



Easter 2021 – Part 2
Christ's Preparation for Burial: Extravagant Gratitude
Pastor Mike Fabarez

We're so grateful this Good Friday to be inside and actually have a service, aren't we? We missed a lot this last year, including the ability to meet inside for Good Friday, and that was because we were grappling, of course, with this pandemic, which you're tired of hearing about. And if you wrestled through it like I did personally for several weeks, the weirdest thing that I anticipated when I found out I had it and the weirdest thing to experience, of course, for me at least, was not being able to smell. I hated that because it wasn't the same experience going by this place every day. I missed out on that and even used to really enjoy just driving by the Outback just to smell things and taking the long way home from work to swing by Lucille's was not worth it anymore. So I sense when you don't have things that you used to have, like Good Friday services or the sense of smell, you really do miss it.

And you think about the grace of being able to smell. What a gift it is from God to be able to have the sense of smell. Our olfactory senses are just a grace and a gift that God gives us and we are all used to experiencing that. And of course, we are attracted to that sense of having things smell good. And a lot of you go out, you buy candles for your house, or maybe you just wake up in the morning, can't wait to smell your cup of coffee. It's a great thing. Or maybe you spend way too much money on those little vials of oil and, I don't know, diffuse them at your office, whatever you do. We like our environments to smell good. Matter of fact, we even like ourselves to smell good. That's better than smelling bad. We like to smell good. And so people go out and they spend a lot of money trying to put perfumes and colognes on themselves. As a matter of fact, you might be surprised to learn that it's an 80 billion dollar industry per year that people spend just in the fragrance industry trying to smell good. You get a little bit of cologne or a little bit of perfume, and it costs so much money. And you think, wow, what a weird modern reality this is. Well, it's not just the modern reality, I hope you know that. This has been going on since the beginning of time. It's actually something we read about in antiquities. We read about it certainly in the Bible, that they were very concerned about having the right fragrances, the right spices. And of course, they all prefer to experience those things. It's a good thing. And you might expect that and think, well, of course they did. People prefer comfort. People prefer things to smell good. That's just normal human activity.

What may surprise you as you work your way through the Bible and become a student of the Bible, look back in time and see even way back in the book of Genesis in Chapter 8, where after the flood, Noah and his family, they get off the ark and for the very first time, you have this engagement in burnt offerings. God then allows human beings to eat meat. This is when people become carnivores in the biblical story and we have in that scene a transition. When they're burning these animals, because they take seven pairs of the clean animals as they look back on it and say, OK, God set this up in a particular way. As they're doing these sacrifices, here's what the Bible says in Genesis Chapter 8. It says, "Noah built an altar" "and the Lord smelled the pleasing aroma." You think, well, that's a weird thing. They've got this God who dwells in unapproachable light, this God who's spirit and not a human being like we



are. It's just amazing that God is described in a passage like that as smelling this pleasing aroma.

Now of course, that kind of anthropomorphism, we call it, the kind of expression of God and how he views that session of thanksgiving and that sacrifice that is given by Noah and his family, it gives us the sense that God is just pleased with it. Pleased with it in a way that is not describable in other terms, it's a sense of having a great smell of something. And we know what that is, it's satisfying. It brings back good memories. It transports us to another place. And certainly in that time, as human beings are given this license to be able to feed themselves in a very different world than the pre-flood or pre-diluvian world, you know, as carnivores yourself I assume, it certainly smells good to have a barbecue, even if you're a, you know, weird non-meat eater. Right? (audience laughs) Whatever, I mean, you got to admit it smells good to drive by In-N-Out Burger. It's just a good smell. And you can't ignore that.

And in the Bible, the sacrificial system which was the centerpiece of all of Israel, they were engaging in these sacrifices of bulls and oxen and goats and lambs, and you would, you know, walk by the center of Israel's worship and you would smell this. And even as it says in Leviticus Chapter 1, the priests would burn these burnt offerings on the altar and it was a pleasing aroma to the Lord. Of course, the act itself was acceptable and pleasing to God because God is a God who is to be worshiped. But it's an interesting way to put it, this analogy. Because you would, as a worshiper, experience that smell. Now think about it. That went all through the Old Testament and the Tabernacle. Then Solomon pours all this money into erecting the temple itself and even in that very "civilized" fortress city of Jerusalem, if you're going to go to worship, or you're going to visit during Passover or any of the festivals, you're going to smell this great smell, like driving by, you know, Lucille's barbecue. You have a sense of this being something that's not just watching the priests and hearing the choirs and the trumpets and the instruments and the praise. But you would smell the good smells that you would experience, the fragrances of smells of barbecues and eating, and that's something that is irreplaceable. It's something very unique about the worship system.

