

NOTES AND QUESTIONS FOR INDIVIDUAL OR GROUP STUDY OF THE GOSPEL OF LUKE – PART THIRTEEN

At the beginning of the previous chapter, Jesus had taught His disciples how to pray. 'Let's keep talking,' He said to the future fishermen. He had dealt with a variety of wrong expectations which hinder this relationship. Jesus is not like the reluctant bed-bound friend; He is not like the Devil; He was not created by a woman; He does not look at the outside of a man like the lawyers, but at the inside. Now in front of a huge crowd He spelled out the biggest hindrance, hypocrisy. 'Hypocrite' was the word for a Greek actor who played his part by wearing the appropriate mask. Jesus described hypocrisy as being like leaven, elsewhere explained as first wrong teaching, (Matt. 16:12) and then the attitude of malice and wickedness which motivates it. (I Cor. 5:6-8)

Pretence has no place in our relationship with God because everything is seen by Him. The underlying emotion which encourages hypocrisy is fear of others. As Christians we have nothing to fear from anyone so let us shout our life-giving message from the rooftops! Those who reject God have judgement to fear but if we belong to Him, He will care for us as He does for the birds. Remember that as we acknowledge Jesus on earth before men He is acknowledging us in heaven! The only sin which will not be forgiven is the sin of refusing His love and forgiveness, which will lead us to deny Him. Expect trouble as a fisherman but realise that even if we are accused in court, God will care for us and give us the words to answer. (12:1-12)

A man in the crowd tried to draw Jesus into his family dispute over money. The Lord refused to be a judge and take sides because the Kingdom of God is about mercy and reconciliation. He spoke to all societies which measure people in terms of dollars, and think of security as being about finances. Jesus told the warning story of the wealthy man who retired to enjoy his money and died the same night. Our only wealth and security are in heaven one day, and all of God's immeasurable grace to be drawn on right now. Love of things hinders fellowship with Christ. (12:13-21)

Life which prizes material things is spoiled by anxiety in three areas. We worry about what to eat, the necessities of life. We worry about what to put on, how we look in the eyes of others. We call it 'keeping up with the Joneses.' We worry about our life span, the unknown future and how much or how little we have left. If we belong to the Kingdom of God then all our needs, our status and our future are in the hands of the King. What a relief! If we seek Him, we can cheerfully let go of everything else to those in far greater need, and relax. (12:22-34)

Jesus urged His fishermen to be pre-occupied not with the anxieties which dominated everyone else's life but with the task He has given us until He returns. He compared them to slaves waiting for their master to return from his wedding, having no idea at what hour of the day or night he will come, but ready to serve him anyway. Jesus, our master, is to 'marry' His bride, the church (Rev. 21:2) but in the meantime we have work to do. He used the striking picture of Himself as a thief coming at night who does not advertise his time of arrival. The return of Jesus is that big a secret. (Matt. 24:36) In response to Peter's question as to whether Jesus meant this parable for them, He expanded the story. The Lord offered Peter and the others a choice to help them answer the question for themselves. They were to be stewards in God's household responsible for the care of His other servants by feeding them with truth. They had been entrusted with everything which belonged to God, 'servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God.' (I Cor. 4:1) We have two choices, get on with teaching others until Christ returns or waste the opportunity regarding Christian ministry as an activity for our own benefit. If we do the latter it is the

ultimate form of abuse. Those who teach falsely are most deserving of judgement and punishment.(12:35-48)

Jesus' baptism in water by John was obviously not a picture of sin being washed away because He did not have any sin. Baptism is symbolic of death and resurrection.(Rom.6:3-11) In allowing John to baptize Him Jesus was confirming His acceptance of His Father's plan that He should die on the cross for the sin of the world, but in anticipation that the Father would raise Him to life again. He was keen to get on with it and finish the plan. He warned His friends that following Him would bring them into trouble, starting in their families. The gospel divides one generation from the next. Notice that Jesus did not anticipate that it would divide husbands and wives who had become one in Him.(12:49-53)

Still pursuing the theme of His return, Jesus challenged His hearers to consider the meaning of current events in the light of His warning. We confidently forecast the weather but do not seem to use the same insight to interpret the storm clouds of history which point much more surely to a coming crisis which will herald Him returning to take over as King. He encouraged them with this in mind to keep up to date with those around us, settling disputes rather than letting them drag on unresolved, and threatening to distract us from the task.(12:54-59)

QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY AND DISCUSSION

1. What insight does Jesus give into the meaning of suffering? Is it God's punishment for our sin? What should be our response to adversity?(13:1-5)
2. What does the story of the unfruitful vineyard teach us about the timetable God puts on His world? How should we respond to Jesus' warning here?(13:6-9)
3. Why did the religious people object to Jesus healing on the Sabbath? Would they really be so hard-hearted as to deny healing to a person who needed God's help for such a reason? How did Jesus show up the hypocrisy of their attitude? How might we show the same attitude today?(13:10-17)
4. What was the point of the two parables of the kingdom of God which Jesus used? Was He talking about something good or bad in His kingdom? How did these parables expose the dangers of the religious attitude He had just encountered?(13:18-21)
5. What answer did Jesus give to the question about what percentage of the population would become believers? What is the narrow door and how do we enter it? Why will there be some surprises on the day of judgement? How can we be sure we have entered the narrow door?(13:22-30)
6. Why do you suppose some Pharisees warned Jesus about Herod's intentions? What did His answer mean? What did Jesus mean about reaching His goal on the third day? How should His answer encourage us when we are under threat? Why had Jerusalem played such an important part in history? What is her future?(13:31-35)