

**John 12: 1-11; “The Fragrance of the Spikenard”, Sermon # 64 in the series –
“That All May Honor the Son”, Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall
on August 29th, 2021, in the Morning Worship Service.**

At this hour I would like to show you the tremendous spiritual significance of Mary’s actions, which are so highly commended to us by our Lord Jesus Christ. It says in verse 3 that she took a pound of very costly oil of spikenard, and she anointed the feet of Jesus and she wiped His feet with her hair. In doing this, a beautiful fragrance filled that whole house, in Bethany. The Fragrance of the Spikenard powerfully spoke to everyone there in most definite ways. It will speak to us as well, if we will consider it carefully.

1st of all – The Fragrance of the Spikenard showed forth Mary’s thankfulness. (verses 1-3) 2nd – The Fragrance showed forth Mary’s love for Christ’s willingness to go to the cross. (verses 4-8) And 3rd – The Fragrance of the Spikenard showed forth Mary’s faith as a witness to people around her. (verses 9-11) May the Fragrance of the Spikenard speak to us now, so that our thankfulness, our love, and our faith will also be known to God, and to others around us.

1st of all –The Fragrance of the Spikenard showed forth Mary’s thankfulness.

Verse 1 says: “Then, six days before the Passover, Jesus came to Bethany, where Lazarus was who had been dead, whom He had raised from the dead.” “There they made Him a supper; and Martha served, but Lazarus was one of those who sat at the table with Him.” Evidently this was a supper prepared by Mary and Martha, for the Lord Jesus specifically, because of what He had recently done for them as a family; in that He raised their brother Lazarus from the dead. Mary was very thankful for this, and she wanted to show forth her thankfulness in a tangible way. She talked the matter over with Martha, and she invited Jesus to supper, along with his closest disciples. Sometime just shortly after He finished eating, she decided to do what she had been thinking about doing for some time, an act which would honor Jesus for His love for them.

She had this ointment which she had saved back for herself for some special occasion. She wasn’t really enamored in using it for herself any longer. But now, she thought, she would lavish it on Jesus. Some of you may be wondering whether this was the same supper that is mentioned in Matthew chapter 26 and Mark 14, which was held at Simon the Leper’s house. There are some real points of similarity in the two accounts, but I do not think so. The woman was indeed Mary in both cases. But the days are different. This supper being six days before the Passover and that one being two days before it. In this one, she poured out the oil on His feet, anointing them. In that account, she broke the flask and poured it upon His head, as He sat at the table.

Matthew Henry says – “These two being the most public and solemn entertainments given *Christ* in Bethany, Mary probably graced them both with this token of her respect; and what she left of her ointment this first time, when she spent but a pound of it (John chapter 12, verse 3), she used that second time, when she poured it all out.” (Mark 14, verse 3) In both cases, we need to understand that her thought in doing this, her pouring out this costly fragrant ointment on Jesus’ feet, and wiping His feet with her hair, she would show forth her thankfulness for all that Jesus had done for her, and for Martha, and for Lazarus. This giving of what she had, which was of great value, the costly oil of spikenard, she believed, would do that very thing.

She would draw the attention of everyone there to Him. She would pour the precious oil on the feet of Jesus which would show forth her thankfulness for what He had done for Lazarus in raising him from the dead. It would show forth her personal appreciation of Christ’s Person and His mission of teaching and helping people with their greatest problems, trials, and difficulties, in a God-glorifying, God-honoring way. It would say to all who were watching her that Jesus was her Master and Lord, and to all in her family He had been the best of Friends. In this amazing way, she would show forth her willingness to follow Him all the way through His ministry, support Him in it in every way, and to serve Him to the end, in the most humble and loyal ways.

She had already declared this with her life; by committing to be His disciple, by her sitting at His feet and listening to His word. That, to her, was her greatest joy. Her pouring the oil and her wiping His feet with her hair; this showed forth her desire to honor Him, even to the point of personal and public worship of Him before His closest disciples. These acts demonstrated her willingness to pour out her life for Him, and to serve Him in the most menial ways. They declared her highest and deepest thoughts of Him; as being Lord of all. She is saying by her actions that He was worthy of the highest regard, even her worship, and the worship of all men. In this wonderful way, she would commend Him to them all, and she would commend Him to us today.

Let me ask you if you are thankful to God for having sent the the Lord Jesus into the world for you, a person who occasionally, if not regularly, has problems and difficulties that are too great for you to solve. Have you thanked God for sending the Lord Jesus, and through Him showing you all of the kindness and goodness in His every consideration of your life, and your greatest needs? Are you thankful for the many ways that He has provided for you and your family through Christ; and that He has personally shown to you by His kindness, the wonderful provision and care that He has taken in regard to the greatest needs of your life?

