

Matthew 26:1-13

Title: The Fragrance of Brokenness

1 When Jesus had finished all these sayings, he said to his disciples, 2 “You know that after two days the Passover is coming, and the Son of Man will be delivered up to be crucified.” 3 Then the chief priests and the elders of the people gathered in the palace of the high priest, whose name was Caiaphas, 4 and plotted together in order to arrest Jesus by stealth and kill him. 5 But they said, “Not during the feast, lest there be an uproar among the people.” 6 Now when Jesus was at Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, 7 a woman came up to him with an alabaster flask of very expensive ointment, and she poured it on his head as he reclined at table. 8 And when the disciples saw it, they were indignant, saying, “Why this waste? 9 For this could have been sold for a large sum and given to the poor.” 10 But Jesus, aware of this, said to them, “Why do you trouble the woman? For she has done a beautiful thing to me. 11 For you always have the poor with you, but you will not always have me. 12 In pouring this ointment on my body, she has done it to prepare me for burial. 13 Truly, I say to you, wherever this gospel is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will also be told in memory of her.” (Matthew 26:1-13 NIV)

- For the last 3 years Jesus has been teaching a lot of things. But Matthew 25 (last week) concluded his teachings in the book of Matthew, as Matthew notes in v. 1 “1 When Jesus had finished all these sayings...” .
- Of course the things that speak the loudest in the life of Jesus are still yet to take place, and they will culminate with His death and resurrection. And that’s where Jesus is heading.
- **He has warned** the multitudes about the corrupt religious leadership.
- **He has spoken** to His disciples about the things to come.
- He has healed the brokenness of so many in Israel.
- He has disrupted the broken system of the law.
- Now, it’s almost time for Him to fulfill His work in his dying and rising from the dead.
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- But before that, he goes to a little dinner party at Simon the Leper’s house.
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- **Mary who is actually the woman with the alabaster flask of very costly oil.**
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- NOT the same Mary, or the same alabaster flask that we see in Luke 7. That happened in Galilee a couple of years before this event that we see happen in Bethany just outside of Jerusalem.

This story involves this broken flask. And as we’ll see Jesus redeems the whole thing and makes it about something beautiful. But what good for us to see is that this has been part of the narrative for the whole ministry of Jesus leading up to this moment.

- **Jesus heals broken things and flips them on their head.**

- **Brokenness was always the plan.**
- But not just brokenness for brokenness sake. But brokenness for the sake of setting free what was on the other side of the brokenness.

The title of this sermon is: **The Fragrance of Brokenness**

So there they are at the house of Simon the Leper, and Jesus is reclining at the table, and it says in v. 7 that this woman (Mary) comes up to him with an alabaster flask of very expensive ointment, and she pours it on his head...

Put up Image of Alabaster Flask

- Alabaster is a mineral that is commonly used to make different types of sculptures or utensils, in this case a flask.
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- And in the days of Jesus, when a young woman reached the age of availability for marriage, her family would purchase an alabaster flask for her, and they would fill it with precious ointment — a combination of spices and oils.
- The size of the flask and the value of the ointment would parallel her family's wealth.
- In this case, it appears that Mary's family was fairly well off because for a young woman making minimum wage, this would've been almost a year's wages. We're talking the equivalent of a \$25k jar of perfume.
- **And this alabaster flask would have been part of her dowry for her future husband.**
- When a young man would eventually come to ask for her in marriage, and the Father would give him permission to marry her, she would respond by taking the alabaster flask and breaking it at her future husband's feet.
- **And this gesture of anointing his feet showed him honor, and signified that she was his.**
- And so Mary is here. Mary, the sister of Lazarus who watched her brother die, and watched Jesus raise him from the dead.
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- **Mary knows who Jesus is.**
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- And so she comes with her alabaster flask of very costly oil, and while Jesus, and no doubt others, are reclining around the dinner table, she takes this thing and breaks it open, and pours it on the head of Jesus.
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- **And the disciples are indignant it says.** We learn from John's gospel, that it wasn't actually all of the disciples. It was really just one. It was Judas. And he was angry. And

maybe for good cause. I mean, we're talking \$25k here. You could do a lot of good with \$25k.

