

# A Faithful Soul in the Shadow of the Cross



## SABBATH—FEBRUARY 21

**READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY:** John 11 and 12.

**MEMORY VERSE:** “ ‘ I [Jesus] tell you the truth, unless a kernel [seed] of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds’ ” (John 12:24, NIV).

**IMPORTANT THOUGHT:** In the death and resurrection<sup>1</sup> of Lazarus, John gives a preview of Jesus' death and resurrection. The shadow of the Cross causes Mary to give Jesus her complete faith.

**WE LOVE HIM BECAUSE HE FIRST LOVED US.** In John 11 and 12, John begins the slow change from Jesus' earthly ministry (work) to the events<sup>2</sup> leading to the Cross. The two main events in John 11 and 12 happen in Bethany, just across the Mount of Olives from Jerusalem. John describes Jesus' raising of Lazarus from the grave and His anointing with perfume by Mary. In this way, he prepares the reader for the sad but necessary events that will soon happen.

“The raising of Lazarus makes the religious leaders angrier. The Sanhedrin<sup>3</sup> sees Lazarus's resurrection as a threat. So the Sanhedrin begins planning Jesus' death. In contrast to the Sanhedrin is Mary's glorious faithfulness to Jesus. Her faithfulness comes at the right time. When Jesus went down into the darkness of His great trial, He carried with Him the memory of Mary's faith. It was an example of the love that would be His from the people He would save.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 560.

\*Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, February 28.

<sup>1</sup>resurrection—return to life.

<sup>2</sup>events—things that happen.

<sup>3</sup>Sanhedrin—the Jewish governing council.

SUNDAY—FEBRUARY 22

### THE RAISING OF LAZARUS (John 11:1-44).

**Read John 11:1-44. Then answer these questions:**

1. Why did Jesus wait so long before going to Bethany? How did the delay make Jesus' act more of a miracle?

2. Read what Jesus said in John 11:25, 26. How did the act of raising Lazarus help prove those words to be true?

3. Read what Jesus said in John 11:41, 42. How do these verses show where Jesus' power came from? Also read John 11:22.

4. What is so important about the confession<sup>4</sup> of faith in John 11:27?

The bottom line of Christian faith is that there is real power in the gospel.<sup>5</sup> The power that raised Lazarus from the grave is real. This power is still available today! God may not turn sad happenings into happy ones. But the resurrection power of God will bring meaning and comfort to our souls if we let it.

Death, betrayal, and destruction leave people sad over the loss of loved ones. This loss cannot be explained away. We often wonder why Jesus did not stop them from dying. We struggle to understand what "glory to God" might possibly come out of sad events. When sad events happen, we can remember that the God who raised Jesus from the grave is still able to create something out of nothing. Even when all seems hopeless, we can still put our trust in Him. We have to, because if we do not, what else is there? Fortunately, we have stories in the book of John that can give us even more reasons to trust in God.



**We can trust God,  
even when life seems hopeless.**

**Read John 11:37. Who has not thought of almost the same thing when a sad event happens to him or her? What is the only answer we can give?**

<sup>4</sup> confession—when you say to other people that you believe in Jesus.

<sup>5</sup>gospel—the good news of salvation.

## MONDAY—FEBRUARY 23

**MARY AND MARTHA**  
(John 11:31, 32).

**What was the first thing both Martha and Mary said to Jesus when they first saw Jesus come? How did those words show both faith and doubt at the same time? John 11:21, 32.**

To Mary and Martha, Lazarus's death was not the worst thing. The worst thing was Jesus' delay! Mary and Martha each seemed to have reacted<sup>6</sup> to Jesus very differently. When news of Jesus' arrival came, Martha went to meet Him. But Mary stayed at home until Martha came to get her. Both Mary and Martha were upset and sad. But Martha combined her statement (announcement) of discouragement with strong statements of continued faith in Jesus (John 11:21, 22, 24, 27). In answer to Martha's faith, Jesus offered one of the most wonderful descriptions of His life and mission: "I am the resurrection and the life'" (John 11:25, 26).

