

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

Prayer by which the 'fishermen' keep in touch with the Chief Fisherman is vital according to Jesus in chapter 11. In the two chapters which follow He looked at the expectations and attitudes which hinder prayer. Now in chapter 13 He began to explore what hinders the fish from getting caught, why people are reluctant to trust themselves to Jesus.

The first and biggest difficulty many people have is suffering, whether it is caused by others or by natural disaster. Another common example is congenital abnormality in babies.(Jn.9:2,3) Most people wrongly interpret these events as God's particular punishment for particular sin. Jesus deliberately denied this explanation but at the same time urged us to see these occasions as good times to check where we really stand with God, because life is temporary and uncertain.(13:1-5)

Our second reason for not responding is apathy, supposing that there is no hurry, like the fig tree which could not see any urgency to produce fruit. Jesus pointed out that the reason we have time to make up our minds is because of the patience of God,(Rom.2:4) who gives us the privilege of opportunity to reconsider, but not limitless time. As far as the farmer/fisherman is concerned our responsibility is not to write people off but to feed them and wait, while at the same time warning them they do not have forever.(13:6-9)

The third obstacle is shown by a repeat of the opposition Jesus faced in chapter 6. Religious people wanted to keep His work within their rules. The synagogue officials had taken the fourth commandment to do no work on the Sabbath day and interpreted it to suit themselves. The Sabbath was intended to be a day to rest from ordinary activity and instead to focus on the work of God in which we are to relax so that He will continue that work in us. They had arbitrarily decided that this forbade people such as them helping the needy but it did not prevent them meeting the needs of their animals. They had shaped the rules to suit themselves. When Jesus broke their law by healing the crippled woman He was doing exactly what the Sabbath was designed to do, to show the creative work of God. When she stood erect for the first time for years, she was demonstrating God's plan to equip us to face the world unashamed. The demon who was removed from her life had clearly been replaced by God because the woman immediately glorified Him. She was not left as an empty house.(11:24-26) The Lord's exposure of their hypocrisy was a humiliating but deserved defeat for empty religion, which was thoroughly enjoyed by the crowd who were sick of rules which they sensed kept them away from a real relationship with God.(13:10-17)

To underline His concern about the damage caused by man-made religion, Jesus used two illustrations about problems which arise in the kingdom of God. That kingdom is within us, not yet in heaven.(17:21) Elsewhere the field is the world and the seed, the word of God.(8:11) Mustard seed in particular is compared to faith in the word.(17:6) What had gone wrong? Mustard was intended to be an annual crop to be harvested regularly not left to grow into a tree. It is all too easy in the Christian church to forget what is intended to be the end result of our preaching and to let the church grow into a structure which becomes the central purpose of our existence. The birds of the air in the parable of the sower were the agents of the Devil who find a nesting place in our organizations from which they can snatch the seed which lands on the path, the hearts of those who are for the moment hard against the word of God.(8:5)

Jesus' second picture of what goes wrong in the kingdom of God was set in the kitchen where a woman hid leaven, dough containing yeast, in the flour. Flour is ground up seed, and leaven elsewhere is false teaching.(Matt.16:6,11,12) A woman in the Bible is either the faithful bride,

the church, or the unfaithful harlot.(Eph.5:22-33; Rev.17) A church can readily fall into the trap of trying to make truth more tasty by adding a spice of wrong teaching. The problem is that the false teaching all too quickly takes over the message we offer to a hungry world.(13:18-21)

Jesus' disciples, like many Christian workers since, wondered if the struggle to win people to their cause meant that Christians would always be just a handful in any society. As so often before instead of answering their question, Jesus reminded them of how they could be sure where they stood with God. The word 'narrow' in Greek is 'stenos', and means there is a door which will only admit one at a time. Jesus described Himself as 'the door',(Jn.10:7) so therefore being a Christian is about meeting Him alone. Simply being in the crowd or the family around Jesus does not mean that we know Him. From all over the world will come into heaven people who have met Him personally. Their number and identity may surprise us. At the same time there will be religious hangers-on who will be shocked to find themselves excluded. They thought they would be first in the kingdom of God but they were horribly wrong.(13:22-30)

Word had reached Herod of the progress of Jesus' ministry. He felt himself threatened by Jesus' message about how God sees the heart, as he had been by John's straightforwardness. Some of the Pharisees who themselves had no reason to love Herod, warned Jesus of the danger He was in. Jesus' response was simple. He was on a journey which would lead Him to Jerusalem and to death and resurrection. He would not die one day earlier than the Father had planned. As Dr David Livingstone, the missionary-explorer put it, 'I am invincible until the will of God is completed in my life.' Jerusalem had been where so many prophets had been killed yet she would one day be the very place where the King would be welcomed.(13:31-35)

QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY AND DISCUSSION

1. Why did Jesus accept yet another invitation to a meal with a Pharisee? What were their motives in asking Him to share their tables? Why did they remain silent when Jesus challenged them about what He was going to do? How once again did He expose their hypocrisy? How does He expose ours at times?(14:1-6)
2. In the parable of the wedding banquet, how did the guests embarrass themselves? Why is this such a problem for religious people? What view of ourselves is necessary if we are to enter the kingdom of God?(14:7-11)
3. In this next dinner party who are we to invite and why? How does this story relate to our priorities in evangelism? What effect would Jesus' teaching in this story have upon the composition of our churches? How does this dinner illustration follow from the one before?(14:12-14)
4. What is the problem in the third dinner party? What was the meaning of the various excuses? How do they apply to us? Whom did the master welcome instead of the original invited guests? What was Jesus saying to the religious people in each of these three dinner illustrations?(14:15-24)
5. What is necessary for us to be disciples of Jesus Christ? Does He really want us to hate our families? What does it mean to 'carry his own cross'?(Gal.2:20) What illustrations did Jesus use to explain what we need to consider before we commit ourselves to being His disciples? What warning or encouragement does each illustration give?(14:25-35)