He is the One who has helped You to understand that He is the author of life and all of the health and strength that you have. He is the One who has shown you the path of life and how to live it in giving you the Bible, and opening your eyes to understand its all-important eternal truths. How do you show forth your thankfulness for all the help that He has personally given to you, in mediating your prayers to God in regard to every great matter of concern to you in your life? You should contemplate the acts of worship that you give to Him, and give Him your life and your all. Renew your covenant with Him; that solemn promise that you will serve Him with everything that is most valuable to you; that you will pour out your life in service to Him, and show forth your thankfulness to him so that other people will know of it.

2nd – The Fragrance showed forth Mary’s love for Christ’s willingness to go to the cross. (verses 4-8)

“But one of His disciples, Judas Iscariot, Simon’s son, who would betray Him, said, ‘Why was this fragrant oil not sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor?’ ‘This he said, not that he cared for the poor, but because he was a thief, and had the money box and he used to take what was put in it.’ ‘But Jesus said, ‘Let her alone; she has kept this for the day of My burial.’ ‘The poor you have with you always, but Me you do not have always.’ There should be no doubt in our minds that Mary’s pouring out this precious ointment on the feet of Jesus, and wiping his feet with her hair, was meant to be a very profound demonstration of the love which she had Jesus her Lord. I believe that in this act, she was anticipating His going to the cross to die.

What she did had a great impact on all who were sitting at the table with Jesus, but especially Judas. And not in a good sense, but in the sense of his heart sin of covetousness. Instead of seeing her act as an act of love to the Lord Jesus, he thought of it only in terms of the money wasted. He was a thief, and thought that if the ointment had been sold, it would have put 300 denarii in the purse of the disciples; particularly that he might take from it. But Jesus says to him that the most important thing in this case was not the needs of the poor, but the need to understand His death and burial that were coming, and showing love to Him in relation to it. Judas had no love for our Lord. He only wished to hold the office of an apostle so that he might get something out of it.

In this case, money. But as Jesus said – You cannot serve God and money. We know love because Christ first loved us, and gave Himself for us. It was the fragrance of love for Christ which filled the air in that house that day, through Mary’s actions. I believe, as we think of the Scriptures, that it was the literal fulfillment of Song of Solomon chapter 1, verse 12, which says – “While the king is at his table, my spikenard sends forth its fragrance.” Judas should have been able to see that Mary’s actions were a holy and loving response to all that He had taught her about Himself. She knew what Judas did not know, that Jesus was willingly going to the cross, and somehow she comprehended the fact that it was His full obedience to His Father which was taking Him there.

She knew this, for He had told all the disciples that He was going to the cross. She remembered that He had told them that He was going to go to the place of suffering and death. And she knew that Jesus always sought to do His Father's will. She knew that doing the Father's will in this particular case, related somehow to all of them, His disciples, being able to have eternal life. She knew that when He did go to the cross that there was going to have a much greater impact on all of them than they were presently able to comprehend, or to acknowledge. And so Mary did what she did, pouring the oil on His feet, unashamedly in the presence of them all, because she saw His willingness to go. She saw that He would not turn back from this greatest act of obedience. And she loved Him for it.

I believe that Mary did not think of this act of pouring the ointment as simply being her own personal act. It was that. But it was more. And it was this. She was doing this act of devotion in a way that pointed to Christ's sufferings; His pouring Himself out unto death in this greater sense; in this particular sense, on behalf of all of the disciples, so that they would be able to have eternal life. I think that she grasped this in a very simple way. She certainly knew that her act of pouring the ointment was the right way to show forth her own personal thankfulness for all that Jesus had shown to her, of His power, and His love, and His grace. But I believe that in her mind, she thought that in the anointing which she would give the Lord Jesus she was representing all Christians. I think that she was thinking that if they could be in her place, at that time, they would do the same thing out of love to Him.

And so, she would do what any disciple would do, if they could have been there in that time and in that place. When she anointing Jesus' feet and wiped them with her hair, she represented everyone who loved Jesus, by her act. She did not want Jesus to have to die, but she somehow she knew that Jesus must die. She remembered His words which are recorded in a number of places in the gospels. Mark 9: 31 – "For He taught His disciples and said to them, "The Son of Man is being betrayed into the hands of men, and they will kill Him." "And after He is killed, He will rise the third day." "But they did not understand this saying, and were afraid to ask Him." But she was beginning to understand.

And she thought of the words which Jesus had spoken to them; the words of Mark 10: 45 – "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many." And also Matthew 26: 2 – "You know that after two days is the Passover, and the Son of Man will be delivered up to be crucified." These were the words which were ringing in Mary's mind at that time. She was coming to know this gospel of Christ crucified, and now she would preach it in elementary form by her actions, by pouring the fragrant spikenard oil on to her Master's feet. She was saying – Jesus is God's anointed. He is "the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

If Jesus must go to the cross, she reasoned to herself, it must be in relation to all of His people. If Jesus is going to the cross, it must be for me. If Jesus is going to the cross, He will die a horrible death. But this must be for me, and it must be for all of His people. This most remarkable anointing of Jesus by Mary represents the love of all sincere believers in Him who want to honor their Lord for what He has done for them. There were those who were looking forward to the cross in Old Testament times, and what He would do for them. And now we look back upon His finished work of obedience and sufferings; those of us who have believed in Him since He suffered, died, and rose again on our behalf.