**What you do understand Jesus' words in John 11:25, 26 to mean? What hope is suggested in those words?**

When Mary finally went to meet Jesus, she repeated Martha's complaint. But she did not make any announcement of continued faith as Martha did.

<sup>6</sup>reacted—how a person acted toward a situation.

Mary received no spiritual message from Jesus. He received no announcement of faith from her (John 11:32, 33; John 11:22-27). Jesus had come to invite them to see Him. He is the Resurrection and the Life. But Martha's and Mary's minds fixed on the loss of their brother instead.

In this story, it is not hard to see that Mary's and Martha's hearts were filled with stormy emotions. The pain of Lazarus's death almost crushed them. Jesus' delay had added doubts to their sorrows. Martha seemed to be keeping her emotions under better control. But she still did not understand fully what Jesus had come to do (John 11:39).

**This story has a happy ending. But what hope do you find in this story for stories that do not have happy endings?**

## TUESDAY—FEBRUARY 24

**THE EVIL PLAN TO KILL JESUS**  
(John 11:45-57).

**Read John 11:45-57. Then answer the following questions:**

1. Did the religious leaders believe Jesus had really done this miracle? Or did they think it was a trick? Explain the importance of the answer.
2. What "good" excuse did the leaders give for having to stop Jesus? Does

that argument make sense? Explain your answer.

In John 11:45-57, we see the reactions of the religious leaders to Lazarus's resurrection. His resurrection would seem to bring unlimited opportunities to the human race. But the religious leaders are interested only in their own positions and wealth.

John clearly uses the religious leaders' own words against them. They plan to kill Jesus, because they fear that if they let Him continue His ministry (work), "everyone will believe in him, and then the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation'" (John 11:48, NIV). The first readers of John's book could see that this statement would have been very foolish. Jesus' death brought about worldwide belief and the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple. These were the same things the religious leaders tried to prevent. Even their leader, Caiaphas, prophesied that they knew nothing at all (John 11:49-52). The council decided that Jesus had done nothing to deserve death. But His death was the only way to keep their position and the security (safety) of their nation.

**The religious leaders symbolize the danger we all face: making false excuses for our actions for personal reasons. How have you made false excuses for your actions? What can we do to stop ourselves from doing this? Some verses that might help are Matthew 16:24; 1 Peter 4:1; and Philippians 2:4.**



**Look for other people's interests (needs).**

**WEDNESDAY—FEBRUARY 25**

**MARY OF BETHANY (John 12:1-8).**

The anointing by Mary of Jesus' feet at Bethany probably happened on Saturday night. It was the week before Jesus' death (John 12:1). Bethany was located about two miles east of Jerusalem, on the other side of the Mount of Olives.

**Read John 12:8. Put yourself in the position of someone there who did not know about the coming death of Jesus and who saw the reaction of Jesus and Judas to Mary's act. What reasons would they have for thinking Judas was right? What lesson is there for us about judging actions by what we see?**

The heart of this story lies in the sharp difference between Mary's wholehearted faith in Jesus and love

for Him and the coldhearted reasonings of Caiaphas (at the end of John 11) and Judas. Mary's unselfish love and sacrifice lead her to anoint Jesus' feet. But greed and self-interest lead Jesus' enemies to criticize Mary's act of love.

In this story, we see Mary's total devotion<sup>7</sup> of soul. Mary may have had doubts before Lazarus's resurrection. But now those doubts are gone. Mary's every emotion flows with praise and thanksgiving to Jesus, who raised Lazarus and who is about to die for her. The perfume Mary pours on Jesus cost her a year of hard work. But it represents Mary's whole life, dedicated to Jesus. Such total devotion is not very popular, as Judas makes it clear. "What a waste," people say. "You could have done great things with your life. But you choose to waste it on Jesus!"



**Not a waste, but total devotion!**

Judas's reaction is normal and human. Mary's action does seem a waste.

