

John 12:1-3      “What Do You Smell Like?”

JOH 12:1-3 Six days before the Passover, Jesus arrived at Bethany, where Lazarus lived, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. 2 Here a dinner was given in Jesus' honor. Martha served, while Lazarus was among those reclining at the table with him. 3 Then Mary took about a pint of pure nard, an expensive perfume; she poured it on Jesus' feet and wiped his feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume.

This section of Scripture marks the beginning of the most important week in all of post-fall history, as it marks the fulfillment of all God has said concerning His Son's coming into this world to redeem sinful men.

As important as the first week in history was, which was the creation of the world by God as He spoke the universe into existence, this particular week in our text becomes even more significant to the degree that God's redemptive work now enables man to be reunited to his Creator, presently and forever.

Being a part of creation as sinful people in this world means very little if we are not reestablished as completed human beings who are no longer at enmity with our God and Creator. Being a part of creation only to die in our sin and suffer eternally for the penalty of our sin is a waste of what that first week of creation was designed for which was intended by God for creating and then having eternal fellowship with His people, not separation.

And so, as we come to our text, though it is one of the saddest times in history regarding how Israel rejected and ultimately killed their Messiah, it is also one of the most joyous times as we know the rest of the story which results in the glorious resurrection of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

JOH 12:1 Six days before the Passover, Jesus arrived at Bethany, where Lazarus lived, whom Jesus had raised from the dead.

Now, you'll remember from last week that Jesus had to flee from Bethany to Ephraim because the Jewish leaders were seeking to arrest Him. He had just raised Lazarus from the dead and so the Sanhedrin decided that for Jesus to continue doing these miracles would only lead the people to follow Him which they believed would lead to a revolt against Rome.

Because the Jewish leaders were only more concerned with their position of power and prestige they concluded that the best course of action would be to kill this one man rather than have the whole nation be destroyed.

And with the Passover near at hand they know that Jesus will be coming back to Jerusalem where they can seize Him, which is why we read in JOH 11:57 “But the chief priests and Pharisees had given orders that if anyone found out where Jesus was, he should report it so that they might arrest him.”

In verse one of our text the apostle John gives us a specific time, and that is six days before Passover. What John does not give us are some of the details of Christ’s final days as do the other gospel writers.

For example, we know at this time that Jesus was in Ephraim, but because the Passover was at hand He needed to go back to Jerusalem to celebrate this feast. Ephraim is located a short distance north of Jerusalem. He only needed to make the walk directly into the capital city. But instead He goes back to Bethany according to our text.

The only way to get to Bethany without going through Jerusalem was to head east into the Jordan River valley and then south to Jericho. This is where Luke gives us some details as to what that route provided Jesus in the way of ministry in the last six days of His life.

One of the amazing things Luke tells us is that while Jesus and His disciples were preparing to go to Jerusalem via Bethany He explained in some detail what would happen once He got to Jerusalem.

LUK 18:31-33 Jesus took the Twelve aside and told them, "We are going up to Jerusalem, and everything that is written by the prophets about the Son of Man will be fulfilled. 32 He will be handed over to the Gentiles. They will mock him, insult him, spit on him, flog him and kill him. 33 On the third day he will rise again."

This could not be clearer and yet the very next verse tells us that the disciples still didn’t get the full picture of what Jesus came into this world to do in redeeming sinful men.

LUK 18:34 The disciples did not understand any of this. Its meaning was hidden from them, and they did not know what he was talking about.

After this they headed toward Jericho and on route Jesus runs across a man every Sunday school child has heard of. His name was Zacchaeus.

LUK 19:1-10 Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through. 2 A man was there by the name of Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was wealthy. 3 He wanted to see who Jesus was, but being a short man he could not, because of the crowd. 4 So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore-fig tree to see him, since Jesus was coming that way. 5 When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today." 6 So he came down at once and welcomed him gladly. 7 All the people saw this and began to mutter, "He has gone to be the guest of a 'sinner.'" 8 But Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, "Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount." 9 Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. 10 For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost."

Again, all of this is happening within the short span of six days before the final Passover of Jesus' life. As Jesus was leaving Jericho, on His way to Bethany, another man confronts our Lord. The gospel writer Mark gives us some details.