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- And the response is, "Mary, why the waste? We could have done some REAL good with this oil. If you weren't going to use for your dowry anyways, then why do something useful and lasting with it?"
- **But like we'll see, that's exactly what Mary did. Mary actually did the greatest thing she could've with the treasure that she had.**
- But make no mistake. What she did was not the product of haste.
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- **Mary had to count the cost and she knew exactly what this would mean for her.**
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- **But there was something bigger at play here. And there was something greater than marriage on Mary's heart and mind.**
- Mary knew what mattered most. And it's not a normal, safe, comfortable life. It's Jesus.
- What mattered most to Mary was Jesus
- **And so, in the presence of the leper** who's broken life was restored by Jesus, **and her brother**, who's dead life was restored by Jesus, **and the disciples** who were coming out of a broken religious system, **Mary takes her alabaster flask** and breaks it before Jesus.
- **And as Mary pours out what is most precious to her, she says, in affect, "Jesus, all that I have is yours. I am literally laying my future, my plans, my life as I have known it, before you."**
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- **And as it broke, her plans, her future, and her life, as she knew it, broke too.**
- But she knew something that many of us have don't. She saw something that many of us can't see.
- **She knew that, in Jesus, there was something better. There was a greater treasure than her own life.**
- She knew that **no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, that which God has prepared for those who love him.**
- She knew that God had said to his people, that **HE HAD** a plan to give them a **HOPEFUL FUTURE**. And so she let her own plans and dreams of a future break before him.
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- Mary brought what was most precious to her and let it be shattered before Jesus, and in turn she received something far better.
- **Sometimes in life, dreams have to be shattered in order to make way for something better.**
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- And in this, we have much to learn from Mary who knew that Jesus was better.
- And **who knew that just like the oil of her flask could only get out if it was broken open, so the best stuff in life is found when we allow our plans, and our empires that we've erected to be torn down in surrender to God.**

- And this type of full abandonment to Jesus wasn't new for Mary. Remember in Luke 10...
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- Martha says to Jesus, "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself? Tell her to help me!"
- And Jesus answers her, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and upset about so many things. There are only a few good things. And only one that is necessary. And Mary has chosen that good thing, which will not be taken away from her."(Luke 10:41-42)
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- What are your "good things"?
- **Is Christ not worthy of you bringing that to him?**
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- **Jesus invites us to his table, to come and pour out that which is most valuable to us, in exchange for something that is better.**
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- Let me ask it another way. What could be your greatest act worship? What could be your greatest act of obedience? What would be the most right response to who Christ is?
 - Do that and you will never waste your life.
 - Bring your treasure, But ALSO, bring your leprosy. Bring Your're death. Bring your brokenness. Bring your fear and pour it out at the feet of Jesus.
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- For Mary this was it. It wasn't likely that she would ever get another alabaster flask. Not only was this expensive, but this one act, most likely changed her life forever.
- **But, really... what else is there?**
- I mean, if Christ isn't our life then what are we even doing here?
- If we're not willing to pour it all out at his feet, then what are we living for?
- As the old C.T. Studd poem says, "**Only one life,'twill soon be past, Only what's done for Christ will last.**"
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- **Mary gave up that what she could not keep, to gain what she could not lose. (ref. Jim Elliot)**
- She gave up the possibility of an earthly, temporal, possibly awesome (but temporal) relationship with her future husband, in exchange for an eternal relationship with Jesus.
- **A flask that was intended to be broken at the feet of her someday husband, she broke before Jesus effectively binding herself to him and him alone.**
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- These alabaster flasks would almost become a part of the woman who wore them. It was like a part of their identity. So much so that they were even allowed to wear them on the Sabbath.
- This was A PART of her. This was **her** sent. **Her** fragrance. Part of what people knew her by.
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- You know me in part, by my dreads...
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- When she broke it open and and poured out it's contents at the feet of Jesus, she was breaking open and pouring out her very identity. **And in exchange she took on his.**

What is yours? What is your identity wrapped up in? What treasure is your heart wrapped around? What pain and brokenness is your heart consumed by?

Pour it out at the feet of Jesus today. What is your response to who Jesus is? What is your worship will you offer? What is your act of obedience? What is the act of surrender?

Offer that to Jesus.

- And will people thing you're **crazy**? Probably.
- **People in the house that day thought Mary to be irresponsible, a bad steward, wasteful, unwise, a bad planner, self-centered.**
- **Unfortunately, in response to most acts of extravagant worship and sacrificial obedience to Christ, THIS IS how people will respond to you.**
 - Sadly much of it will come from inside the church.
 - Don't let people tell you that you are wasting your time or your life and living for Jesus and doing things that seem crazy with Jesus.
- **Nothing that is given to Christ is a waste. The only that thing that is wasted is that which is **not** given to Christ.**
- **Charles Spurgeon commenting on the subject says:**
 - "All those who have done wonders for Christ have always been called eccentric and fanatical. Why, when Whitfield first went on Bennington Common to preach, because he could not find a building large enough, it was quite an unheard of thing, to preach in the open air. How could you expect God to hear prayer, if there was not a roof over the top of the people's heads? How could souls be blessed, if the people had not seats, and regular high-backed pews to sit in! Whitfield was thought to be doing something outrageous, but he went and did it; he went and broke the alabaster box on the head of his Master, and in the midst of scoffs and jeers, he preached in the open air. And what came of it? A revival of godliness, and a mighty spread of religion. "I wish we were all of us ready to do some extraordinary thing for Christ – willing to be laughed at, to be called fanatics, to be hooted and scandalized because we went out of the common way, and were not content with doing what everybody else could do or approve to be done." **(Charles Spurgeon)**

The thing that was cause for laughing and mockery in the life of George Whitfield was the very thing that God, arguably, used the most in his life.

