



# Believe

JOHN

MESSAGE

STUDY GUIDE

GROUP MATERIAL

SONGS

## Examining the text & our hearts:

*Bible Reading: John 12:1-11*

- 1 Six days before the Passover, Jesus came to Bethany where Lazarus was, the one Jesus had raised from the dead.
- 2 So they gave a dinner for him there; Martha was serving them, and Lazarus was one of those reclining at the table with him.
- 3 Then Mary took a pound of perfume, pure and expensive nard, anointed Jesus's feet, and wiped his feet with her hair. So the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume.
- 4 Then one of his disciples, Judas Iscariot (who was about to betray him), said,
- 5 "Why wasn't this perfume sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor?"
- 6 He didn't say this because he cared about the poor but because he was a thief. He was in charge of the money-bag and would steal part of what was put in it.
- 7 Jesus answered, "Leave her alone; she has kept it for the day of my burial.
- 8 For you always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me."
- 9 Then a large crowd of the Jews learned he was there. They came not only because of Jesus but also to see Lazarus, the one he had raised from the dead.
- 10 But the chief priests had decided to kill Lazarus also,
- 11 because he was the reason many of the Jews were deserting them and believing in Jesus.

### **I. The Lazarus Story Continued**

#### **A. The narrative returns to Bethany**

B. Chapter 12 is tied to chapter 11

- ? "The Lazarus episode is... extensive ...running from 11:1 to 12:11. Many see it as extending only as far as 11:44, but this is to cut it off too abruptly & miss the close connections & development... in 11:45-12:11. Jn. 11:45-57 contains the response to the miracle, including the division caused by it. The anointing of Jesus for burial by Mary in 12:1-8 is explicitly set in the home of Lazarus with Lazarus himself present (12:1-2) & the whole section is rounded off in 12:9-11 by...Lazarus becoming
- "The story of the raising of Lazarus (11:1-44) is incomplete without its aftermath in 11:45-12:11,

and... [forms] a single unit ... [which has a complex structure & doesn't follow the common...pattern of miracle, dialogue, discourse ... There's no concluding discourse. Instead, narrative & discourse are tightly interwoven." [Robert P. Vande Kappelle, Truth Revealed, p. 150]

- "The reference to [Mary's] anointing [of Jesus] at 11:2, while it speaks of an event that's not yet taken place acts as a kind of [fore-shadowing], pointing forward to the anointing as integral to the Lazarus story." [Dorothy Lee, Creation, Matter & the Image of God, p. 114]
- "11:1 marks ... the introduction of Bethany, ... Mary & Martha, the sisters of Lazarus...the main characters... These characters disappear from the narrative...in 11:47-53... [But,] reappear in the scene of the anointing (12:1-8). Thus, these two [episodes] could be seen together." [Varghese Johns, Imagery of Love in...John, p. 236]
- The "editorial comments about Lazarus stitch together the events of John 11 & the first half of John 12 (11:1; 12:1, 9-11, 17) ... These repeated reminders of Lazarus...connect the scenes as mutually interpretive." [Daniel J. Brendsel, Use of Isaiah 52–53 in John 12, p. 195]

### C. The raising of Lazarus is the pivot point in this Gospel

- "Does [John's] narrative have a middle? ... The raising of Lazarus is this pivot. It constitutes the 7th & climactic sign, but it is also ...the event that provokes [Jesus'] arrest & condemnation." [Andrew T. Lincoln, Truth on Trial, p. 149]
- "The raising of Lazarus is a great hinge in the plot of the Gospel."— James Resseguie, Strange Gospel, p. 186]
- John 11 & 12 are pivotal chapters that bring to a climax the mighty works of Jesus & set the stage for his death & resurrection. In the Synoptic Gospels, the cleansing of the temple led to the arrest of Jesus, but in John, it is the raising of Lazarus... sets in motion the events that lead to Jesus' death." [Robert P. Vande Kappelle, Truth Revealed, p. 149]

### D. The structure of this narrative

#### 1. Chiastic Narrative

- "In the Johannine account, the sisters [Mary & Martha] form part of a chiastic narrative in 7 scenes...from Jn. 11:1-12:11... [Lazarus'] life under threat of death forms the frame of the narrative with his raising from the dead as the center-piece, flanked on either side by the sisters' very different responses, along with those of the Jewish mourners." [Dorothy Lee, Creation, Matter & the Image of God, p. 114]