If you happen to be a priest, it's not just smelling food, it is smelling things like baked goods, you went into the holy place, you'd have fresh bread that would be baked. Who doesn't like the smell of a bakery? You would have this incense altar. Think about that. You would have an altar that was just there for nothing else than to burn incense and make the room smell good. You had the oils that would burn in the lampstands and all these things would put out this distinctive and positive fragrant aroma in the room. Even throughout the temple as it grew in the traditions and things beyond even the Mosaic law, you'd have bowls that would burn incense throughout the facility. Even into the Holy of Holies you would have shovels and you would have pots and you would have various receptacles for the burning of these coals that would bring this distinctive smell, even some very specific ingredients for the incense and the oils that were used that were exclusive to the worship in the temple and the tabernacle.

I mean, this all makes us think about the ways in which we will spend a lot of money and even value and have this sense of experience relationally with each other, with the purchase of



colognes and perfumes. And that is something that isn't listed in Scripture as building a very important connection to what we're here to experience tonight and that is the reminder of the death of Christ on a cross 2,000 years ago. Containers were much more valuable than our containers that we buy at the fragrance store or the department store. The alabaster jars, for instance, that were described like the one you see on the screen, they were valuable in and of themselves. But beyond that, they would contain a very expensive perfume, just like we would have today. Only sometimes you would pass these perfumes on from one generation to the next. And often, of course, the more wealthy you were in the ancient Greco-Roman world, the more valuable they were and the more volume that you would have.

If you're thinking about all that, you think, well, I thought we were here for Good Friday, maybe we should be talking about, you know, the Last Supper or, you know, that scene where Jesus gets up and washes the feet of the disciples and takes the basin and the towel and does all that. And I think that's super appropriate for a Good Friday service. But this Good Friday, I want you to go not to the Last Supper, but the second to the last supper in Scripture. The previous time, the penultimate time when Jesus is having a meal with his disciples and he has it in what you see here on the stage. We've recreated this for you to give you a sense of what this second to last supper was like. The ancient Greco-Roman world in the 1st century had atriums where a lot of them ate outside. And then there was the tricliniums, they would call them, this dining area with a very low table. Some of the buzzwords that would indicate what kind of table that they were at would be indicated by words like they were reclining at the table.

Even the word itself, the word for the Last Supper is the word that is enlisted to describe the second to the last supper, which is describing not just a casual meal, it's describing an elaborate meal, a meal at a triclinium probably that looks something like this where you would recline. And it's kind of like having these oblique parking spaces. You know, they would lay down on one side like this and the next person would come in. So it would be like you would be shoulder to shoulder, but you would kind of flank your body behind the person that you were next to. And oftentimes they would lean on one elbow and they would eat off the table with the other hand. And this was the scene for a very elaborate meal in the house of a man named Simon. Simon, not Simon Peter, but Simon who was healed by Jesus of his leprosy. And apparently he was a man of wealth because he had probably not only a fancy atrium, but he had the triclinium where he sat his guests. And it was a big room because all the disciples were there. And more than that, friends of Simon's from Bethany, this city just outside of Jerusalem were there, including Mary and Martha and Lazarus.

And that's the scene that we have, not Jesus washing the feet of the disciples with a basin of water, but the passage that we want to think about tonight, the scene that we want to think about is Mary washing the feet of Jesus. And this happened just a week before Jesus was crucified and it was done not with water, but with a very, very expensive, and this is about the right size, the pint of, it's called a pound in the English Standard Version, but a pint of this very expensive perfume. Matter of fact, that perfume was described as costing a whole year's wage of an average, you know, entry-level worker. So if you want to modernize that, that's like a pint full of very expensive perfume that would cost \$25,000. This is the kind and of the value



that's described in Scripture that would be passed on as an heirloom from one generation to the next. And in the Greco-Roman world, you might use that not only for special occasions to dab behind your ear, but you might use it given the guests that you have and the level of importance, you might take a little bit and put it on the heads of your guests. This was part of the tradition of the ancient world.

