

**John 12: 1-19; “Mary’s Love and Christ’s Triumph”, A Sermon
delivered on Palm Sunday by Pastor Paul Rendall on April 9th, 2017,
in the Morning Worship Service.**

This morning I want to open up for you, the significance of Mary’s demonstration of love for her Savior, and then couple it with what the disciples did for Jesus when He rode into Jerusalem, in what is often called His triumphal entry. These events, which went before Jesus’ going to the cross, will be remembered forever. And they touch our lives in relation to our doing service for Jesus today. We want to learn from them. There are 4 things that I would like to bring to your attention so that you will understand better how to show your love to Christ. 1st of all, we want to understand Mary’s good work which was done for Jesus. 2nd – We want to look at Judas’ failure to understand Mary’s Christian love. 3rd – We want to look at the commendation that Jesus gave to Mary’s sacrificial love, and 4th – We want to think about the critical issues of love and hate. (verses 9-16)

1st of all – We want to understand Mary’s good work which was done for Jesus.

It is very amazing to me just how unaware the disciples of our Lord were, at this time, of what the Lord Jesus was intending to do, and what He was going to undergo in coming to Jerusalem. He was very deliberately in His going to the cross to die for the sins of God’s dear people. He would finish this good work, and He would be buried and be raised from the dead, in a little more than a week. He came to Bethany six days before the feast of Passover and He stayed at Mary and Martha’s place where they made Him a supper where Martha served. The Supper itself was not held at the house in which Lazarus and his two sisters lived. Rather it was held, we are told in the gospels of Matthew and Mark, in the house of Simon the Leper. This is a little confusing, because a similar incident of a woman pouring oil on Jesus feet is recorded in Luke Chapter 7, verses 36-50. In that passage Jesus was invited to the house of another man named Simon. But he is Simon the Pharisee.

So here we have two separate incidents of oil pouring. There also seems to be a conflict between Matthew and Mark’s gospels with John’s, over the timing of when this supper took place. I believe that the conflict is resolved by saying that Jesus actually did come to Bethany six days before the Passover, as John records here. The Passover was on Thursday the 14th of Nisan. So counting back you would think that this supper took place the Friday before, on the 8th. Jesus did travel from Jericho to Bethany on Friday the 8th, but He got there toward evening and then began the Sabbath. So Jesus rested with His friends Mary, Martha, and Lazarus on the Sabbath; and then when the Sabbath was over, on Saturday evening, they went to have the supper at Simon the Leper’s house. Then the triumphal entry took place “on the next day” as it says in verse 12 of John 12. This would have been a Sunday. Matthew and Mark’s relating of it makes it seem as though it took place 2 days before the Passover. But in their relating of the events, they do not actually specify the time that this supper took place. They rather seem to be going back in time to say that it did take place while He was in Bethany. They do not specify the day. (See R.C.H Lenski’s treatment of this, on John 12)

But during this supper, in which the 12 Apostles and a few other men reclined at the table, Mary did something which was not at all received well by Judas Iscariot, and some of the other disciples. What Mary did that evening will always be remembered, for Jesus said that it would be remembered in Matthew 26: 13. And so it has been, and so it will be. It says that she took a pound of very costly oil of spikenard, anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped His feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the oil. Verse 2 of our text says – “There at Bethany they made Him a supper; and Martha served, but Lazarus was one of those who sat at the table with Him.” These three people mentioned were Jesus’ closest friends, outside of His

apostles. Their making Jesus a supper means that they had prepared a feast in His honor. Their house may have not been as big as Simon the Leper's house. But Martha didn't mind serving Jesus, wherever it would be held. Verse 3 of our text states that Mary took "a pound of very costly oil of spikenard, and anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped His feet with her hair." Matthew's gospel says that "a woman came to Him having an alabaster flask of very costly fragrant oil, and she poured it on His head as He sat at the table." Mark's gospel says that, "she came having an alabaster flask of very costly oil of spikenard," and that "she broke the flask and poured it on His head."

