

JESUS THE SAVIOR

A Gospel-Centered Exploration of
JESUS' CRUCIFIXION AND RESURRECTION



MATT CHANDLER & GEOFF ASHLEY



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ABOUT THE GOSPEL PROJECT

Some people see the Bible as a collection of stories with morals for life application. But it's so much more. Sure, the Bible has some stories in it, but it's also full of poetry, history, codes of law and civilization, songs, prophecy, letters—even a love letter. When you tie it all together, something remarkable happens. A story is revealed. One story. The story of redemption through Jesus. This is *The Gospel Project*.

When we begin to see the Bible as the story of redemption through Jesus Christ, God's plan to rescue the world from sin and death, our perspective changes. We no longer look primarily for what the Bible says about us but instead see what it tells us about God and what He has done. After all, it's the gospel that saves us, and when we encounter Jesus in the pages of Scripture, the gospel works on us, transforming us into His image. We become God's gospel project.

ABOUT THE WRITERS



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HOW TO USE THIS STUDY

Welcome to *The Gospel Project*, a gospel-centered small-group study that dives deep into the things of God, lifts up Jesus, focuses on the grand story of Scripture, and drives participants to be on mission. This small-group Bible study provides opportunities to study the Bible and to encounter the living Christ. *The Gospel Project* provides you with tools and resources to purposefully study God's Word and to grow in the faith and knowledge of God's Son. And what's more, you can do so in the company of others, encouraging and building up one another. Here are some things to remember that will help you maximize the usefulness of this resource:

GATHER A GROUP. We grow in the faith best in community with other believers, as we love, encourage, correct, and challenge one another. The life of a disciple of Christ was never meant to be lived alone, in isolation.

PRAY. Pray regularly for your group members.

PREPARE. This resource includes the Bible study content, three devotionals, and discussion questions for each session. Work through the session and devotionals in preparation for each group session. Take notes and record your own questions. Also consider the follow-up questions so you are ready to participate in and add to the discussion, bringing up your own notes and questions where appropriate.

RESOURCE YOURSELF. Make good use of the additional resources available on the Web at gospelproject.com/additionalresources and search for this specific title. Download a podcast. Read a blog post. Be intentional about learning from others in the faith. For tips on how to better lead groups or additional ideas for leading this Bible study, visit: ministrygrid.com/web/thegospelproject.

GROUP TIME. Gather together with your group to discuss the session and devotional content. Work through the follow-up questions and your own questions. Discuss the material and the implications for the lives of believers and the mission to which we have been called.

OVERFLOW. Remember... *The Gospel Project* is not just a Bible study. *We* are the project. The gospel is working on us. Don't let your preparation time be simply about the content. Let the truths of God's Word soak in as you study. Let God work on your heart first, and then pray that He will change the hearts of the other people in your group.



SESSION 1

THE SAVIOR IS ANOINTED FOR BURIAL

“Authentic worship always involves obedience and sacrifice.”¹

HERBERT W. BATEMAN, IV

INDIVIDUAL STUDY



Not much can compete with the joy of a young child on Christmas morning. For days or even weeks she has seen wonderfully wrapped presents under a lit and decorated tree. Her anticipation has built until it is nearly ready to erupt in joyful consummation as paper and bows fly through the air in an unwrapping frenzy.

Little compares with that feeling except, perhaps, the joy of the parent as unbridled childhood anticipation collides with the patient longing of the parents to see joy's consummation in their child.

In those moments, it is abundantly clear that it is more blessed to give than to receive. Still, we all have within us the struggle to gratify ourselves, the struggle of greed.

In what areas of your life do you feel you are generous?

What compels your generosity?

In this session, we will see a contrast between the generosity of a woman and the greed of Judas as manifested in the account of Jesus' anointing at Bethany. In their respective responses to Jesus, we see the importance of giving Him priority and honor over everything in our lives. The distinction between these two people serves as an opportunity for us to consider our own hearts in light of the opportunity we have to express our devotion through visible acts of worship.

1 Mary Prepares Jesus

⁶ While Jesus was in Bethany at the house of Simon the leper, ⁷ a woman approached him with an alabaster jar of very expensive perfume. She poured it on his head as he was reclining at the table.

