

## Study 13: Dangerous illusions

*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 16:18-17:19** 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 the parables of the lost sheep, lost coin and prodigal son Our Lord emphasised the generosity of God's mercy. But now we are reminded again that God is not a soft touch. His forgiveness and help flow from his own immense goodness and love, not from contempt for the law nor from tolerance of injustice nor from any entitlement of ours. If we deceive ourselves and become complacent or conceited we may miss our chance of salvation.

### 1. The law and the kingdom of God (16:14-18)

- i) \*Do you think that your own possessions make it more difficult for you to serve God faithfully?
- ii) Even commentators find verse 16 puzzling. What do you make of it?
- iii) Why do you think that Our Lord's teaching about marriage is introduced at this point?

### 2. The rich man and the beggar (16:19-31)

- i) Does the parable suggest that the rich man neglected Lazarus deliberately? Is it his fault if he never really noticed Lazarus? Is it our fault if we are unaware of the needs around us?
- ii) Is Luke suggesting that poor people have an automatic right to enter heaven?
- iii) Does the rich man seem to think that he has a right to Abraham's help?
- iv) Why can the rich man not be rescued despite his regrets, while the prodigal son could?
- v) Do you think that Our Lord could still save the rich man from the place of torment, even though Abraham could not?
- vi) What kind of mindset is needed to accept that someone has risen from the dead?

### 3. Admonitions for leaders and teachers (17:1-10)

- i) Are the warnings in vv. 1-4 addressed just to the official leaders of the community? What kinds of behaviour mentioned in these verses are likely to lead others into sin?
- ii) How do you think that God increases our faith (vv. 5-6)? Is it always a straightforward, instantaneous gift, independent of our activities and experiences? If not, what kinds of tasks or experiences do you think God might send to develop our faith?
- iii) Ought leaders and teachers to expect admiration and special treatment (vv. 7-10)?
- iv) \*Have you ever felt that you have done some special service for God which entitles you to special appreciation or reward (vv. 7-10)?

#### **4. Ten lepers (17:11-19)**

- i) Why do you think that the nine Jewish lepers were more interested in showing themselves to the priests than in expressing gratitude?
- ii) Why does Luke emphasise that the grateful leper was a Samaritan?
- iii) \*Does your membership of a Christian community make you feel that you have a special right to Our Lord's help with practical or spiritual challenges? Do you feel more ardent when asking for help than when giving thanks for it? Do you give thanks continually (see Eph. 5:20)?