

The Beautiful Aroma

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[0 : 00] Six days before the Passover, Jesus therefore came to Bethany where Lazarus was, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. So they gave a dinner for him there. Martha served and Lazarus was one of those reclining with him at the table.

Mary therefore took a pound of expensive ointment made from pure nard and anointed the feet of Jesus and wiped his feet with her hair. The house was filled with the aroma of the fragrance, of the perfume.

But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples, he who was about to betray him, said, Why was this ointment not sold for 300 denarii and given to the poor?

He said this not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief and having charge of the money bag, he used to help himself to what was put into it. Jesus said, Leave her alone so that she may keep it for the day of my burial.

For the poor you always have with you, but you do not always have me. When the large crowd of the Jews learned that Jesus was there, they came not only on account of him, but also to see Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead.

[1 : 20] So the chief priests made plans to put Lazarus to death as well. Because on account of him, many of the Jews were going away and believing in Jesus.

Wow. That is the reading of the word of the Lord. Please be seated. Wow. Thank you, praise team. Beautiful, beautiful music for us to worship the Lord by. Thank you. Thank you. Let's see how far we get this morning.

Odors. Aromas. They have a huge effect upon people. You know that, right? Perfumes and colognes are big business and expensive.

I mean, the bottles of cologne I used to buy 30 years ago, now they cost 40 bucks then. Now they cost 90. What happened? Aromatherapy uses scents to improve your mood.

[2 : 27] One of the reasons I've learned to enjoy the fall season, I hated fall. I grew up hating fall. Dark, it got dark earlier and it started to get cold.

Two things I hate. But I've learned, actually since moving here 11 years ago, I've learned to enjoy fall. And you know what does it for me?

Scented candles. I am a Bath and Body Works groupie. I am not ashamed. Yeah, I buy the good candles. On sale.

Aromas are how I won Sandy. I never heard that story, did you? Yeah, that's how I won.

That's one of the reasons she loves me. At Temple University, I wore cologne. I always wore cologne. I have 10 different bottles of cologne. I was into, as one girl said, you like fragrances?

[3 : 28] Fragrances? Fragrances? Fragrance. Fragrances? I said, yes, I like fragrance. We call them smells in West Philly.

But yeah, to this day, when I wear one of those colognes from the college years, it transports her. She goes, and I go. Aromas can do that.

Bring up good memories, past, you know, you remember it. It clicked. Y'all know what I'm talking about. It clicks. Something triggers in your memory. And if it's a good memory, it's like you're right there all over again.

But they can also repel. Skunks use a noxious odor to repel enemies. We use horrible odors to repel attackers.

A horrible smell is a sign of food gone bad. Broccoli. How can something that's supposed to be so good for you have such a toxic smell when it goes bad?

[4 : 43] It's amazing. And of course, we use deodorants and colognes to hide our BO so that we can have friends. But keep in mind, keep in mind, the same aroma can affect people in different

ways.

Our relationship to Jesus gives off an aroma. For some, it is an aroma of life. But to others, it's the smell of death.

To God. In Jesus, we smell wonderful. So let me ask you a question.

What do you smell like? What do you smell like? This section focuses on the extravagant act of devotion of Mary, but also the reaction of Judas and other unbelievers.

John actually mentioned this scene already. He mentioned it way back in chapter 11, the beginning of chapter 11. He mentions that when he talks about Lazarus, Martha, and Mary, he mentions, then he says in a little caption about Mary, verses 1 and 2, that Mary is the one who anointed Jesus' feet.

[6 : 12] He gives kind of a heads up that he's going to talk about this section in chapter 12. And why does he do that? Because it was already well known.

You see, what Mary did for Jesus was well known whenever the gospel was proclaimed. It seems at some point as they talked about Jesus' life, they got around to talking about this scene with Mary. Matthew 26, 13 says it this way, Jesus speaking. He says, truly I say to you, wherever this gospel is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will also be told in memory of her.

