

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

So far the people Jesus has healed have come to Him for help or been brought by someone else so that He could touch them or speak to them. In various ways they have illustrated what being healed spiritually is really all about – the leper needed cleansing, as we do from sin; the paralytic needed power to walk again, as we need Christ's strength to live right; the man with the withered right hand longed to have the ability to work; Peter's mother in law wanted to be well to serve Him. Levi walking away from his old life and opening his home to Jesus and those who wanted to know Him brings all these miraculous interventions into one man's story. In the next group of encounters, Luke deals with the important question, what is our part if Jesus is to work in our lives?

The centurion would definitely not be Jewish, and it is likely that his slave was imported too and so not a Jew either, yet the two of them provide an outstanding example of the response that Jesus seeks from us. The Roman officer grasped a simple but profound principle. If Jesus is God all we have to do is to take Him at His word. Right from creation what He said He did. Our responsibility is to believe Him when He speaks and be confident that He will do it. The centurion recognized that the work of God in his household had nothing to do with his worthiness. There is no indication of whether the nearly dead slave had faith like his master did. Presumably the slave would not have been healed if his master had not sought help from Jesus. In faith we are to seek Him, for ourselves or for others, and by faith we are to follow His instructions.(7:1-10)

The next story of the raising from the dead of the widow's son says nothing about faith on the part of the corpse or his grieving mother. Why then did Jesus work this miracle? He acted because of compassion when He saw the tears of a woman who had lost not only her husband but now her only son. It reveals the other component in the sovereign work of God, His boundless love for the needy, regardless of whether we seek Him in faith. The reaction of the crowd was to acknowledge that only God acts in this way. All of us were spiritually dead,(Eph.2:1) until we met Jesus(7:11-17)

The last person in that time who, we would suppose, might have a problem of doubt was John the Baptist. Locked in prison since he had dared to tell Herod the truth about his responsibility as a leader to be an example,(Lk.3:20) John had begun to struggle. Alone in chains in his prison cell, he found himself asking whether he had imagined what he heard and saw of the work of the Holy Spirit when he had been persuaded to baptize his cousin Jesus.(Lk.3:21,22) Plagued by uncertainty, John did the right thing with his doubt. He asked Jesus to confirm the truth by answering his question. All too often we confuse others by sharing our doubts with them. The Lord welcomes our honest questions. John could not come in person so he did the next best thing and sent two of his friends. Jesus' answer was to let His work speak for itself. Isaiah had promised what the Christ would do when He came.(Isa.35:5; 61:1) His work was entirely consistent with His word.(7:18-23)

Having sent a message which would strengthen John's faith, Jesus took the opportunity to ask the crowd to reconsider what they had received from John's ministry. He asked them what their expectations of him had been. He pointed out how unrealistic they had been and the importance of checking our prejudices against the word of God. Mal.3:1 had explained that he would simply be a messenger preparing the way for the king, not the king himself. He reminded them that John's ministry opened the way for a new kind of human being, one born again of the Spirit of God. Any one reborn would be far greater than even a great man of God like John. The ordinary

people whose hearts had been changed by John's preaching got the Lord's point. The religious people rejected not only the messenger but the message he brought them. Jesus was able to take the opportunity to explain not only how their hard attitude had closed their minds to John's ministry, but how it was now having the same kind of tragic effect on their response to Him. "Wisdom is vindicated by her children", means that when we have made up our minds according to our own expectations we will go to any lengths to justify them however ridiculous our conclusion may be. This is the very opposite of faith.(7:24-35)

After all He had said about the attitude of the religious people, it must have come as a surprise to Jesus' disciples when a Pharisee invited the Lord to dinner! Without reservation Jesus accepted, as He always does when anyone seeks to know Him. All went well with the dinner until word reached those in the street that He was there. A woman, who presumably was a prostitute by the way she is described, came into the Pharisee's house in search of Jesus. She approached Jesus and began to weep tears of repentance over His feet, using her hair to dry them and some fabulously expensive ointment to anoint them. Simon, the Pharisee, was outraged. To him, religion meant avoiding contact with sinners lest we be infected by them. Reputation in his view was all important. Letting such a woman into his house was threatening enough but allowing her that close was absolutely unthinkable. Jesus answered him in two ways. First He told a story of two people forgiven different amounts. Who would be most grateful? Then He reminded his host that this woman had performed the basic customs of hospitality by washing and anointing His feet which Simon had overlooked. Finally Jesus forgave the woman's sins as only God can. Her faith had saved her, so real saving faith must include repentance from the heart.(7:36-50)

QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY AND DISCUSSION

1. Were Jesus' disciples only men? What role did the women have then and later? Does this indicate how gender roles should be different in Christian ministry?(8:1-3)
2. What four kinds of soil did Jesus describe? What four attitudes of heart do they represent? What is the seed? Who is the sower? What does this parable teach us about our own response to the word and what we should expect in ministry? How does Jesus' illustration of the lamp build on His teaching concerning the sower?(8:4-18)
3. Why do you suppose Jesus did not put the demands of His family first? What bigger principle was He teaching us? Again what was the lesson from the storm at sea? What did Jesus want from His family as well as His disciples?(8:19-25)
4. What does the story of the healing of the demoniac teach us about the authority of Jesus? Why did Jesus pick on the pigs?(Lev.11:3) What was the reaction of the local people and why? What, by contrast, was the former madman's response to Jesus? Why did He not encourage him to become His follower?(8:26-39)
5. Why did Jesus allow the woman with the haemorrhage to interrupt His rush to a dying girl? What did He recognize in the woman which made this the moment to help her? When He came to Jairus' house why were some allowed into the girl's room and some excluded? Why did Jesus tell her parents to remain silent about what had happened? Was He really expecting her healing to be kept a secret?(8:40-56)