MATTHEW 26:6-7

At first glance, it is hard to appreciate what is happening in this scene. First and foremost, who among us would be at all honored by someone sneaking up behind us and pouring an entire bottle of canola oil or Chanel No. 5 on our heads? Rather than honored, we would be humiliated if not extremely confused.

Second, we miss the social boundaries from a historical perspective. Here we have a woman who is interrupting a feast in a room full of men. In this particular cultural context, this would have been quite the cause of confusion and conversation.

We know that the culture of a people determines what is socially acceptable and permissible, but throughout the Scripture we find that the kingdom of God turns expectations upside down. We see this evidence of upside-down expectations even from the beginning of the scene with Jesus eating in the home of a man identified as a “leper.” (See Lev. 13–14 for the requirements of the Mosaic law as it relates to leprosy.) Regarding the law with respect to skin diseases:

⁴⁵ The person who has a case of serious skin disease is to have his clothes torn and his hair hanging loose, and he must cover his mouth and cry out, “Unclean, unclean!” ⁴⁶ He will remain unclean as long as he has the disease; he is unclean. He must live alone in a place outside the camp.

LEVITICUS 13:45-46

Since Simon welcomed visitors into his home, perhaps he had been healed of his skin disease, but still being identified as “Simon the leper,” it may be that he was considered unclean by his neighbors. Whether he was clean or unclean, there was Jesus in the middle of the house belonging to “the leper,” and He was reclining at the table as they shared a meal together.

What are some other evidences you can think of from Scripture of the kingdom of God reversing expectations?

How does seeing this context help us better appreciate who Jesus is and what He does?

The scene being set, we now turn our attention to the anointing, which was in preparation for the task ahead of Jesus, namely, His death and burial.

Anointing oil was used for a number of purposes in Scripture. People are most familiar with it in its symbolic function to confirm an Israelite office or authority. For example, priests were to be anointed with oil (see Ex. 29:7), as were kings (see 1 Sam. 10:1), and sometimes even prophets. (See 1 Kings 19:16). Additionally, certain objects were anointed, such as the tabernacle and everything in it. (See Ex. 40:9). What all of these examples have in common is the consistent theme of setting apart a person or thing for devotion to God.

From the parallel account in John 12, we learn that this woman who anointed Jesus was Mary, the sister of Martha and Lazarus. Mary's original intentions are not entirely clear. Was she expressing in this act of devotion her belief that Jesus is the Christ, meaning the anointed One of God?

Or perhaps Mary was one of the first in the Gospels to really understand that the messianic mission would march through a tomb. Whether Mary was initially and intentionally aware of the significance of her action or not, Jesus clearly saw the act as stretching beyond the present into the future. In this simple glorious act, she has prepared Jesus for His upcoming burial. (See Matt. 26:12.)

What feelings do you think Mary experienced as these events unfolded?

How have you faced humiliation and shame for devotion to Jesus?

2

Jesus Praises Mary

A rare 1823 copy of the Declaration of Independence was once purchased for less than \$3 and later sold for nearly \$500,000. An Andy Warhol sketch reportedly was purchased for less than \$5 and valued around \$2 million. A rare 1,000-year-old Chinese bowl was purchased for about \$3 and sold at auction for more than \$2 million. Occasionally the national news will share an epic story like these of one man's trash becoming another man's treasure. We marvel at the lucrative discovery, but we can also look with derision at the one who sold the fortune for a pittance. This feeling is what fueled the disciples' response to Mary's anointing of Christ.

⁸ When the disciples saw it, they were indignant. "Why this waste?" they asked. ⁹ "This might have been sold for a great deal and given to the poor."

¹⁰ Aware of this, Jesus said to them, "Why are you bothering this woman? She has done a noble thing for me. ¹¹ You always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me. ¹² By pouring this perfume on my body, she has prepared me for burial. ¹³ Truly I tell you, wherever this gospel is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will also be told in memory of her."

MATTHEW 26:8-13

"Why this waste?" A simple question from the perspective of the disciples. For them there was no compelling reason to empty an entire bottle of valuable oil upon the head of Jesus. Regardless of their true motivations, they missed the significance of this act of devotion and expressed their belief that her gift was wasted. But in demeaning this woman and the value of her act, the disciples unknowingly demeaned Jesus and His coming death and resurrection.

