

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

Once already, Jesus had spoken of His purpose in coming into the world, to preach the kingdom of God.(4:43) He had encouraged the poor to look to Him and be blessed by possessing the kingdom of God,(6:20) through responding to the message He came to proclaim.(7:28) Now with His team of ‘fishermen’ beside Him He began the task in earnest. As surprising as the qualifications to be disciples of the men in His team, were the backgrounds of the ‘fisherwomen’ who shared in the task. Mary Magdalene had been possessed by seven demons, indicating previous involvement in spiritism, but she had now been set free. There is no indication that she was the prostitute at the end of chapter seven, nor guilty of any other immorality which fiction has attributed to her. She had definitely changed sides however, and would be privileged in future to be the first to meet the risen Christ, whom she loved, and to proclaim the good news of His resurrection, with passion.(Jn.20:1-18) Joanna, married to Herod’s steward, had also come over from the enemy, and may well have been influenced by John the Baptist. We know nothing else about Susanna, except that like the others she had money and made it unreservedly available to Jesus.(8:1-3)

Jesus campaign to preach the kingdom of God began with what has become His most famous parable, the story of the sower. First He described the four kinds of soil with which the sower had to work and then in response to their questions explained the meaning to His team. The seed is the word of God, planted in men’s hearts by Jesus and those through whom He is allowed to work. Before going into detail in His exposition, Jesus explained His strategy in using parables rather than straight statements as His way of teaching. He reminded them of what God told Isaiah,(Isa.9:6) about preaching to people who listened and looked, but did not understand as yet because their hearts were not ready. Isaiah was assured that his words would not be wasted because there would come a time in adversity when his message made sense. Seed can sit a long time in the ground before rain and sun bring it to fruition. Parables may be remembered long before they are understood.(8:4-10)

Some seed lands on hard unyielding hearts from which it is quickly removed by the Devil who uses all kinds of means and people to distract. Other hearts looks receptive on the surface but there is still a hardness underneath which is revealed by adversity. There are yet others who really are open to the word but are also receptive to all kinds of other messages about the value of money and pleasure. Finally there are hearts open to Jesus and nothing else, in whom the word is wonderfully fruitful, both as His qualities appear in those people and as the truth is multiplied into others’ lives. Are these four different kinds of people, or us on four different occasions? Even as Christians our heart attitude to the word of God can fluctuate between these four possibilities, sometimes all in the same day.(8:11-15)

Hearing the word of God is His way of switching the ‘light of the world’ on inside us,(Matt.5:14-16) but He is also to be the light for the world around us, so why hide Him? There is no limit to how much of the light of Christ through the word of God we can receive and pass on. At the same time if we keep the truth to ourselves its blessing somehow slips away from us.(8:16-18)

The family arrived to see Jesus. On another occasion,(Mk.3:21) their purpose in finding Him was to lock Him away to save them public embarrassment. Family disapproval was yet another pressure Jesus had to live with like the disapproval of religious people. Knowing that the Father was pleased with Him freed Him to respond to their needs rather than their demands. He took the opportunity to teach His audience as well as His family that the secret of their needs being met was to hear and then do the will of God, like the good soil and the uncovered light.(8:19-21)

Jesus decided it was time to take His fishermen back to sea to learn a new lesson. Supposing they knew better than Him how to sail a boat, they let Him go to sleep. When the storm came, they panicked. He rebuked them for a lack of faith, not because they did not anticipate the storm or His response, but because they had forgotten who He was.(8:22-25)

The next 'storm' Jesus faced was from a crazy, naked man in a cemetery whose demons shouted at Him to go away. Again He demonstrated His authority, this time over Satan, whose agents were exiled to a herd of pigs who rushed madly into the sea. The local people who presumably owned the pigs which God had forbidden,(Lev.11:7,8) preferred their swine to their madman and sent Jesus away. The former demoniac wanted to follow the Lord and was told to start being a disciple by returning home and witnessing to family and friends.(8:26-39)

While one crowd told Jesus to go away, another crowd welcomed Him. First in the queue for His help was a desperate religious leader whose 12 year old daughter was dying. Jesus agreed to come to his home but His seemingly urgent mission was interrupted by someone who, one might have expected, could have waited a few more minutes. A woman who had had a gynaecological problem for 12 years reached out to the Lord. Jesus recognized that this was the moment to heal her because at last, after trying every other approach, she had finally come in faith to Him. From there He moved on to Jairus' house, apparently arriving too late. Some laughed at Him and were excluded from the miracle. Only her parents and His three close friends believed Him and saw the miracle of a dead child sitting up and asking for food. Her parents were instructed to keep quiet about Jesus because unlike the demoniac they did not yet understand what He had done.(8:40-56)

QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY AND DISCUSSION

1. What were the principles on which the disciples' outreach was to be based? Do these same principles still apply to us today? Why did Jesus not take the opportunity to go and witness to Herod? Could it have saved His life in the future?(9:1-9)
2. When the disciples returned from their mission, why did they need time alone with Jesus? What did the feeding of the 5000 teach them about how they might be more effective next time they went out to witness of Him?(9:10-17)
3. Why did Jesus ask His followers two questions in verses 18 and 20, not just one? What according to this section do we have to understand and do to become a disciple of Jesus?(9:18-27)
4. What was the secret of the life of Jesus? What did the disciples see and hear which would help them in future? How did Peter miss the point of this moment?(9:28-36)
5. Why do you suppose Jesus' other disciples could not help the demon-possessed boy? Why did the Lord describe them as 'unbelieving and perverted'? What did they still need to learn before they could begin to be effective?(9:37-48)
6. In what three different ways did James and John fail to understand what it meant to be a follower of Jesus? How do we still make the same mistakes?(9:49-56)
7. How did three other people say they wanted to follow Jesus? Why did He seem to discourage them at this point in their understanding? How does He say the same to us today if we hesitate for the same reasons?(9:57-62)