- John tells us that the one who actually speaks up and gets mad at Mary, wasn't just any disciple, it was Judas — the one who betrayed and sold out Jesus.
- **Life of Judas ended in regret and destruction.** You don't need to give your ear to the Judas' in your life. Give your ear to Jesus and those are who are speaking like him.
- And you know what Jesus said about Mary. **"Truly, I say to you, wherever this gospel is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will also be told in memory of her." (v. 13)**
- **Jesus didn't say this about the disciples** who cast out demons, or **Peter** who God would use to preach to thousands, or **Paul** who would plant dozens of churches, or even of **Lazarus** who rose from the dead! **Jesus said this of the woman who poured it all out in worship before him.**
- But listen guys, if you find yourself more often than not, being the of the naysayer or whistle blower in response to what the followers of Jesus are doing are, you need to be very very careful that you know exactly what you're doing.
- Because if THEY ARE hearing from God, walking in His spirit, then you're not in good company being the accuser who is coming against them. It's the job of Satan to accuse the brethren. Don't join in with that. And don't be found in his company.
- **Blessed is the person who sits NOT in the seat of the scornful (Psalm 1:1)**
- Don't be found in the company of Jesus. Be found in the company of Mary, pouring out what is most valuable to us, even if it seems absurd to every other person around us.
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- The difference between Mary and Judas is that
- **Mary saw Jesus worth her entire life and her whole future. Judas saw Jesus as worth about 30 pieces of silver.**
- **And some of us are often not far from this.** Instead of exchanging what we have to gain intimacy with Jesus. We end up giving up intimate relationship with Jesus in exchange for the cheap worthless thrills of this life.
- Let this question be a litmus test. Where is your treasure? Because Jesus said, **"Where your treasure is, there your heart would be also." (Matthew 6:21)**
- **Brokenness in the life of Mary was the plan. And this was the fragrance of brokenness. As she pours out what was most valuable to her, and as Jesus receives the broken vessel of expensive perfume, turning the "wasting" of this women's life into an act of worship.**
- Mary's act also was literally a living parable and a foreshadowing of what was about to happen in the spiritual realm just two days from now when Jesus would be crucified.

Jesus was the ultimate alabaster flask — broken as an act of worship to the Father on our behalf.

Jesus went before us in offering His best as an act of worship. And all of creation cried out in agreement as He did.

- When Christ died, it was like all of creation echoed what was happening in the spiritual realm.

Listen:

- By God's own doing, His glory had been confined for thousands of years to the ark of the covenant. His presence confined to Holy of Holies.
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- And yet God wanting nothing more than for us to know the fullness of who he is. To receive him as intimately as the dirt receives the rain.
- He sends Jesus and as the prophet Isaiah writes that **"He was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities" (Is. 53:5)**. Like an alabaster flask, Christ was broken open.
- And as He breathed his last breath and gave up his life.... what happened? **The earth joins in! Earthquakes!**
- And then **tombs** break; **sting of death** breaks. The **power of hell**, breaks. The **chains of sin** break.
- The **veil of the temple** breaks
- The walls of the ark of the covenant break
- **And just like the alabaster flask was broken and the pure nard of the oil came rushing out**, the life of Christ was broken, and the universe echoed in agreement, as the glory, and presence, and power of God poured out.
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- Christ offered up His life, and God who had confined himself to little boxes and little rooms, now said to the whole earth - the walls have been torn down, so now you enter in BOLDLY.
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- **It was as if the Divine alabaster flask had been broken open and God poured Himself out like rain upon the earth.**
 - **"I will pour water on the thirsty land... I will pour out my Spirit on your offspring, and my blessing on your descendants." (Is. 44:3)**
 - **"I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days. And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. (Joel 2:28-29, 32)**
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- And just like the fragrance of Mary's offering filled the whole house that day. So the fragrance of Christ's offering filled the whole Earth with the glory of God, **"The whole Earth is full of His glory."**
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- And not just the whole earth. But our whole being, Christian.

- **The presence of God that was once confined to the ark of the covenant and to the holy of holies, now fills you.**
 - “You yourselves are the **temple** of God. (1 Cor. 3:16)”
 - “You are the **dwelling place** of God, by His Spirit.” (Eph. 2:22)
 - “You are the **fragrance** of Christ.” (2 Cor. 2:15)
- **Brokenness was always the plan. And this was the fragrance of brokenness as through his brokenness, Jesus broke every thing that separated us from the Father.**

The life of Jesus had to be broken. The pure, powerful, spotless life of Jesus had to broken, and in exchange, the glory, power, and presence of God was poured out. And Christ, in His love, invites us into breaking as well. He invites us into this exchange. He invites us, in our lives to experience the fragrance of brokenness.