This was an extravagant gift. Matthew described the perfume as "very expensive"; both Mark and John include that it was an expensive oil valued around 300 denarii. (See Mark 14:3,5; John 12:3,5.) Considering that a denarius was roughly equivalent to a day's wages, this jar was worth nearly one year's salary. Imagine someone today taking \$50,000 and setting it on fire, and you will understand the confusion of the disciples.

Now imagine someone giving her life savings for the sake of Christ and you will understand the devotion of Mary. Since women generally were not able to have jobs that would provide such income, this was probably a family heirloom with sentimental value in addition to its monetary value.

In return for her devotion, she was met with disdain by the disciples. They were indignant in their response and sought to scold her. But their anger was motivated more by love of their own kingdoms than love for the kingdom of God.

But the condemnation from the disciples is juxtaposed with Jesus' incredible commendation.

“Why are you bothering this woman? She has done a noble thing for me.” This “noble thing” that she has done bears hints of Jesus' earlier commendation of the widow's offering. (See Mark 12:41-44.) Though on opposite ends of the spectrum in regard to the intrinsic value of their individual gifts, both acts share the common denominator of wholehearted devotion, thus demonstrating that an act of sacrifice has value by virtue of motivation and intent, not inherent worth.

How do you measure the value of your giving?

“You always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me.” The desire to provide for the poor is a noble desire as well. After all, the Bible commands it and the apostles exemplified such a longing. (See Prov. 21:13; 22:9; Gal. 2:10; 1 John 3:17.) But the Bible also suggests that there is a time for all things. (See Eccl. 3:1-8.) There is a time to give your oil to the poor and a time to pour your oil on Christ.

“Wherever this gospel is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will also be told in memory of her.” Not only did Jesus praise her action, but He declared that it would be forever etched in the narrative of the gospel as an example of devotion and love. Likewise, the people of God are compelled by love to give to the work of God's kingdom. (See Acts 4:32-35.)

Why do you think Jesus singled out Mary's act of devotion as an enduring example?

How can our giving honor Jesus and serve as an example for others?

3

Judas Plans the Betrayal

Matthew's Gospel immediately moves from the anointing by Mary to the betrayal by Judas:

¹⁴ Then one of the Twelve, the man called Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests ¹⁵ and said, "What are you willing to give me if I hand him over to you?" So they weighed out thirty pieces of silver for him. ¹⁶ And from that time he started looking for a good opportunity to betray him.

MATTHEW 26:14-16

When Don Richardson, a missionary to New Guinea, first began to share the gospel with the Sawi tribe, he became aware of the extreme cultural divide that separated the tribe from a Christian understanding of the last days of Jesus' life. In particular, the Sawi understanding was distorted by their cultural commendation of betrayal. For the Sawi, treachery was a virtue to be celebrated.

As Richardson progressed through telling the narrative of the gospel, the narrative tension and suspense increased until the events of Judas' betrayal, at which point the Sawi began to celebrate. Rather than seeing the betrayal as the wicked rejection of the King, Judas was viewed as the hero of the story, given his skillful duplicity and infidelity.²

What are some forms of betrayal that are common in our culture?

What underlying motivations can fuel betrayal in these cases?

What is implicit in the Matthew 26 account is made explicit in John's Gospel. According to John 12, it was Judas who led the chorus of condemnation of the woman's anointing, and it is not from love of man but love of money. Thus, when he went to the chief priests and asked for payment, his motivations had already been exposed. Judas was not driven primarily by religious or theological conviction but by greed.

The contrast between Judas and Mary could not be more striking. Mary was willing to forfeit wealth for Jesus. Judas was willing to forfeit Jesus for wealth.

The contrast between Judas and Jesus is even more stunning. Judas sacrificed others for his own gain. Jesus sacrificed Himself for the gain of others.

This was no last minute and accidental betrayal in the heat of the moment. Judas was not cornered by the priests, nor did he just give in to his fleshly desires in a moment of passion and weakness. He walked two miles (the distance from Bethany to Jerusalem) over a mountain and through a valley in the middle of the night in order to seek out someone who might meet his craving for money.

The chief priests were more than happy to oblige, as they had been seeking an opportunity against Jesus for quite some time. Judas's arrival and willingness represented the open door they needed.

Furthermore, Scripture testifies that Judas' actions were influenced by Satanic desire (see Luke 22:3-6), and it was Satan who had previously left Jesus until an "opportune time," according to Luke 4:13 (ESV). The desires of the chief priests, Judas, and Satan all converged in this one opportunity for betrayal.

