

# Spices for Christ's Grave

by J.R. Miller

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*We can honor Christ with our heart's true adoration, our love, and our service, and we must bring our heart's blood to heal hearts.*

**Scripture:** Psalm 141:2, Matthew 25:40, Mark 16:1, Romans 12:1, 2 Corinthians 2:15, Philippians 4:18, Colossians 3:23-24, Hebrews 13:15, 1 Peter 2:5, Revelation 5:8

**Topics:** "Worship", "Service to Christ"

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## Description

J.R. Miller reflects on the poignant moment when Mary Magdalene and other women prepared spices for Jesus' body after His crucifixion, highlighting their deep love and devotion despite their despair. He emphasizes that their act of honoring the dead Christ serves as a powerful reminder of the love we should show to the living Christ, who is now resurrected and alive. Miller encourages believers to bring their heartfelt worship, service, and endurance in suffering as fragrant offerings to honor Christ, just as the women did in their sorrow. He illustrates that true worship and acts of love, even in trials, are precious to God and should be a continuous part of a Christian's life. Ultimately, he calls for a life of self-sacrifice and service, reflecting the love of Christ in all circumstances.

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## Transcript

"When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices so that they might go to anoint Jesus' body." Mark 16:1

Sometimes in a night of storm and darkness, there will appear for a moment a little rift in the heavy clouds, showing a speck of blue sky with a single silver star shining in it. Something like this is the beautiful incident in the story of those dark hours between Christ's death and resurrection, when the women went out, after the sun-setting, to buy spices for the grave of their Friend.

It had been a day of unutterable sadness to them. The hope had gone out of their hearts. They sat in despairing grief. All was lost, that made it worth while for them to live. They thought the wonderful visions they had had of the glory of the Messiah--had vanished now forever. All that remained to them was a sweet memory, a terrible cross, and a dark grave.

In the dense gloom of that Sabbath, there is just one spot of brightness: it is the loving act of the women friends of Jesus. As soon as the holy hours of the Sabbath had closed, they hastened out to find the shops, to buy spices and ointments to carry to the tomb in the early morning, to strew upon the sacred

body of their beloved dead.

Thus the love of women shines out as a bright star--when even the love of apostles remained in eclipse. One writer compares it to the nightingale, which is famed for her sweet songs in the night. She sings in the day as well; only, as other songsters are then in full chorus, her sweeter strains are not distinguishable from the rest. But at night, when all others are hushed, her song is heard, and is more sweet by reason of the contrast with the surrounding stillness.

So it was with these women. They served in the day of bright sunshine; but their service was now overshadowed, so to speak, by the noisy crowd which thronged around the Savior. But when the voice of the noisy, effusive crowd was hushed during the dark night of trial and suffering, which followed the brief day of popularity, they continued to give forth the music of love and sympathy through the dark loneliness of the night.

We must notice, that it was love for the dead Christ which prompted this sweet service. The women had no thought that He would rise again. Indeed, the nature of their offering shows that they had not. It was to honor His dead body that they brought the spices. They had hoped that He would live and found a great kingdom--but their hopes had perished! They had no expectation of ever seeing Him again. Yet they wanted to honor Him. They remembered what He had been to them while He was alive. They remembered his beautiful life, with its gentleness, purity, and strength. They remembered the words they had heard Him speak, which had been such an inspiration to them. It was love for a friend who had been everything to them, and now was dead--which inspired these loyal women in what they did--and not any hope of ever seeing Him again alive.

They did not understand the meaning of His death. To them, His life was a bewildering tragedy. Did it mean that He had failed? They could not tell; they could not understand it. But it left them without hope of seeing Him again. Yet mark how they loved and honored Him, even though they understood not, the glorious meaning of His death, and saw in it only disaster and hopelessness.

How much more should we love and honor Christ today, when all is plain to us, when we see the divine love shining out in His death--and know its whole blessed meaning! While these women were preparing their spices, Jesus still lay silent and cold in His grave, at the door of which Roman soldiers kept their watch. But we see Him risen, and alive for evermore. On His head He wears many crowns. He is our friend, living and with us; not dead, and remembered only from a sweet vanished past--but our companion, our guide, our helper, with us always, in all the blessedness of His love!

