

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

For about 1400 years, the Old Testament custom of the Passover had been observed every year in anticipation of this very year when Jesus Himself would be the Lamb who died for each family.(Exod.12; Lev.23:4-8; Jn.1:29; I Cor.5:7) The day was getting closer but the disciples were unaware of how history was about to be made. The Old Testament had also spelled out how Jesus would fall into the hands of His enemies.(Zech.11:12,13). Judas Iscariot, who had for some time been in the habit of stealing from the disciples,(Jn.12:6) let Satan into his life to carry out his plan. The chief priests were looking for their opportunity and provided the temptation. The flesh, the Devil and the world came together to persuade Judas to an act of terrible treachery.(22:1-6)

Jesus and His friends needed a room to meet in a city, in which they were strangers, during a crowded public holiday. Like the owner of the donkey in chapter 19 who made his animal available to Jesus, so the owner of a convenient upper room, large enough for them all, would be willing to offer them accommodation when the Lord asked for it. He would be identifiable by his unusual behaviour which was in contrast to what was normal in his culture. Men did not carry water pots. Perhaps his wife was sick or caring for a baby. Those who love the Lord are unashamedly different.(22:7-13)

During the meal Jesus used the familiar imagery of the unleavened bread to spell out the meaning of this Passover. His second picture however would have shocked His disciples because the Old Testament had forbidden them to drink the blood of any sacrifice.(Lev.17:14) Although the blood of a lamb could be poured out for atonement for their sin, the life of the animal could not enter into them. Jesus however would be different. His blood would cleanse their sin and, by His Spirit, His life would be poured into His disciples on the day of Pentecost. This would be the last Passover until the kingdom of God began within them. He hinted that His betrayer was among them and left them arguing about who he might be, causing each one to search his own heart.(22:14-23)

Feeling already uncomfortable, they picked up an old dispute about who would be His Prime Minister when He became the King. Jesus presented His totally opposite view of true leadership. Secular leaders want to have authority over others. Christian leadership is about service. When they had learned this difficult lesson on earth, Jesus would have great responsibility prepared for them in heaven. Earthly service is an apprenticeship for eternity.(22:24-30)

Simon Peter as a future leader would be a particular target of Satan. Despite his determination never to desert his Master he would fail by denying Him repeatedly. His own failure would be an unforgettable reminder of his human weakness as he sought to help his friends. Jesus by identifying with him in prayer would, on the other hand, never fail him. He went on to remind them of what they could expect of Him as the provider of all their needs as they went out to serve Him. He urged them to be equipped for the challenges ahead of them with a sword, surely the word of God.(Eph.6:17) They did not understand and picked up, not the word of God, but two real swords. For the moment He gave up trying to explain. He dropped another hint about the coming crucifixion by referring to Isa.53:12 but again they missed it.(22:31-38)

Jesus went to His favorite spot for prayer on the Mount of Olives. He urged the disciples to pray, not for Him, but as protection for themselves. Instead they fell asleep as we are so often asleep to the spiritual danger in which we stand. A little distance away Jesus asked the Father to take away the cup of death which He was facing. Was He panicking at the thought of the cross and looking

for a way of escape or was it more likely that the cup at that moment was the more imminent danger of death from shock indicated by the sweating of blood? If it was the latter then the angel who strengthened Him was the answer to His prayer.(22:39-46)

Through the olive groves came the huge mob who arrived to arrest Him, led by Judas who identified Him in the dark to His enemies by a kiss of greeting, a last pathetic attempt to keep up an appearance of innocence. Jesus rebuked Judas for his hypocrisy. A disciple identified in John's account as Peter,(Jn.18:10) made a wild swipe with one of the two swords, severing only the ear of one slave. It was his attempt to keep his promise never to let the Lord down. He must have felt humiliated by the Lord healing the man's ear. Jesus ordered His followers to stop military resistance, and then rebuked the chief priests too for their hypocrisy.(22:47-53)

Peter, probably more angry than fearful, followed Jesus' captors to the courtyard of the chief priest's house. Repeatedly others in the crowd accused Peter of being a disciple of Jesus. With increasing irritation he denied any knowledge of Jesus. As predicted the cock crowed. Jesus caught Peter's eye across the courtyard and Peter burst into tears. The look must have been one of love and forgiveness, not of condemnation. It broke Peter's heart.(22:54-62)

Like any other group of bullies supposing they had their victim helpless in their hands, the temple officers tormented their prisoner with beating and ridicule. When morning came Jesus was brought into the Jewish Council chamber for His first trial. The Council had one accusation. Had He claimed to be the Christ, the Son of God? He not only freely acknowledged who He was but repeated Psalm 110:1 which He had challenged the Pharisees to explain in Lk.20:41-44. In the view of the Council, He had confessed to blasphemy.(22:63-71)

QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY AND DISCUSSION

1. What charges did the priests bring against Jesus before Pilate? Was there any truth to them? What was Pilate's original verdict? How did he try to evade responsibility? Why did Jesus answer the charges before Herod? How did Herod deal with the case?(23:1-12)
2. What again was Pilate's verdict when Jesus was brought back to him? How did he attempt to settle the case? Why did his strategy fail? Why did the crowd choose Barabbas? What warning is there to us in Pilate's behaviour?(23:13-25)
3. What was the eventual impact of that day on Simon of Cyrene?(Acts 13:1) How did Jesus comfort the women who mourned over Him on the way to the cross? What future event is He warning them about?(23:26-31)
4. What were the different attitudes of the two criminals? How do their responses illustrate the two attitudes of humanity to the cross?(Isa.53:12) What did Jesus promise to the criminal who trusted Him? What was the Lord's attitude to those who crucified Him? How could He possibly speak that way? What further insult was He subjected to?(Ps.22:18) How did the various groups around the cross add more abuse to their cruelty? Why do people do such things?(23:32-43)
5. What happened to the sky and the temple curtain during the crucifixion? How did Jesus face His death at the final moment? What does this teach us about death as a Christian? What was the impact of all this on the centurion and the rest of the crowd?(23:44-49)
6. What immediate fruit was there from Jesus' testimony before the Council? What does this tell us about even the darkest situation? How did the women also respond to His death? What important promise had they all forgotten?(23:50-56)