But that's not what happens here. You have in this text, Mary, washing the feet of Jesus with very expensive perfume. And again, you think, well, this didn't seem like the right kind of Good Friday service. Well, I want to tell you the reason that I think we need to spend our whole time here talking about this. Because Matthew Chapter 26 verse 13 should be a convicting passage to all of us, because I think it speaks to the reality of what's going on at this dinner that took place just a few days before Christ was crucified and it is tied to the crucifixion in a way that Jesus expects us to be talking about. Matter of fact, here's how he put it in verse 13 of Matthew 26. He says, "Truly, I say to you," and he only starts certain sentences with that kind of emphasis, I'm telling you something important here. "Wherever this gospel is proclaimed," look at this phrase now, "in the whole world." Now, Jesus, if anyone knew what the extent of the world was, and he certainly had a sense of how long this kingdom would be built in this period of time we called the Church Age. But he says, "Wherever this gospel is proclaimed in the whole world," note this now, he says, "what she has done," what Mary has just done, it says, "will be told in memory of her." Wherever the gospel is preached in the whole entire world, they're going to be talking about this and they're going to be talking about what Mary did.

Now, I was convicted in thinking, well, what should we be talking about this Good Friday? We've looked at so many aspects of that last week of Christ. The wrestling in prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane. We've talked about the betrayal. We've talked about the issues of him actually going before Pilate. We see the trial before the Sanhedrin. We've looked at so many aspects of the darkness falling upon the land for six hours. The things that we have watched and recreated, I thought to myself, I've never recreated this scene. I've never had us focus on this. I've never had a set constructed that reminds us of what Mary did. And yet Jesus expected this to be a topic of our discussion. How important is it for us to stop here 2,000 years later and think about it? Wherever, it says, in the whole world this is preached, the Gospel, which is what Compass Bible Church is all about, this is going to be told. We're 7,586 miles away from where this took place. I mean, about as far away as you can get from it. And I'm thinking the gospel is being preached here. And if we sit here as a bunch of Gentiles thinking about the cross of Christ, it would be good for us to spend some time remembering what Mary, the sister of Lazarus, did 2,000 years ago to take a very, very expensive \$20,000, \$30,000 pint of expensive perfume and poured it out. Think about that. Spent it all at one dinner. You talk about a bill for dinner. That's crazy.

So let's talk a little bit about perfumes and colognes. Let's talk about this very expensive perfume that was poured out on Christ and give you a little bit of the context. I said this is just before Christ goes to the cross. "It's six days before the Passover." The Passover lamb would be sacrificed on Friday, just in contemporaneous time as Christ was being crucified. So he's going to die on Friday. This is six days before that. This is probably at the end of the Sabbath

day, probably after sunset, a later meal in Bethany. So Saturday, six days before Christ is crucified, they come to Bethany, which is just up the back slope of the Mount of Olives, not far from the Kidron Valley and the old city of Jerusalem. And it says this is where Lazarus, you might remember, was, his hometown, "whom Jesus had raised from the dead." And this is John Chapter 12, stating the scene. In John Chapter 11 was the passage that described the raising of Lazarus from the dead in Bethany.

It says, "So they gave him a dinner for him there." They were in honor of Christ and in honor of Lazarus and Martha served Lazarus. "Martha served, and Lazarus was one of those reclining at the table." And it says this, "Mary therefore took a pound," which is about this liquid pint here, "of very expensive ointment, pure nard," it's described as, "and anointed the feet of Jesus and wiped his feet with her hair." That was just an outrageous thing to think through, right, ladies? Rarely in the first century, respectable ladies had their hair let down. Certainly not in public. And in private, you can see the very intimate setting where you have Jesus, the disciples, you have Lazarus, you have Simon, who was healed by Christ, Simon the leper, and here is Mary who is taking down her hair and is at the feet of Christ and she's pouring out this very expensive perfume.

