

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

Supposing the short, amazing life of the best friend they had ever had was over, some of His followers huddled in fear and grief in their homes while a few brave women ventured out on Sunday morning to the tomb to prepare His body for a traditional funeral. Expecting nothing but days and weeks ahead of sorrow, they were confronted with a series of shocks. Despite the large stone sealed over the mouth of the tomb, supposedly guarded by soldiers, (Matt.27:62-66) there was no-one there; the stone had been rolled away and when they entered the tomb there was no body. The biggest surprise was still to come. Two angels met them and announced the news. He had risen from the dead and was alive. A cemetery is the wrong place to look for the living! The angels reminded them of Jesus' frequently repeated but unheard message that after His crucifixion He would rise again three days later. (9:22; Matt.12:40; 17:9,23; 20:19) Finally His promise made sense. With no body to care for, there was no alternative but to spread the news of the resurrection to the rest of His followers. The two Marys, Joanna and the other women rushed off full of excitement only to be met with complete disbelief from those whose minds were as closed to the good news as theirs had been. Peter, to whom the angels' instruction had been particularly directed, (Mark 16:7) had to check the unlikely story out for himself. He was still recovering from the emotional turmoil of his denial of Jesus contrasted with the Lord's unchanging love for him. He found the same empty tomb, which left him confused but hoping. He went home to think it through. (24:1-12)

Two sad looking figures were walking along a dusty road from Jerusalem towards the village of Emmaus about 10 kilometres away, talking miserably about what had happened three days earlier. A third figure joined them, vaguely familiar but as yet unrecognized. When He asked them what they were talking about they stopped, surprised. Surely everyone knew? They proceeded to tell Him all about Himself! But it was all in the past tense. They related what they knew of His life, teaching, work and death at the hands of the religious leaders. They even told Him of the rumour of the resurrection being spread by the women to whom angels had supposedly appeared. It must have been hard for the Lord to keep a straight face! Finally He began to speak about the Old Testament promises that the Christ would not only have to die for our sake, but would rise from the dead and return to heaven. He then took them book by book through the scriptures demonstrating how every book was about Him. He was the central theme from Genesis to Malachi. They had never had a Bible study like this before. At last it all made sense. Later they would say that their hearts burned within them as He taught them about Himself. So absorbing was the message they heard that day, that in no time at all they found themselves in Emmaus. Still unaware of who He was, they invited Him to stay in the home to which they were heading. At the table, He took the bread and gave thanks, and suddenly they realized with whom they had traveled. Maybe this was the first time that day they saw His outstretched hands, with the marks of the nails. No sooner had they identified their visitor than He disappeared back into eternity. Realizing how blind they had been, they had to return to Jerusalem to share the exciting news. Tired though they must have been, they covered the 10 kilometres in record time. Rushing back into the upper room, both talking at once, they found the apostles listening to the account of Jesus appearing to Simon Peter. (I Cor.15:5) When the risen Lord Jesus Christ teaches us about Himself all through the Bible we cannot wait to share the good news. (24:13-35)

As once again the audience struggled with disbelief while they listened to the two from Emmaus, the Lord responded to their need for certainty by appearing suddenly in the middle of the group. Understandably they were shocked and thought He was a ghost. Jesus set out to lay their doubts to rest for ever by demonstrating how unmistakably real He was. First He invited them to touch

His hands and feet, scarred by the nails.(Jn.20:25-28) They were still too excited to take in what He was showing them so He asked for food. The 'ghost' ate a piece of fish while they watched in wonder. Now they knew that His resurrection was real and physical, not a vision or a hallucination.(24:36-43)

The most compelling evidence of the resurrection was yet to come. Future generations of those seeking Christ would not have the privilege of a personal appearance of Jesus to convince them. Like the two on the road to Emmaus, the apostles were treated to a very special Bible study. The Lord took them through the Old Testament book by book. The Law of Moses referred to the first five books, the Prophets to all the historical books including the major and minor prophets, and the Psalms meant all the poetic books. Once more He showed them how the theme of every book was Him, His death and resurrection, and the message and task with which He would leave them. He emphasized what He had taught them for three years and the simple response of repentance which God requires of us as the condition of forgiveness of sin. He wanted the whole world to hear the message but this process was to start in their own city of Jerusalem. They were the first little group He had chosen for the job. They had had the privilege others would not have of seeing Him in a physical body. The rest of us would have to believe their message without such a miracle. How could that happen? By Him sending His Spirit to live within them, teach them throughout His word, empower them and demonstrate Himself through them. For the moment they were to wait until the chosen day, still 7 weeks ahead.(24:44-49)

Forty extraordinary days of resurrection appearances ended with a short walk with Jesus to the village of Bethany, just 3 kilometres from Jerusalem on the slopes of the Mount of Olives. It was the home of Mary, Martha and Lazarus,(Jn.11:1) the village from which the donkey was borrowed for Jesus' entry into Jerusalem,(Lk.19:29) and the Lord's base during the last week before His crucifixion.(Mk.11:11) It was a fitting place at which to say goodbye for the moment, when He was carried up to heaven.(Acts 1:9) No longer terrified and in despair, and needing to hide away, they began 10 days of joyful waiting for His promise of His Spirit and the beginning of the next exciting chapter in human history.(24:50-53)

QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY AND DISCUSSION

1. What for you were the most memorable moments in Luke's account of the life of Jesus?
2. What questions are you left with after completing this study? How do you expect to find answers to them?
3. What difference will this book make to your life in the future?
4. To whom would you particularly recommend reading this book as a starting point for learning about the Christian message?