

## Study 10: Last chances

*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 12:49-14:6** 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.

Questions marked with an asterisk are about your personal spiritual life, and intended mainly for personal meditation – you should not feel any pressure to talk about personal things unless you wish to.

In this passage we find again the themes we have already met in Our Lord's teaching on his last journey to Jerusalem: vigilance and alertness, hostility and confrontation, and a destiny of suffering which may not be shirked. But division and destruction are even closer now, and the window of opportunity for choosing salvation is narrowing fast.

### 1. Division (12:49-53)

- i) \*Have you encountered opposition to your faith in your own family or your circle of friends? How did you handle it?
- ii) How should we handle opposition to our faith in our own families and circles of friends? Is it ever right to be confrontational and/or to separate ourselves from a beloved group? Can you think of any passages in the New Testament which give us good advice?

### 2. The time is short (12:54-13:9; 13:18-30)

- i) Is it easy to interpret the signs of the times correctly (12:56)? What might prevent us from doing so? [See also Study 8.]
- ii) How can we 'settle with our accuser' (12:58)?
- iii) Is trouble and suffering, e.g. the deaths of those killed by Pilate or by the tower in Siloam (13:1,3), a sign to us? Does the Bible teach us that suffering is always a punishment for sin?
- iv) Do the parables of the fig tree and the narrow door teach us that Our Lord's mercy is limited (13:9,25)?
- v) Have you ever grown mustard<sup>1</sup> or set bread to rise (13:18-21)? How quickly do they get bigger? Why did Our Lord choose quick-acting things as images of the Kingdom of Heaven? Do you feel that the Kingdom is coming quickly?

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<sup>1</sup> St. Luke probably took the mustard-seed comparison from St. Mark's Gospel (4:30-32); but Luke's background was urban, and he seems to have misunderstood it slightly. Mustard is a vigorous green vegetable, but not a tree, and St. Mark says that the birds nest in its shade, not in its branches. The tree idea may owe something to Ezekiel 17:23, "On the mountain height of Israel I will plant [a cedar sprig], that it may bear branches and produce fruit and become a noble cedar. And under it will dwell every kind of bird; in the shade of its branches birds of every sort will nest."

### **3. Doing good cannot wait (13:10-17, 14:1-6)**

- i) Is it unreasonable to assume that someone who has suffered pain and disability for 18 years can put up with it for another day to avoid upsetting religious observances?
- ii) Our Lord did not wait to be asked by the crippled woman or the man with dropsy. Was this unusual? Why do you think he did this?
- iii) \*Do you feel a sense of urgency about giving what help you can to people in need, e.g. by making donations to well-run charities or offering help to housebound neighbours? Have you ever put off things like this? Have you ever missed opportunities to help altogether by putting things off?

### **4. "I must go on my way" (13:31-35)**

By calling Herod a 'fox' and telling the group of Pharisees to go to him, Our Lord implies that he detects a trick in their warning. Probably Herod just feared a popular rising or riots, so wanted Our Lord to hurry out of his territory. Our Lord responds that he will not be hurried away from the last few days of his ordinary pastoral work, but nevertheless Herod need not worry: Our Lord's destiny lies in Jerusalem rather than Galilee, and that destiny is death.

- i) What different responses to Our Lord are shown in chapter 13? Might Herod have been right to expect disturbances?
- ii) Can you remember any events earlier in St. Luke's Gospel which show how important Jerusalem was for Our Lord?
- iii) What messages do verses 28-30 and 34-35 have for the mixed Jewish/gentile communities for whom St. Luke wrote?