MAR 10:46-52 Then they came to Jericho. As Jesus and his disciples, together with a large crowd, were leaving the city, a blind man, Bartimaeus (that is, the Son of Timaeus), was sitting by the roadside begging. 47 When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" 48 Many rebuked him and told him to be quiet, but he shouted all the more, "Son of David, have mercy on me!" 49 Jesus stopped and said, "Call him." So they called to the blind man, "Cheer up! On your feet! He's calling you." 50 Throwing his cloak aside, he jumped to his feet and came to Jesus. 51 "What do you want me to do for you?" Jesus asked him. The blind man said, "Rabbi, I want to see." 52 "Go," said Jesus, "your faith has healed you." Immediately he received his sight and followed Jesus along the road.

Jesus knew this was His last six days and yet He was always looking for ways to serve the Father as He served these people and loved them and ministered to them in miraculous ways.

And now, Jesus finally arrives at Bethany where Lazarus lived, and whom Jesus had raised from the dead. And as He enters the town a meal has been prepared for Him according to our text.

JOH 12:2 Here a dinner was given in Jesus' honor. Martha served, while Lazarus was among those reclining at the table with him.

As short as this verse is, it's chock full of all sorts of marvelous truths. One of the first things we note here is that this dinner is given to honor Jesus. This again is on the heels of our Lord giving life to Lazarus who had been in the tomb for four days.

One of the things we learn from this is what A.W. Pink points out in his commentary on John. Essentially he says that this is a picture of our future position with Christ. Lazarus has been given life and now he sits at the side of Christ in the most joyous place of honor and happiness as he enjoys the fellowship of His Savior.

This is what is in store for you and me in Christ as Jesus Himself points out in the book of Revelation.

REV 3:20-21 Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me. 21 To him who overcomes, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I overcame and sat down with my Father on his throne.

Later in the book of Revelation an angel explains to the apostle John what is in store for all believers who are regarded as the bride of the Christ.

REV 19:6-7, 9 Then I heard what sounded like a great multitude, like the roar of rushing waters and like loud peals of thunder, shouting: "Hallelujah! For our Lord God Almighty reigns. 7 Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready. 9 Then the angel said to me, "Write: 'Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!'" And he added, "These are the true words of God."

The imagery of dining in intimate fellowship with our Lord is pictured here with this supper which is to honor Christ in our text, but it also points out the benefits of such fellowship for you and

me as Lazarus reclines at the table with Jesus. Just as Lazarus is brought near to the Lord, we too, who are in Christ, are given the privilege to be near our Savior, and the apostle Paul tells us why.

EPH 2:13 But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ.

This had to be an amazing experience for Lazarus who had just come out of the tomb only a short time before this. Instead of rotting in a grave he's enjoying life; the life Jesus gave him who said to Martha, "I am the resurrection and the life."

To be with Jesus is all Lazarus wants. And this is exactly what Jesus wants as well; for us to be where He is in fellowship and love forever. This is precisely what our Lord prayed to the Father later in this gospel of John.

JOH 17:24 "Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world.

This supper in Bethany was a way to not only honor Jesus but to thank Him for what He had given them in the way of life. He gave Martha and Mary their brother back from the dead, and now they want to rejoice in that life as they look forward to the Passover which is the celebration of life where the Lord brought His people out of the bondage of Egypt so many years before.

Notice also in verse two that Martha served, while Lazarus was among those reclining at the table with him.

Every church ought to have a bunch of Martha's. Service was something she took very seriously, particularly as it pertained to serving Jesus. But what is interesting about this incident is that it is in stark contrast to the previously recorded instance of Martha serving Jesus. Remember that?

LUK 10:38-42 As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. 39 She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said. 40 But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked, "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!" 41 "Martha, Martha," the Lord answered, "you are worried and upset about many things, 42 but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her."

Unlike that incident Martha is not now serving with an attitude, nor is she serving only out of duty, being distracted by all the preparations. Her service here is one of love and thankfulness which is the way all of us who have been given life in Christ ought to be serving, realizing that it is a privilege to honor Christ in this way.

Notice too, that Martha is the one shown to be serving here in our text, while Mary is probably sitting at the Lord's feet just as was happening in the account I read in Luke.

