

Blessed be the name of the Lord, Jesus.

The Bible highlights significant moments in the life of Jesus, including His death, burial, and resurrection. These events carry deep theological meanings and teach us powerful lessons. One such moment is the anointing of Jesus with ointment, which is seen in various passages of Scripture. To understand this better, it is important to distinguish between Ointment and Perfume.

In Jewish tradition, ointment (often referred to as “spices” or “myrrh”) was used to anoint the body of a deceased person, typically as part of the burial process. Perfume (or “fragrance”) could also be used, but it wasn’t in liquid form as the ointment was. Anointing with ointment was not only a physical preparation but also had symbolic significance expressing respect, honor, and the sanctification of the body.

The Jewish Burial Custom

According to Jewish custom, before a body was buried, it was anointed, especially the head, with ointment. However, we see something unusual in the burial of Jesus. While Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus followed some burial customs, they did not anoint Jesus with the usual ointment.

John 19:38-40 (NIV) states:

“Later, Joseph of Arimathea asked Pilate for the body of Jesus. Now Joseph was a disciple of Jesus, but secretly because he feared the Jewish leaders. With Pilate’s permission, he came and took the body away.

[39] He was accompanied by Nicodemus, the man who earlier had visited Jesus at night. Nicodemus brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about seventy-five pounds.

[40] Taking Jesus’ body, the two of them wrapped it, with the spices, in strips of linen. This was in accordance with Jewish burial customs.”

Joseph and Nicodemus brought myrrh and aloes, which are typically used for burial, but notably, they did not use the Ointment that would have been customary. The Ointment was traditionally applied to the head, and while we see them applying Perfume/spices, they are not performing the complete burial ritual.

The Women's Intentions: A Delayed Act of Love

The women who followed Jesus, including Mary Magdalene and others, were prepared to anoint His body with Ointment after the Sabbath had passed. They were deeply saddened by His death, and they wanted to express their love and honor for Him by following the burial practices. However, they were delayed because of the Sabbath restrictions.

Luke 23:54-56 (NIV) says:

[54]"It was Preparation Day, and the Sabbath was about to begin. [55]The women who had come with Jesus from Galilee followed Joseph and saw the tomb and how His body was laid in it.

[56]Then they went home and prepared spices and perfumes. But they rested on the Sabbath in obedience to the commandment."

The Sabbath was sacred, and according to the Jewish law (Exodus 20:8-11), no work was allowed on the Sabbath. Therefore, the

women could not carry out the anointing immediately. They had to wait until the first day of the week, when the Sabbath was over. This highlights both their devotion and their adherence to Jewish customs.

The Moment of Revelation: Jesus Had Risen

When the women finally arrived at the tomb on Sunday morning, they discovered that Jesus had risen. This moment brings us to one of the key theological points: the timing of when we offer service and devotion to the Lord is crucial. The women came with their ointments and perfumes, but when they arrived, they found that their act of devotion was no longer needed in the same way. Jesus had already defeated death.

Luke 24:1-3 (NIV) says:

"On the first day of the week, very early in the morning, the women took the spices they had prepared and went to the tomb.

[2]They found the stone rolled away from the tomb

[3] but when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus."

Theological significance: The anointing of Jesus was meant to prepare Him for burial (Matthew 26:12), but after His resurrection, the ritual became irrelevant. The ultimate sacrifice had already been made. Jesus had conquered death, and He was now alive. This is a pivotal point in Christian theology: Jesus' resurrection symbolizes victory over death and sin (Romans 6:9-10). The rituals associated with death are no longer necessary because He has overcome death.

The Anointing Woman: A Model of Timely Worship

In contrast, there was a woman who anointed Jesus before His death. Mary of Bethany is noted for anointing Jesus with expensive perfume (John 12:3). This act was both symbolic and prophetic. She anointed Jesus in preparation for His burial. Jesus Himself acknowledged that she had done this in the appropriate time.

Matthew 26:6-13 (NIV) records:

[6]While Jesus was in Bethany in the home of Simon the Lepper,

[7]a woman came to Him with an alabaster jar of very expensive perfume, which she poured on His head as He was reclining at the table.

[8]When the disciples saw this, they were indignant, 'Why this waste?' they asked.

[9]'This perfume could have been sold at a high price and the money given to the poor.'

Aware of this,

[10]Jesus said to them, 'Why are you bothering this woman? She has done a beautiful thing to me.

[11]The poor you will always have with you, but you will not always have me.

[12]When she poured this perfume on my body, she did it to prepare me for burial.

[13]Truly I tell you, wherever this gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told in memory of her.'"

Jesus highlighted the significance of her act: She anointed Him at the right time, in preparation for His burial. Theological takeaway: Timing is crucial when it comes to honoring God. Mary's act of worship was a prophetic symbol of Jesus' impending death, and it was a meaningful preparation for what was to come. Jesus' statement that "wherever the gospel is preached" will also include her story signifies the importance of worshiping at the right time in alignment with God's will.

The Folded Cloth: A Symbol of Hope and Purpose

After Jesus' resurrection, when the disciples entered the tomb, they noticed something significant: the burial cloths were left behind, and the headcloth was folded neatly and placed aside. This simple act holds deep theological meaning. The folded cloth is symbolic of Jesus' victory over death and the fact that His work was complete but not finished. There is still a purpose for the folded cloth: it will be used again.

John 20:6-7 (NIV) says:

[6] "Then Simon Peter came along behind him and went straight into the tomb. He saw the strips of linen lying there,

[7] as well as the cloth that had been wrapped around Jesus' head. The cloth was still lying in its place, separate from the linen."

Theologically, the folded cloth indicates that while Jesus' work on earth was complete, there was more to come. He had completed His earthly mission of redemption (John 19:30), but the ultimate fulfillment of God's plan for salvation was just beginning with His resurrection. The folded cloth was a symbol of hope—Jesus had risen, and the work of salvation was now in full effect.

Theological Lessons: Timing, Worship, and Service

There is a time and place for everything when it comes to serving and honoring God. The women who came to anoint Jesus did so with good intentions, but they arrived too late. Jesus had already risen. The right time to serve and worship the Lord is now not

tomorrow or in the future, but today. Don't wait for a "better" time to give your time, resources, or energy to the Lord.

In the same way, Mary of Bethany's act of anointing Jesus before His death was timely, prophetic, and an act of profound worship. She recognized the significance of the moment and responded in faith and obedience.

Ecclesiastes 3:1 (NIV) reminds us:

"There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under the heavens."

Conclusion: Serve the Lord Today

Jesus said, "You will always have the poor with you, but you will not always have me" (Matthew 26:11). The work of the Lord is not always available opportunities to serve God may come and go. Make the most of the time you have to honor and serve Him.

As you live out your faith, remember that the timing of your

devotion to the Lord is essential. Serve Him today, and don't wait for tomorrow, because tomorrow may be too late.

Maranatha!

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