What church board would accept such an expense? To the human way of thinking, Mary seems emotionally troubled. But notice again how Jesus felt about Mary's devotion in Mark 14:6-9: " 'She [Mary] has done a beautiful thing to me [Jesus]. . . . She did what she could. . . . I [Jesus] tell you the truth, wherever the gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her [Mary]' " (NIV).

**When Judas criticized Mary, he was trying to hide his own spiritual weakness. How do we try to hide our spiritual weakness?**

**THURSDAY—FEBRUARY 26**

**IN THE SHADOW OF THE CROSS  
(John 12:9-27).**

John pictures three main reactions to the miracle of Lazarus's resurrection:

1. The religious leaders want to kill Jesus and Lazarus for fear of what will happen to them (the leaders) if they do not (John 11:47-53).

2. Mary reacts with praise, thanksgiving, and self-sacrificing love (John 12:1-9).

**What is the third reaction to Lazarus's resurrection? John 12:9-11, 17-19.**

<sup>7</sup>devotion—dedication; surrender of self to someone else; loyalty; faithfulness.

Of the three reactions, Mary's reaction is clearly the one John wishes the reader to see as the best reaction.

**What is Jesus' answer to the Greeks? John 12:20-27. What is He telling us about what it means to follow Him? How did Mary's act in anointing Jesus' feet show what Jesus is telling us?**

John 12:26 shows that to follow Jesus is to forget self. Our lives are filled with working hard for position, wealth, safety, and pleasure. So we do not experience the fullness of life Jesus offers. Jesus seems to be telling us in John 12:25 that the only way we can truly follow Jesus is to lose ourselves. This means we need to die to self fully. This is something only God can do for us if we let Him. To let God help us, we must, like the kernel (seed) of wheat, first die. There is no other way. Judas, the leaders of Israel, and the crowd that came to Jesus as He entered Jerusalem all represent people who did not let God help them die to self.

Of all the people we have studied in today's lesson, only Mary seems to have understood that we must let God help us die to self. She showed this by her works.

**How would you explain to a non-Christian that what Jesus was saying in John 12:25 is for our good? How would you explain what it means to die to self so he or she would understand this verse in a positive way?**



**Which grains of wheat are you like?**

#### FRIDAY—FEBRUARY 27

**ADDITIONAL STUDY:** "If Jesus had been with Lazarus, Lazarus would not have died. Why? Satan would have had no power over Lazarus. . . . Jesus knew that Lazarus's death would greatly test Mary's and Martha's faith. But He also knew that because of this test, their faith would shine with far greater power."—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 528.

"The Savior understood the evil planning of the priests. He knew that they wanted to remove Him. He also knew that their purpose would soon be fulfilled. But it was not His place to hasten His death. So He withdrew from that area, taking the disciples with Him. By His own example, Jesus again enforced the instruction He had given to the disciples, 'When they persecute [attack] you in one town, run away to another one [town]' Matthew 10:23 (TEV). There

was a wide field for the disciples to work for the salvation of souls. If they did not have to show their faithfulness by facing death, they were not to endanger their lives.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Desire Ages*, p. 541.

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:**

1. If you had a year’s worth of salary or a year of time to use to honor Jesus, how would you use it?
2. How does John 12:26 teach us that Jesus not only wants us as friends but as servants too? Why must we be both servants and friends to Jesus?
3. How do the following verses help us understand Mary’s faithfulness to

Jesus? Matthew 19:29; Mark 8:36; Galatians 6:14; and Philippians 3:8. What must happen in our own lives so we can have that same kind of devotion?

**SUMMARY:** In this lesson, we have seen how the kindness of Jesus stirs up different reactions. His kindness in raising Lazarus from the dead and in showing acceptance to Mary leads her to accept Him fully. But Lazarus’s resurrection and Jesus’ support of Mary led to the evil plans of the religious leaders to murder Jesus, the greedy complaint of Judas, and the selfish praise of the crowd. John would have us think about our own reactions to the greatest kindness of all—Jesus’ sacrifice for us on the cross.