It is doubtful that anyone doing this study is compelled by the exact same motivations as Satan or the chief priests. Even the most hardened pagan is hardly actively seeking to crucify Christ. None of us has ever betrayed Jesus in exactly the same manner in which Judas did. Yet we are all creatures driven by desire; our cravings and longings are reflections of our loves and lusts. And biblically our hearts are naturally inclined toward our own kingdoms and glory apart from the work of the Spirit to grant us new hearts and desires.

How might you begin to cultivate a greater love for Christ that compels you toward generosity and sacrifice?

What are a few practical steps you can take to begin to practice generosity as an overflow of devotion and worship?



GROUP STUDY

Warm Up

Throughout Scripture, the people of God are marked by their giving. King David refused to give a sacrifice that cost him nothing. (See 2 Sam. 24:24.) Abraham prepared himself to lose his beloved son. (See Gen. 22.) The Macedonian Christians gave even beyond their means for the sake of their poor brothers and sisters in Christ in Judea and Jerusalem. (See 2 Cor. 8.) And Jacob's sacrifice of 14 years for Rachel seemed as nothing to him because of his love for her. (See Gen. 29:20,30.)

As a group, read Acts 4:32-35:

³² Now the entire group of those who believed were of one heart and mind, and no one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but instead they held everything in common. ³³ With great power the apostles were giving testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was on all of them. ³⁴ For there was not a needy person among them because all those who owned lands or houses sold them, brought the proceeds of what was sold, ³⁵ and laid them at the apostles' feet. This was then distributed to each person as any had need.

ACTS 4:32-35

How do you embody the message of Jesus through your giving?

**“He is no fool who gives what he cannot
keep to gain what he cannot lose.”³**

JIM ELLIOT

Discussion

1. What are some other evidences you can think of from Scripture of the kingdom of God reversing expectations?
2. How have you faced humiliation and shame for devotion to Jesus?
3. How do you measure the value of your giving?
4. Why do you think Jesus singled out Mary's act of devotion as an enduring example?
5. How can our giving honor Jesus and serve as an example for others?
6. What are some forms of betrayal that are common in our culture?
7. What underlying motivations can fuel betrayal in these cases?
8. How might you begin to cultivate a greater love for Christ that compels you toward generosity and sacrifice?
9. What are a few practical steps you can take to begin to practice generosity as an overflow of devotion and worship?

Conclusion

Mark also noted the significant detail that Mary broke the flask in the act. (See Mark 14:3.) The jar, itself of some value, could never be used again either. Together, the sacrifice of the jar and the nard symbolize the totality of the gift. Nothing was held back.

Mary's act demonstrated not only her generosity but also her faith and confidence in Jesus. She had witnessed firsthand His provision and power (including the raising of her own brother, Lazarus, from the dead), and so she came and freely gave.

If our motivation for giving is to receive praise from others or something in return, that is nothing more than greed. If our outright greed moves us to withhold generosity, then we have revealed that God's call on our lives is secondary to our comfort. It also shows that we treasure things other than God and long for our own glory over Christ's.

The Bible is clear: the people of God are marked by their joyful giving. (See 2 Cor. 9:7.) Even when our complex hearts reveal the deadly mix of generosity and greed, the convicting power of God's Spirit allows us to repent and honor God. As God has given His Son for us out of the overflow of His heart, so He calls and compels His people to express their devotion through visible acts of worship. Let us follow the example of Mary, exemplifying love and devotion to our Savior in our generosity.

Spend some time praying this for you and for your group:

"God, stir us to examine the condition of our own hearts before You. Help us to reject the greed of Judas and strive to be like Mary, who gave her most precious possession for Christ. But even more so, may we strive to be like Christ. Amen."

1. Herbert W. Bateman IV, "A Call to Authentic Worship," in *Authentic Worship: Hearing Scripture's Voice, Applying Its Truths*, ed. Herbert W. Bateman IV (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2002), 48.
2. Don Richardson, *Peace Child* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 2005), 151.
3. Jim Elliot, quoted in *Through Gates of Splendor*, by Elisabeth Elliot (Wheaton: Tyndale, 1986), 172.
4. Sean Douglas O'Donnell, *Matthew: All Authority in Heaven and on Earth*, in *Preaching the Word* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2014), [WORDsearch].