So John is just giving a little heads up. Oh, I'm going to talk about, oh, that's Mary, the Mary y'all heard about. Because remember, they, to the people to whom John is writing had already heard something about Jesus.

John is writing his gospel to fill in the gaps. To give them the full skinny. To point them to Christ so that they might believe in him. Okay? Remember that, right?

[7 : 21] And now we come to the actual story. My first point in this passage is the beautiful aroma always begins with a celebration of Jesus.

Verses 1 and 2, it's a dinner party. It's a dinner party. Jesus is always going to a dinner party. It takes place six days before our Lord's final Passover.

We're entering the final week of the life of Jesus before he is crucified. He knows this, they don't.

This dinner is to celebrate Jesus and his marvelous miracle of returning Lazarus to life.

Remember chapter 11, we spent a few weeks on that. He had just raised this man from the dead.

It's a festification. Martha is busy serving as usual.

Here is Lazarus, the man who lived twice. Eating and drinking with his family, friends and neighbors. Can you imagine the questions at the table?

[8 : 31] Oh, come on now. Let's just dive in here with our sanctified imagination. Laz. If he's from West Philly, we call him Laz. Laz. What was it like to die, man?

Laz. How do you feel? You feel good? You still feel good, man? Laz. Laz. When you're God, did you see God? That's what I be asking him.

What was heaven like, Laz? Poor Lazarus just wanted to be near Jesus and get something to eat. And they're talking.

And I can imagine the buzz around the table. There was even a large crowd outside the house wanting to see Jesus and Lazarus, according to verse 9.

The whole town of Bethany is lit. Listen. Listen. You can gather a crowd with miracles.

[9 : 36] And many believers are trying to do that. They think miracles. We've got to do miracles. As if we can. God does miracles.

And not on demand from us, by the way. But we can gather. If we can get more miracles, people will come to Jesus.

And to tell you the truth, a few, by God's grace, might be brought to true faith. Verse 11 reminds us that Lazarus raised to the dead.

And some people believed in Jesus because they saw Lazarus. But here's the thing you've got to remember, ultimately, is that miracles don't produce faith. They can be an occasion for faith to come forth.

But only the Holy Spirit moving people to trust in the gospel of Jesus can produce faith. Only he can do that. Miracles by themselves are not enough.

[10 : 35] That's how John ends his discussion. At the end of this chapter, verse 37, here is what John says. Though he had done so many signs, that's miracles before them, they still did not believe in him.

That's the final statement made about this scene here. Yeah, a few did believe, but the ultimate story is that Jesus did many miracles.

And most did not believe. We'll get there eventually in a little bit, but some people in this crowd are going to travel to Jerusalem, not far away.

And on Good Friday, less than a week from this moment, they'll be crying out, crucify him. Some of the same people in this crowd are going to say, give us Barabbas. We don't want Jesus. Give us the guy. Give us the arm of flesh. Give us the tough guy.

[11:38] Give us the guy who will go to battle for us. You can have Jesus. So the beautiful aroma, first of all, begins with this celebration of Jesus.

That's important, y'all. Your devotion to Jesus must begin with celebrating Jesus. It has to be where you are surrendering yourself. You're beholding how beautiful he is, and you're praising him. And this is what this is supposed to be. When we gather on the Lord's Day, this is supposed to be a celebration of Jesus. And which helps to drive and kickstart your devotion for the week. And that brings up my next point. The beautiful aroma is our devotion to Jesus. The smell that makes God smile is our devotion to Jesus' son.

Making much of Jesus brings a smile to the Father's heart. Once again, we find Mary at the feet of Jesus. She's been there before.

[12:53] We've seen that before. She's listening to what he's taught. We saw it in chapter 11. When she comes up to me, Jesus, where does she go? She goes down to his feet.

If you had been here, my brother wouldn't have died. And now we find her again in the most amazing place, in the most amazing way. Where would you be?

I mean, if you were at this dinner party, where would you sit? Some of us will be trying to get the best seat in the house.

