Philippians 3: 4b-14 and John 12: 1-8 – Why some and not others?

In the passage from John we hear the report of when Mary poured nard, and expensive perfume onto the feet of Jesus.

Unusual for two reasons, firstly washing the feet was a task left only for a servant. Secondly she wiped His feet with her hair – respectable women would never unbind their hair in public.

We are told here specifically that Judas Iscariot was dishonest. But he must have had some reliability to be in the position of controlling the money?

In this passage we see how many times Jesus allows surprising things!

Moving to the Philippians passage, we see that Paul had been a righteous Jew. He reports here that he adhered to everything that he was required to do through the laws of Moses. He was a Hebrew of Hebrews, with a pure line of ancestry to Benjamin.

He had been circumcised which signifies that his heritage and upbringing were in line with Jewish requirements.

His zeal for following the law was beyond reproach, including persecuting the new followers of Christ. Through legalistic righteousness he was faultless.

So a question for you – how come the murders that Paul encouraged and condoned were accepted by Christ? Why was Paul still chosen to be such a prolific mouthpiece for Jesus?

In the Easter story we see Judas sent away when he chose to betray Jesus. Is it simply that no-one is as important to God as Jesus?

Well, yes, that is the case to a point – but we are all precious to God, so that cannot be the reason.

As always, God looks beyond the actions that people take to see what the motivation was behind it. Judas was doing things for his own profit. There was no loyalty or trust in God or Jesus.

Paul did things that we would find abhorrent – persecuting others even to death. But his motivation is what was being judged. His actions were what he thought were in line with the law and God’s word. One commandment says “you shall not worship any God but me”.

It was just that Paul’s perception of the requirements was misaligned – he had not accepted the divinity of Jesus.

We need to be careful when we read the bible. It is full of truth and light that will bring life – but if things are taken out of context, and without praying about the words, it can be misconstrued.

We must also remember that there are a lot of details missed out. So often we see in the book some people being punished by death by God without being told the whole background of why.

Sometimes it can appear that these punishments are not fair. But we must remember that God knows all, whereas we only know what has been reported.

Let us just consider for a moment, in today’s climate, how would we feel if God punished Putin by death? If that may be deemed a justified punishment, how may it be construed in 1,000 years if someone read a report that did not explain all the circumstances that led to that action?

Yes, the bible can be a dangerous book and should be read with prayer and with the background of a loving, compassionate, forgiving, gracious and merciful God.

I will just mention a part of the story of Abraham from Genesis 15. Abraham trusted the abundant generosity of God. He trusted completely in God’s provision and did not rely on other people.

Abraham still struggled with having no heir though. The fact that he, a homeless wanderer, wanted an heir to whom he could leave his estate implies that he felt a certain level of security.

When Abraham speaks to God of his disappointment of not having a son, we could mistake that for him grumbling, complaining, or disbelief. God had already made that promise to him.

It is in the response from God, where He says “from your own body” that perhaps we can be clearer about the way Abraham is speaking. God was not angry or impatient with him, just emphasized that His promise was still valid. A son could be adopted, but when God says emphatically “from your own body” implies that Abraham wanted confirmation and clarification – God’s response settled any doubt.

God promises Abraham descendants aplenty! More than the stars in the sky (at least 8,000 visible from where Abraham would have been). He also promises that the land will be given to them.

God requests a heifer, goat, ram, dove and pigeon. Abraham cuts them in two and lines them up, with a space between them, a corridor in effect. This was the way in which covenant promises were secured. The ritual would be that both parties would pass between the dismembered animals to invoke a like fate on themselves if they broke their pledge.

The smoking firepot that passed through was representative of God.

Please notice that Abraham was not required to pass through the corridor. He had to protect it from the birds of prey, but he did not have to walk through it. Is this another sign of grace?

We know what happens in the future, when Abraham tries to fulfil the promise in his own way, by impregnating Hagar, rather than trusting God’s promise that his heir would be through his wife, Sarah.

How long did it take before the promise of a son through Sarah came to fruition? 25 years! Even the most patient person may have doubt creep in with regard to waiting 25 years for a child. Physical age does have an impact on this too.

God did not require Abraham to participate in the covenant ritual – because of His grace. His knowledge that in human weakness Abraham, just like us, would have doubts and not be able to fulfil that pledge.

This is part of the background of grace we need to remember when reading the bible – and hold onto the same promises for us.

We may not always be steadfast to God, but He will always be steadfast to us. If we slip up temporarily, but come back to Him, we are forgiven. If our actions are not in accordance with His desires, but our motivation behind them is with a love for God, then He is merciful to us.

His forgiveness is never ending, but He will always be looking at our motivation behind actions. What is at the centre of our decision making?

Is it a longing for His kingdom? Or just a longing for our own security and wellbeing?

It is NOT OK for us to sin; it is NOT OK for us to persecute others. But, if our trust and loyalty is in Christ – and we are willing to listen for His voice, then He will speak.

If we hear His voice telling us to change our actions and attitudes, are we going to follow?

Can we be more positive than that – can we promise Jesus that WHEN we hear His voice telling us to change our actions and attitudes, that we WILL follow?!