Now they're all trying to eat at this dinner. And here's the next line that you need to catch in your mind, "The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume." I mean, I'm trying to eat my lamb chops or whatever I'm having here for dinner and now all of a sudden, the house is overwhelmed with this smell. "The house is filled with the fragrance of the perfume." I thought we need to experience this in honor of Mary, remember what took place and to think through that smell. And so what I've done is I've put together here these vials. They've had little vials of spikenard put together. I'm going to have them passed out to you right now. I want you to take that little vial and I want you to experience the fragrance of what was experienced there in Bethany.

So pass those out right now, they're coming down the aisles and I want you to make sure and grab these and take that cap off and make sure that you get a sense of that smell. What you're going to be smelling is spikenard. Spikenard is the fragrance that is made from this plant. Spikenard. Spikenard, you can see where it gets its name. A little spiky, flowery plant. It's grown between about 3,000 and 5,000 feet in elevation in the Himalayan mountains. This was sought after even in the first century in northern India. They would go on long journeys to get this. You can see why it's so expensive and it might cost you \$20,000 to have a pint of it. And this was crushed down. It was very expensive and Roman historians talk about this red rosy smell, this sweet smell that this gave off. I don't know if that flavor is to your liking, but I want you to sense and imagine what spikenard smelt like as that aromatic flavor overcame the room. So this is everywhere, the spikenard smell. And that fragrance is overcoming the room as she is wiping his feet with her hair. And you're thinking, OK, what's that all about?

And you think, well, putting perfume on someone's feet, maybe this is just about, you know, Jesus' stinky feet, right? They didn't have any foot spray around, so... Listen, there are a lot of ways to deal with this. I mean, it was the tradition. It was the formal thing that you did and you would wash the feet of your guests. You would have a servant perhaps to do that as people



gathered. But you think through what's going on here and you think, well, that's not what's taking place. You could do this with water. You could do this with a towel. She's doing this with this very expensive perfume.

But if you read the text, here's what you'll notice. It's not just his feet that she is drenching in this. She saves half of this to pour it on his head. Think about this. So you've got this scene and picture my head height here and I'm reclining at the table and I'm eating. And Mary's going through this elaborate and extravagant spilling out of this spikenard on his feet. And then she comes up from his feet and picture this now she takes this very expensive spikenard and she pours it over his head. Imagine that. It's a pint now. How much is a pint? Think about that. You may have put some on his feet. You're pouring this on the head of Christ. It's running down the sides of his head. It's running down his beard. It's getting all over his cloak, his robe, and it's smelling up the house. And everyone's going, what is going on here?

Well, it says the disciples got into criticizing Mary at this point, as you might too. Right? Why would you spend \$20,000 at a dinner? Judas is the one who starts the discussion and the debate and says, "Well, we shouldn't do this. We should definitely not be wasting that expensive ointment on this. It doesn't make any sense." And Jesus steps in and, of course, defends her. And why would he defend her for that? Well, the Bible says a couple of things about what took place here as he has his head now drenched in very smelly, fragrant, aromatic perfume. That's all going on. And you're thinking to yourself, think now, Sunday school grads about when this is happening. It's happening on Saturday, probably after sunset, the weekend before Christ goes to the cross on Friday. Think about this. He'll be in the Garden of Gethsemane on Thursday and here we are on Saturday night.

You know what comes next, right? What's coming next is the Triumphal Entry that I preached on last week. And if you think through pouring oil on someone's head, you might think rightly back through the Old Testament and remember, when does that happen? Well, here's a depiction in art of the scene that we read about in our Bibles where the prophet would come with a flask of oil, like in this scene where David, the son of Jesse, is picked out from all of his brothers and selected to be the king of Israel. And God says that's the one. So Samuel takes that flask and he pours it on the head of young David. Think about that. What an amazing thing that would have been. And even in that scene, you have the reflection of the ingredients that probably much like you have when the prophets are set apart and when the priests are set apart, it's a very special blend of aromatic, fragrant, sweet-smelling perfume that's poured on David, this kid who just was called out from keeping the sheep. It changed everything in that room and it changed everything in this room. It changed everything because the fragrance filled the room just probably like it did in Samuel's scene with David.

