

Title: “**SIX DAYS BEFORE THE PASSOVER**”Text: John 12:1-11Subject: *The Supper at Bethany*Date: Sunday Morning — March 28, 2010Tape: John #79Reading: *Psalm 28:1-9*Introduction:

The title of my message is found in the opening verse of John 12. — “**SIX DAYS BEFORE THE PASSOVER**” As we open our Bibles to the 12th chapter of John’s Gospel, we come to the end of our Lord’s public earthly ministry. Everything else recorded in John’s Gospel, until his arrest in the Garden of Gethsemane, tells us about our Savior’s private instructions given to his beloved disciples during the last six days of his life on this earth.

John 12 is really a climactic chapter. For three years without wavering the Lord Jesus has declared and proved his manifold perfections. He has manifested his blessed person in public and private; and he has verified every claim he ever made as the Son of Man by his words, by his deeds and by his behavior. And the result, among his own disciples, there has been a deepening awakening. They have begun to see and appreciate more fully who he really is. And after the climactic resurrection of Lazarus from the dead, his chosen, the sheep of his fold, had a more confident awareness that this is indeed the Son of God. Yet,

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the unbelieving were more completely hardened in their unbelief. The very same things that had in those three years melted the hearts of God’s elect only hardened the Lord’s enemies; and their hatred intensified with every passing day.

(2 Corinthians 4:14-16) “Now thanks *be* unto God, which always causeth us to triumph in Christ, and maketh manifest the savour of his knowledge by us in every place. ¹⁵ For we are unto God a sweet savour of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish: ¹⁶ To the one *we are* the savour of death unto death; and to the other the savour of life unto life. And who *is* sufficient for these things?”

Now, let’s read our text together. May God the Holy Spirit, whose Word we now read, graciously take the things of Christ and apply them to our hearts, as only he can.

(John 12:1-11) “Then Jesus six days before the passover came to Bethany, where Lazarus was which had been dead, whom he raised from the dead. ² There they made him a supper; and Martha served: but Lazarus was one of them that sat at the table with him. ³ Then took Mary a pound of ointment of spikenard, very costly, and anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped his feet with her hair: and the house was filled with the

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odour of the ointment. ⁴ Then saith one of his disciples, Judas Iscariot, Simon’s *son*, which should betray him, ⁵ Why was not this ointment sold for three hundred pence, and given to the poor? ⁶ This he said, not that he cared for the poor; but because he was a thief, and had the bag, and bare what was put therein. ⁷ Then said Jesus, Let her alone: against the day of my burying hath she kept this. ⁸ For the poor always ye have with you; but me ye have not always. ⁹ Much people of the Jews therefore knew that he was there: and they came not for Jesus’ sake only, but that they might see Lazarus also, whom he had raised from the dead. ¹⁰ But the chief priests consulted that they might put Lazarus also to death; ¹¹ Because that by reason of him many of the Jews went away, and believed on Jesus.”

BLESSED COMPANY

This event is recorded no less than three times in the Gospel narratives of our Lord’s earthly life. Obviously, the Holy Spirit intends for us to learn much from it and meditate often upon it. **First, we have a sweet picture of the blessed company of the redeemed** (vv. 1-3).

“Then Jesus six days before the passover came to Bethany, where Lazarus was which had been dead, whom he raised from the dead. ² There they made him

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a supper; and Martha served: but Lazarus was one of them that sat at the table with him. ³Then took Mary a pound of ointment of spikenard, very costly, and anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped his feet with her hair: and the house was filled with the odour of the ointment.”

Before I proceed, it must be stated that with the observance of this Passover, the legal, Old Testament ordinance ceased forever. The Passover here mentioned, was the fourth during our Lord’s earthly ministry. The Lord Jesus was looking forward to it with peculiar delight. **He was anxious to eat it with his disciples before his death** (Luke 22:15), because he was...

- anxious to fulfil his Father’s will,
- anxious to complete his covenant engagements as our Surety
- and anxious to finish the mission for which he had come into the world, — anxious to save his people from their sins!

With the celebration of this Passover, the ordinance of it was to cease forever, because Christ our Passover was about to be sacrificed for us. Once the substance came, the shadow died away (1 Corinthians 5:7-8; Colossians 2:16-17).

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(1 Corinthians 5:7-8) “Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened. For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us: ⁸ Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness; but with the unleavened *bread* of sincerity and truth.”

(Colossians 2:16-17) “Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath *days*: ¹⁷ Which are a shadow of things to come; but the body *is* of Christ.”

