

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

After four chapters of training it was time to send the fishermen out to fish. Their training had included a fine balance of listening to theory and watching Jesus in action. They had seen Him lay the groundwork for future teaching of the crowds by the use of parables which they would remember, though not yet understand. They had witnessed miracles of cleansing lepers, healing the paralysed, giving sight to the blind and speech to the dumb. They had seen problems which had defeated doctors solved, and the dead raised. They had observed storms being calmed and the Devil being defeated. In all of these were pictures of the power of the gospel to restore people to normal, as God created them to be. Now it was their turn to try all this out. First Jesus called His disciples to Him and then sent them out. He gave them both a task and the power and authority to carry it out. He instructed them to meet spiritual needs by proclaiming the kingdom of God and practical needs by healing. He encouraged them to trust Him for all their needs and to accept gratefully the hospitality they were offered. They did as they were told.(9:1-6)

Word of Jesus' ministry reached Herod whose conscience was troubling him over his murder of John. Could Jesus be John resurrected? Had one of the Old Testament prophets returned? He wanted to meet Jesus to check out the rumours but not enough to mingle with the crowds who were constantly around him. Jesus knew that Herod's time would come and He waited.(9:7-9)

The fishermen returned full of all that they had done, perhaps forgetting who had worked through them. Jesus wanted to take them away for a quiet time of reflection but, as so often, their day off was interrupted by the crowd, hungry for teaching, practical help and finally food. The needy crowd became a teaching opportunity when the disciples suggested sending the people away to find their own food. Jesus challenged them, 'You give them something to eat!', but they had to admit that their own resources of 5 loaves and 2 fish were totally inadequate. He told them to instruct the crowd to sit down ready to eat. Jesus looked to heaven rather than to Himself, thanked His Father and handed out food, first to the disciples and through them to the hungry crowd. This would always be His way of working, to equip us so that we can feed others. Not only were all of them satisfied including the disciples, but every disciple walked away with a basketful of food to remind him of a simple principle, Lord I cannot but You can!(9:10-17)

They had just completed one test of their readiness to be fishermen. Now the Lord set them a new test with two simple questions, 'Who do the multitudes say that I am?' and 'But who do you say that I am?' Peter, alone, got the point but for the moment was told to keep quiet about what he did not yet fully understand. Jesus spelled out what it meant to be His disciple. It had something to do with our response to the cross and the resurrection, first for Him and then for us. Grasping this would usher in the kingdom of God in us.(9:18-27)

The next lesson in successful fishing for men took place on a mountain top. As He prayed, He began to glow from within with the glory of God. Transformation was His secret and would be the secret for us also.(Rom.12:2; II Cor.3:18) When the Lord is allowed to be Himself in us, He will show in our lives, and the Bible characters will come alive as they did for Jesus. Moses and Elijah were speaking of the coming crucifixion as they had done in their Old Testament ministry. Peter missed the point and wanted to keep the moment alive by building permanent memorials. He had to learn that transformation is simply the consequence of listening to Christ. So often like Peter, James and John we are asleep to the opportunity. Again for the moment they had nothing to say until what they had experienced made sense.(9:28-36)

From a glimpse of heaven they moved to a glimpse of hell in one suffering family. The other disciples had been unable to help the demon-possessed boy, presumably because they just tried to copy Jesus. This is why we too are ineffective until we experience transformation. But transformation, Jesus explained, would begin with rejection at the cross. Still they did not understand, and like us were too scared to ask.(9:37-45)

Arguments about promotion among Jesus' followers were common. At other times the chief contenders were James and John, pushed forward by their mother.(Mk.10:35; Matt.20:20) On this occasion Jesus explained that being great was about being least, like a young child. Perhaps to make up for his previous mistake John tried to take the lead by keeping their ministry exclusive. Jesus rebuked him for his competitive attitude. For the third time the two brothers missed the point by urging punishment of those who were unreceptive to Jesus' ministry. Each of these disputes revealed hindrances to transformation.(9:46-56)

Other would-be followers approached Jesus but for various reasons were shown not to be ready to be true disciples. The first one assumed that belonging to Jesus' company was about being part of an organisation, with earthly headquarters. The second thought following Him was a career to be taken up when family commitments had been discharged. There is no indication that the man's father was dead yet. The third wanted his family's support before becoming a disciple. All three had to learn that we have to follow Jesus like Levi,(Lk.5:27) who got up immediately and walked out, after which he could bring Jesus into his home and family.(9:57-62)

QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY AND DISCUSSION

1. How did the second outreach build on the experience of the first? How were they to pray before they began? How do these instructions prepare us also to be missionaries? What were they to do about their need of support and accommodation? What instructions were they given about how to handle rejection? How do we face similar situations today?(10:1-16)
2. What authority do we have in relation to the Devil? How are we to use such authority and how might we value it wrongly? What has to happen for us to respond to the gospel? Is there anything we can do to help this response to happen in others?(10:17-24)
3. What two simple principles sum up the whole Old Testament law? How are they the means of us receiving eternal life? Was there any difference between the thinking of the lawyer and that of Jesus? How would Jesus' answer to the question about who was his neighbour have shocked the lawyer? Why would he have found it difficult to do what Jesus described in the story of the Good Samaritan? How should truly loving God make such love possible?(10:25-37)
4. What had Martha got wrong in her desire to serve Jesus? How should Jesus' answer to the lawyer in the previous story have helped her to handle the situation differently? Were not Martha and the Good Samaritan doing the same thing?(10:38-42)