- These alabaster jars were often hung around a woman’s neck as a way of emitting a hint of the fragrance that was inside. It acted like a perfume.
- But as the jar hung there, it was **just a hint** of what was inside. In order to fully release the contents of the flask it **had to be broken. And Christ invites us into this.**
- **Often the Christian must experience Divine crushing in order for fragrance of Christ to pour out of us.**
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- And I don’t know why exactly it is this way. Maybe it is because as we suffer, we suffer **WITH** Christ? Because there is fellowship with Christ in His sufferings. There is “koinónos” — camaraderie, a sharing, a partnership with Christ as we suffer.
 - And so somehow in the mystery of God, the fragrance of Christ is poured out through our lives as we suffer **with** him.

I don’t know, but I know this: **God is glorified as we suffer with Christ.**

The Kingdom of God is upside down. The first shall be last. You want to get ahead, humble yourself and serve. **In the Kingdom of God, death brings life.**

God exchanges beauty for ashes. But He doesn’t just EXCHANGE beauty for ashes. But he makes beauty FROM ashes.

In the kingdom of God, LIFE COMES FROM DEATH.

- This is the way God has designed the entire universe to work. The process is: “**Life, death, new life.**”
- We see this everywhere.
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- **In the Kingdom of God, death brings life.**
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- In the Kingdom of God broken things produce beauty.
- Like Zak said in our preaching meeting the other day: "I think God likes it when things break, because that's when the beauty really comes out." (Zak Shellabarger)
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- For those who are feeling like you're right in the middle of it right now, I know it's hard to see past the trial, but you don't know what God is doing behind the scenes. You don't what God is doing IN you. And pulling OUT of you.
- And you may not even realize it, but the goodness, the "pure nard" (King James) is maybe right at the surface, and it may not be able to be poured out until you are broken open.
 - "For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory." (2 Cor 4:17)
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 - "Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing." (James 1:2-4)
- **You have no idea what God is up to when you are in the middle of what seems like nothing more than a broken life.**
 - There is no olive oil without the crushing of olives.
 - There is no walnut without the breaking of the shell.
 - There is no pure gold without the refiner's fire.
 - There is no diamond without extreme heat and pressure.
 - And there is no pure nard without brokenness
 - We see it through all creation, and it's no different in our lives. **God uses breaking to bring out the beauty that is inside.**
 - **Death bring LIFE.**
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- Death does not get to have the final word. Not in the Kingdom of God. In the Kingdom of God, God flips the whole thing upside down, and uses death to bring life.
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- Tattoo...
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- God uses breaking and the death and loss of things to bring out beauty. And most times, the best stuff ONLY comes through some kind of breaking, loss, of dying.
- It wasn't that the oil in this flask had no use before it was broken. It still smelled lovely no doubt. But the **best** stuff, and the **fullness** of what was inside could only come out after the breaking.
- And in God's love, He will sometimes allow breaking into our lives, because he sees what is on the other side. He see's what is hidden inside that flask because he put there long ago, and he wants to see it come out.

- And so he will sometimes, in his love, allowing breaking into our lives, in order to bring it out.
- And unfortunately, just like this alabaster flask that Mary had that day, there is no clean shortcut to extract all of the goodness that God has hidden in you.
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- Sometimes there's just no shortcut to God producing in you what he wants to.
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- "We can rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that they are producing in us (good stuff) patience, and perseverance, and endurance, and character, and the kind of hope that does not disappoint."
- So don't resist it. I know it's uncomfortable. But don't resist it. Lean into it.
- God, in all of his infinite wisdom and love, is working in you something far better and eternal, and believe it or not, it is for His glory, **and your good.**
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- **Are you waiting for some kind of break through in your life?**
- **Some kind of breaking out of God's power and presence in your life? Are you waiting for the anointing of God's oil to pour over you?**
- **Brokenness precedes the anointing.**
- **Brokenness precedes breakthrough.**
- **Brokenness precedes blessing.**
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- He is using your situation to press you like the olive press; to forge you like the earth does to make diamonds; to refine you like fire does to make pure gold.
- He is using your situation to break the alabaster flask of your life so that the hidden, eternally valuable divine treasures inside of you can begin to pour out.
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- **You know what the greatest treasure has been though from the breaking in my own life? The treasure of knowing and being known by Jesus.**
- It's what this house on this tattoo represents.
- Jesus bringing me home and into a whole different dimension of knowing Him in a way that I had imagined was even possible.
- And this was really what Mary was after this day. And she got it. She got him.
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- "I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus... I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ and be found in him... I want to know Christ — yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead.
(Philippians 3:8-11)