

(T) Welcome to **Discipleship training On The Air**. In this Bible study series you may learn how to build up the Christian Church. Two teachers will do Bible study together from John chapter 12. We will use “the five steps” method of Bible study. As you listen to this programme, make notes in a notebook or record the programme. You may join our Bible study every week by preparing for the next Bible study. You may also gather a few people around you and use this method of studying the Bible together. Doing Bible study together with a few other Christians is one of the best ways to grow to maturity as a Christian.

(S) **STEP 1. READ**

Let us read John 12:1-50 together. When you are two or more people, take turns to read one verse each until you have completed the reading. Due to shortage of time, please read John chapter 12 for yourself.

(T) **STEP 2. DISCOVER**

Let us discover and discuss some important truths in John chapter 12. “Which truth in this passage is important for you?” or “Which truth in this passage touches your mind or heart?” Think and write your answer in your notebook. After a few minutes take turns to share your discoveries with one another.

(S) An important truth for me is in John 12:1-11 about Mary anointing Jesus. This event is not the same as the one described in Luke chapter 7, but it is the same as the event described in Matthew 26 and Mark 14. A dinner was given at the house of Simon the Leper in honour of Jesus. According to the custom in Israel, the guests were reclining next to the table. Mary, the sister of Martha and Lazarus, broke a jar containing very expensive perfume and poured it over the body of Jesus, from his head to his feet. Then she wiped his feet with her hair. The whole house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume.

The event contrasts the *generosity* of Mary with the *selfishness* of Judas. He criticised her act as a terrible waste of money. He had calculated that the perfume was worth a year’s wages! Some of the others were also indignant. Wherever Mary looked she met angry glances and looks of shocked disapproval. Only Jesus himself came to her defence. Only Jesus understood her intention and said, “It was intended that she should save this perfume for the day of my burial.” Mary, more than any of Jesus’ disciples, must have been convinced that Jesus would soon be put to death by his enemies. While Jesus had often predicted his death, Mary was perhaps the best *listener* Jesus ever had. According to Jewish custom, after death the body was wrapped with spices in strips of linen. However, Mary wanted to honour Jesus while he was still alive. So she poured the spices out over Jesus as a preparation in advance for burial. Jesus accepted her costly gift and he predicted that her kind deed would be made known all over the world.

Of course, Jesus cared for the poor, and of course, Jesus disapproved needless wasting. But Mary’s deed was not a waste. It was an act of love towards Jesus, a preparation for the most important death in the history of this world! And it was an act of faith in the predictions of Jesus about his death, expressing her conviction that Jesus would soon die. I am impressed to see that Jesus evaluates the spending of money in a different way than the traditional way in the world.

(T) An important truth for me is in John 12:12-19 about the triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem. The following two facts are very important to me:

First. Jesus shows that he is in control of the whole situation.

The Sanhedrin had not planned to kill Jesus during the Passover Feast, but his triumphant entry into Jerusalem forced them to hasten the execution of their plot. By entering Jerusalem, Jesus shows that he has come to lay down his life *voluntarily*.

Second. Jesus shows that he is the Messiah, the Prince of peace.

His entry into Jerusalem on a colt was a literal fulfilment of the prophecy in Zechariah 9:9. The people of Jerusalem would see their king coming to them, riding on a colt. While riding on a horse was associated with *war*, riding on a donkey was usually associated with *peace*! By riding on a colt, Jesus shows that he is the Messiah, but not the political and military Messiah of popular Judaism, but the Messiah of the Bible. He shows that he did not come to conquer their political enemies, but that he had come in the interest of peace. He would die to make peace between God and sinful man!

(S) **STEP 3. QUESTION**

Let us try to understand all the truths in John chapter 12 and ask our questions about the things we still do not understand. “Which question about anything in this passage would you like to ask to the group?” Think and write your question in your notebook. Then discuss the questions and try to find answers.

1st Question. (12:20) Why were their Greeks among those who came to worship in Jerusalem at the Passover Feast?

(T) For centuries the Jews had immigrated to surrounding countries or had been exiled to far away places. There they built synagogues to worship God and to study the Old Testament. Gentiles (non-Jews), who were attracted by the purity of monotheism, began to convert to Judaism. Some Gentiles were circumcised and promised to obey the whole law. They became *proselytes*, that is, Jews who shared in all the privileges and responsibilities of Judaism. But other Gentiles were not circumcised and did not keep the ceremonial law. They were called *the God-fearing*. They were not allowed into the temple, but only in *the Court of the Gentiles*. Thus, up to the time of Jesus, the ceremonial law of the Jews still formed *a wall of separation* (Eph 2:14-15) between Jews and the non-Jews (Gentiles).