Six days before the final Passover our Lord Jesus came again to Bethany, the town of Martha, Mary, and Lazarus. They made a special supper for him. Martha, who was always a busy, active woman, served the Lord and the guests. Lazarus, who had been raised from the dead, sat at the table with Christ and the others. Then, we read in verse 3 that Mary, whom we saw sitting at the Savior’s feet and hearing his Word in Luke 10, took a pound of very costly and fragrant ointment, anointed his feet and wiped them with her hair. When she did, the house was literally filled with the fragrance of the ointment.

We read in verse 2 that “**They made HIM a supper.**” — That is what we should seek to do every time we come together in his house, every time we gather our families to

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pray and every time we enter into our closets. O Holy Spirit, make it so. To gather together in his name, more than anything else, is to gather for his honor, — to make him a feast!

(Song of Solomon 1:7) “Tell me, O thou whom my soul loveth, where thou feedest, where thou makest *thy flock* to rest at noon: for why should I be as one that turneth aside by the flocks of thy companions?”

(Song of Solomon 1:13) “A bundle of myrrh *is* my wellbeloved unto me; he shall lie all night betwixt my breasts.”

If we make him a feast, he will come in and sup with our souls (Revelation 3:20; Song of Solomon 5:2)

(Revelation 3:20) “Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me.”

(Song of Solomon 5:2) “I sleep, but my heart waketh: *it is* the voice of my beloved that knocketh, *saying*, Open to me, my sister, my love, my dove, my undefiled: for my head is filled with dew, *and* my locks with the drops of the night.”

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Here are three things, three great features, which ought to characterize every believer and every Gospel church...

- Communion with Christ, as portrayed in Lazarus sitting at the table with the Savior.
- Worship, as portrayed by Mary anointing his feet.
- And service to Christ and his people, portrayed in Mary serving the table.
- The work was harmonious: no envy and no self-exaltation. — Each were in their place.
- The workers were one. — *“They made him a supper.”*

(Philippians 2:1-5) “If *there be* therefore any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any bowels and mercies, ² Fulfil ye my joy, that ye be likeminded, having the same love, *being* of one accord, of one mind. ³ *Let* nothing *be done* through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. ⁴ Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others. ⁵ Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus:”

(Philippians 2:14-18) “Do all things without murmurings and disputings: ¹⁵ That ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation,

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among whom ye shine as lights in the world; ¹⁶Holding forth the word of life; that I may rejoice in the day of Christ, that I have not run in vain, neither laboured in vain. ¹⁷Yea, and if I be offered upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I joy, and rejoice with you all. ¹⁸For the same cause also do ye joy, and rejoice with me.”

LAZARUS AT THE TABLE

John just casually mentions the fact that Lazarus, whose body just a few days earlier was rotting in the tomb, was sitting at the table with the Lord Jesus, his family and friends and a good many neighbors, including the Chief Priests and Pharisees. **So the second thing we see here is the fact that our Savior’s wondrous works are as undeniable as they are unexplainable.** — There sits Lazarus!

No one could pretend to that his resurrection was a mere optical delusion, and that the eyes of the bystanders must have been deceived by a spirit or vision. There sat Lazarus, in the flesh, and eating and drinking and talking with other men.

The very same things are true with regard to our Savior’s resurrection from the dead. — Was Lazarus seen for by the

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people of Bethany, going in and coming out among them? So was the Lord Jesus. — Did Lazarus eat food before the eyes of his friends? So did the Lord Jesus eat and drink before His ascension.

We should mark this and remember it in this age of abounding unbelief and skepticism. Our Lord’s resurrection will bear any weight we can lay upon it. Just as he placed beyond reasonable doubt the resurrection of Lazarus, so he placed beyond doubt his own victory over the grave. If we believe that Lazarus rose again, we need not doubt that the Lord Jesus rose again also. If we believe that Christ rose from the dead, we need not doubt that he raised Lazarus from the dead and will raise us from the dead. Our Lord’s most wondrous works are both undeniable and unexplainable.

- The Incarnation
- Substitution
- Regeneration
- The Resurrection to Come

MARY’S ANOINTING

Next, John gives a brief description of Mary’s very instructive act of anointing the Savior’s feet (v. 3).

“Then took Mary a pound of ointment of spikenard,

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very costly, and anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped his feet with her hair: and the house was filled with the odour of the ointment.”

There are several things that are both striking and instructive here.