Because we got to be first. I used to always tease people in Miami about that when I lived in Miami. And I could talk about Miami because I lived in Miami. My people. I love Miami.

But I used to always tease Miami folk. Miami folk always have to be first. And you saw that when you get on the airplane. When you're getting off the plane. In Miami, when you're getting off the airplane, all of us who live in Miami, they jump in the aisle and run down the aisle.

[13:58] I mean, you're sitting there, right? You get off row by row. Row by row. I phone a lot now. Row by row. No, but not in Miami. In Miami, everybody gets up and runs in the center aisle and runs down front.

And I used to put my leg in the aisle. Because I'm a sinner. Sizable black man.

No one's going to mess with him too much. I just put my leg in the aisle. And I let everybody in the row in front of me go. And then I get out in the aisle.

And walk down the aisle slowly. Where would you be?

Do you want to always... Are you in the camera that has to have the best seat? Would you have been at the feet of Jesus or trying to get up front and try to be, you know, hear everything?

[14:57] I don't know. I'm just asking. I like making fun and poking, but you know. Where would you... Would you be in the kitchen with Martha bringing out the food?

That's where Sandy would have been. We would have been holding her down, no? Well, she would have tore herself in two. You would have tore yourself in half, right? One at his feet and one in the kitchen.

Would you be outside the house not able to get in? Because you just feel like that. I'm always on the outside. Maybe you're a disciple and you're just glad to be at the table.

But be encouraged. All who trust in Jesus as a son of God, living for him, are welcome at the table. No matter who you are, where you're from, what you think about yourself, you're welcome at the table of Jesus.

Jesus. Mary's ointment, it said, is made of pure nard. I won't go into all details about nard.

[16:04] Spike nard, it was called. It was a plant and root from India in particular, but it was... An ointment was made from it. And it was a special ointment because it was used as burial perfume for wrapping the corpse.

It's likely what Lazarus has just come out of. She would have used some of that on her brother just a few days before.

And now she's giving it to Jesus. You know what she's saying, right? She's recognizing something. Call it women's intuition. I don't believe that's what's happening. I think it's more than that. Even though I do believe in women's intuition, I do. I really do. I've learned. Sandy's taught me.

My mother's taught me. I learned. But I think the Spirit of God was impressing upon her because she was devoted to Jesus, see? And when you're devoted to Jesus, the Spirit of God speaks and lets you in on some things here and there.

[17 : 14] Come on, somebody. It was highly prized ointment. It was pure. Pure, it says. It wasn't the cheap stuff.

It wasn't a knockoff. It was a pound of it. And in those days, it was about, that's about 11 ounces in their reckoning. Worth 300 denarii.

300, y'all. Well, keep in mind, a denarius was a day's wage. 300 denarii. That's almost a year's salary for a working stiff. She took, take a year of your salary, whatever it may be, whatever your salary is, take a year of that and buy some perfume and see what people think of you.

Anyway, especially if you're married. Don't do it. But she took that and she just pours it out on Jesus.

It took time to save that kind of, maybe it was part of a dowry. Maybe it was a family heirloom. We don't know for sure. What was she saving it for, right?

[18 : 26] Maybe her wedding, like I said, dowry. But listen, she has a better use for it now. Yeah. I wonder if you're saving money for something and the Lord is saying to you right now, or has been saying to you, I want you to use that for my glory over here.

I'm just putting it out there. I didn't say give it to me. I didn't say that. So don't go out here thinking that. But maybe God might want you to use that in another place for his glory.

He redirected Mary. He redirected her understanding of her possessions. He redirected her understanding of her treasure.

Give it to Jesus. Someone described Mary's gift to Jesus as a great sacrifice.

I don't think she would have called it that at all. I sacrifice for the Lord, we say.

[19 : 37] I don't think she would have said that at all. It was devotion. Love.

Commitment. It was someone who'd been overwhelmed by his love. You see, she knew the love of Jesus. He came by her house. He has shown her great love and kindness.