By the way, unlike the account in Luke, this supper is not taking place at Martha and Mary's house. Rather, it's taking place in the home of a man called Simon according to Matthew 26:6 and Mark 14:3. In fact, this man Simon is identified as Simon the Leper.

At this time in history lepers were not people you wanted to hang out with, let alone have supper with. And yet, he is given this designation. What is likely here is that since everyone who ever asked Jesus to be healed was healed, Simon was probably given this name as a testimony of one who was a leper but has been healed by Jesus and is now opening his home to join in this celebration.

It is in this context that Mark records for us that Mary is about to do something quite amazing.

MAR 14:3 While he was in Bethany, reclining at the table in the home of a man known as Simon the Leper, a woman came with an alabaster jar of very expensive perfume, made of pure nard. She broke the jar and poured the perfume on his head.

This is essentially what John records for us in our text.

JOH 12:3 Then Mary took about a pint of pure nard, an expensive perfume; she poured it on Jesus' feet and wiped his feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume.

Notice that Mark tells us that a woman, who is unnamed, poured the perfume on Jesus' head, while John tells us that it was Mary who poured the oil on Jesus' feet. Which was it? Did she pour the oil on the feet or on the head of Jesus? The answer is both. One account simply supports the other.

But the most important thing here is that Mary recognized something the others didn't, which leads to the question, why in

the world was Mary doing this in the first place? This is the question Judas asks.

JOH 12:4-5 But one of his disciples, Judas Iscariot, who was later to betray him, objected, 5 "Why wasn't this perfume sold and the money given to the poor? It was worth a year's wages."

Now before we answer this question we need to go back and examine what Mary was actually doing. We need to picture this.

"Then Mary took about a pint of pure nard, an expensive perfume; she poured it on Jesus' feet and wiped his feet with her hair."

No one really knows what kind of perfume this was. The Greek language is a bit ambiguous here as it describes the type of perfume which in the NIV and NASB is called pure nard, while the KJV calls it spikenard.

Whatever type of perfume it actually was the one thing we do know is that it was very expensive. And in fact, as Judas points out, "It was worth a year's wages."

How Mary came to obtain such a treasure we're not told, but obviously it was hers, which points out how she was willing to offer up such a sacrifice of praise as the cost of her treasure was put aside in favor of the value she placed on Jesus Himself.

So often in life we don't count the cost of serving Christ, and when we do we often conclude that it's much too expensive. And instead of understanding the value of our eternal God and Savior, we look to the riches or the fame or the relationships of this life in favor of the life and eternal treasures Christ has given us in Himself.

We sometimes have a tendency to dole out in small portions the life we've been given in Christ, when our Lord has made it clear that He wants it all. We say, "Lord I'll give you this part of my life, but for now I'm not willing to give you this other part. To me it's a costly perfume I'm not finished admiring and using on myself."

1CO 6:19-20 Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; 20 you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body.

2CO 5:15 And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.

Mary understood the cost of following Christ. And though this perfume was only a thing it was an outward expression of how she was willing to give her all, her life for the sake of Christ.

But more than that she understood the reason for Christ coming into this world, unlike what the others understood fully at this time. Remember the verse I shared earlier?

LUK 18:31-34 Jesus took the Twelve aside and told them, "We are going up to Jerusalem, and everything that is written by the prophets about the Son of Man will be fulfilled. 32 He will be handed over to the Gentiles. They will mock him, insult him, spit on him, flog him and kill him. 33 On the third day he will rise again." 34 The disciples did not understand any of this. Its meaning was hidden from them, and they did not know what he was talking about.

Mary understood much of this. And part of the reason is that she was always spending time seeking the face of her Savior. She was always in His presence learning from Him and seeking to know more of her God and His purposes.

She sensed that Christ was about to die and she was anointing His head and his feet for burial in a most dramatic way. She had humbled herself, not just in giving her most expensive prize in the oil, but in the way she did it. She wiped his feet with her hair. A more acceptable way of the day would have been to wipe his feet with a cloth or towel.

But Mary wanted to show Jesus and the rest of the disciples that there was a personal advantage to honoring Christ in this particular way where the one who was blessing Jesus actually shared in that blessing. The oil that anointed Jesus would anoint her as well and exude the same fragrant aroma as that coming from Jesus.