These Greeks, who had come to the Passover Feast of the Jews, were such *God-fearing* Gentiles. We do not know why they wanted to meet Jesus. Maybe they no longer believed in the wisdom of the Greeks and also could not find any real peace in the religion of the Jews. The answer of Jesus suggests that they wanted to talk to Jesus about *salvation*. These Greeks made their request via Philip and Andrew, the only two disciples of Jesus who had Greek names. Jesus gave his answer to his disciples, who in turn conveyed the answer to the Greeks.

2nd Question. (12:23-24) What does Jesus mean when he says that unless a kernel of wheat dies, it remains only a single seed?

(S) A crowd of Jews were standing around Jesus when he made his reply to the question of the Greeks. He said, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds”. Jesus said that the time has arrived that he would be *glorified*. Jesus is referring to his death on the cross, his resurrection from the dead, his ascension into heaven and finally his enthronement in heaven when he goes to sit at the right hand of God the Father. Jesus was speaking about his approaching death.

The Greeks wanted to meet this famous earthly Messiah, who had such a triumphant entry into Jerusalem. But Jesus made it clear to them that meeting the earthly Messiah would not help them at all! The earthly Messiah first had to die. Only after his death and resurrection, as the heavenly Messiah, would he be able to save them! But now, the time of his most bitter suffering and death had finally come.

Jesus speaks of his death as a seed falling into the earth and dying. Every farmer knows that unless a seed falls into the earth and dies, it cannot become a plant bearing many more seeds! Jesus says that it is absolutely necessary for him to die. If he does not die on the cross, no one *can be saved*! Jesus also says that his death would produce the greatest harvest in the world. If he dies, then very, very many people *will be saved*. Thus, when Jesus speaks of his death as a seed falling into the earth and dying, then he is teaching that *his death* on the cross as a substitution in our place is absolutely necessary for the salvation of people!

3rd Question. (12:25-26) Why should a Christian hate his life in this world?

(T) In John 12:25-26, Jesus says, “The man who loves his life will lose it, while the man who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honour the one who serves me”. A Christian must hate his life in this world, because it is the only way his life can be saved. A person who loves his own life is a person who gives his own life, his family and friends, the material possessions and the ambitions of this world *a higher priority* than Jesus Christ. Such a person will lose his life, that is, Jesus Christ will deny him and he will perish for ever.

Three things are important with respect to hating your own life in this sinful world:

One. The principle of self-denial.

When we look at verse 23-26 together, we notice that the same principle of self-denial is true for Jesus and for Christians. In verse 23-24, Jesus *must die* in order to save very many people. In verse 25-26, the Christian *must be willing to die for the cause of Christ* in order to be saved. Of course, a Christian cannot die as a substitution for others and he cannot die in his own strength. Nevertheless, he must deny himself and his selfish interests in order to save his soul.

Two. The teaching about putting Jesus first.

The same teaching of giving Jesus the first place in one's life is taught in the other Gospels. In Matthew 10:37-39 (Mark 8:34-38) and Luke 14:26-33 Jesus says, "Anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves his son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; and anyone who does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it".

In Acts 5:29, Peter says to the governing authorities, "We must obey God rather than men". A Christian must give Jesus Christ the first place in his life. He must give his highest allegiance to Jesus Christ and not to his parents, or teacher, or nation, or government. If there is a conflict between what Jesus Christ commands and what parents, teachers or the governing authorities demand, then a Christian must choose to obey Jesus Christ and gently resist the others.

Three. The suffering in service.

In verse 26 Jesus says, "Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honour the one who serves me". Jesus means that if a Christian serves him, then let him *follow* Jesus Christ *all the way*, even though it is the way of self-denial and the cross.

To take his cross and follow Jesus in Matthew 10:39 means to be willing to suffer difficulties, rejection, persecution and sometimes death for the cause of Jesus Christ and his kingdom in this world.

But the Christian may keep in mind that the cross leads to the crown. Jesus says, "Whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it". And he says, "My Father will honour the one who serves me".

4th Question. (12:31-32) Who is the prince of this world? What does it mean that he will be driven out?

(S) In John 12:31-32 Jesus says, "Now is the time for judgement on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out. And when I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw all men to myself." The lifting up of Jesus from the earth refers to his *death* on the cross, his *resurrection* from the dead, his *ascension* into heaven and his *enthronement* in heaven. The death of Jesus on the cross is at the same time the judgement of this evil world and the driving out of the devil from his princely position in this world.

