

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

Having been conceived of the Holy Spirit, and anointed by the Holy Spirit at His baptism, it now comes as no surprise to know the secret of the effective life and ministry of Jesus. He was 'full of the Holy Spirit'. John the Baptist was filled with the Spirit which implies that there was a previous time when he was not. Jesus was full of the Spirit which describes a settled state. It was never any different. It is only when the Spirit is in full control of us that we will be led by Him as Jesus was here. It is striking that the two most difficult challenges in Jesus' ministry came here at the very beginning and then at the very end when He died for us on the cross. Unless He could overcome temptation His death on the cross for our sin would have been pointless.

Jesus was tempted for 40 days as His resurrection appearances would also be for 40 days. In the time of Noah it rained for 40 days.(Gen.7:12) Elijah was in the wilderness for 40 days.(I Kgs.19:8) Moses' life was divided into three periods of 40 years. For Jesus these 40 days were spent without food, by the end of which time He would have been desperately weak. Only then did the Devil move. The first temptation was to make His very first miracle for His own benefit by turning stones into bread. The real temptation lay in the little word 'if'. The purpose was to place the seed of doubt as the Devil did with Eve in the Garden of Eden, 'Has God said?'(Gen.3:1) The temptation appealed to His physical appetite, which John referred to as 'the lust of the flesh'.(I Jn.2:16) The Devil had used the same trick with Eve to whom the fruit was 'good for food'.(Gen.3:6) Jesus' answer was from the word of God each time. This time it was to remind us that there is a greater food than that for the body.

The second temptation contradicted the plan of God by offering Him an earthly kingdom which avoided the cross. It proposed an alternative to God's plan as the Devil's words to Eve contradicted God's plan for her and Adam.(Gen.3:5) The world spread out before Him looked good and appealed to what John described as the 'lust of the eyes'.(I Jn.2:16) Again Jesus' reply was to restate God's fundamental plan that He and He alone should be worshipped. There could be no other plan.

The third temptation took him to the pinnacle of the temple in Jerusalem and challenged Him to prove who He really was by jumping off the temple tower in the expectation that the Father would send a contingent of angels to catch Him before He hit the ground. Such a dramatic event would catch the attention of the crowds below so that they would immediately know He was from God and listen to His message. The Devil encouraged Jesus by misquoting scripture in leaving a vital line out of Ps.91:11,12, 'To guard you in all your ways', which had the effect of making God's intervention conditional on us being in His will. Once more this resembled the technique in the Garden of Eden in which the Devil denied the word of God 'You surely shall not die!'(Gen.3:4) It reminds us too of John's explanation of the Devil's strategy to work on 'the boastful pride of life'.(I Jn.2:16) Once again the answer was from scripture. Don't you dare to challenge God!(4:1-12)

The Devil had no more tricks for the moment so he gave Jesus a break until an opportune time as he gives us time off in which we think we have won, only to ambush us at the least expected moment.(4:13)

'Full of the Spirit' meant being 'led by the Spirit' which we are now told will be in the 'power of the Spirit'. We cannot have His power without His control. So His ministry began first in the logical place, the synagogues, the places where people met together to study the word of God. These of all people should have been waiting for Him.(4:14,15)

Now Jesus faced the next most difficult audience of His ministry, His home town family and neighbours who had known Him all His life. His very first sermon was straight to the point as He read from Isa.61:1,2 in which the Father had set out for the Son His priorities when the time came for Him to come to earth. In keeping with the circumstances of His birth He was to preach the gospel first to the poor, the people who would have no way of rewarding Him. He was sent to the needy to tell them that all God had promised for thousands of years was to happen right now. His message was clear. He was claiming to be the fulfillment of this promise of the Messiah, the Christ. The response was confusion. On the one hand they were deeply impressed by how He spoke but at the same time they were familiar with Him as Joseph's son, one of themselves. He aggravated their confusion by reminding them of a well known saying about the lack of credibility given to a prophet in his home town. He compared them to the people who did not listen in Elijah's time, and in the life of Elisha, and so through both of them, God blessed non-Israelites instead. They were furious as His impudence and tried to throw Him over a cliff but God in a mysterious way freed Him from their power.(4:16-30)

From Nazareth He moved a few miles to the nearby town of Capernaum, to another synagogue. Last time people were impressed by His gracious words, this time it was by His words of authority. He had the unique ability to combine graciousness and a commanding manner which could not be ignored. He demonstrated His authority over demons whose master He had already defeated in the wilderness. He set a man free from the Devil's power as He would set us free. Word spread fast that this was no ordinary preacher.(4:31-37)

Jesus' ministry to big crowds never made Him too busy to stop and help one needy family. Simon Peter's mother in law was sick and unable to serve until Jesus raised her up. He wants to 'raise us up' to serve Him also. Repeatedly He showed His authority over sickness and demonic power in people's lives. The crowds continued to flock to Him and wanted to keep Him for themselves alone, but He would not be owned by one group. He still refuses to be limited to one church or denomination. He came for the world and no-one was going to restrict Him.(4:38-44)

QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY AND DISCUSSION

1. How did Jesus turn His pulpit into a parable? What in this story are pictured by the fish, the sea, the boats, the nets and the fishermen? What did Jesus' first disciples have to do to become His followers? What do we have to do to become 'fishers of men'?(5:1-11)
2. If leprosy is a picture of sin in our lives, how does this story illustrate the very first thing Jesus wants to do in our lives which will attract the attention of the people around us?(5:12-16)
3. What does this next story teach about the lengths faith will take us to so that we can bring others to Jesus? What does paralysis picture in our lives? What does it illustrate about the second action of Jesus in us when we come to the cross and meet Him? Why were the Pharisees so upset when a needy person got help from Jesus?(5:17-26)
4. How does the call of Levi, also known as Matthew, explain what is meant to happen when we become followers of Jesus? Why did the Pharisees object this time? How do people still do the same? How did Jesus answer? How does the same answer still apply? What was their next complaint? How did Jesus' three replies silence them for the moment? How do we face the same complaints today?(5: 29-39)