There is a union in a sense in which that pleasing aroma which is found in Christ is the same aroma the Father acknowledges in us because of our union with Christ. Remember that right after Jesus was baptized in the Jordan the heavens were opened up and the Spirit of God came upon Jesus, and the Father said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased." (MAT 3:17)

You and I who have trusted Christ for the forgiveness of our sins also please the Father because we are united to the Son in whom He is pleased. In a sense we have been anointed with the same oil

which anointed Christ in that He is most holy and we derive our holiness from Him as we are united to Him by faith.

We get a glimpse of this when Moses was instructed to set up the tabernacle to which the priests would enter into the presence of God on behalf of Israel. And part of this process involved an anointing oil to make holy all of the utensils of the tabernacle. Moses gave a list of herbs to combine into this oil.

EXO 30:25-33 Make these into a sacred anointing oil, a fragrant blend, the work of a perfumer. It will be the sacred anointing oil. 26 Then use it to anoint the Tent of Meeting, the ark of the Testimony, 27 the table and all its articles, the lampstand and its accessories, the altar of incense, 28 the altar of burnt offering and all its utensils, and the basin with its stand. 29 You shall consecrate them so they will be most holy, and whatever touches them will be holy. 30 "Anoint Aaron and his sons and consecrate them so they may serve me as priests. 31 Say to the Israelites, "This is to be my sacred anointing oil for the generations to come. 32 Do not pour it on men's bodies and do not make any oil with the same formula. It is sacred, and you are to consider it sacred. 33 Whoever makes perfume like it and whoever puts it on anyone other than a priest must be cut off from his people."

This oil was reserved for a most holy purpose. Those things in the temple that touched the oil were consecrated and were in turn considered holy. This oil that we see in our text is a picture of that special oil only to be used to consecrate that most holy possession of God, His Son, our Messiah, Jesus Christ.

And the oil that touches Him and consecrates Him for a holy purpose in turn touches those who are intended to become holy. Mary has been consecrated with this holy oil, if you will, and has become holy, not because of anything she has done on her own to earn such holiness, but because of the one who is consecrated and has touched her with a special touch which leads to eternal life.

Mary has honored Christ with a most expensive oil and will in turn become identified with all that Christ will do on her behalf in six short days as the one anointed to take away the sins of His people.

But simply being anointed with the life of Christ by faith is not all that Mary partakes in. Because what she receives she shares with all.

JOH 12:3 Then Mary took about a pint of pure nard, an expensive perfume; she poured it on Jesus' feet and wiped his feet with her hair. *And the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume.*

By anointing Christ she shared in the anointing and received the benefits of the anointing by being able to administer those benefits to all in that house; the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume.

One of the ways in which this was accomplished was through Mary moving about in the house. Wherever she and Jesus went there went the fragrance. As she fellowshiped with others in that house, there went the fragrance.

And everyone knew that it was a fragrance that came from Christ through this anointing. It was a fragrance that now belonged to Jesus and Mary, and yet not just Mary could benefit from it as it lingered in her hair. Every person in that room who touched Jesus, who embraced Him in love and gratitude for the life He gave to Lazarus, would also be anointed.

Each of those people would share in Christ's fragrance in a personal way as their clothes would be touched by such a costly perfume. But before we close this morning we each need to ask ourselves this question. How do we smell?

I'm not talking about your personal hygiene. I'm asking, has Jesus touched you? Have you embraced Him? Have you become identified with the One who was anointed to take your sin and pay it in full? Do you now share in His life by faith? If so, do you share the fragrant aroma of a life touched by Christ when you walk into a room?

Is your house, and by that I mean your life, filled with the fragrance of the perfume?

To be filled with the fragrance of Christ is to be filled with the Holy Spirit who anoints us for works of service as we love and serve Christ, not just with the left overs we can give, but with the most precious thing we can give, and that is ourselves without holding back.

May we join with David who came to understand the grace and mercy of God and who found his salvation in the One who anointed him.

PSA 23:5-6 You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. 6 Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.

2CO 1:21-22 Now it is God who makes both us and you stand firm in Christ. He anointed us, 22 set his seal of ownership on us, and put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come.