

# Life Group Questions

March 26<sup>th</sup>, 2023

**Crazy Devotion** – Pastor Ray Harms-Wiebe – **John 12:1-11**

To the Life Group leader: thank you for your ministry leading this Life Group. **Take time to review the questions, selecting those you believe will be most helpful for your group study.** You will not have time to use all the questions. Ask the Holy Spirit to guide you as you lead, as you select questions, and as you guide the discussion.

## Reconnect

Come together with these preliminary questions:

- How has God gifted you to serve Him?
- How will you serve Him this spring at Willingdon Church?
- Where has God placed you in the city? What is your role there?

## Open in Prayer

Ask the Holy Spirit to speak to you through the text, the questions, and each other.

## Message Recap Questions

**Review the message using these questions**

1. What stood out to you most in this week's message?
2. What was the most meaningful thing you heard in the message? Why?
3. What questions are still lingering?

## Questions

1. Who normally washed guests' feet?
2. What were guests' feet normally washed with?
3. What is special about the fact that Mary used Nard?
4. Why do you think Mary would do this for Jesus?
5. Is this event the same one as recorded in Matthew 26:6-16 and Luke 7:36-50? Read and discuss. Explain your answers.

6. Why do you think a crook like Judas would be entrusted with the money box?
7. What did Jesus mean in verse 7?
8. What can we learn from Mary's actions?
9. What applications can we make from her example?
10. Why did a large crowd of Jews come to see Jesus?
11. What did the Pharisees want to do to Lazarus? Why?
12. What should be done for the poor?

## Choose Your Next Step

**What next step will you commit to for the upcoming week (and beyond)?**

## Closing Prayer

A closing prayer is an effective way to point people back to our Loving Father as they seek to apply their new learnings throughout the week. Ask group members to share what they sense God calling them to. Pray for each other and commit to continue to do so during the week as people step out in obedience to God's leading.

# Commentary

This chapter contains no miraculous 'sign', and no sustained discourse. The first two narrative sections (vv. 1–11, 12–19) report events in which others honour Jesus, even though many do not grasp the significance of what is happening. In the third section (vv. 20–36) the arrival of the Greeks seeking Jesus serves as a signal that the 'hour' is at hand, and this generates a mixture of dialogue and monologue. The chapter ends with a lengthy meditation, steeped in Old Testament Scripture, as to why so many Jews did not believe, and a reflective summary of Jesus' authority and of the urgency of belief. Every paragraph builds toward the farewell discourse, passion and resurrection which immediately follow.

The anointing of Jesus at Bethany demands comparison with Matthew 26:6–13 = Mark 14:3–9; Luke 7:36–38. Matthew and Mark tell of an anointing at Bethany, in the house of Simon the leper. Their incident is undated, but is placed toward the end of Jesus' public ministry. The woman is unnamed, but she anoints Jesus' head with ointment of nard, taken from an alabaster jar. The disciples (Matthew.; Mark. has 'some of those present') were indignant. Jesus defends the woman, relates the anointing to his death and burial, mentions the fact that the poor will always be present, and promises that the woman's deed will always be remembered wherever the gospel is preached. By contrast, Luke reports a dinner at the home of a Pharisee (unnamed). An unnamed woman of immoral character, learning of Jesus' presence at the meal, brings an alabaster jar of perfume (not specified as nard). Overcome with remorse, she weeps so copiously that her tears wet Jesus' feet, which she wipes with her hair and then anoints with the perfume. The subsequent discussion centers neither on the poor nor on Jesus' impending burial, but on the unvoiced accusation of the Pharisee, who thinks that if Jesus were a prophet he would have known what kind of woman this was and forbidden her to touch him. Jesus detects in her tears the gratitude of one who had been forgiven much.

Although there are some critics who hold that one event stands behind the four reports, the discrepancies between Luke's account and the other three are so large that only unbridled imagination can offer adequate reasons to explain why so many differences would have been invented. The parallels between John and Matthew/Mark are much closer. Both place the anointing in Bethany, though Matthew/Mark specify the home of Simon the leper while John does not say to whom it belonged. In both, the ointment is pure nard; in both the reaction of the onlookers is that the perfume should have been sold and given to the poor. Matthew specifies that this was the reaction of the disciples; John names one particular disciple, Judas Iscariot. Both mention the sum of three hundred denarii as the value of the perfume (Mark says 'more than' three hundred denarii). In both Jesus defends the woman, and makes a reference to his burial.

Nevertheless, there are differences between John and Matthew/Mark. The least important is the setting: in Matthew/Mark it is placed after the triumphal entry, in John it is placed before. It must be remembered, however, that the time indicators in Matthew/Mark are notoriously loose. These

Evangelists often order their accounts according to topic, not chronology. In John's case the event is tied to the raising of Lazarus (vv. 1–2, 9–11), and the devotion of Mary serves, amongst other things, as a startling foil to the decision of the leaders to kill Jesus (*cf.* notes on 11:53). Apart from a number of details, none of which provides the remotest hint of contradiction (*e.g.* Mark does not name the woman, John specifies that it was Mary; Mark speaks of breaking the alabaster jar, John does not), the most startling difference is in the descriptions of the anointing. Mark speaks of an anointing on Jesus' head, John of an anointing on Jesus' feet followed by wiping of Jesus' feet with the woman's hair (*cf.* Luke's account, where the hair of the immoral woman was used to wipe her tears from Jesus' feet before the perfume was applied). This strange pattern of textual affinities has convinced many scholars that, assuming there were two separate incidents, there has been a 'crossover' of details as the stories were retold, resulting in clear errors in John's account. Why would anyone wipe off perfume that had just been applied? And would a respectable woman let down her tresses in male company?

Nevertheless, several small details in the text encourage the reader to inject a small dose of historical imagination before resorting too quickly to the critic's knife. *First*, the amount of nard is noticed by John, and is implied by Mark's reference to the breaking of the jar's neck (*i.e.* the jar was full, and breaking the neck was the way to pour all of it out). It is far too large a quantity to have been poured out over the head alone. *Second*, in both Matthew (26:12) and Mark (14:8), Jesus is reported as saying that the perfume was poured on *his body* in anticipation of his burial—a strange way of referring to his head alone. These two observations strongly suggest that the perfume was applied to more than Jesus' head or his feet. Indeed, if Jesus could see in its application a prefiguring of the unguents applied at his burial, one must suppose that it was lavishly applied. *Third*, Matthew and Mark have thematic reasons for referring in particular to Jesus' head: they wish to show that he is being honoured, anointed as king. It would not have been inappropriate for John to make the same emphases, but by mentioning the anointing on *Jesus' feet* there is injected into the description a sense of the woman's self-perceived unworthiness. She thus becomes a foil not only of the religious authorities who were actively plotting Jesus' death, but of the disciples who, in the very next chapter, have to be *taught* to wash one another's feet, and by Jesus himself. In short, it is reasonable to suppose that what actually happened was comprehensive enough to generate the accounts of both John and Matthew/Mark, including the divergences that initially seem so odd.