But the point is, he's being set apart to be what? To be the king. Well, the next morning, Jesus is going to wake up. He's going to have a young donkey rounded up by the disciples and he's going to be riding into Jerusalem as they're saying things like this, "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, even the king of Israel." Think about that. If he really is the king coming in in the coronation parade to take the throne in Jerusalem, you'd think, well, he needs to be anointed. Here's the anointing of Jesus by Mary at a dinner on Saturday night



as oil is poured on his head and an, you know, unauthorized, unplanned, all the disciples are surprised, event, as she, with an extravagant sense of gratitude, comes to Christ and pours perfume all over him.

Now, if you're thinking about that, you're thinking, "Oh, is that what this was all about?" Well, that's not what Jesus said it was all about. It may have been the royal overtones, as other commentators have put it, is undeniable in the scene because the next morning he's going to ride in and be hailed as king. But when Jesus looks at this, he says this as he defends her and he says, "Listen, she's just done a beautiful thing." That's the word he uses. Why? "Because she has anointed my body beforehand for burial." She's anointed my body and of course, you can see it down his head, coming probably across his chest, down his arms and here's all of this fragrant perfume that's poured out on him and he says, "She's getting me ready for burial."

I mean, most people in the crowd on Palm Sunday the next morning are going to be saying, "here comes our king. Save us now. Hosanna!" They expect him to reign and rule and to vanquish the Roman oppressors. And Jesus knows where this is headed. By Thursday, he's going to be wrestling in the Garden in prayer saying, "Let this cup pass from me, but not my will, but yours be done." And he says, you know, I know I'm going to the cross and I know I'm going to be put in a tomb. And what she has just done days away from my crucifixion as she's prepared my body for burial because, of course, that's what happens and has happened throughout history. I mean, the Egyptians were famous for this, right? We read the conflation of the Egyptian practices of trying to preserve their dead, their bodies, with the Israeli practices that we see performed even on Joseph as the Egyptians engage in that and we see throughout the Bible this sense of concern for the preservation of bodies.

And it's more than just the preservation. Even as the history in America will bear out in the mortician profession of our country, this is about, if you can read the fine print there, it's about being free from odor. The embalming process is we know this when bodies die, they stink. I mean, they start to reek of death. And matter of fact, those who have experienced the smell and stench of death, it's unlike anything else when human bodies die. And so there's always been a concern about that. And if you're in a situation like in the civil war where you can't intern people in the ground right away, I mean, this is important that you somehow pack the body in a way that will keep it from smelling that stench of death. Which, after all, Jesus knows he's going to the cross to die. It's really all about his death. His death as Isaiah 53 prophesies is going to be a crushing of his own life, having him pour himself out unto death. And so for us, we think about him either hanging on a cross and dying or maybe rising from a tomb in Jerusalem. But you don't think about perhaps the interim period of time.

We have a body to take down off the cross, a body that has been beaten, a body that has been bruised, a body that's been hanging and dying and suffocating out there in the sun. And we have to pull it off of the cross and then we have to hastily somehow get it to a tomb and a grave. And of course, Joseph of Arimathea says, "Well, I'm going to put him in my tomb." So the rich man here now lends him this tomb and people are taking a dead body and quickly, hastily before sundown because the Sabbath was coming, this is Friday evening now that



Jesus is executed and they're saying, "OK, we've got to put some spices together." Because Joseph Arimathea was rich and even in concert with Nicodemus that we learn about in John 3, he gets involved with his underwriting and writes some checks. He's being persuaded as a secret follower of Christ and they get some spices together and they put them in that tomb. But he didn't have a formal "embalming." He didn't get packed in spices the way that someone did. He was laid in the tomb haphazardly in a way that was not the full treatment of what you would get as a Jewish man who dies, particularly a beloved rabbi who dies and is cared for and attended to by his best friends. And so as Mary pours out this very expensive perfume, Jesus says it's like she's preparing my body to be put in that grave.

That's an interesting thing that she does. Jesus is looking forward to his death, but I might recommend to you that even though Jesus says she's anointed my body beforehand for burial, I think that probably is his perspective. I think this is a true statement. Obviously, Christ said it, but he says, well, she's done what she could. He's looking forward to his death. But I just wonder when she does what she can in this extravagant expression of her gratitude to Christ, I just wonder why she's so grateful to Christ. Why is she going and spending \$20,000 at dinner to show her devotion to Jesus Christ?

