

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

Jesus' example in praying so often to His Father inspired His disciples to want to pray in a meaningful way. The trainee fishermen needed to learn how to keep in touch with headquarters. What was the secret? John may have taught his followers set prayers such as the Psalms. What Jesus taught has become the world's best known prayer, the Lord's Prayer, here in a slightly shorter form than in Matthew 6. It can be thought of either as a prayer to be learned and repeated by heart, as millions have done in times of need, or at the same time it can be a series of headings for our own prayers.

- It begins with a recognition of our relationship with God as our shared Father.
- His name and therefore His authority are to be supreme – we are to pray according to His plan.
- We want Him to be the King, in us now, and in the world when He returns.
- We want Him to supply our very basic needs every day.
- Our greatest need is to be forgiven by God.
- Our next need is to be able to forgive others as His forgiveness flows on through us to them.
- We want Him to lead us because otherwise we will wander straight into trouble.(11:1-4)

The story of the friend disturbing another friend at midnight because a third friend had turned up unexpectedly would be a common event in their very hospitable culture. Equally common might be the reaction of the friend on being wakened reluctantly with a request for bread. 'Go away! Don't you know what time it is?' The friend out in the street was not to be put off and kept knocking until the one in bed took the easy path and got up, handed over bread, somewhat ungraciously, and jumped back into bed as fast as possible. When Jesus encourages us to ask, seek and knock is He telling us that God is like the friend who loved his bed? Is God really irritated by our inconvenient demands, but gives in under pressure. Surely not. He is a Father who will give His sons exactly what He knows they need. The key words are 'How much more...' in verse 13. The point of the story is the contrast between the bed-loving friend and our heavenly Father. Parents respond to their children's needs in the middle of the night though friends may not want to be bothered. Our real need, our Father knows, is for the Holy Spirit who is waiting to come into the lives of those who invite Him. Effective prayer has to begin with this request before we are ready to ask for anything else.(11:5-13)

The Devil keep some people dumb because his view of life leaves us with nothing worth saying. This man was literally dumb through demon possession. Jesus set him free. Some bystanders, presumably Pharisees, saw the world upside down and gave the credit to Satan for the work of Jesus. Others having just seen a miracle were demanding more miracles. Jesus with remarkable restraint pointed out that if the Devil had done this, there must be civil war in hell. He hinted at the unseen war between heaven and hell played out in this man. Jesus is the stronger man who can throw the weaker man, the Devil, out of His house, our life. It must be impossible therefore for Christians to be demon-possessed. Jesus urged them to make up their minds which side they were on. There are only two choices. There is no room for 'don't knows'. He warned about the futility of casting out demons if He does not replace them. Our task is to preach the Kingdom of God so that Jesus is invited in, at which time any other invader has to leave.(11:14-26)

After the man who gave the Devil credit for the work of Jesus, came the woman who wanted to give credit to His mother. Jesus, without putting His mother down, responded as He had on a previous occasion,(8:19-21) by pointing out that blessing only comes through believing and obeying His word.(11:27,28)

Jesus continued dealing with wrong views of what people should expect of Him. He turned now to those who only looked for the spectacular. They wanted bigger and bigger miracles although they had already seen many. He reminded them of Jonah who went through 'death' in the whale and 'resurrection' on the beach to be able to speak to the people of Ninevah. The cross and the resurrection would be His final miracle, but would people looking only for the dramatic listen to Him even when that happened? They would have less excuse than the Ninevites who responded to Jonah's simple message, or the Queen of Sheba who listened to Solomon's wisdom. Let the truth of Christ switch the light of understanding on in our hearts and then let it shine out into a dark world.(11:29-36)

The next misconception about Jesus came from a Pharisee who invited Him for lunch. The host expected his guest to follow the cultural custom of ceremonial washing. Jesus explained that cleanness before God is about the inside not the outside. A clean inside shows as charity, literally mercy, not criticism of the outside of others.(11:37-41)

'Woe' is sadness, the opposite of 'blessing. Six times Jesus explains why the religious people were so miserable. The first 3 woes were addressed to the Pharisees who emphasized the outside and the last 3 to the lawyers who turned grace into academic rules.

- In their tithing of garden herbs they found an excuse for neglecting the needy.
- In their demand for recognition by men rather than God.
- In their dead insides which meant they were not respected by ordinary people.
- In the impossible standards they set for others but fell short of themselves.
- In their reverence for great men of the past whom their fathers had killed.
- In their hiding of truth behind their scholarship which kept others away from learning.

Religious opposition began to grow as the Pharisees started to plot to get rid of someone who made them so uncomfortable and threatened their position.(11:42-54)

QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY AND DISCUSSION

1. With what word did Jesus sum up the problem of religious people? How did it show then and how does it show now? Why will it lead to us being persecuted? How are we to respond at such times? What does it mean to blaspheme against the Holy Spirit? Who does this, and with what consequence?(12:1-12)
2. Why did Jesus not take the opportunity to stand up for justice? What much bigger issue concerned Him? How can we be rich towards God?(12:13-21)
3. What three things are we anxious about according to this passage? Why is there no need to worry about these aspects of life? What are we to do instead? How does this approach work out in practice?(12:22-34)
4. Instead of being pre-occupied with worry about earthly issues, what deep concern should we have? How will being ready for Christ's return show in practice?(12:35-40)
5. While we wait for the return of Jesus what should a faithful steward be doing? What on the other hand will the unfaithful steward do? What behaviour does this refer to today? Why is this such a serious matter?(12:41-48)
6. What baptism was Jesus so concerned to get on and accomplish? Had He not already been baptized by John? Why and how would this event divide people? How are we meant to interpret current events in the light of what Jesus promised? How should our interpretation affect our relationship with others?(12:49-59)