We have much greater reason for honoring Christ today, than these faithful women had at the close of that sad, dark Sabbath. They prepared spices for His dead body. How can we best honor Him? The grave is empty, and His body no longer needs to be anointed with the fragrant perfumes that are fitting for the dead. But is there not something suggestive of a true heart's offering in spices and ointments with their sweet odors? What have we to bring--to honor our Redeemer?

We may bring our heart's true worship. Homage is fragrant. The sweetest spices that grow in this world--are those that grow in the garden of love. If we truly love Christ, and breathe our love out to Him in prayer and praise, we are honoring Him in a way that is most pleasing to Him. Worship is fragrant to Christ. In the ancient temple the altar of incense was the altar of prayer and praise. In John's vision of heaven, he saw golden vials full of incense, which were the prayers of saints. The meaning is, that the worship of earth's humble believers rises up to heaven as fragrant incense. There is something exquisitely

beautiful in this thought. The homage, the praise, the pleadings of God's people rise from lowly homes, from sick rooms, from darkened chambers of grief, where loved ones kneel beside their dead, from humble sanctuaries, and are wafted up before God, as the breath of flowers is wafted to us in summer days from sweet fields and fragrant gardens.

There was an old Jewish legend that Sandalphon, the angel of prayer, stood at the gate of heaven, receiving in his hands the supplications and the praises of earth, which were changed to sweet flowers as he took them. The old, strange legend is insightful. Sincere heart-breathings of love and faith, do indeed rise as the fragrance of sweet flowers into the presence of Christ. When acceptable worship was offered, God was said in the Scripture to smell a sweet savor. We can honor Christ with our heart's true adoration. We can bring the spices and ointments of loving homage. Nothing else in the world is so precious to Christ--as the love of His own people, when it breathes out from lowly hearts and rises up to Him.

There is another beautiful fragment of legend, gathered out of old rabbinical books, which says that there are two orders of angels--the angels of service and the angels of praise. The angels of praise are of a higher order than the others. No one of them praises God twice--but having once lifted up his voice in the song of heaven, he perishes and ceases to be. He has perfected his being. His song is the full flower and perfect fruit of his life that for which he was created. He has now finished his work, and his spirit is breathed out in his one holy psalm.

The legend may be simple--but there is in it a sweet thought and a deep and holy truth. The highest act of which the human soul is capable--is the praise of true worship. We are taught to glorify God in whatever we do. Adoration should rise continually from our hearts. We are made to praise our God. The unpraising life is yet an unfruitful life; at least, it has not yet borne the sweetest, ripest, and best fruit of the Spirit, that which in God's sight is most precious of all fruits. In heaven--all of life is praise--and we come near to the heavenly life, only in the measure that our life here is praise and homage. Thus we have in the Epistle to the Hebrews the counsel, "Through Christ then, let us offer up a sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of lips which make confession to his name."

We can bring spices for Christ, in service of love for Him. He has redeemed us. All our hopes--come out of His sacrifice for us. All our joys--come from the cup of His sorrow. All our peace--comes from His anguish. We will wear crowns of life and glory--because He wore a crown of thorns. As we think of what we owe to Him, our love must grow deep and tender; and what can we do but serve Him? It is sweet to think of His love, to receive the memorials of His sacrifice, to remember His sufferings in saving us.

But that is not enough. These women, even in their deep, bewildering, overwhelming sorrow, rose up and prepared spices and ointments for the dead Christ. Shall we be less true and earnest in our love for the Christ who was dead, but is now alive?

There are everywhere those who need our service--Christ's little ones, who are hungry and thirsty and cold, or who are in spiritual need. We are not to wait until they are dead--and then bring flowers to their coffins. The women who brought the spices to our Lord's grave had first gone with Him in His weary journeys, ministering unto Him of their substance and with their hands. The world is full of sore human needs. For these we are to bring our spices, if we would honor our Master, and we are to bring them while the need is pressing.