She sat at his feet. She heard his teaching. She loved the word of God. When Jesus taught the word of God, she just, she, everything in her being lit up.

Did not, the disciples will say in the road, later after Christ is resurrected, his disciples will meet him, and they will say, did not our hearts burn as he spoke with us, and as we walked, and he opened up the scriptures.

See, that's what she's experienced. And then her brother, he resurrected her brother. She is overall in Jesus and her devotion. She is, she's all in, y'all.

[20 : 41] She's all in. Sacrifice? She would have said, are you kidding me? All I have belongs to Jesus.

It's his. He can have whatever he wants. The Bible does talk about our sacrifices, though. Here's how the Bible talks about our sacrifices.

Romans 12, 1. I appeal to you, therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.

What is spiritual worship? What is worship full of the Holy Spirit? Powerful singing? Can be. Can be. Can be.

But that's not what he says. What is true spiritual worship? The offering of ourselves.

[21 : 46] You taking your body and saying, Jesus, take me. That's worship. If it's not that, then it's not worship.

It can have other elements. But if it's not this, if we're not giving ourselves to Jesus, then what we say with our lips means absolutely nothing.

That's the sacrifice the Lord wants. Not even your money. You. Because you've, you recognize that you were doomed without him.

And he's had mercy. The kindness of the Lord has led you to repentance and faith and life. Life.

Life. Abundant life. Eternal life. And you say, Lord, I'm yours.

That's worship. And all the other stuff is gravy. And it's good gravy. Here's another example of worship. It's in Hebrews.

[22 : 44] Hebrews. Hebrews chapter 13, 15, and 16. Here's another example of sacrifice. Through him. That's Jesus. Let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God.

What does he mean? Singing. Well, it can be. It can be. But watch what he says. That is the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name. You're testifying of Jesus.

That's the sacrifice he wants too. And then he says, Do not neglect to do good. And to share what you have.

For such sacrifices are pleasing to God. You want to sacrifice? That's where we look. That's where we look.

Will you confess the name of the Lord, especially in difficult places? Will you give of your substance to share and bless others?

[23 : 50] Will you seek by God's grace every day? Lord, help me to do good. To do some good to somebody. Somebody, Lord. Send me some.

You ever pray this? Send me somebody to do good to, Lord, in your name. And not patting yourself on the back or trying to get them to think well of you.

But for Jesus' sake. Yeah, that's the kind of sacrifices I think Mary would agree with. But this ointment? Don't think so.

Mary's gift was twofold. One, she felt in her soul, again, that Jesus was going to die.

That's why she gives burial perfume for him. Not just, it wasn't just used for burials. But Jesus makes the point that it's for his burial. So, I'm going with him.

[24 : 51] She didn't likely know why Jesus was going to die. Because none of them had it straight. None of the disciples understood his death.

But they didn't, but she knew it was coming. The other disciples, the twelve, didn't think he was going to die. They thought when he talked about dying, that he was just being melancholy.

Having a moment, you know. Now, that's why Peter says, Lord, be far from you. Jesus had to rebuke him for that, remember? That's another story. I don't think she knew why, but she knew it was related to his ministry of God's word and powerful deeds to her and everyone else.

She had to honor his sacrifice in some tangible way. She had to honor him in some way for that impending death.

And so, she does what she could. She brings the most costly, the most precious thing that she owned, and she pours it over him. She bathes him in it. When's the last time you sacrificed anything in honor of the Lord's sacrifice for you?

[26 : 07] I don't know. Just a thought. Secondly, Mary's gift was an act of humble surrender and devotion to the Lord Jesus.

Humble surrender and devotion. Let's break it down. Jesus is reclining at the table. You know, this is one of those, it's not like our table's legs up here like this. This is a low, low-lying table, so you have to lay down on your side to eat at it.

Eat there. His feet are behind him. She takes the position of a servant, washing her master's feet. She pours out, she opens up the flask, and she pours out 11 ounces of this wonderful perfume, this ointment, whatever.

