

REFLECTION GUIDE

JOHN 11:45-12:8 | THE BEAUTY OF A TRUE DISCIPLE

KEY TERMS

Romans - At this point in history, Israel was under Roman occupation. The Jews were allowed some level of self-rule, but ultimate authority rested with Rome. The fear in v. 48 is that Jesus is beginning to stir up a rebellion that will result in Rome responding with strong military force.

Passover - Passover is the Jewish festival remembering God's deliverance of Israel from slavery in Egypt. The rest of John's Gospel (including Jesus' death and resurrection) takes place during and immediately following Passover, which makes the point that Jesus is true and better Passover—delivering people from sin and death.

SYNOPSIS

After raising Lazarus from the dead, many *believed* in Jesus, while others were still troubled by his actions (vv. 45-47). One group in particular goes to the Pharisees with a concern that Jesus' following is growing and eventually Rome will intervene with military force (v. 48). In response, Caiaphas, the high priest, says *it is better for you that one man should die for the people, not that the whole nation should perish* (v. 50). What Caiaphas means is that he doesn't care if Rome squashes Jesus and his followers, as long as the nation as a whole is safe. Ironically, though, Jesus will die *for the people*, just not in the way Caiaphas means these words. The religious leaders respond to Caiaphas by making plans to put Jesus to death themselves (v. 53). After this, Jesus lays low outside of Jerusalem and the surrounding areas until the next Passover when Jesus returns to Bethany, just outside of Jerusalem (vv. 55-12:1). While in Bethany, Mary and Martha host Jesus for dinner and during the dinner Mary anoints Jesus' feet with expensive perfume and washes his feet with her hair (v. 3). Anointing people with oil was a common practice in 1st century Israel, but typically oil was placed on the head. By anointing Jesus' feet, Mary's actions reveal great humility and devotion. Judas then responds to what Mary has done by saying *Why was this ointment not sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor?* (v. 5). Judas' question seems noble, but John tells the reader that Judas only said this because he was a thief and wanted the money for himself (v. 5). Jesus, however, ends the scene affirming the goodness of Mary's actions (vv. 7-8).

GOING DEEPER

Read Philippians 3:7-11 and Revelation 5:11-14. Reflect on Mary's act of devotion as she anoints Jesus with costly perfume, Paul's words about counting everything as loss compared to knowing Christ, and the voices of heaven declaring Jesus' worth. How do these passages help you see the surpassing value of Jesus? What might it look like for your worship and daily life to reflect that he is truly worthy?

DID YOU KNOW?

The perfume Mary used to anoint Jesus' feet (v. 3) was pure nard, imported from the Himalayas. John says it was worth 300 denarii, roughly equal to a year's wages for a laborer. This extravagant act shows Mary's devotion and contrasts sharply with Judas' greed.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

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LEARNING THE WORD

1. Read John 12:1-8. Make 3-5 quick observations. Who is present? What transpires?
2. The immediate background of this dinner is Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead (see John 11:28-44). What did Mary, Martha, and Lazarus learn about Jesus from that event? How might that new insight motivate what she does here?
3. If you had been present, what do you think would have been most shocking to you about what Mary does? What do you admire most about Mary's action towards Jesus?
4. We also see something important about Judas in this event. In fact, Mark 14:10-11 seems to indicate that Mary's anointing of Jesus with expensive perfume was the final event that pushed him to betray Jesus. What warning should we see in Judas about the heart of a "false disciple" – what was wrong about his expectations for following Jesus? How does he serve as a contrast to Mary?

LIVING THE WORD

5. In our day, we are commonly told the lie that we belong to ourselves, exist for ourselves, rely on ourselves, determine our own views and values, and ensure our own happiness. But Mary shows us a different paradigm for living in worship of someone else (Jesus). How is Mary's approach to finding a meaningful life surprising and counter-intuitive to us and to our modern assumptions? See also John 12:23-26.
6. Is it strange to you that Jesus not only accepts such a gift but affirms it as appropriate and good? What does this tell us about the uniqueness of *who he is* and the uniqueness of *what he is about to do*? How does this demonstrate how amazing his love and grace towards us really is?
7. In this passage, Mary is a beautiful example of a true disciple whose love of Jesus overflowed in humility, generosity, worship, service, boldness, witness, and abandon. If you had to pick one or two as areas you want to grow in your own life, which would you choose? Why?