A – Threat of Lazarus dying 11:1-16

B – Martha & Jesus 11:17-27

C – Belief and Unbelief of 'Jews' 11:28-37

D – The raising of Lazarus 11:38-44

C – Belief and Unbelief of 'Jews' 11:45-52

B – Mary & Jesus 12:1-8

A – Threat to Lazarus from chief priests 12:9-11

#### 2. Sandwich Narrative

- "John's Gospel is using a literary device known as intercalation — one pericope is sandwiched in between another — to add emphasis to the overall message of the Jewish leaders' desire to kill Lazarus...John's use of intercalation is influenced by the writer of Mark's application of it in [his account of Jesus' anointing] Mark 14:1-11." [Michael Chung, "Bracketed Bethany Anointing," Bulletin for Biblical Research, Vol. 25.3 (2015) p. 68]

- "In [the Bethany anointing] chapter 14 Mark has created a 'sandwich' structure, i.e., a 'ABA' pattern Mk. 14:1-2 & 14:10-11 relate to two stages in the conspiracy against Jesus, while the 'filling in the sandwich' is the story of the anointing, Mk. 14:3-9... Mark wishes to bring home to his readers...the contrast between malevolent machinations in the background & devoted love in the foreground." [Graham Jackman, Word Became Flesh, p. 26]

E – Plotting to put Jesus to death – John 11:45-53

F – Mary anointing Jesus – John 12:3-8

E – Plotting to put Lazarus to death as well – John 12:9-11

### **E. Indication of the structure**

1. Lazarus at beginning – facing death – 11:1-2

2. Lazarus at end – facing death – 12:10

- After being raised by Jesus, Lazarus “become[s] the object of a death plot... [by] the chief priests... [So,] within a relatively short space of time, ironically Lazarus is returned to the very situation he was in at the start of John 11 –facing imminent death, but this time because he had just been brought back to life!” [Andrew Lincoln, “Lazarus Story,” in Richard Bauckham (ed.) John & Christian Theology, p. 215]

### **F. Three characters; three models of discipleship**

1. Martha believes – 11:27

2. Mary loves – 12:3-8

3. Lazarus lives – 11:44:12:1

- “In terms of birth order, it can hardly be doubted that Martha is the elder of the two sisters, since her name is almost always placed in advance of her sister Mary...Both sisters have equal stress in John’s...narrative, confessing their faith in either word or deed... The order of names must therefore reflect birth order...Martha is the elder sister, Lazarus is the 2nd sibling, & Mary is the youngest of the family.” [Dorothy A. Lee, Creation, Matter & Image of God, p. 129]

- “In the Bethany scenes Mary, Martha, & Lazarus offer 3 models of discipleship. Martha believes, Mary loves, & Lazarus lives. [These 3] encounter Jesus & their various responses to him...in the scenes in Bethany (11:1-12:11) [are] examples of responses to Jesus...Martha’s statement in 11:27 models faith for all disciples... 12:1-8 shows Mary’s response of love as she anoints Jesus’ feet & wipes them with her hair...The Bethany cluster...is about belief & unbelief, about life & love, & above all, about Jesus.” [Lamar Williamson, Preaching John, p. 145]

## **II. The sisters – Martha and Mary**

### **A. Both sisters are the main characters – both are needed**

**B. Martha; her confession of faith – chapter 11; Mary; her anointing of Jesus – chapter 11:2; 12:3-8**

### **C. Both are committed disciples**

### **D. John does not portray one more favorably than the other**

- “John does not portray one sister more favorably than the other...he presents both women as models of discipleship. John highlights the Christ...confession of Martha, but Mary also has a discipleship role because she anoints Jesus as Messiah (12:1-8).” [Susan Miller, Women in John’s Gospel, p. 60]

- “Contrary to the expectations set up in 11:1-4, Lazarus... [is not] the main character (i.e., the focus...other than Jesus). The role of main character goes not to him, but to his sisters. Despite some attempts to privilege one sister over the other, the dual focus on Martha & Mary -...focusing on one then the other, & back again, disrupts any notion that one of the sisters trumps the other as the ‘main’ character of the narrative.” [Jason S. Sturdevant, Adaptable Jesus of the 4th Gospel, p. 154]

- “Both sisters begin with rudimentary faith in Jesus ...& both...arrive finally at performing deeds of fully committed disciples. Jesus led both sisters, however, via different routes to that common goal. Martha’s journey unfolded initially via words. Mary’s, on the other hand, went the path of emotional expression...With both sisters ... Jesus then moved from words & tears to acting.” [Jason S. Sturdevant, Adaptable Jesus of the 4th Gospel, p. 154]

**E. Application:**

1. Martha and Mary are different personalities

- “The characterization of Martha & Mary in John closely matches the portrayal in Luke [Lk. 10:38-42] – of Martha as the outgoing & vocal sister & Mary as the quieter but more devout one, always found at Jesus’ feet (Jn. 12:3; Lk. 10:39).” [Robert P. Vande Kappelle, Truth Revealed, p. 150]

2. We are all constituted differently

a. The way we live out our discipleship should look differently

b. Not everyone lives out their discipleship the same way

c. Different times of life may change how we serve

i. Situation changes

ii. Over time we change

d. Don’t be locked in to one way of how you live out your discipleship

e. Don’t say “I’m not ...” or “I don’t have....”

f. Recognize the opportunities and respond in a timely way – don’t wait until...

