

Bible Study Guide: Week of 3-28-2022

1. Read through the passage below
2. Read my notes and commentary
3. Read the questions at the end and ponder or discuss with others

Pastor Andrew

John 12:1-8

Six days before the Passover Jesus came to Bethany, the home of Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. ²There they gave a dinner for him. Martha served, and Lazarus was one of those at the table with him. ³Mary took a pound of costly perfume made of pure nard, anointed Jesus' feet, and wiped them with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. ⁴But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (the one who was about to betray him), said, ⁵"Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii and the money given to the poor?" ⁶(He said this not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief; he kept the common purse and used to steal what was put into it.) ⁷Jesus said, "Leave her alone. She bought it so that she might keep it for the day of my burial. ⁸You always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me."

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This Passover festival is the third and final such festival celebrated by Jesus in the gospel of John. Therefore, this event took place a mere week before the crucifixion. Ironically, it was the raising of Lazarus that caused the leaders of the temple to plot to put Jesus to death once and for all (see John 11:45ff). Jesus' supreme act of love and life leads to a hateful plot to do away with Jesus. The dinner is in honor of and gratitude for Jesus' act of raising Lazarus from death (John 11). As she is pictured elsewhere (Luke 10:38ff) Martha is busy serving. The Greek verb is *diakonei*—the same root as our English word *deacon*. Lazarus is "reclined" at the table with Jesus—just as the disciples will do at the last supper. The "dinner" they give is one of two instances of this Greek word *deipnon* in John. The other occurs in John 13:2 to refer to their last meal together. These are two instances of foreshadowing that point us forward into Jesus' "hour" of trial, suffering, and glory.

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Mary's actions, in addition to being consistent with her posture "at Jesus' feet" elsewhere (as in Luke 10:38ff), also foreshadow the coming scene in John 13 when Jesus washes the disciples' feet. Her act of wiping his feet prefigures Jesus' wiping the feet of the disciples with the towel. Mary is already obeying Jesus' command to love one another and wash one another's feet before he has even given the command! This is discipleship in the Gospel of John—to know and follow Jesus and to love one's fellow followers. The perfume would have been made from an extract of the Himalayan spikenard plant, a precious and prized substance. The pleasant fragrance is a symbolic contrast to the stench of death described at Lazarus' tomb (John 11:39). Jesus has replaced the rotten smell of decay with the fresh fragrance of life.

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Judas will also come up extensively in the coming passion narrative. His presence here sets up a tension between Jesus and Judas. In addition, John characterizes Judas not only as "the one about to betray Jesus," but also as a "thief," calling our minds back to John 10:1 and 10:10 where Jesus describes those who are contrasted with the Good Shepherd. A denarius was about a day's wages, so this perfume cost almost a year's wages!

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Mary's actions show a true picture of discipleship. Her relationship with Jesus is like that of the sheep and the Good Shepherd. In contrast, Judas' actions are compared with that of the proverbial thief from Jesus' parable of the Good Shepherd. Judas is one who will try to scatter and destroy the shepherd and the flock, however he will not win the day. Jesus will invite Mary and the others to live with him in this way from this time onward. His comment about the poor is not intended to justify lack of concern for the poor, but rather to highlight the short time remaining until Jesus' death and resurrection. The disciples must come to know Jesus and the window of opportunity for doing so during his earthly ministry is coming to a close soon.

Discussion/Reflection Questions:

- 1. To which character in this story do you most relate? Why?**
- 2. Do you think Judas' complaint about the use of the perfume is warranted? Why or why not?**
- 3. We've all lost someone we love in our lives. If Jesus gave you your lost loved one back safe and sound how would you express your gratitude?**