And she pours it out on him. And it's so much, it's running over his feet. Evidently, she has long hair, but she's not Rapunzel, people. You know, she gets down on the ground and lets her hair down.

[27 : 17] And she's wiping the excess. Can you see her? She's wiping the excess off his feet.

And it was scandalous, by the way. I saw this when we were in Amman, when I was in Jordan for a mission trip years ago. Women cover their hair.

You don't let your hair down in the presence of men who are not close relatives. I mean close relatives. For her to uncover herself like that was unthinkable.

But she was willing to be scandalous for Jesus. Uh-oh. I had to ask myself, Lord, when was the last time someone was scandalized by my devotion to you?

When was the last time someone said, That's too much, Kev. You're overdoing it, Kev. Kev, you got to come back to earth, Kev. Don't be too deep, Kev.

[28 : 22] I went to the last time someone said that to me or to you. Notice the smell of the suspenseful ointment fills the entire house.

An aroma. Strong perfume. Well, light up a room. Ended up the entire house. It wasn't a mansion, people. But it was sizable. It was big enough.

Filled the entire house. Her devotion to Jesus was unignorable. It was obvious devotion. It was a beautiful aroma.

And here's something you got to think about. When she got up and walked away, the aroma was still in her hair. Everywhere that Mary went around the house, the aroma went away from her. It filled the house. It went everywhere. It was gone. It was just, you couldn't get away from the aroma. Wherever Mary went, you smelled her devotion to Jesus.

[29 : 24] It's all over. Can I ask another question? I know I'm asking a lot of questions this morning. And I'm just hoping that's my way of applying the text.

So stay with me. Can people smell Jesus on you? Can they smell in your actions and attitudes Christ?

See, see, not just your actions. The aroma involves your attitudes. We can do the right thing with a wrong attitude and we stink. I can testify to that personally.

It's true, right? You ever do the right thing, but in your heart, you were mad. You were, you were, you know, but you're, but you're getting it done. But you were just, you were, I don't smell like Jesus, y'all.

You can ask him, ask him, ask him to forgive you. He will. But is your devotion to Jesus obvious? Paul picks up on this thing in a powerful way.

[30 : 30] In 2 Corinthians chapter 2, 14 and 16. I think we'll have that. Yeah. He says, but thanks be to God who in Christ always leads us in triumphal procession and through us spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of him everywhere.

For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing. To one, a fragrance from death to death.

To the other, a fragrance from life to life. Who, who is sufficient for these things? I can't handle that. Some believe what Paul is saying here is that this aroma of Christ actually comes through our suffering faithfully in his name.

And then bearing witness to him in it. Because that's the context of the section there. He's talking about, he's talking about, he's making a point that triumphal procession is when a general will go into the, a Roman general will go into town with his captives behind him.

I won the battle. He, he, he would lead the procession on his charger, on his horse, and the, the captives coming behind him in chains. Some to be executed, by the way.

[31 : 46] Here's the thing. Paul is saying, we're the captives. And Jesus is the general. And he's leading us. And we are the captives, but not in chains.

We've been set free by his love. Oh, come on somebody. We're in the line. We, he's leading us all the way of the glory. He's leading us. But, but watch this. In that leading, there will be suffering. We saw it right here. Y'all came down here because y'all suffering. That's not abnormal. Normal. That's normal Christian living. We live in a fallen world.

We're fallen bodies. But we have a unfallen savior. A risen savior. I gotta, I gotta wrap this up, y'all. My wife is giving me the eye. I'm gonna wrap it up.

I'm gonna land the plane. A little early, but I'll land it. You give up a smell and your faithfulness to Christ and devotion to Jesus, especially, not only, but especially, and when you're suffering and trusting in him, you are giving off an aroma.

[32 : 58] And that aroma to, to, to brothers and sisters or to those whom God is calling to faith in Jesus, yet aroma is life to life, even though you may be suffering.