It is not money alone, nor chiefly--that we are called to bring. Love is better than money. Christ Himself gave no money, so far as we are told; and yet never was there any other who gave so royally as He did.

He gave time, strength, energy, thought, toil, and love. These are the spices we must bring. They are fragrant to Christ. Money is needed--but money alone will never bless the world. Nothing but love, will uplift men and save them. Nothing but heart's blood--will heal hearts!

We cannot live a Christian life that will please Christ, without cost to ourselves. It never can be an easy thing to be such disciples as He would have us to be. An easy, self-indulgent life--never can be a really Christ-like life. It was not easy for Christ to redeem His people. From the beginning to the end of His earthly ministry--He poured out His own precious life. The people thronged about Him with their sins, their sorrows, and their needs; and virtue went out of Him continually to heal them, to comfort them, to feed their heart-hunger. He utterly forgot Himself, and gave His life and love without stint, to everyone who asked. At last He literally gave Himself, emptying out His heart's blood--to become life to dead souls. His sufferings were finished when He bowed His head on the cross. But now it is ours, to suffer for Him. Nothing but the giving of life--will ever save the world. It is ours, then, to perpetuate the self-sacrifice of Christ on this earth. Only in so far as we do this--are we truly bringing spices to anoint Him.

Another way in which we may bring spices to honor Christ, is in patient endurance of suffering.

Christian life is not all active. It is easier oftentimes--to toil and sacrifice, even to the uttermost, than it is to be still and sweet in time of pain. Yet that perfume is very fragrant--which rises from the heart that suffers and yet sings. Even amid human joy and gladness, it is sweet to Christ when the odors of adoration rise from the heart. But praise when the life is in the midst of trial or sorrow--is doubly precious to Him. The incense in the temple gave out no perfume until it was cast upon the fire. Just so, there are many lives that do not yield the richest sweetness of love--until they are in the fires of pain. With such sweet fragrances, Christ is well pleased.

We should seek to honor Christ in all those experiences of our lives which are hard. You are watching by the bedside of one of your dearest friends. You pray earnestly for the sparing of the life that is so precious to you; but at length it seems to be God's will to take it from you. Then your duty is submission. Tears flow, and the heart's pain is very sore; but there is no murmuring, no complaining. There is trust and peace. In such quiet, loving submission--you are bringing spices and ointments to Christ.

A young man made known to his mother, his decision to go out as a foreign missionary. At first, in the sudden surprise, she could not give her consent. But she carried her burden to Christ, and one morning, as she met her son, she threw her arms around him and said, "It is all settled. God has given me grace to say to you, 'Go!' and I bless Him for putting it into your heart to go; I adore Him for giving me an Isaac to offer on His altar."

When the parting came, she took off her wedding-ring in the presence of her husband, and said, "This is the dearest thing I possess. I have worn it more than forty years; and now, in the expectation that I shall never see you again in this world, I give it, in your father's presence, to you as a token of our united love." That was strewing spices before Christ. It was honoring Him by the sweet and quiet acceptance of His will, when to accept it cut into the very heart of human love.

Gentleness of temper, speech, and feeling--when one is called to endure insults, wrongs, or injuries--is another, example of the love which honors Christ.

None of us can live long in the thick of life--and not sometimes be touched rudely, perhaps even cruelly, by others. How shall we endure these things that so hurt and wound us? We know what Jesus would

do--what He did do in like experiences. When He was reviled, He reviled not again. There are certain flowers that emit no fragrance as they grow, but when they are crushed--they give out perfume which anoints the hand that bruised them. Christ's life was ever giving out love and kindness. He met reviling with blessing. They hung Him on the cross until He died--but in that cruel death He made eternal redemption. When we are wronged, or hurt, or treated unkindly, or cruelly, if we would honor our blessed Lord--we must endure with sweet forgiveness and patience. Love which bears all things, endures all things, forgives, returns kindness for unkindness, brings spices and ointments to honor Christ!

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