Well, this isn't obviously the first connection that we have in the text of Scripture between Mary and Martha and Jesus. Matter of fact, we have a lot of reason just in the previous chapter in John Chapter 11, why Mary and Martha might be very grateful to Jesus. I mean, grateful in a way that might say, "Hey, I don't care how much it cost, if I can show how grateful I am to Jesus, I'm going to do it." Because, of course, in John Chapter 11, that's the story where Lazarus is raised from the dead. He's in the grave for four days. And it says in that text, as Jesus says, "Take away the capstone," the cover to this crypt, this tomb that he's in. It says here the sister of the dead man said to him, "Lord, by this time there's an odor" with the strange language of the King James, "Lord, he's stinketh." Right? "I mean, we can't open that tomb. I mean, I don't know if you know what a dead body smells like Jesus four days after it dies, but you do not want to open that grave."

And yet think about that, you're expecting the stench of a rotting corpse maybe mixed with some aloe or some myrrh, some frankincense that you put on it. Who knows, maybe some spikenard, but you realize it's going to stink. And instead, you open up that grave and out walks your brother and in tears, you listen to Christ as he talks about the fact that he "is the resurrection and the life that no one comes to the Father but through him," he's taught that repeatedly. Now he says, if you believe in me, this avenue through which you can have life after death and I'm proving it by raising your brother from the dead. How grateful do you think Mary and Martha were that Mary would go and find the most expensive perfume that's been handed down probably through her family and she's going to take it and not put a dab on the forehead of Christ? She's going to pour the whole thing out over the body of Christ from head to toe. I mean, she was grateful for sure.

I mean, there's no way she didn't have a sense of relief. We've all stood, I assume, by the grave of our loved one and thought this is a horrible experience. To reverse that, to have that reversed would be like the ultimate. And you would say if someone could reverse this for me



how grateful would I be? Sometimes at funerals, when I preach at funerals, I can't help but saying it, and I don't mean to be flippant about it, but I remind people that death is the enemy. I'll say things like death really stinks. I mean that metaphorically but it's also true literally. It's a horrible, horrible thing. And yet on Good Friday, we talk about the death that, as John Owen put it, brought "Death to Death." Death on Good Friday, reversed death, much like, at least in a temporary sense, Lazarus' death was reversed.

Here's the way the Bible puts it, which is the most bizarre statement of all. You've read it probably if you've grown up in church and you know it, you don't stumble over it anymore. But if you were thinking about death, death where Jesus even thinks I'm going to die, I see this perfume over my body is like preparation for the preservation of my body so that it doesn't stink. You're thinking death stinks in every way. And yet here's how the death of Christ is described to the Ephesians. "Christ loved us and gave himself up for us," he died for us as "a fragrant," a good smelling, a fragrant, aromatic, beautiful smelling "offering and sacrifice to God." Now, if you think about that, in light of the death of an animal and a barbecue in your backyard, you may go, "Well, I get that. I mean, you got me thinking about how good it must be, the smell, to be a priest and to be about all those sacrifices and the incense and all that. I get how sacrifices smell good. But I don't get how death of a human being smells good. That smells horrible."

Well, metaphorically, this is the most aromatic, fragrant thing that can happen is that Christ would die on a cross on Good Friday 2,000 years ago. As a matter of fact, look at how it's put here. In this picture that depicts the good smelling aroma that the Bible continually says, I know it smells good to you worshipers, but it's an acceptable sacrifice to me as you bring your lamb without defect. Now here's Christ dying, the "Lamb of God that takes away the sins of the world." The most awful thing of all, the death of a human being, the death of someone we love. And yet it's a fragrant, acceptable sacrifice to God. It's an amazing thing, especially when we understand what the death of Christ was all about.

It was a substitution for our death. It was the thing that reversed the penalty that I owe to God. As a matter of fact, if I embrace this by faith and repent of my sins and I trust in what Christ has done, then here's what the Bible says takes place from that point on in my life, I become "the aroma of Christ to God." Think about that. I become the aroma of Christ to God. Now, I know if you're a Bible scholar, right? You know, the context of this is about evangelism and me spreading the fragrance of Christ. But in the middle of it all, here's the explanation. I before God, he smells Christ.