And, but they see that you're holding on to Jesus. Or better, he's holding on to you. And, and, and, and they, and they're drawn to that life. In the midst of your suffering, in the midst of your pain, even in the midst of your dying, God will bring life.

Amen. As you testify to him. But, to those who are perishing, to those who don't want Jesus, who reject the, the history, the truth, who just don't even want to think about it, who are happy being agnostic.

I don't know what the truth is. And they're happy about it. To those, that smell, that aroma of your devotion to Jesus is death to death.

Death to death. You ever get on the elevator, and somebody comes on the elevator wearing some really nice perfume or cologne, and it's like, hmm, that smells nice.

[34 : 26] But then you realize, they took a bath in it, and now that which smelt becomes death, obnoxious.

You can't wait to get off the elevator. You, it's like it's suffocating you. That, that beautiful smell now has become noxious to you.

Because it's like, it's just, why? Because it's too much. Listen, when you're devoted to Jesus, your smell becomes too much.

Oh, people like a little Jesus. If you're just a nice person, you go to church on Sunday, and you, and you're just a nice person, and you, you let little ladies go in the door before you, and you, and you, you know, you, you always say something, you smile a lot, and just have a, good morning.

You say, God bless you a lot, you know, and that kind of stuff. You know, I mean, if you're just a little bit of Jesus, people can tolerate a little bit of Jesus. People like Jesus. Until they meet the real Jesus, the full Jesus.

[35 : 38] See, you see, he's overwhelming. He, he, he, whoo, he, when he walks in the room, they start, people start gagging. When the, when the, when the real Jesus shows up, when all of, when his glory, the Jesus that says, I didn't come to negotiate with you.

That Jesus. You know, when, when enemies were at war, um, uh, you know, when they want to, when they want to bring peace, they negotiate a treaty.

Jesus is the great king, and you and I have been given a message. As part of the aroma, we're giving a message. Our lives and our lips must, are the aroma that testified to Christ, right?

And we've been given a message from the great king for whom at, at war, the whole world is at war with. And when, and when, when he shows up, he doesn't negotiate a, a, a, a peace treaty.

Jesus has one message. Surrender. Totally. No, there's no giving. No, what we pray that Ukraine and Russia will negotiate a peace treaty.

[36 : 54] I pray that will happen, but it's going to be give and take. You give something. We give something. Okay. Russia, get back some territory. You can give back some prisoners. You know, they're going to negotiate back and forth. That's not the gospel.

The gospel is not a negotiation. When Jesus, when King Jesus shows up, he says, you surrender totally, completely. That's all I'm at. That's all we're going to deal with. Somebody in here, somebody here.

I, I, I'm on the bed in the room, this side, somebody here is trying to negotiate. No. Surrender.

When you surrender to love, when you surrender to divine love, Oh my gosh. You, you, you're not a, you are captive, a willing captive.

Take me. You're surrendering to divine love. You can't, the love that says, I will go to the cross and die for you. And, and I, and I will do it because I love you. Not because you love me.

[37 : 55] Cause you don't. You see, that's, that's the kind of love that says, when you see that kind of love, when that impacts you, you just say, Lord, I'm yours.

I surrender all every day because I keep trying to crawl off the altar as a living sacrifice. I keep trying to crawl off. So every day I got to come back.

Say, Lord, here we go. Come on. Work at me. Work at me. Remind me how much you love me.

Remind me how much you love your people. We got more to talk about in this passage, but this is just, this is, this is the heart for me.

Where is your devotion? Are you blown away? By the matchless love of Jesus. So much so, that you're giving yourself to him.

Your future, your destiny. Like Martha, sorry, like Mary, even your future happiness, she's giving it to Jesus.

[39 : 01] She's giving it. Take me. Father, bless your word to your people's hearts. Help us, Lord, to see who your son is.

Open our eyes, Lord. Give us clear vision. 2020. Open the eyes of our spirit. may each one of us present ourselves as living sacrifices.

All that we have belongs to you. May Jesus get the glory. Amen. Amen. Amen. Thank you.