Although we can say that there were two separate incidents of oil being poured, one on Jesus' feet by a woman in Luke 7, and this other one by Mary in John 12, I cannot believe that the incidents recorded in Matthew and Mark and this one in John are separate incidents. They are the same incident, and each gospel has something to contribute in relation to what happened. In the incident in Luke 7, the woman who came to Jesus was very conscious of her sin. In this passage, Mary was very conscious of the sinlessness of her Lord, and how much she loved Him for His mercy to her and to her brother, and to all the disciples. This act was very planned out and a consciously deliberate act on her part. It was an act which exhibited her deep appreciation to Him for all that He had taught her, and for all that He had already done for her by His grace. She was honoring Him not only for giving her the spiritual truth which led to her salvation, and the many truths related to being His disciple, but she was also honoring Him for the confirming miracle of her brother's being raised from the dead.

She had known of Jesus' love and His power before, but in that miracle there was a further revelation of His mission, and His ministry; that it was His purpose to save fallen sinners completely from their sins. He showed this when He raised her brother from the dead. You will remember that when Lazarus fell sick, that Jesus deliberately waited 2 days longer before coming to them, so that Lazarus really would be dead. It could only be after Lazarus had died that Jesus could display His great love and power to save him completely. But Mary, of course, didn't know this beforehand. Maybe you remember, that In John 11: 28, Jesus sought her out to talk to her about this issue. Martha told her, "The Teacher is come and is calling for you." "As soon as she heard that, she arose quickly and came to Jesus." In verse 32 it says, "Then, when Mary came where Jesus was, and saw Him, she fell down at His feet, saying to Him, 'Lord, if You had been here my brother would not have died.'"

She didn't understand what the Lord Jesus was going to do that day. I would say to you that this is the same with us, today. We do not understand what the Lord Jesus is doing in relation to us on any given day. But the Lord most definitely had led her to this point. In verse 40 He says, "Did I not say to you that if you would believe, you would see the glory of God?" And she really did see the glory of God that day in the raising of her brother. In fact, I think that it was that act, which had just taken place a few days before, which made her think about her own faith in relation to Christ's word. She thought about what Christ had said to her, and to the other disciples before in Matthew 16: 21, that - "He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised the third day." She now knew in her own heart that this too would come to pass.

And that is why she came with this costly oil. She came to this supper bringing to Him the alabaster box. It was her most valuable possession. She came to pour out its contents upon her Lord, because she knew His value, and she had beheld His glory. She now believed in her heart that He would pour out His precious life in death. But she also had the faith to believe that if He had given to her what was most precious, then she would do the same for Him, in relation to His upcoming death. She would prepare His body for burial with this oil. She would have no other chance. It was a good work born out of her faith. She broke the flask and poured it out on His head first. Then she took the remainder and poured it out on His feet, and wiped it with her

own hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance. She knew of the preciousness of His life. She knew that He would be poured out in death, and she knew that His life was being poured out as a sacrifice for those whom He loved, and she wanted to honor that life.

In this act of hers, she was declaring by faith, to Jesus and to all who were present, that she knew what was shortly to happen to Him when He went up to Jerusalem. He would die there, and she wanted to honor Him for His life. It was an act which acknowledged and displayed her understanding of Jesus' earthly ministry as a whole; what it had been thus far, and what it would become in His sufferings and death. It was no doubt true that Mary, among all of Christ's disciples, saw more clearly than all the rest, that her Lord was deliberately going to going to the cross to die. I must ask you now – Do you see the value and the preciousness of Christ pouring Himself out to death so that you might have eternal life? Then what sacrifices ought you to make for Him? What can you render to the Lord for all that He has done for you?