Maybe you have heard an illustration about the fact that, hey, God, as he looks at me, he sees the perfection of Christ. Here it is put in the terms that we're talking about, the olfactory sense of having a pleasing aroma when God "smells" me. Think about that. The idea of how he looks at me. He sees me as this pleasing aroma of Christ. That's a remarkable thing on Good Friday that we need to think about because sin in the Bible is the thing that makes me stinky. The reality is the wages of my sin, the wages of what I've done is death. That's a bad thing. That's a stinky thing. It's a horrible thing. A horrific thing, a stench. I mean, I was dead. I was walking around as a dead person to God. I was relationally separated from him in the



trespasses and sins in which I just walked, I freely just did these things. There's the aroma of death. And yet here is the reality, even in the Old Testament, looking forward to the death of Christ. Look at passages like this in Ezekiel Chapter 20 verse 41. He says, "As a pleasing aroma I will accept you."

Do you know anything about the book of Ezekiel? Ezekiel was written when? Think about this now, written when? Sixth century, fifth century B.C., they are in Babylon because of their idolatry and the immorality and all their adultery and all the things they did wrong and God is disciplining his nation. Looking forward to the restoration, though, he says, "As a pleasing aroma I will accept you." I mean, we're drawn to things that smell good. And here is God saying I'm going to accept you, fully accept you. How is that possible? Well, the only way that's possible, you understand, is to be accepted in Christ. That Christ has satisfied. We call it propitiation. He is the propitiation for sins that God the Father can look at the Son and say, satisfied. It is acceptable. Then we become from that point on the aroma of Christ to God. God smells the acceptability of a life that I didn't live. He sees as a satisfaction the death that I never died. That's the transaction in the exchange of the cross, and it was all illustrated 2,000 years ago in Bethany at the house of Simon the Leper by Mary, the sister of Lazarus. All of it because of an expensive pint of perfume as Jesus looks forward to his death, which for Mary with an expression of her gratitude for the amazing Christ who gives life.

If you embrace that by faith and you trust in the finished work of Christ, you can leave this room and start to do things that now specifically those events become pleasing aromas to God. This is all an illustration, the analogy. Look at it this way, as the Philippians gave money to Paul, a missionary, that simple act of supporting this missionary work, he says, "The gifts you sent, a fragrant offering," a fragrant offering, it smells good, "acceptable and pleasing to God." You helped launch Hill Country, think about that, our next church plant. Or you helped launch the last one in Tustin or Huntington Beach where people are getting saved, that missionary work, that church planning, the Bible said it's like, "That thing that you did, it's like it just smells good to me. It's a fragrant offering." As Christians, we need to think our whole lives are that way. We need to think about ourselves being that sacrifice that smells good, that's acceptable to God only in Christ, of course. But you ought to, as you've heard many times, "present your bodies as living sacrifices." I don't have to die because Christ already died. I don't have to have this terrible stench of death, and the expectation of the second death, I can be holy and acceptable to God in Christ, which is what the whole book of Romans is about. I can do little things even. I can say thank you like Mary did, even if I don't have \$20,000 to show it. I can give a sacrifice of praise to God just being thankful. I can do good this afternoon. I can do good tomorrow. I can share something I have in the name of Christ. "For such sacrifices are pleasing to God," they smell good.

Let me give you the opportunity to do that, very simple. You may not think of it this way, but when we participate in the Lord's Supper, we're doing something that is at the heart of what we as people in Christ, if we're accepted in Christ, can do and it's like a sacrifice that's an aromatic fragrant offering to God. I say that because even when Christ instituted the Lord's Supper, he took a cup and when he had given thanks, think about that. For what? For a sip out of this cup? For a little piece of the unleavened bread he gave thanks for that? That was



just to teach us that we ought to be thankful for our food every day? He gives thanks and then he talks about the fact that this cup represents the blood of the covenant that I'm making, the promise that God made to forgive you, to make you acceptable, like a pleasing aroma. All of that. The promise of God to make us acceptable in Christ, he gives thanks for that. The early Church began to call it that. They called it in Greek, the Eucharisto, the Eucharisto. You know that transliterate the Eucharist. Eucharisto means thanksgiving. I'm blessing God. I'm being thankful to God.

We pick up the cup and we remember the cup and we say this is the reminder of Christ's death. And it's the thing for which I'm thankful for. Here's how it's translated in the English Standard Version, it's translated "the cup of blessing with which we bless" God. We say, "God, thank you." You can in the next three minutes, be in your heart thankful for what Christ has done for you, and you've just engaged in something that is like Mary pouring out perfume on the head of Christ. Think that through. The ability that you have to affect God's afternoon, an amazing truth.

