

Leader's Guide
Sports in Focus Guide Seven

Below are some additional insights for
John 11:55-12:50
Source for answers: MacArthur New Testament Commentary

Context of John 11:55-12:50

This section of John's Gospel contrasts the different reactions of love and hate, belief and rejection of Christ, leading up to the arrest, trial, and crucifixion of Jesus. The Sanhedrin and other Jewish leaders wanted Jesus dead but did not want him killed during the Passover time because they feared His popularity with the people. Jesus entered the city on His own time in order that it might happen exactly on the Passover day when the lambs were being sacrificed. In God's perfect timing, Jesus Christ presented Himself to die.

Keys to Text

Passover Feast: The Passover was a special feast day in Israel's religious calendar and was linked to what took place in the Exodus (Exod. 12-13). It became entrenched in Israel's tradition and has always marked the day of redemption from Egypt. Passover began with the slaying of the Passover lamb, which had to be a lamb without blemish.

Read John 11:55-12:50

1. As the Passover began, what were the Jewish leaders busy doing?

Up to this point, the Lord did not allow His enemies to take His life. Hence He had avoided provoking unnecessary public confrontations with the hostile Jewish authorities. When "the Pharisees went out and conspired against Him, as to how they might destroy Him ... Jesus, aware of this, withdrew from there" (Matt. 12:14-15; cf. 8:4; 16:20; John 4:1-3; 7:1; 11:53-54). When confrontations did occur and His enemies sought to kill Him, He evaded them. The people of His hometown of Nazareth wanted to throw Him off a cliff, but Jesus "[passed] through their midst, [and] went His way" (Luke 4:30). On another occasion, enraged at His claim to be God (John 8:58), the hostile Jews "picked up stones to throw at Him, but Jesus hid Himself and went out of the temple" (v. 59; cf. 10:39). Jesus' commanding presence also prevented His enemies from seizing Him before the predetermined time (John 7:44-46).

2. Compare the scenes of Jesus' private life and public life in this passage. What differences or similarities do you find in how Jesus behaves? How he treats people?

3. At the supper described in the first part of chapter 12, how did Mary's attitudes and behavior contrast with Judas?

The stunned silence that must have followed Mary's startling and unexpected act was suddenly broken by a voice raised in protest. The conjunction *de* (but) introduces the stark contrast between Mary's selflessness and Judas's selfishness. As is always the case in the Gospels, John's description of Judas Iscariot emphasizes two facts. First, he was one of the Lord's disciples (Matt. 10:4; 26:14, 47; Mark 14:43; Luke 22:3, 47; John 6:71); second, he was intending to betray Him (Matt. 26:25; 27:3; Mark 3:19; 14:10; Luke 6:16; 22:4, 48; John 6:71; 13:2, 26-29; 18:2, 5; cf. Acts 1:16). So shocking and singularly defining was Judas's betrayal that the gospel writers could not think of him or refer to him apart from it. That he was not merely a follower of Christ, but one of the Lord's inner circle, makes his betrayal all the more heinous. It was the most despicable act in all of human history—and

the one that merited the most severe punishment. In the chilling words of the Lord Jesus Christ, “Woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been good for that man if he had not been born” (Matt. 26:24).

Wanting to appear philanthropic, Judas acted outraged over such a profligate waste of money, exclaiming, “Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii and given to poor people?” Chronologically, these are Judas’s first recorded words in the New Testament. They expose the avarice, ambition, and selfishness that ruled his heart. He had cast his lot with Jesus, expecting Him to usher in the political, earthly messianic kingdom most Jewish people were looking for. As one of the inner circle, Judas had eagerly anticipated an exalted position in that kingdom. But now, for him, that dream had turned to ashes. Jesus had so antagonized the Jewish leaders that they intended to kill Him (John 7:1; 11:53). Not only that, the Lord Himself warned the disciples that His death was inevitable (e.g., Mark 8:31; 9:31; 10:33). And when the Galilean crowds sought to crown Jesus as the earthly king Judas thought He would be, the Lord refused to cooperate with them (John 6:14–15).

4. Why was it significant for Christ to enter Jerusalem at Passover time?

The next day was Monday morning, the day after the supper at Bethany (12:1–11). During the night, Judas had met with the chief priests and agreed to betray Jesus to them (Matt. 26:14–16). But Jesus was not at the mercy of His enemies’ plots; He remained in absolute control of the circumstances. The divinely ordained time had come for Him to die (v. 23; cf. 13:1), but He would do so on His own terms. The Jewish leaders, fearful of how the large, volatile crowds in Jerusalem might react, wanted to put Jesus to death, but not during the Passover celebration (Matt. 26:3–5; cf. Luke 22:2). Their plan was to seize and execute Him after the feast was over and the people dispersed.

But regardless of His enemies’ desires, the Lord would die at the precise time foreordained in God’s eternal plan (cf. 10:17–18; 19:10–11; Acts 2:23; 4:27–28; Gal. 4:4–5); fittingly, the Lamb of God would be sacrificed on the same day that the Passover lambs were being sacrificed, because He is “Christ our Passover” sacrifice (1 Cor. 5:7). Therefore Jesus prepared to publicly enter Jerusalem to force the issue of His death. He knew that the accolades of the crowds would infuriate the Jewish leaders, and make them all the more desperate to kill Him. As always, God would use the foolishness and wickedness of evil men to accomplish His own purposes (cf. Gen. 50:20; Ps. 76:10; Acts 4:26–28).

5. Mary demonstrated her love and devotion in a costly, sacrificial way. How can you demonstrate your love for Christ this week?

6. Many religious leaders cared more about their circumstances and position than about the truth about Jesus (12:42-43). What are some specific ways you’ve seen that modern-day believers “love the praise of men more than the praise of God”?

Skeptics sometimes argue that Israel’s rejection of Jesus Christ casts doubt on the truth of His claims. It seems incredible to them that most of the Jewish people, especially the religious leaders who were steeped in the text of the Old Testament, could have missed the obvious implications of His miracles. Such a shortsighted view, however, ignores the power of sin (John 3:19–20) and Satan (John 8:44; 2 Cor. 4:4) to blind people to the truth. Thus, as John reminds his readers, though Jesus had performed so many signs before the Jewish people, yet they were not believing in Him. Jesus’ miracles were unmistakably legitimate, and left no excuse for Israel’s unbelief; the people had hardened their hearts against the truth. Far from calling into question the veracity of the evidence, such

unbelief revealed the depth of their depravity (1 Cor. 2:14). Significantly, though they attributed His miracles to satanic power (Matt. 12:24), Jesus' opponents—unlike modern skeptics—never denied their reality (cf. John 11:47). The fact of unbelief in the face of such irrefutable and powerful evidence makes clear the limitations of apologetics. While evidences can be given for gospel truth, the response of the sinner is not limited to the mind and human reason—salvation requires a regenerated heart, the work of the Holy Spirit (see the discussion of John 3:1ff. in John 1–11, *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary* [Chicago: Moody, 2006], chaps. 8–9).

7. Jesus said He came as a “light.” What has the light illuminated in your life that needs changing?