1. When we consider who Christ is, we ought to be overwhelmed at his wonderful condescension in allowing this woman to anoint and bathe his feet! — I am astounded that he condescends to allow me to serve him!
2. When we realize who Mary was, what a great privilege this was for her!
3. This was an act great love and devotion, displayed in extraordinary, sacrificial generosity. — She poured out “*a pound of ointment of spikenard, very costly.*” — It was worth 300 pence, about a year’s wages. — Love never counts the cost. Love never weighs the consequence. Love never considers a loss a loss when the loss is made for the one who is loved.
4. This was an act of great humility. — She wiped his feet with her hair.
5. The whole thing was motivated and inspired by gratitude. — The Lord Jesus had just raised her brother from the dead!
6. Though it was a spontaneous act of love, this sacrifice and anointing required thoughtful, deliberate

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preparation. — Our Master tells us here that Mary had specifically kept this precious ointment for this occasion.

7. Mary did this thing without calling any attention to herself. — **Spurgeon said**, “Silent acts of love have musical voices in the ears of Jesus. Sound no trumpet before thee, or Jesus will take warning and be gone.”

Her love and gratitude produced her humility and generosity! To whom much is given and forgiven, the same will give, forgive and love much.

This anointing of our Lord by Mary is also a beautiful picture of Gospel preaching.

- The Word of God is a casket, a treasure chest, containing the costly spikenard of Christ crucified.
- The Gospel preacher breaks open the casket and pours out the spikenard.
- And the sweet odor of Christ crucified fills the house.

MARY’S OPPOSITION

In verses 4-6 we are told that Judas Iscariot, who had no love for Christ, but rather was a hypocrite and a covetous person, said, “Why was not this ointment sold for three hundred pence and given to the poor?” Judas did not care for the poor. He was interested in money and material

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things. What he really had in mind was that Mary should sell the ointment and give the money to him as the treasurer of the twelve. Of course, he could not suggest his real thoughts; so he tried to impress the Lord and the others with his piety and concern for the poor.

So the *fourth* thing we see in this passage is the fact that anyone who seeks the honor of Christ and seeks to serve the interest of his honor will meet with opposition, often in the most unsuspected place. Mary anointed the feet of Jesus with precious ointment, and wiped them with the hair of her head. The ointment was not poured out with a niggardly hand. She did it so liberally and profusely that *“the house was filled with the odor of the ointment.”* She did it under the influence of a heart full of love and gratitude. She thought nothing too great and good to bestow on such a great Savior. Sitting at his feet in days gone by, and hearing his words, she had found peace for her conscience and pardon for her sins. At this very moment she saw Lazarus, alive and well, sitting by her Master’s side — her own brother Lazarus, whom he brought back to her from the grave. Greatly loved, she thought she could not show too much love in return. Having freely received, she freely gave.

But there were some present who found fault with her conduct and charged her with wasteful extravagance. Judas

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led the charge; but all the other apostles joined his opposition of Mary and her devotion. Judas was of so great esteem and authority among them, that what he did they are all said to do. So cunningly he had carried his conspiracy, that they all suspected themselves rather than Judas; each said, “*Is it I?*”

- Many, like Judas, who have no interest in the cause of Christ, except in pretense and show, openly oppose true devotion at every opportunity.
- Sadly, many truly faithful disciples are influenced by them and follow their lead.
- We must never allow ourselves to be moved from “*patient continuance in well-doing*” by such people.

MARY’S DEFENDER

Fifth, in verses 7 and 8 the Lord Jesus comes to Mary’s defense. Our God has promised, them “*that honor me I will honor;*” and he is as good as his word.

“Then said Jesus, Let her alone: against the day of my burying hath she kept this. 8 For the poor always ye have with you; but me ye have not always” (vv. 7-8).

Mary often sat at his feet and heard his words. She listened much and said little. She knew that his death was near; and she took this opportunity to anoint him for that day, fearing

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that once the Pharisees laid hold on him, she would not be able to anoint him (Matthew 26:12; Mark 14:6-9).

(Matthew 26:12) “For in that she hath poured this ointment on my body, she did *it* for my burial.”

(Mark 14:6-9) “And Jesus said, Let her alone; why trouble ye her? **she hath wrought a good work on me.** ⁷ For ye have the poor with you always, and whensoever ye will ye may do them good: but me ye have not always. ⁸ **She hath done what she could:** she is come aforehand to anoint my body to the burying. ⁹ Verily I say unto you, **Wheresoever this gospel shall be preached throughout the whole world, this also that she hath done shall be spoken of for a memorial of her.**”

Mary believed the Word of God which she saw fulfilled in the Lord Jesus. In a day when few understood his doctrine, Mary believed and, believing, she understood. Faith is simply trusting Christ, taking God at his Word, believing him. That faith which stands in the word of man is not faith at all. True faith stands in the Word of God alone. Our Lord Jesus told his disciples that he must die and rise again. Mary simply believed him, and came as a penitent sinner to anoint him for his burial. Where does your faith stand? What is the basis of your faith? Is it your

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feeling? Your experience? Or, is it the Word of God? Faith believes the Word of God (1 John 5:7-12).