One. The judgement of the world.

The world of which Jesus is speaking is the world of the people who rejected him and of their leaders who condemned him. It is the world of Judas, who betrayed him. It is the world of the soldiers who mocked him. It is the world of Pilate who sentenced him. In short, *the world* is the whole society of evil people who are alienated from God and have the devil as their prince. This world had tried Jesus Christ and cast him out, without realising that by means of that very act the world had condemned itself. This world is now judged, that is, condemned to everlasting destruction in hell, unless people in it repent and turn to Jesus Christ.

Two. The driving out of the devil.

Jesus says that through his death on the cross the prince of the world will be driven out. The casting out of the devil out of his position as ruler in the world results in Jesus drawing millions and millions of people from every nation of the world to himself! By the death of Jesus on the cross and by his resurrection, ascension and enthronement in heaven, the devil lost his power over the nations and he cannot keep them from hearing the gospel any more. The devil cannot prevent people being robbed out of his kingdom of evil. Colossians 1:13 says that Jesus Christ robs people from every nation out of the evil kingdom of the devil and brings them into the righteous kingdom of Jesus Christ. The Greeks, who came to see Jesus, represent the beginning of an uncountable number of people from the Gentiles who will believe in Jesus Christ. Today, Jesus still draws people to himself by means of the Bible and the Holy Spirit.

5th Question. (12:37-46) How does the Bible view faith and unbelief?

(T) One. How the Bible views faith.

Philippians 1:29 teaches "It has been granted to you ... to believe on Christ". Acts 13:48 says, "All who were appointed for eternal life believed". The consistent teaching in the Bible is that *faith is a gift of God. Faith is not a work of man.* God gives faith and then man has the responsibility to exercise the faith that God gives.

Two. How the Bible views unbelief.

In John 12:37-40 is written, "Even after Jesus had done all these miraculous signs in their presence, they still would not believe in him. ... For this reason they could not believe, because, as Isaiah says 'God has blinded their eyes and deadened their hearts, so they can neither see with their eyes, nor understand with their hearts, nor turn - and I would heal them'."

The Bible holds people responsible for their own unbelief. In Isaiah 1:2-4 we read that the children of Israel rebelled against God and became corrupt. Therefore, in Isaiah 6:9-10 God judges them and says, "Make the heart of this people callous; make their ears dull and close their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts, and turn and be healed." The Israelites had seen so many miracles and heard so many good words of the prophets and yet, by their own choice they had hardened their hearts against God. They refused to believe. *So God allowed them to become what they wanted to be.* They wanted to shut their eyes and ears. So God made their eyes and ears even more tightly shut! *They reaped what they themselves had sown!* In the same way, the Pharisees and many other Jews had seen the miracles of Jesus Christ and had heard his many teachings and yet they too had refused to believe in Jesus Christ. Therefore, they are judged in the same way. Likewise, today, every person has a responsibility to respond to the words of God in the Bible. He has a responsibility to respond to the teachings and works of Jesus Christ. If your attitude is like that of the Pharisees and you constantly criticises Jesus Christ, then your heart will also be hardened and you will not be able to enter into God's kingdom. However, if you sincerely respond to God's word, you need not have any fear. Every good and clean heart will respond to God's word. God's Word will grow and will bear fruit in such a heart!

(S) **STEP 4 and 5. APPLY and PRAY**

After brainstorming with one another and recording a list of *possible applications*, consider which possible application God wants you to turn into a *personal application*. Then take turns to pray about one truth that God has taught us in John chapter 12.

Dear Father in heaven, I love you more than my parents or teachers or my government. If a conflict arises between what Jesus Christ commands me to do and what my parents, teachers or the government authorities demand me to do, give me your grace to choose to obey Jesus Christ.

(T) Dear Father in heaven, I too love you more than anything in this world. I love you more than I love my own life. Therefore, I want to serve Jesus Christ all the way, even though it is the way of self-denial and suffering. And when I have to suffer difficulties, rejection, persecution or even death for the cause of Jesus Christ and his kingdom in this world, please give me your grace to persevere.

(S) **ASSIGNMENT FOR NEXT WEEK**

First. Make a commitment to do Bible study every week. Prepare next week's Bible study. Use "the five steps" method to prepare John chapter 13.

Second. Join a house fellowship that does Bible study. See the workbooks "Go and build Christ's Church" and Internet on www.dota.net

Third. Listen every SATURDAY to WEDNESDAY on the radio to "Discipleship training on the air".