Mary would take what was most precious to her, and she would break it and she would pour it out for Christ. She would pour it on His head thus acknowledge Him to be her High Priest. Just like Aaron had the oil poured out on his head in Psalm 133, she would anoint Jesus for the fulfillment of His High-priestly ministry of sufferings, death, and burial: "Behold how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!" "It is like the precious oil upon the head, running down on the beard, the beard of Aaron, running down on the edge of his garments." "It is like the dew of Hermon, descending upon the mountains of Zion; for there the Lord commanded the blessing—Life forevermore." Mary was united with Jesus in His cause and kingdom. She was united with Him in His purpose to fulfill all righteousness and for His intent to suffer in order to do so. She was united to Him in His life and His death and His resurrection, by her faith. This oil poured forth on His head and His feet says it all.

2nd – We want to look at Judas' failure to understand Mary's Christian love.

(verses 4-6)

"But one of His disciples, Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, who would betray Him, said, 'Why was this fragrant oil not sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor?' "This he said, not that he cared for the poor, but because he was a thief, and had the money box; and he used to take what was put in it." "But Jesus said, 'Let her alone; she has kept this for the day of My burial.'" This reaction of Judas' really shows the reality of his bad heart. He was always calculating the value of things to the penny in terms of what it might bring to Himself and not to Christ. Mary would honor Christ with her most precious gift; she would pour it out upon Him, but Judas does not see the value of lavishly honoring His Master. He covers his covetousness with the false zeal of giving the money which could have been derived from the oil's sale, to the poor. Let us all take care that we value things aright. Bringing honor to Christ is the greatest and finest work that we can do. And if it takes a lavish gift to honor Him, should we then think the cost too great?

No, Mary was right, in every way, to have done what she did. The fragrance of her offering was being polluted by Judas' poisonous words. Judas is implying that by Christ's approving of Mary's lavish gift, that He is robbing the poor, that this is a wasted investment; implying that Jesus should not have allow it to be spent upon Him. Judas is asserting that Jesus is lavishing this upon Himself, and not giving to charity. All the while, Judas is thinking to himself that this is a waste because he will not see any of the proceeds from it, for even if it was sold, he would not have been given it to the poor entirely. He would have taken a good portion of it. What covetousness and hypocrisy.

Now, we must not simply be disgusted with Judas in his sin of robbing Christ's honor and stealing His resources for ministry, in the name of doing something noble. It was indeed disgusting; the way that he attempted to ruin the beauty of Mary's gift and her actions to honor her Lord. His hypocrisy was truly revealed that day. But we must look to our own hearts and

see if there be any wicked way in our own life, as well. “Search me, O God, and know my heart, and try me and know my anxieties; and see if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.” That is Psalm 139, verses 23 and 24. Let us not be critical of the gifts which others give to Christ to honor Him, or to show Him their love. Let us not think of offerings unto the Lord as something wasteful. Let us ask ourselves whether we have a generous spirit as Mary did? Are we willing to give to Christ what is most precious to ourselves in terms of our resources and possessions?

Are we pursuing peace toward every brother and sister around us? Let us beware of the sins of covetousness and a critical attitude toward other brothers and sisters around us. I think of those verses in Ephesians 5. “Therefore be imitators of God as dear children, and walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma. This is what Mary was doing and picturing for us that day. She wanted to love, as Christ had loved her. The text here in Ephesians goes on to say, “But fornication and all uncleanness or covetousness, let it not even be named among you, as is fitting for saints; neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks. This is what is set before each disciple of Jesus Christ; whether they will pursue subtle or secret sins, or whether they will give thanks, and show forth that thankful spirit in giving of themselves to good works which will truly honor Christ.

