

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

The training of the 'fishermen of men' had begun. The message had been illustrated, the cross of Christ to cleanse from sin, which is like leprosy, and the resurrection life of Christ to overcome our inability to live His way, which is like paralysis. Levi, the biggest leper of them all, had begun to follow Jesus by leaving his dishonest, repulsive lifestyle and opening his home to Jesus and those who wanted to know Him. Already the religious people who saw godliness as outward performance in keeping away from sinners, or giving something up, had begun to move in. Jesus had answered them with His message of meeting need and giving a life to be celebrated. Now they started to turn the pressure up. Their focus was on their special day, the Sabbath.

The Old Testament law had made provision for the poor. No-one need starve because those in need could gather grapes left over in the vineyard or wheat left in the corners of wheat fields, but they would need to gather the food for themselves.(Deut.23:24,25) Jesus' disciples were poor so they exercised their right to pick grain as they walked through the fields. The Pharisees, who were probably also the owners of the fields and resented the grain they were losing, had decided that the process of rubbing the ears of wheat to separate the grain was work, and therefore forbidden under the commandment to keep the Sabbath.(Exod.20:8-10) Their 'godliness' would deny food to the hungry. Jesus answered from the story in I Sam.21 of David persuading the priest to give him the showbread, which was laid out daily in the tabernacle, for his followers who were poor and hungry. The bread in the tabernacle was only for the priests, but now all Jesus' followers would be priests.(I Pet.2:9) God has established such practices for the needs of His people, not His own satisfaction, as the Pharisees supposed. Religion can hinder spiritually hungry people from being fed from the word of God.(6:1-5)

Their second attack on Jesus was even more outrageous. A man with a withered right hand, presuming he was naturally right-handed, would have been restricted in his ability to work. Without Christ, we too are withered in our ability to do God's work of meeting the needs of others. Again the religious people objected to healing this man on the Sabbath. By doing so they were forbidding God doing His own work of restoring a man to usefulness. Jesus as always was not going to be intimidated by opposition. By His response, the cruel bankruptcy of outward religion was exposed. The anger of His opponents was rising towards boiling point.(6:6-11)

Again Jesus went away for time with His Father. He was never too busy to pray. He was about to make 12 decisions which would change the world if He got them right. He had to be sure. His choices were extraordinary. The first 4 were fishermen, and probably illiterate. Their personal oddities would emerge as time went on. Matthew had been the cheating traitor, Thomas was the scientific doubter, Simon had been a nationalist guerilla, and Judas Iscariot became His greedy betrayer. Was that the best God could do? The exciting prospect lay not in what they were but in what He could do with their lives by teaching and example. The crowds gathered again seeking teaching and practical help, and He met their needs. Eleven of the 12 apostles would be His future plan for reaching millions.(6:12-19)

Jesus now began His first serious class in discipleship with 4 promises and 4 contrasting warnings. His promises were to the poor, the hungry, the grieving and the hated that He would reverse their situation. At the same time those who had it all now would one day lose what they were clinging to. Comparison with Matt.5:3-12 gives us an important clue. Jesus was talking not just of physical need which He will change one day but of our recognition of spiritual need which He waits to meet right now. It follows therefore that those who live in self-satisfied comfort now

will not only face judgement one day beyond death, but are already inwardly in desperate need.(6:20-26)

Jesus went on to explain how we could recognize someone who was 'blessed' by God. In their poverty of spirit and life, God has lavished His grace upon them which now overflows in giving abundantly even to those who caused their poverty and suffering in the first place. The religious people would expect to treat well only those who were good to them. They considered that their enemies deserved only justice. The blessed treat others as they would long to be treated, even though totally undeserved. They love, they give generously, they do good, they lend expecting nothing, they are merciful, they do not judge or condemn, and they pardon, just as God does, because it is God doing all this through them.(6:27-38)

The Lord used a series of illustrations to explain to His followers how different His way was from the religious model. The religious had blind teachers showing them the way. Their pupils could only end up like the teachers. If on the other hand our Teacher is Jesus we will grow like Him. Telling someone else how to behave is like picking dust out of another person's eye with a whole tree in your own. Imagine being operated on by a half blind eye surgeon. Of course when Jesus has restored our spiritual sight we begin to see with His eyes of compassion and mercy rather than in our previous judgemental way. As fruit trees produce fruit according to their nature, people produce spiritual fruit according to who lives in them.(Gal.5:22,23) Our mouths can only send out the message we have treasured in our hearts, whether good or evil. God is not impressed by religious words that do not come from the heart and are lived out. Before building a house consider its foundations. If we build on the solid rock of Jesus we can withstand the worst disasters of life.(Matt.7:24-27; 16:18; I Cor.3:10-15; 10:4) The choice is striking.(6:39-49)

#### QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY AND DISCUSSION

1. How does the story of the centurion and his slave illustrate the true nature of faith? What do we so often demand of God which falls far short of this example?(7:1-10)
2. In what way does the story of the widow's son picture what God wants to do in people's lives today? Did anyone show faith in this story? Why did Jesus restore this particular boy to life?(7:11-17)
3. Was John's action an example of faith or doubt? How can we learn from him? How did Jesus respond to his question? How will He answer ours?(7:18-23)
4. What did Jesus teach people about the reason John the Baptist had come into the world? Why did He describe him as less than those in the kingdom of God? What explanation did He give for how God's messengers are received? How was this illustrated by the different responses of those who heard His message? What wrong expectations may we have of preachers?(7:24-35)
5. How does the story of the immoral woman with the vial of perfume add further to our understanding of what is necessary for us to become Jesus' followers? How will religious people react when we do? What have they failed to understand?(7:36-50)