

Study 4: Firm foundations

May the words of our mouths and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our rock and our redeemer.

Please prepare for our meeting by reading **Luke 6:11-49** and thinking about the following questions. If you haven't time for everything, just do whatever you can – no one will check up on you. If possible, please bring a Bible with you to the meeting.

In the last study [4:31-6:11] we saw that Our Lord challenged everyone he encountered to decide for or against him, by speaking authoritatively although he was not a qualified scribe, healing the sick and sinful, and prioritising mercy and humanity above strict legalities. St Luke's record of those episodes followed that of St Mark quite closely in most respects.

But it is likely that many of the people who decided for Our Lord were mainly thinking about what they hoped he would do for them - looking after their needs, bringing the Kingdom of God into line with their easy-going lifestyles, and perhaps even launching an era of prosperity and power. St Mark recorded very little of what Our Lord said about how his hearers should behave from day to day, so at this point St Luke decided to add some of Our Lord's basic teachings to make clear that the Kingdom of God is not an easy or comfortable option. Luke probably knew about those teachings partly from the witnesses themselves and partly from notes which witnesses had jotted down (either while listening or later) and circulated. There may have been dozens or hundreds of such jottings available to him, with lots of duplication and no indication of context, so he would have had to decide which teachings to include, how to arrange them, and where in his Gospel to record them.

1. "He chose from them twelve"

- i) Do you think that it was easy for Our Lord to decide which of his disciples should be apostles?
- ii) Can you think of any reasons why Luke recorded the choosing of the apostles just before his first big collection of Our Lord's teachings?

2. Blessings and woes

- i) Verses 20-26 have a lot in common with St Matthew's beatitudes (Mt. 5:3-11). But what are the differences? Does Luke convey any messages which are missing from Matthew?
- ii) Luke seems to suggest that it is wrong to have a safe, comfortable lifestyle and to be liked. Is it?

3. "Love your enemies"

- i) Do you think that literally turning the other cheek is the best way of showing love to someone who is exploitative or abusive? If not, or not always, what can we learn from this passage?
- ii) Do the ideas of exposing one's face to blows and being stripped of one's clothes bring to mind any other Gospel events? Might these ideas have had special significance for the persecuted Christians for whom Luke was writing?

4. Judgment and discernment

- i) Verses 37-42 seem to say that we should not judge others, but verses 43-45 seem to encourage us to work out whether a person is good on the basis of what they do. Is there a real contradiction here?
- ii) Who do you think are the 'blind guides' and the people with 'wooden beams' in their eyes and the 'decaying trees' to whom Our Lord is speaking? Do we encounter blind guides in our own lives? Are we ourselves sometimes blind guides?
- iii) Do you think that any of Our Lord's sayings are intended to be amusing?

5. Building on rock

'Why do you call me "Lord, Lord", and do not do what I tell you? [6:46]. In this passage St Luke for the first time (but not the last!) shows Our Lord appealing to us to use our common sense and act on what we believe.

- i) Do you think that common sense is important in the Christian life?
- ii) Is common sense enough to make good Christians of us?