We're going to have the ushers come forward, we're going to hand out the elements of the Lord's Supper. Every Good Friday we participate in the Lord's Supper. It's for Christians who put their trust in Christ. And maybe today's the first time for you to do that, to say, "I know that I cannot be acceptable to God. I need to repent of my sins. I need to trust in Christ." And then you take these elements and they are an expression of that, they're a declaration of that, they're a cup and a wafer of thanksgiving for Christ's blood and his body that was sacrificed on a cross as a fragrant offering to God.

I know it's a COVID pack, and I'm sorry about that. They were on sale, so we're cleaning them out. But there is a wafer buried in there somewhere. So you take a little extra effort to take those elements apart, take them out. It's all sealed there. And then hang on to it for a minute, and between now and the time I have us take these things together, Joseph's going to play and I want you, first of all, to make sure there are no outstanding problems between you and God. If there are sins that need to be confessed, confess them now and then spend the majority of these two or three minutes being thankful to God.

He took the cup and we he had given thanks he gave it to them. We're going to drink this cup together but I want you to be thankful. Mary showed the depth of her gratitude. Christ saw it as something he called a beautiful thing. Let's do a beautiful thing right now by offering up a sacrifice of praise to God. You quietly, privately talk to God, and then we'll take these elements together in about two minutes.

The impact of your thanksgiving, I want to illustrate it with the picture in the book of Revelation Chapter 5, Chapter 8, even in Psalm 141, gives us this picture of our prayers. I would say specifically, even as the Bible emphasizes our prayers of thanksgiving to God. It says they rise up before God like the incense in the censer, in the bowls, in the off altar of incense, raising up before God continually day and night. Here is the picture of the people of God redeemed by Christ when they thank God. It's going up before God like the incense that's burned on the incense altar, in the bowls. That's just an amazing thought. You smell



something good tonight, you walk into a bakery, you smell a steak, you drive by In-N-Out Burger, whatever it might be, if you go that smells good. I mean, that's the impact illustrated, analogized in you and I praying to God, even our prayers for requests, showing our dependence upon God, our reliance upon him. It's an amazing thing in the last three or four minutes here, you can sit here in the comfort and quiet of this building and you can be saying things to God in your heart that rise before him, like something that smells fragrant and beautiful.

"She's done a beautiful thing to me." And then Jesus says in Matthew 26:13 and "people are going to remember this wherever the gospel is proclaimed all over the whole world." So I feel really good that we have gone to the effort tonight to focus on what Mary did, seeing the theological implications of it. I hope that you'll take that vial and remember the fragrance of that room that night, maybe even after come up, take a picture of the set and take a look at this room in which Mary did something that was to be honored for centuries around the world. That you would remember the taste and the experience of ingesting elements that remind us of how thankful we ought to be that Christ was the fragrant offering and sacrifice to God that makes us the aroma of Christ to God. So much to be thankful for, and I hope so much to remember to drive us on into the future, praying more, thanking God more, being more reliant upon the life, death and resurrection of Christ. If you know what that's all about, your trust is in him, then I invite you to eat this bread and drink this cup.

God, please give us a greater dependence upon our prayer life to even bring you that sacrifice of praise, the praise of our lips to you that we say we are thankful. That we, like Mary, can do a beautiful thing by being grateful, maybe even in some ways being extravagant. That we can, even like the Philippians did, be extravagant with what we have to see the work of Christ go forward. That we can do something as simple as sharing what we have, sharing our home, sharing a meal, sharing our vehicle, whatever it might be, and seeing those, as Hebrews 13 says, being an "acceptable, pleasing sacrifice to you." And even just saying thank you in our hearts and our prayers. God, drive us to do those things which are much more important than most of the things we did this week. More significant than the urgent things that always steal away our time from you in our devotional life, in our prayer life. So God we thank you for Mary of Bethany, sister of Lazarus, who reminds us tonight to be grateful and thankful, most importantly, as Jesus focused in on the death of Christ that makes us right and fragrant before you. We're grateful for that. We love you tonight, we thank you for this time together.

In Jesus name. Amen.