

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

Followed by an ex-blind beggar and the rest of His disciples, Jesus entered Jericho. Word of what had just happened outside the city must have spread ahead of His arrival. A big crowd was waiting for Him. Struggling to see past them was one of the most hated men in Jericho, the chief tax-collector, Zaccheus. Perhaps he knew Levi, also known as Matthew, the invitation he had received from Jesus, and the change which had occurred in his life.(Lk.5:27-29) He had heard stories but he was hungry to find out who Jesus was for himself. He was a short man with a big bank balance, not used to people standing in his way. Unable to push through the crowd he did something he probably had not done since he was a boy. He ran ahead of the procession and climbed a tree. Safely hidden among the leaves he hoped to see but not be seen. To his shock, Jesus not only saw him but called him by name and asked the unthinkable, to be welcomed into Zaccheus' home. Zaccheus was down the tree in a moment and gladly welcomed Jesus into his affluent house to the usual disapproval of the religious crowd who assumed that a man of God would avoid such an obvious sinner. His repentance from the heart showed not only as a commitment to stop his crooked, greedy behaviour but to put right the very substantial wrongs of the past. The Lord makes Himself at home in our lives when we acknowledge we are lost, and want to be found by Him. The particular expression and degree of our 'lostness' is irrelevant to Him.(19:1-10)

Jesus was about to begin the final phase of His journey from Galilee to Jerusalem. He was aware of the expectation which was building around His arrival in the Holy City. Would He lead a coup and take over the government? His followers had ignored His repeated hints about His coming death and resurrection, and were hoping for other things. He told a story to turn their focus back on the key question He wants us to be asking, not when and how will He take over the world, but what right now is our role in His kingdom?

Jesus' story concerned a man who was to become king in another place and then return, as He would go back to heaven as the King and one day return to earth to rule His kingdom. In the meantime the future king entrusted his resources to ten of his slaves, as Jesus entrusts the message of the riches of His grace to us.(Eph.2:7; 3:8) The question the slaves needed to ask was not when would their lord return but what were they to do with the mina they had been given in the meantime? The citizens who did not want him back again were obviously the religious people who wanted nothing to do with Jesus and would be glad when He was dead. They would face the wrath of their king, just as Jesus' enemies will face judgement when He returns. The point of this story is that not only were the new king's enemies in big trouble but his supposed slaves would be answerable for what they had done with their minas. Two of the slaves reported spectacular multiplication of their minas, one to 10 and the other to 5 more. Their secret was faithfulness. Their reward was in terms of responsibility for 10 and 5 cities in the future kingdom. If we have been faithful with Christ's message of grace it will have multiplied into others' lives. Serving Him now is just an apprenticeship for eternity and the privilege of serving Him on a vastly greater scale. One slave on the other hand had hidden his mina and done nothing with it. His reason lay in his view of his lord whom he regarded as an exacting man who expected something for nothing. If we waste the grace of God which has been offered to us to be put to use so that it might be reproduced in others' lives, it is because we have a wrong view of who God is, not believing Him to be a God of grace.. We would be in the same position as Christ's enemies though calling ourselves His servants. He warned us that if grace is offered to us and never used, it will one day be withdrawn.(19:11-27)

The journey continued until Jesus and His disciples arrived in a village near Jerusalem. How was He to enter the city? Zechariah the prophet had said how it would be, as a humble king on an untamed donkey.(Zech.9:9) But where would they find a donkey? Jesus drew on the willingness of one of His unnamed friends to serve Him. Whether they had made any prior arrangement we have no idea. What we do know is that the owner of the donkey readily made his animal available to Jesus, for whatever purpose and whenever the Lord needed it, as we are to make all we are and have Jesus' to use when He wishes. We are to submit to Him as the previously unriden donkey recognized its Creator. As He began His descent towards the city, there was mass excitement among the crowds who had heard and responded to His ministry in some way. Their enthusiasm was as yet only for His miracles rather than His message which they had not yet understood. They sang part of Ps.118:26, a Psalm which recognized that the coming Messiah who would be the 'stone which the builders rejected' but would 'become the chief corner stone'. The Pharisees objected because using this Psalm implied that they were the builders who would reject the Messiah. Jesus reminded them of Habakkuk's promise,(Hab.2:11) that even an inanimate creation would one day acknowledge its Creator when proud men refused to do so.(19:28-40)

Seeing the city of Jerusalem spread out before Him, Jesus grieved again,(13:34,35) for the terrible fate which would come upon it some 40 years later, as the result of wasted opportunities to trust in God. As the rightful owner of the temple Jesus entered His house and expelled the traders. Instead of a place where men heard God and went out to the city to proclaim Him freely, the commercialism of the city had taken over the temple. The church of Jesus Christ is about God's free grace, not a business, as it so easily becomes. In the temple courtyard Jesus welcomed all who came to His house, teaching them daily to the jealous fury of the religious leaders whose lucrative trade was under threat.(19:41-48)

QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY AND DISCUSSION

1. What was the key issue for the religious leaders after Jesus came into 'their' temple and began teaching? How did Jesus turn the question back on His critics?(20:1-8)
2. Who were the owner of the vineyard, the vinegrowers, the slaves and the son? How did this parable answer the question of the previous section?(20:9-18)
3. Why did the religious leaders use underhanded means to try to eliminate Jesus? What was so difficult about the first trick question the spies asked Him? What was Jesus' answer and why was it so brilliant? How does His answer help us?(20:19-26)
4. What was the second trick question and why did it seem hard to respond? How did Jesus answer it this time? Again, what is the value of His response to us? Why did some religious people approve of Jesus' answer?(20:27-40)
5. How did Jesus now challenge His critics in return? What was the point of His quote from Ps.110:1? How might Jesus' description of religious teachers be appropriate today? What would be modern equivalents of the things He said about them? How can we avoid making the same mistakes?(20:41-47)