3rd – We want to look at the commendation that Jesus gave to Mary’s sacrificial love. (verses 7 and 8, and Mark 14: 8)

“But Jesus said, ‘Let her alone; she has kept this for the day of My burial.’ “For the poor you have with you always, but Me you do not have always.” Mark says, “She has done what she could.” “She has come beforehand to anoint My body for burial.” This oil of spikenard; this precious oil, was something that Mary had laid up beforehand for such a time as this. Jesus commends her for it. Even so, we ought to lay up something lavish to serve Christ with, of our own resources. Think of how you might draw attention to Him by the giving of a gift, to the glory of Christ. Think of some act of kind generosity to His cause, which will show forth your thankfulness to Him for everything that He has done for you and all the grace and truth that He has given you. Mary is commended for “doing what she could.” Ask yourself – Am I doing what I can, to draw attention to the death of Christ, and to the greatness and glory of His resurrection? Let not the poor be neglected in your thinking, but think about how you can show forth the fragrance of Christ to those who are perishing and to those who are being saved.

Think of the words of 2 Corinthians Chapter 2 and verse 12. “Furthermore, when I came to Troas to preach Christ’s gospel, and a door was opened to me by the Lord, I had no rest in my spirit, because I did not find Titus my brother; but taking my leave of them, I departed for Macedonia.” “Now thanks be to God who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and through us diffuses the fragrance of His knowledge in every place.” “For we are to God the fragrance of Christ among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing.” “To the one we are the aroma of death leading to death, and to the other the aroma of life leading to life.” “And who is sufficient for these things?” “For we are not, as so many, peddling the word of God; but as of sincerity, but as from God, we speak in the sight of God in Christ.” O that each one of us would go to the closet of our hearts and take the alabaster box of the oil of spikenard; those resources and precious possessions; what has been so valuable and costly and precious to us; that which we have saved for ourselves; let us break it and pour it out upon Christ to honor Him. Let us pour it out in love for Him upon His cause and kingdom. Let us honor His death for us, and let us honor His life given to us. And let the fragrance of our love for Him fill the room. Let glory come to your Savior and Lord by giving Him your best. More love to Thee, O Christ; more love to Thee.

And then, 4th – We want to think about the critical issues of love and hate.

(verses 9-19)

“Now a great many of the Jews knew that He was there; and they came, not for Jesus’ sake only, but that they might also see Lazarus, whom He had raised from the dead.” “But the chief priests plotted to put Lazarus to death also, because on account of him many of the Jews went away and believed in Jesus.” “The next day a great multitude that had come to the feast, when they heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem, took branches of palm trees and went out to meet Him, and cried out: ‘Hosanna!’ ‘Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!’ ‘The King of Israel!’ Evidently word got around to many of the Jews that Jesus was there at Simon’s house in Bethany, and that Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead was there also. And so they came to see Lazarus, just as much as they came to see Jesus, the One who had raised him from the dead. Bethany was only two miles from Jerusalem, and so it would not be hard for them to walk over and see them.

However, we must look at this whole episode more carefully in terms of love and hate. All those who came to see Lazarus and Jesus, did not come out of love. Some came out of hate. Some came with a critical eye. Some came with malicious intent. There were some who came to see Lazarus and Jesus, not to rejoice in the goodness and power of Christ, who raised this man from the dead; nor to admire His handiwork in raising Lazarus from the dead, but to actually stir up the hate which they already had within them, by confirming for themselves this miracle that Jesus performed. They hated Jesus before. But now they hated Him even more now. This healing was not something that they could deny or disprove. But they could hate Him the more for doing it. How can these things be? How can religious people like the scribes and Pharisees and rulers of Israel be so wicked as not to have an open mind to receive the truth, when the proof of Jesus’ being their Messiah, the King of Israel, was right there in front of them in Lazarus’s being raised from the dead?

It was because of the deceitfulness of sin. These were men who were power-mongers of a false religious system. They liked to have the chief seats in the synagogues and to be called “Rabbi”. They were envious of Christ because people were following Him and not them. They wanted to be seen by others as being great and wise and spiritual when they were none of these things. They wanted to promote a system of false religion in relation to the Scriptures of God. They wanted to twist the Scriptures and make it seem as if salvation was by ceremonial works. Supposedly people would be saved by keeping the rules which these false religionists had built up around the Scriptures. But God had never commanded any such things. Their worst sin was their hatred of Christ without a righteous cause. God sent His Son out of love to fallen sinful mankind, but they would hate whom God had sent because they did not want this man to rule over them. Actually, if the truth were known, they did not want anyone who did not believe in their false system to rule over them. And this is the characteristic of all unrepentant unbelievers. Ultimately, they will not want to be accountable to God, or to any truly righteous man. They think that their freedom from all true righteous authority is their right, and their own system of rules imposed upon the Scriptures, is the way of righteousness. But it is only a legalistic self-righteousness, and it will never save anyone.

