

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

In the previous chapter we have seen that the key to receiving all that God gives us in the ‘dinner parties’ of chapters 14-16, and then wants us to share with other needy people, is faith in Christ. We are saved by faith. We are to live by faith. Faith is to be the all day long attitude of our hearts towards the Lord. Another word for Christian faith is prayer. We are to ‘pray without ceasing’. (I Thess.5:17) But what really is prayer?

To illustrate His urging that we should pray constantly instead of losing heart, Jesus told them a story of a judge and a woman who pestered him constantly until he finally acted on her behalf. Is this what prayer is, nagging God until He finally gives in and answers our prayer? We have already seen in the previous chapter on faith that the secret of faith is not its size but its object, Jesus. The clue to the meaning of this parable is in the description of the judge as not fearing God or respecting man, and of being unrighteous. This is exactly the opposite of what God is like. The point is therefore a contrast not a comparison. Unlike the judge God is just and acts at exactly the right moment. How then does faith operate in prayer? Because of who God is, we can be absolutely confident that when we pray, He hears us, knew our need before we even opened our mouths, and will do what is best. (Matt.6:7,8) We can therefore move on to the next problem and do the same again. The woman in this story got stuck, possibly for years, on one issue because the judge, the object of her prayer, was unjust. (18:1-8)

The account of the two men praying in the temple develops the same idea. The Pharisee trusted in himself and his previous record to receive an answer. He listed his achievements just in case the Lord had forgotten. He was the object of his own faith. The tax-gatherer on the other hand had no confidence whatsoever in his own record which was typical of his occupation in those days. His expectation rested in what he had heard about God, that He was full of mercy. In repentant prayer he trusted in who he knew the Lord to be. He alone knew his prayer had been answered and that he was forgiven. (18:9-14)

The disciples in their enthusiasm to manage the demands on Jesus, so that His time would be best used, wanted to ban parents bringing their children to be blessed by the Lord. Jesus, they decided, was for adults only. Jesus took the opportunity to teach another principle about faith. It is like the unquestioning trust of a small child in his or her parent which sadly becomes more cautious and limited as time goes on. When we believe Him and receive Him without reservation into our lives we become His children. Prayer is the simple response of a baby, not the intellectual agreement of an academic. (18:15-17)

The next story addresses again the question of the object of our faith or the recipient of our prayer. The wealthy leader of a synagogue was like the Pharisee in verse 11, supposing that he had a good record of performance which would open heaven to him. He wanted to make quite sure that he had achieved a pass mark. He began with a compliment to what he felt was another successful candidate for eternity when he addressed Jesus as ‘Good Teacher’. Jesus reminded him first that all goodness comes only from God. He then gave him a test of 5 of the 10 commandments. The ruler was delighted. He was quite sure he passed. He had not noticed the trap which Jesus then sprang when He challenged him to sell all that he had and give to the poor to become a follower of Jesus. The trap was in the 5 missing commandments. The first 4 relate to God whom somehow he had missed out. The 10th one was about coveting, the very issue which dominated his life as a man in search of money. Money was his God. The problem again was the object of his faith. The Lord reminded His followers how difficult a choice this is for many people, God or things. The ‘eye of a needle’ may have been the name of a city gate

through which a camel could only enter unladen and on its knees. This story is not particularly about money but anything or anyone who takes God's place at the centre of our lives and as the object of our faith. Peter wondered if their sacrifice of home, job and security was enough. The Lord turned the question around to encourage Peter that what we have let go of is nothing compared to the richness of our inheritance, not just one day in heaven, but right now. As members of the family of God we are welcome in so many more homes and lives than would ever have happened had we clung tight to our 'god of money'.(18:18-30)

From time to time Jesus dropped a hint of what was to come.(Matt.16:21; 17:22,23; 20:17-19)
The disciples did not want to hear this and so they blocked it out of their minds, which is why the resurrection took them by surprise.(18:31-34)

The blind beggar provided a further example of believing prayer. On the face of it his cry for mercy may have seemed like a request for money but he realized this was no ordinary passer by. He recognized Jesus as the Son of David, the promised Messiah, who was therefore the object of his faith. He knew that as the Messiah, Jesus could restore his sight and asked Him to do so. The Lord responded to his faith. Without hesitation the beggar, unlike the rich ruler, left his old way of life behind to become a follower of Jesus.(18:35-43)

QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY AND DISCUSSION

1. How does the story of Zaccheus compare to that of the rich man and the poor man in the previous chapter? How is this account similar to that of Levi meeting Jesus in chapter 5? What objections were again raised by the religious people?(19:1-10)
2. Who are the nobleman and the slaves picturing in this next story? What do the minas represent? In what way can we multiply what God has given us? What does the Lord want us to do with what He has entrusted to us? What indication does this parable give concerning reward or punishment beyond death? What was wrong with keeping the mina in a handkerchief? How does this story relate to Jesus' meeting with Zaccheus?(19:11-27)
3. What can we assume had gone on beforehand between Jesus and the owner of the colt? How was the colt's owner similar to the slaves who used their minas well? How are we like colts on whom no-one has ever sat? Why did Jesus choose this way to enter Jerusalem?(Zech.9:9) In what two different ways was Jesus received as He rode into the city? Why did some welcome Him? What did their use of Ps.118:26 reveal about their expectation? How did Jesus answer those who wanted to silence His admirers?(Hab.2:11) How does He still divide?(19:28-40)
4. Why did Jesus weep over Jerusalem? What did He foresee? Had He lost His temper when He threw the traders out of the temple? Why did He call them robbers? Again what two opposite reactions were there to His presence in the temple?(19:41-48)