time. All we need to know is how it will all end, not when. Jesus compared our view of His return to earth with the way we see the seasons. Leaves on trees in the spring mean that we have absolutely no doubt that summer will follow. We do not need a date. Having refused to give a date Jesus seemingly introduced confusion when He spoke of the kingdom of God being 'near', and within 'this generation'. Was He now promising His return in the First Century? Did He get it wrong? Repeatedly He had already told them that the kingdom of God was not in the far future but 'within' or 'among them'. (Lk.17:21) In other words Jesus was again reminding them that what they were to concern themselves with was not a date for His return but their responsibility now in anticipation. They could be sure of His word which would always be true. They did not need a timetable. Our responsibility is to be wide awake to God's direction in prayer, aware of the traps of wild or worried living that are waiting to destroy us. (21:25-36)

For a number of days, Jesus succeeded in being available to the people who wanted to hear from Him during the day by turning up in the temple, but at the same time inaccessible to His enemies by hiding out on the Mount of Olives at night. The time on the mountain, if it followed His practice on other occasions, was spent alone with His Father in prayer. (22:39) He had to be sure that what He taught came from heaven, just as we do. (21:37,38)

QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY AND DISCUSSION

1. How was the chief priests' problem with catching Jesus eventually solved? Who organized Jesus' betrayal? Did Judas have a choice or was it all the Devil's fault? How had he made himself vulnerable to this temptation? (Jn.12:6) What warning does this story hold for us? (22:1-6)
2. How did Jesus' disciples find an available room in a busy city crammed with visitors? How does their experience encourage us to expect God's solutions to practical problems? Why did Jesus bother with this Old Testament custom? (22:7-13)
3. What did Jesus explain to His disciples was the meaning of the bread and wine they shared? How could it be true that they would not do this again until the kingdom of God came? Why did Jesus let the disciples argue among themselves as to who was the betrayer? (22:14-23)
4. Why were they arguing yet again about who was to be the greatest? (9:46) What had they misunderstood about Christian leadership? How could Jesus' idea of leadership possibly work? How did Jesus' prediction of Peter's failure illustrate what He was teaching? How did their misunderstanding about taking swords also demonstrate the same problem? (22:24-38)
5. When Jesus prayed on the Mount of Olives was He trying to avoid going to the cross? What did He mean by 'remove this cup from Me'? (Isa.51:17; Jer.49:12) What was the outcome of His prayer? Why did Jesus want the disciples to pray with Him? Was it to help Him or them? How may we also be asleep instead of praying? (22:39-46)
6. How did Jesus confront Judas with his treachery? Should we confront those who betray us? What do you suppose Peter was aiming for when he cut off the high priest's slave's ear? How would he feel when Jesus healed the slave? How did Jesus confront the chief priests and their supporters? Again is there a time for us to do the same? (22:47-53)
7. Why did Peter deny Christ? Was he a coward? How did Jesus deal with his denial? How can we learn from His example? What does the behaviour of Jesus' captors tell us about the state of their hearts? On other occasions Jesus was silent when criticized. Why did He answer this time? What was His response to their question? (22:54-71)