

STUDY 5

Jesus is Anointed at Bethany
John 12:1-8

READ the passage.

Jot down what you think it is about.

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Thinking About How You Read The Passage

This passage contains issues of dying, extravagance, making a fuss at table, and caring for the poor.

What is your immediate reaction to these issues- the ideas that spring to mind almost instantly in your life?

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How do you think this reaction might impact on how you read this story? Who are the heroes and villains, and what is really important in the story?

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Thinking About John 12:1-8 With Our Partners

To our partners: Who do you identify with or have sympathy with in this story and why?

They said:

- Judas Iscariot's words of concern for the poor do not match his intentions, which were self interest and envy of Jesus' anointing by Mary. Also, he is trying to destroy or water down the good intention behind Mary's gift of love and warm welcoming heart for people under her roof.

- The poor, in most cases, are used as scapegoats by those in high and strategic positions to acquire or use a situation to gain access to something for themselves – pretending to show goodwill towards those in need and pretending to show pity towards them.
- 'I sympathise with Lazarus and Judas Iscariot: Lazarus, because even after being raised from the dead, the chief priests were still plotting to kill him; and Judas, because he doesn't know that Jesus knew his scheme. He thought he was clever and did not know that Jesus could see through him.'
- 'I have sympathy for Martha. On another occasion, she did not realise that the personal attention that Mary gave to Jesus was just as important as the preparation she was making to serve the guests a meal.'
- 'I also feel sorry for Judas, because he thought only about keeping money for himself at the expense of his own salvation. He didn't know his future actions

- had been ordained beforehand.'
- 'We would identify with Mary. She was perhaps preparing for Jesus' death or at least understood the grave situation in Jerusalem.'
- 'I am concerned with Judas' attitude. It seems like he paid attention to the poor but actually he only wanted to create the opportunity to steal the money for himself. I have sympathy with Mary, for Judas blamed her whereas she only wanted to show her love to Jesus. The things that Mary did seem economically irrational, but true love is always willing to sacrifice and forget to calculate the economic loss.'

What new insight or 'aha' moment did you have as you read this list? How might this insight change your understanding of the passage?

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Do we occasionally get so busy with the serving – the worship life, or caring for others – that we forget our need to focus on Jesus?

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Our partners raise the issue of Judas' actions being pre-ordained. How do you feel about the idea that Judas was just playing a part he had no control over? Can we be responsible for what we did not choose?

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Going Deeper Into The Passage

To understand this passage we need to place it within the surrounding story, and see this event as part of a much larger set of events.

In chapter 11, we have the story of the raising of Lazarus, which led some people to believe in Jesus (11:45), and others to report this event to the Pharisees as some sort of terrible thing (11:46). Typical of religious organisations, this led to a meeting. It was arranged by the Pharisees and the chief priests. The upshot of the meeting was a decision that Jesus should be put to death for the good of the nation. As Caiaphas said, 'It is better for you to have one man die for the people than to have the whole nation destroyed.' (11:50)

This meant that life in public became very dangerous for Jesus and he went to Ephraim with the disciples, and stayed there for some time. This was probably a time for Jesus to try to get the disciples up to speed about what was really going to happen, and to have a rest before the stress of the final days.



Lent Event – Bible Study Five

It is very rare that being a follower of Jesus in this country is dangerous. It can, however, be embarrassing or uncomfortable. When was the last time you felt embarrassed or uncomfortable about letting people know you were a Christian?

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At chapter 11, verse 55, we have a shift in the story. We are told that the Passover is near, and people were going up to Jerusalem. The Passover was central to the life of Israel. It was an act of remembrance of the way God had saved the people and brought them out of slavery (e.g., Lev. 23:4-8). Jerusalem, too, was central to life – the site of the temple, the economic and political centre of the community, and the throne of the hoped for king/messiah in the line of David. Jesus is seen as the new Passover, the new temple, and the new site of the presence of God among people.