If this is so, this should lead each one of us to ask ourselves whether we truly want Jesus to rule over us? For, if we do, we will find ourselves praising Him, and glorying in the fact that He was willing to humble Himself; ride into Jerusalem that day on a colt, the foal of a donkey, and humble Himself greatly in the eyes of God and man. He did these things, and yet He was endowed with salvation. “Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion!” “Shout, O daughter of Jerusalem!” “Behold, your King is coming to you; He is just and having salvation, lowly and riding on a donkey, a colt, the foal of a donkey.” (Zechariah 9: 9) Many of the people in the crowd that day were enabled to recognize Jesus as their Messiah and they were rejoicing in Him and believing in Him. They had seen the Lord raise Lazarus from the dead. Some had heard of

it later; and yet were able to come and see Lazarus that day, and to know for themselves that this great miracle had taken place, and that it had been done by Jesus.

Sometimes people say that the same people that cheered Jesus coming into Jerusalem that day were the same people who put him to death. No, beloved, I do not believe that it was the case. It is true that there were people there, on that day of Mary and Martha's feast, who had come to see Lazarus, and Jesus, and who didn't come with right motives. They were the some of the same people who listened to the Pharisees in verse 19 of John 12, say – "You see that you are accomplishing nothing." "Look the world has gone after Him!" But in verses 17 and 18 it says – "Therefore the people, who were with Him when He called Lazarus out of his tomb and raised him from the dead, bore witness." (They bore witness to the fact that He was their Messiah) "For this reason the people also met Him, because they heard that He had done this sign." The people who met Jesus, were the people who were acclaiming Him King when He came into Jerusalem riding on the colt the foal of a donkey. Those who cheered and waved the branches and spread their garments in front of Him as He rode were those who loved Him, not those who hated Him.

O, it is no doubt true that there were many there who did not love Jesus at all; but rather they hated Him. This was the critical issue; for there was no good reason to hate Jesus. There was every reason to rejoice in Him, and to believe in Him, and to be glad in all that He did in those days. And there is also every reason for every man to rejoice in Jesus and to believe in Him now! Those who waved the palm branches were those who were proclaiming Him their spiritual King! They were proclaiming their approval of all that He had come to do, and declaring their joy over all that He had already accomplished. They were looking forward to all that He was going to do and accomplish in the future. They were not fickle or hard-hearted. They were not hypocritical. They would not change their mind or vacillate in their allegiance when He went to the cross. Many of them would not necessarily have the fortitude of heart to follow Jesus to the cross, but all of His closest disciples were in that camp. And so, let us see and understand, that their love for Jesus at this time was a sincere love, even as every true disciple's love is a sincere love.

Their love caused them to cry out – "Hosanna", which means – Lord save! Their love caused them to praise the Lord Jesus for coming in the name of the Lord to save them, to help them, to heal them, and to rule over them. All of these were good indications of their saving faith. Do you have saving faith in Jesus today? You can know by whether or not you praise Him for going to the cross and dying for your sins. You can know by whether or not you want Him to rule over you and to show you where you might need to change so that you will not promote yourself and your selfish sins, but rather Christ and His righteousness. Let us remember in closing, the truth of verse 16 – "His disciples did not understand these things at first; but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things were written about Him." Let us see that there are many things in the Christian life that we do not understand at first, but by God's grace, we will come to understand because we love the Lord Jesus and all that He has done and all that He will do, for us.