(1 John 5:7-12) “For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one. ⁸ And there are three that bear witness in earth, the Spirit, and the water, and the blood: and these three agree in one. ⁹ If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater: for this is the witness of God which he hath testified of his Son. ¹⁰ ¶ He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself: he that believeth not God hath made him a liar; because he believeth not the record that God gave of his Son. ¹¹ And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. ¹² He that hath the Son hath life; *and* he that hath not the Son of God hath not life.”

The basis of our faith is the Word of God, and the Word of God alone. I fully agree with Martin Luther who wrote...

“Feelings come and feelings go,
And feelings are deceiving.
My warrant is the Word of God;
Naught else is worth believing!”

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With David, I say, “*My soul fainteth for thy salvation: but I hope in thy word.*” — “*Thou art my hiding place and my shield: I hope in thy word.*” — “*Remember the word unto thy servant, upon which thou hast caused me to hope.*” — “*I wait for the LORD, my soul doth wait, and in his word do I hope*” (Psalm 119:81, 114, 49). Our feelings are no basis for hope. Our hope is in that which God has caused to be written in Holy Scripture. If I have “*a good hope through grace,*” I ought to be able to turn to some text, or fact, or doctrine of God’s Word as the source and basis of it. Our confidence must arise from something that God has said in his Word, that we have received and believed with our hearts. — “*The heart is deceitful above all things*” (Jeremiah 17:9). — “*He that trusteth in his own heart is a fool*” (Proverbs 28:26). Good feelings are deceiving, unless we can point to “*Thus saith the Lord*” as the basis of our hope. Our hope is found in, arises from, and is based upon the Book of God. — “*For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope*” (Romans 15:4). The Book of God was written specifically to give believing sinners an assured hope of grace, salvation and eternal life in Christ (1 John 5:1-3).

The basis of hope is the Word of God. And that which is revealed in the Word of God which gives us hope is the Person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ, our

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Substitute (Romans 8:34-35; 2 Corinthians 5:17-21). Christ is the Foundation upon which we are built. — *“Christ is our Hope”* (1 Timothy 1:1). — We *“hope in our Lord Jesus Christ”* (1 Thessalonians 1:3). — *“The LORD is my portion, saith my soul; therefore will I hope in him”* (Lamentations 3:24). — Our hope is in Christ, our Covenant Surety, our blessed, sin-atonement Redeemer, our Righteousness and our Advocate and High Priest in heaven. — *“I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day”* (2 Timothy 1:12).

The basis of our hope is the Word of God. That which is revealed in this Book that gives us hope is the Person and Work of the Lord Jesus Christ. And I want you to see that the good hope of grace and salvation that God gives to his elect is something that is felt in us, felt inwardly in our hearts. The Apostle Paul speaks of God’s saints as people *“rejoicing in hope”* (Romans 12:12). We read in Romans 5:5, *“Hope maketh not ashamed, because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us.”*

The Lord Jesus undertook Mary’s cause, came to her defense and held her up as an example of faith and devotion. I say with David, *“Be thou my strong rock, for an house of defence to save me”* (Psalm 31:2), — **“Plead**

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my cause, O LORD, with them that strive with me” (Psalm 35:1), and with the prophet, — **“O LORD, I am oppressed; undertake for me”** (Isaiah 38:14). — **“I would seek unto God, and unto God would I commit my cause”** (Job 5:8). — **“Plead my cause, and deliver me: quicken me according to thy word”** (Psalm 119:154).

(Psalms 7:10) “My defence *is* of God, which saveth the upright in heart.”

(Job 22:25) “Yea, the Almighty shall be thy defence, and thou shalt have plenty of silver.”

(Psalms 59:17) “Unto thee, O my strength, will I sing: for God *is* my defence, *and* the God of my mercy.”

(Psalms 62:2) “He only *is* my rock and my salvation; *he is* my defence; I shall not be greatly moved.”

(Psalms 62:6) “He only *is* my rock and my salvation: *he is* my defence; I shall not be moved.”

(Psalms 89:18) “For the LORD *is* our defence; and the Holy One of Israel *is* our king.”

(Psalms 94:22) “But the LORD is my defence; and my God *is* the rock of my refuge.”

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In verse 8 the Savior says, “There will always be poor people in the church and in the world for you to take care of and provide for; but I will not be with you very long in the flesh and you will not have these opportunities to show your love and devotion to me so directly.” **However, in these days he tells us that what we do for others in the his name is done unto him** (Matthew 25:34-40). We should never forget that, and ever look for opportunities to serve the needs of others.

