

The Fragrant Aroma

✘ Have you ever been tempted to restrain your emotions in a worship service because someone might misunderstand or become uncomfortable? Often women have been accused of being overly sensitive or sentimental. But when your outpouring of love and thankfulness goes beyond words to tears, don't be embarrassed. I believe the Lord receives those tears as worship.

Four times in the gospels, the story appears of a woman's lavish gesture of worship—anointing Jesus with a very expensive jar of perfume. Three of these reports are likely descriptions of Mary of Bethany, the sister of Martha and Lazarus, whose ministry to Jesus occurred during the final week of His earthly life (see Matt. 26:6-13; Mark 14:1-9; John 12:1-8).

The fourth account, however, though similar in detail, is a report of a separate event involving a different woman and occurring earlier in the life and ministry of Jesus than the week of His passion (see Luke 7:36-50).

This woman's name is unknown. No one is even certain of the city in which the story takes place. Luke identifies her only as "a woman who had lived a sinful life in that town" (v. 37, NIV).

Drawn Into His Presence

The unknown woman evidently learned of Jesus' whereabouts when He went to have dinner with Simon the Pharisee. "She brought an alabaster jar of perfume, and as she stood behind Him at His feet weeping, she began to wet His feet with her tears. Then she wiped them with her hair, kissed them and poured perfume on them" (Luke 7:37-38).

What was she thinking when she pulled that expensive vial out

of hiding? What did the bottle of perfume represent to her? Was she holding in her hands a bit of security in an uncertain world?

Whatever significance the perfume held for her, this woman saw something in Jesus that perhaps no one else in the room understood. She courageously risked the public disdain and rejection of a room full of holy men in order to get into His presence, because she saw Him for who He was.

Undoubtedly, she had encountered Jesus before. Perhaps He had met her gaze one day in the marketplace with eyes of compassion and understanding. Maybe her heart had been touched by His preaching, or perhaps He had stopped to speak a kind word to her or even to heal one of her sick children.

Entering Simon's house, the woman was probably anxious about being turned away before she could find Jesus. Nevertheless, she made her way to where He was reclining.

By this time, surely everyone was staring at her, shocked by her presence. But she was undeterred from her purpose.

The Ministry of Her Tears

Standing behind Jesus, she began to weep. Hot tears fell like rain upon His dusty feet as she was overcome with gratitude and love for Him. She had come to worship Him!

The air was probably thick with the critical murmurings of the men. Not only did she show up uninvited, but she was crying and touching Jesus!

Jesus was not uncomfortable with her emotional outpouring at all. In fact, He was deeply touched by it and quietly received the ministry of her tears.

As she knelt at Jesus' feet, she must have noticed that He'd not been offered the basic hospitality of water, so she washed His feet with her tears and wiped them dry with her hair and

her kisses. Then she took the expensive jar of perfume and began to anoint His feet.

I believe this woman saw the need of our Lord as only God's women can. She ministered to Him as best she could, using her very own tears and hair, because no one else had acknowledged His need for water and a towel.

As he watched the intimate drama unfold, Simon called Jesus' behavior into question, declaring it completely unbecoming a spiritual leader. He said to himself, "If this man were a prophet, He would know who is touching Him and what kind of woman she is—that she is a sinner" (Luke 7:39).

But Jesus did know, and He wasn't repelled by her presence as the religious hierarchy was. Going against the current of popular religious opinion, Jesus welcomed her worship. After all, His entire mission was to seek and save the lost. This woman was a priority in His eyes, not an unpleasant interruption!

Outpoured Hearts

There were probably those present who were dismayed, also, by this woman's extravagant waste of the costly perfume. Her gift may have been rejected outright by the religious men gathered there in Simon's home because it was very likely the proceeds of her past immoral lifestyle.

But worship is about the outpoured heart, and that's not always religiously correct! This woman had experienced a life-changing encounter with Jesus and had come to lavish upon Him, as an offering of worship, what was perhaps the greatest material treasure of her life. Jesus did not rebuke her. In giving Him her treasure, she also gave Him her heart (see Matt. 6:21).

For his part, Simon received from the Lord a well-deserved rebuke. He had invited Jesus into his home for completely

selfish reasons and then treated Him badly. It was considered a serious breach of etiquette and an insult not to offer a guest in your home water to wash his feet.

He had also neglected to greet Jesus with a kiss on the cheek, a practice still observed by men in the Middle East. Simon bypassed this formality and even omitted the inexpensive touch of perfumed oil for His head, a common preliminary to a feast in those days. But Jesus had graciously overlooked Simon's offenses.

Until Simon commented to himself about the woman's reputation. Then, using the parable of the two debtors as an introduction to His correction, Jesus contrasted Simon's negligence with the woman's heartfelt adoration (see Luke 7:40-46) and concluded: "'Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven—for she loved much. But he who has been forgiven little loves little.' Then Jesus said to her, 'Your sins have been forgiven'" (vv. 47-48).

This woman did not need anyone to point out to her the fact that she was a sinner. I'm sure someone was around to remind her of it every day of her life. But it was this very fact that caused her to love Jesus so much: She was indeed a woman who had been forgiven much.

Simon, on the other hand, had little regard for Jesus because he was self-righteous and blind both to his own need for forgiveness and to the authority of the One reclining at his table.

Are you a Simon, or do you identify more closely with the woman holding the vial of perfume? If you are like the woman—a sincere worshiper of Jesus—He will receive you, no matter what your past may be and no matter how emotional or lavish your expression of love. You are already deeply loved by Him and always welcome in His presence.

Lord, help us to see You for who You are and to "love much" as

we extravagantly worship You with outpoured hearts!

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