Let each of us rejoice today that Mary was led by the Spirit to do this good work. It was a good work done for Christ, and it was a good work done on our behalf as well. Let us ask ourselves whether we are ashamed or unashamed of the gospel which Mary preached that day in picture form. More love to Thee, O Christ! More love to Thee! Can you say from a heart filled with love for Christ who went to cross – I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God unto salvation for all who will believe, and to all who have a broken heart over their many sins? You know the reality of sins forgiven! You know the preciousness of Christ's death on your behalf. Will

you not tell Christ of your love for Him, for what He has done for you? If you do not yet know Christ, will you not make God's Anointed your Anointed? All of your greatest affections should be poured out upon Him, and you should consciously think of how His love for you in going to the cross is meant to draw forth your love to Him in acts of devotion and in doing good works which you will do because you love Him.

3rd – The Fragrance of the Spikenard showed forth Mary's faith as a witness to people around her. (verses 9-11)

Verse 9 says – “Now a great many of the Jews knew that He was there; and they came, not for Jesus' sake only, but that they might also see Lazarus, whom He had raised from the dead.” “But the chief priests plotted to put Lazarus to death also, because on account of him many of the Jews went away and believed in Jesus.” These verses show us that there were a good many people of the Jews there that day at Martha and Mary's supper. It says that they came not for Jesus' sake, but also to see Lazarus whom Jesus had raised from the dead. If they came to see him were they invited to this supper? If so, it must have been quite a feast that they prepared. And what Mary did that day, in anointing Jesus' feet, a great many people either saw it or they heard about it later. I believe that her act of devotion to Jesus, therefore, was a great witness to her faith in the Lord Jesus.

For when they came to see her brother, they no doubt did so out of curiosity to see a man who had really been raised from the dead. But they probably hung around for a while, and they then either saw or heard about Mary's act of anointing the feet of Jesus and wiping them with her hair. Jesus' power to save is seen in both. Jesus' raising Lazarus from the dead no doubt astounded the Sadducees, those who did not believe in the resurrection from the dead. But it also angered the chief priests, who then plotted to put Lazarus to death as well. And the reason that they plotted this way was because it was on account of Lazarus that many of the Jews went away and believed in Jesus, it says. What a great witness to Christ it was, that He raised Lazarus from the dead!

But if they saw or heard about Mary's devotion to Christ in her pouring out the expensive ointment on Jesus' feet, that was a great witness to Christ also. Her devotion to Christ in these acts of anointing his feet and wiping His feet with her hair, and her filling the house with the fragrance of the Spikenard spoke volumes to all who were there. They showed Mary's true faith in Jesus. They showed forth her desire to make known His love for her and all sinners in His going to the cross. They showed forth the fact that even though she did not understand fully, the implications of His coming death and resurrection from the dead, now that Lazarus had been raised from the dead, and that after 4 days of being dead, then she most certainly believed that Jesus could be raised from the dead even if He died.

And what would that mean? Well Mary and Martha would soon find out. They would be in agony when they beheld His agony on the cross. For they knew that He was a righteous Man. Later, however, they would find out that His sufferings were for their sakes. But they would have great joy on the day that He would rise from the dead. They had already tasted of Christ's power in the resurrection of their brother. And Jesus had said to them on that day – “I am the resurrection and the life.” “He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live.” “And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die.” “Do you believe this?” This is the fragrance of the Spikenard. The fragrance of the Spikenard was the fragrance of Christ's coming sufferings. But it was also the fragrance of His coming resurrection. It affected everyone in the house that day.

It affects everyone in our world today! Because of the fragrance of your good ointments, Your name, O Christ, is ointment poured forth; therefore the virgins love You.” (Song of Solomon 1: 3) “While the king is at his table, my spikenard sends forth its fragrance.” “A bundle of myrrh is my beloved to me, that lies all night between my breasts.” (Song of Solomon 1: 12 & 13) You see the connection, don't you? Mary's faith was evidenced to all the disciples there that day, and to all of the Jews who heard about it later on. It was her faith that Christ would fulfill His mission and die for the sins of His people. That He would rise again on the 3rd day, and that for all believing in

Him, He would become a bundle of myrrh, spiritually speaking, that would minister to them, grace that was greater than all their sins.

And the fragrance of the ointments of Christ's death and His resurrection are the witness that we bear by faith, to all who will hear. 2nd Corinthians chapter 2, verse 14 – “Now thanks be to God who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and through us diffuses the fragrance of His knowledge in every place.” “For we are to God the fragrance of Christ among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing.” “To the one we are the aroma of death leading to death, and to the other the aroma of life leading to life.” “And who is sufficient for these things?” “For we are not, as so many, peddling the word of God; but as of sincerity but as from God, we speak in the sight of God in Christ.” You see, Mary in her act of devotion to Christ was our forerunner. Her costly devotion was her witness. And it is ours as well.