

BRMC Small Group Study: John 12:37-50

Leaders Guide

Please note that the suggestions below are not model answers but to help guide your study. Feel free to adapt the questions for your group.

Leader's Notes:

Context:

The previous two studies on John 12 brought us through the stories of Mary anointing Jesus with expensive perfume and Jesus entering Jerusalem on a donkey. This is the halfway point for the Gospel of John. The events we read from chapter 12 onward brings us closer to the crucifixion.

Introduction:

In today's study, we will see again that John writes to prove the divinity of Jesus. Jesus fulfils the prophecies that Isaiah made thousands of years before his time. Jesus again explains that he is sent from the Father and carries his authority.

Lesson Objectives:

- To examine our disbelief through the prophecies of Isaiah in this passage.
- To examine Jesus' role as the prophesied one, saviour, and judge.

Observation (John 12:37-43)

1. What does Isaiah's prophecy in John 12:37-43 say?
 - *Few have believed the message of the Lord, and few have seen the arm of the Lord.*
 - *As a result of the people's unbelief and inability to see, God has hardened hearts and blinded eyes to bring the full measure of punishment upon them.*
2. Why would a Jew not openly acknowledge their belief in Christ (John 12:42)?
 - *To a Jew of that time, the acknowledgement of their faith by the Pharisees was important. It was necessary as a Jew to be seen as physically participating and worshipping God at the synagogue. If they were kicked out of the Synagogue, this excommunication would mean that they could not come near to the presence of God in the Tabernacle. Essentially, they would not be able to go to heaven since they are so far from God.*
 - *The irony is that by choosing not to profess their belief in Christ, they had already sealed their fate to not enter heaven through him.*
 - *Culturally, if a Jew was kicked out of the synagogue, they would have to participate in worshipping the Roman emperor instead. To a monotheistic Jew, worshipping an emperor who is one of many gods of the Roman faith was unthinkable.*

Interpretation

3. How do you understand the "arm of the Lord" in John 12:39?
 - *In this context, John was addressing the people who witnessed the miracles Jesus performed and yet failed to see whose hand was in those miracles. That is, God's hand.*
 - *The reason why the people were unable to see God's hand in the miracles was because God did not reveal his hand in the miracles. This was because He knew of the peoples' hardened hearts. That is why in verse 39 it says "Therefore, they could not believe."*

- *God choice to blind eyes and harden hearts is not a random whim and fancy. Pharaoh in Genesis chose to harden his own heart many times before God responded by hardening Pharaoh's heart too. Likewise, in John, we have seen many times how the people have hardened their hearts to God. Thus, God's response was to continue to harden it.*

4. Compare Isaiah 6:8-10 with John 12:40. How does this inform your understanding of John 12:40?

- *As with the question above, we again see how God's choice to blind and harden was a response instead of an act of a frivolous God. The people chose not to believe and God hardened their hearts.*
- *In the context of Isaiah, the unbelief of the people would lead to the destruction of the temple, and the judgment upon the nation of Israel for their rebellion by way of exile. This however, paved the way for her redemption.*
- *In John, this same disbelief would pave the way for a redemption plan that required the Jews and Romans to crucify Jesus, paving the way for the fulfilment of the Messianic prophecies.*
- *Note that Isaiah 6:10b is omitted, "and their ears heavy" as it is possible that John was highlighting the people's refusal to hear Jesus as the Word of God.*

Observation (John 12:44-50)

5. What does Jesus proclaim himself as (John 12:44-50)?

- *He is light (John 12:46)*
- *He is saviour (John 12:47)*
- *He has the authority of the Father (John 12:49)*
- *He is the messenger of the Father (John 12:50)*

Interpretation

6. What did Jesus mean when he said "I do not judge him" (John 12:47)?

- *Jesus' came as a saviour and not a judge in his earthly ministry. His judgement comes after his death and resurrection, at the second coming.*
- *John 12:48 says that his word will judge him on the last day. This means that Jesus has already shared the truth with us. If we choose not to believe, that choice is ours and we will be judged for it.*

7. Was Jesus being legalistic when he mentions the word "command/commandment" (John 12:49-50)?

- *Read Deuteronomy 32:46-47.*
- *God has given a command not as a basis for legalism but in the best sense of Torah (commandments) as a principle for life. This means that the Father has given Jesus a principle for life as to what he says. This principle for life is also eternal life.*
- *The commandment that Jesus teaches is the same commandment that Moses gave since it is from the same Father. This tells us that God is eternal and also that his promises are forever. However, this time, we have Jesus who will help us fulfil this commandment.*

Application

8. Do you value praise from men more than praise from God?

- *God has made us clean and he gives us his glory as we are his children. God also gives us praise.*
- *People tend to look for validation. If they don't find it from God, they would look for it from men.*
- *For eg, in the workplace, would you stand up for your belief in God if it was difficult or unpopular?*
- *Share with your neighbour a passage from the Bible that shows God's promises and validation to his children.*

9. What incidents in our lives can we attribute to the arm of God?

- *Share honestly how God has been real in your life over the past few weeks.*