Mark 14:8 “She has done what she could; she has anointed my body beforehand

**III. Mary versus Judas****A. Mary**

1. John names her

- “In Mary, the reader the reader is given a picture of the fullness of the life of discipleship. Her act shows forth the love that will be the hallmark of discipleship in John and the recognition of Jesus’ identity that is the decisive mark of Christian life.” Gail O’Day, Reflections on John, p. 599

- Jn. 11:2 introduces Mary as the one who anoints Jesus & wipes his feet with her hair (12:1-8) ...It’s conventional to read 11:2 as an editorial gloss inserted to clarify which of the many ‘Mary’s known to Christian tradition is meant here... By pointing forward to Mary’s role in this anointing, the Evangelist connects the Lazarus story with Jesus’ death.” [Robert P. Vande Kappelle, Truth Revealed, p. 150]

- “Matthew & Mark do not name the woman who anointed Jesus in the house of Simon the leper (Mt. 26:7; Mk. 14:3). The woman’s anonymity is startling...in the context of Jesus’ assertion ‘Wherever the good news is proclaimed...what she has done will be told...’ (Mk. 14:9) ...The identity of the woman was known in the early church, which is confirmed by John, who states that it was Mary from Bethany who anointed Jesus (11:2; 12:3).” [Eckhard Schnabel, Jesus in Jerusalem, p. ]

- “In Jn. 11:2 the portrayal of Lazarus’ sister Mary as ‘the one who anointed the Lord with perfume & wiped his feet with her hair’ enables the audience to identify the anonymous woman in Mark 14:3-9 [as Mary of Bethany] in fulfillment of Jesus’ words, assertion ‘Wherever the gospel is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in remembrance of her’ (Mk. 14:9).” [Kirk R. MacGregor, Historical & Theological Investigation of John’s Gospel p. 52]

- Mary is identified as the woman of the anointing (perhaps among a plethora of ‘Mary’s’)... Her anointing of Jesus’ feet... [is] in contrast [to her earlier] meeting with Jesus. Whereas she first falls at Jesus’ feet in grief & disappointment (11:32) she now places herself at Jesus’ feet from a very different motivation: gratitude, devotion, costly generosity, & realization of the repercussions of Jesus’ actions... She is a dedicated disciple of Jesus, with a deeper level of awareness than those around her.” [Dorothy Lee, “Martha & Mary,” in Chris. W. Skinner (ed.) Characters & Characterization in... John, p. 206]

- “The occurrence—of names in the stories of the Gospels may be partially explained by supposing that the named characters were members of the early Christian communities & themselves told the stories of the events...So long as they were known figures, their names remained attached to their stories as...eyewitness sources of these stories. The same explanation easily fits the case of Lazarus, Martha & Mary.” [Richard Bauckham, Testimony of the Beloved Disciple, p. 176]

2. The account in Luke 7 is a different time and person

- “Often we think that Mary, the sister of Lazarus, was a sinful woman. We conclude this only by [an unwarranted] combining stories across Gospels. In Luke 7... a sinful woman anointed Jesus. In John

11-12... Mary [Lazarus' sister] anointed Jesus, so we conclude that Mary was a sinful woman (rescued by Jesus). We may be slandering Mary's character." [David B. Capes, Rediscovering Jesus, p. 16]

- The anointing of Jesus by Mary of Bethany (also recorded in Matt. 26:6–13 and Mark 14:3–9) casts a long shadow forward over Jesus' imminent arrest, trial, condemnation, crucifixion, and burial (John 12:7–8). The story in Luke 7:36–50 involves a different woman, a different place, a different reaction from Jesus, and a different time in Jesus' ministry. ESV STUDY Bible

3. Mary shows her loving devotion in an unconventional way

a. As a servant, washing Jesus' feet; humble

b. Extravagant in her anointing

- "In John... there is no suggestion that [Martha] is less devoted to Jesus than her sister is, but in both [Luke & John] Mary, unlike Martha, expresses her devotion to Jesus in overt ways other than domestic work (listening to him teaching, falling at his feet, anointing him...) & Jesus defends her unconventional expression of devotion." [Richard Bauckham, Testimony of the Beloved Disciple, p. 179]

- "Mary of Bethany does not anoint Jesus' head, but his feet... The effect... is to highlight Mary's extravagant devotion to Jesus, rather than the messianic meaning of anointing. She takes the role, not of a prophet, but of a servant. She performs the role of a servant washing a guest's feet...but does it in an extraordinarily lavish way ... [John] wished to emphasize... Mary's remarkable love for Jesus." [Richard Bauckham, Testimony of the Beloved Disciple, pp. 188-9]