- Spiritually and Eternally
- Physically and Emotionally

DESPERATE HARDNESS

Sixth, in verses 9-11 we see what desperate hardness and unbelief there is in the heart of man!

“Much people of the Jews therefore knew that he was there: and they came not for Jesus’ sake only, but that they might see Lazarus also, whom he had raised from the dead” (v. 9).

Multitudes who came to Jerusalem for the Passover journeyed to Bethany, which was only two miles from Jerusalem. It was reported that Jesus was there; but **they came to Bethany not so much to see Christ as to see**

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Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. How dull and dark is the understanding of the natural man, who is more interested in the curious than in the Creator, more interested in Lazarus than in the one who gave him life!

Here, again, we are reminded that while miracles are a witness of the deity and power of Christ, they do not begat saving faith. Faith is the gift and operation of God the Holy Spirit, bestowed upon and wrought in the hearts of sinners by the preaching of the Gospel (Luke 16:29-31).

(Luke 16:29-31) “Abraham saith unto him, They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them. ³⁰ And he said, Nay, father Abraham: but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent. ³¹ And he said unto him, If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead.”

While it is said that many of these people believed, they were like those in John 2:23-25, who were impressed by the miracles he performed (John 12:37-40).

(John 12:37-40) “But though he had done so many miracles before them, yet they believed not on him: ³⁸ That the saying of Esaias the prophet might be fulfilled, which he spake, Lord, who hath believed our

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report? and to whom hath the arm of the Lord been revealed? ³⁹ Therefore they could not believe, because that Esaias said again, ⁴⁰ He hath blinded their eyes, and hardened their heart; that they should not see with *their* eyes, nor understand with *their* heart, and be converted, and I should heal them.”

Look at verse 10 and 11. — **The chief priests were not impressed but rather angered** because of the notoriety that Jesus had received and because the people were flocking to him. They took counsel that they might not only put Christ to death but Lazarus also!

“But the chief priests consulted that they might put Lazarus also to death; ¹¹ Because that by reason of him many of the Jews went away, and believed on Jesus”
(vv. 10-11.)

Their hearts were totally hardened. They wanted to murder the Son of God and erase every trace of his ministry from the earth. They wanted to murder Lazarus because Lazarus very existence was a witness to Christ as Savior, Lord and Messiah and exposed them as pretentious, religious hypocrites.

What hardness of heart possessed Judas Iscariot! An Apostle and a preacher of the kingdom of heaven, Judas

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proved himself to be both a thief and a traitor. So long as the world stands, that reprobate man will stand as a lasting proof of the depth of human corruption. That anyone could follow Christ as a disciple for three years, see all his miracles, hear all his doctrine, receive at his hand repeated kindnesses, be counted an Apostle, and yet prove rotten at heart in the end, all this at first sight appears incredible and impossible! Yet the case of Judas shows plainly that the heart of man is “deceitful and desperately wicked.” Few, if any of us, know the extent of the desperate hardness and unbelief there is in the heart of man.

Let us thank God if we know anything of faith, and can say, with all our sense of weakness and infirmity, “I believe on the Son of God.” Then “let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall” (1 Corinthians 10:12).

This act performed upon the Lord Jesus was an act of singular respect and honor. It showed great humility on the part of this woman. More importantly, it was **a literal fulfillment of the Song of Solomon** (1:12) — “*While the king sitteth at his table, my spikenard sendeth forth the smell thereof.*”

What this woman did for the honor of Christ, every Gospel preacher must do every time he stands to preach the Gospel. The Word of God is like a sacred chest

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containing precious spikenard, the rich, fragrant spikenard of Christ crucified. As this dear women broke open her box of spikenard, it is the privilege and responsibility of the Gospel preacher to break open the Word of God, that the sweet, sweet aroma of Christ may fill his house. The Gospel of Christ is as ointment poured forth. The sweet savor of the knowledge of Christ is diffused in the house of God when Christ is preached.

Let every ransomed sinner anoint the Son of God spiritually, by faith in him, giving him the honor he so richly deserves. Anoint him as your sovereign King, with the kiss of allegiance. Anoint him as your glorious Savior with the kiss of repentance. Anoint him as your Beloved with the kiss of affection.

Mary lost nothing. Her oil was not wasted. Her labor was not spent in vain. She got by it that good name which Solomon says is “*better than precious ointment.*” You can count on this: those who honor Christ, Christ will honor (1 Samuel 2:30). — “Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God” (1 Corinthians 10:31).

Amen.