In anticipation of the possibility that Jesus might go to the Passover, the chief priests and Pharisees gave orders that anyone who knew where Jesus was should inform on him so they could arrest him. The people speculated about whether Jesus would be brave or foolish enough to go.



Lent Event – Bible Study Five

Jesus places himself in the midst of this evolving story in a quite specific way. Six days before the Passover, Jesus comes to Bethany, a town very close to Jerusalem. Jesus' timing and itinerary is not shaped by either his enemies or by the speculation of the people. This is his decision and his plan, his step on the way to Jerusalem.

He comes to the home of Lazarus, Martha and Mary, which must have been a risky thing for them. They were harbouring a wanted man. Their response was to throw Jesus a dinner. Martha served the dinner, and Lazarus was at table with them. John clearly wants us to understand the reality of Lazarus' return to life. Mary takes some very expensive perfume, anoints his feet, and then wipes them with her hair. There are parallels in this story to those recorded in Mark 14:3-9, Matthew 26:6-13, and Luke 7:36-50, although each has placed it in a part of the story that suits their purposes. What is clear in John is that he wishes his readers to understand that the Son of Man, the one who had shown himself in the raising of Lazarus, dwells

among them in this last banquet, and that his presence draws forth the sort of faith and love that we all should show.

Mary's reaction is proof that she has understood and properly responded to Jesus' question at Lazarus' tomb: 'Do you believe that I am the resurrection and the life, and that in me is eternal life?' (11:25-26)

The reaction of Judas is that this was a terribly wasteful thing. It would have been far better to care for the poor, although John is at pains to explain that this was an excuse because Judas had his hand in the till, so to speak. The issue, though, is not simply to deal with theft or to badmouth Judas. The point is to draw a contrast between darkness and light, and to show the power of darkness manifesting itself even within Jesus' disciples and at such a high point in their journey.



What is your reaction to the idea that Judas, one who had followed Jesus for so long, could actually still represent darkness and not light?

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Our World

Are you able, at this time in your life, to confess that Jesus is 'the resurrection and the life'? If so, what does this mean for you in terms of real life choices and values?

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What are the places and times in your life where even now you may live more for yourself and less for Jesus?

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How keen are you to show your love for Jesus in a public way? How could you actually do that in your community?

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PROJECT

How does it change your attitude to this project if you think of it as an opportunity to serve Jesus? Does it enable you to be more courageous in standing up for the people, and not simply sending money?

Relief and Development Project 5
Village Water Supply and Education

Location - Nachipo, Narus, South Sudan

Partner Church - Sudan Council of Churches

The Situation

The villages of Nachipo have a population of 3,650 people. The land is arid and covered with shrubs. Goat husbandry provides the main source of income and food. Severe water shortage

is a part of life for the people. During the long dry season the communities dig shallow wells in the dry river beds to access drinking water. Alternatively, the children walk more than five kilometres to fetch water from the only well that serves the area. This leaves little time for education. Almost every adult is illiterate and the communities do not have access to schooling or formal education.

The Project

The project provides for the construction of several deep bores in the villages, including a water capturing system as well as a school for the community. The bore holes drastically improve the health of the people, reduce the workload of women and children and strengthen community by providing safe and easily accessible water year round. By reducing the time taken to access clean water, women are able to contribute to the sustainable development of their community. The school provides the essential education for the children of Nachipo, giving them opportunities to go on to further education and a hopeful future.

Achievements

A school comprising of three classrooms was built as a place for learning for the children of Nachipo. Around 150 children are currently enrolled, with children up to the age of 12 years attending to gain literacy skills. Four deep water bores were drilled in the Nachipo region. A management committee of local women and men, plus the village chief, maintains the bore holes.

The Future

In the year ahead, a further six boreholes will be drilled in the Nachipo area providing clean water to hundreds of people. Community workshops on health and hygiene will also be conducted. Funds raised will also support two qualified teachers and provide essential school materials such as desks, chairs, blackboards and teaching and learning aids. Planning is underway for the second phase of construction work including an additional three classrooms, administration block, head teacher's office and storage facilities.