- It is recorded here that Mary anointed the feet of Jesus, while Matt. 26:7 and Mark 14:3 mention that she anointed Jesus' "head." Considering the large quantity of ointment, Mary apparently anointed both Jesus' head and his feet. Attending to the feet was the work of servants (cf. John 1:27; 13:5), so Mary's actions show humility and devotion. Her wiping of Jesus' feet with her hair is also remarkable, since Jewish women rarely unbound their hair in public. Mary's action indicates an expression of intense personal devotion to Christ, but no hint of immoral thoughts or conduct should be read into her actions. ESV Study Bible

- "It [Mary's anointing] was a gesture of lavish, almost reckless devotion, which Jesus himself later called a "beautiful thing". [Mark 14:6]" John Stott, The Cross of Christ, p. 57

c. She illustrates to us how we should respond to Jesus

- The power of the witness of Mary's discipleship in this story is that she knows how to respond to Jesus without being told. She fulfills Jesus' love commandment before he even teaches it (e.g., 13:34-35); she embraces Jesus' departure at his hour before he has taught his followers about its true meaning (e.g., 14:2-4; 16:19-24). ... In the anointing, she shows what it means to be one of Jesus' own. She gives boldly of herself in love to Jesus at this hour, just as Jesus will give boldly of himself in love at his hour. Gail O'Day, Reflections on John, p. 600

## B. Judas

1. The writer exposes Judas for who he is and what was in his heart

2. He is a lover of money and a thief

3. He will betray Jesus

- "In 12:4 the narrator uses 3 descriptive phrases to fill out the initial portrait [of Judas]: [1.] ['Iscariot'] (his surname), [2.] ['one of his disciples'] (his status as a disciple), & [3.] ['who was about to betray him'] (his role in the story). That... 'the betrayer' would speak up against Mary's deed is a telling element of this [episode]. The narrator is drawing a contrast between devotion & betrayal of Jesus... In the present passage both devotion & betrayal are connected to the death of Jesus. Mary's devotion has prepared Jesus for death where Judas' betrayal leads to Jesus' death." [Christopher W. Skinner, John & Thomas, p. 224]

- "In... 12:6 the narrator... in a negative aside... gives direct information about the betrayer. Judas' statement is driven by greed & not by a genuine concern for the poor. In his role as keeper of the

money box he has regularly stolen... [its] contents... [Judas] is presented as a picture of evil & [he] continues on that trajectory even to the end.” [C. W. Skinner, John & Thomas, p. 224]

### **C. The contrast**

1. Mary acts without words

2. Judas only has words of criticism

• Note “the difference between the presentation of Mary & Judas in John’s text. Mary acts; Judas only speaks. She takes the precious oil & anoints Jesus’ feet with it. Judas speaks only of what could have been done. She shows extravagant devotion to Jesus. Judas appears as an egoist who diverts contributions to the common purse to his own use. Through these [contrasts], the narrator is...offering role models... in [stark] tones...In Jesus’ pronouncement (12:7-8) [Mary] has treasured the oil & not given it away [‘wasted it’]. She prepared tenderly for the death of Jesus that Judas is scheming to bring about. Moreover, she has understood that haste is required while Judas sees no urgency.” [Johannes Beutler, John, pp. 320-1]

### **IV. Jesus’ response**

#### **A. Leave her alone**

12:7 Jesus answered, “Leave her alone; she has kept it for the day of my burial.

1. Mary tenderly prepares for the death of Jesus without knowledge of his coming death

2. She does this when she can, not withholding and without waiting – a sense of urgency

#### **B. You do not always have me with you**

12:8 For you always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me.”

1. Jesus is not saying don’t care for the poor.

2. He is indicating that he will soon not be there.

3. Take the opportunity while you have it.

• “Jesus’ response alludes to Deut. 15:11, and therefore he is not discouraging helping the poor. You do not always have me foreshadows Jesus’ impending death on the cross and subsequent resurrection and ascension, as well as the shortness of time remaining for the disciples to have a part in his earthly ministry.” ESV Study Bible

• “12:8 – “For you will always have the poor among you, but you will not always have me”, probably involves an allusion to Deut. 15:11: “There will always be poor people in the land.” Jesus’ point is that under normal circumstances concern for the poor has its place, but these are not normal circumstances. The Messiah is about to die, and Mary, in a gesture rich with prophetic symbolism, has met the need of the moment by anointing Jesus for burial. Hence faith and devoted discipleship triumph over religious observance and works.” G. K. Beale & D. A. Carson, Commentary on the NT use of the OT, p. 469