

The following sermon was preached at Redemption Baptist Church on Sunday, 12 December 2021. We encourage you to look up the Scriptures that are referenced, and see the context for yourself. May the Lord speak to your heart as you study His Word.

The Saving King

Psalm 45:8

As Jesus travelled through the cities of Israel during His 3 ½-year ministry, He often stopped to brief His disciples about an event that was coming in the near future. Time and time again, Jesus forewarned His disciples that He would soon be arrested by the chief priests, be put on trial, be condemned to death, and be crucified, and that after three days, He would rise again. Yet, despite Jesus' repeated announcements of His coming death, His disciples couldn't bring themselves to accept Jesus' plain words. They didn't want to believe that their Lord was about to die. It seems that Mary of Bethany was the only one of Jesus' followers who had a glimmer of understanding that the Messiah was going to die. In simple faith, she poured expensive spikenard on Jesus' head and feet, to show her love and thanks; and Jesus praised her for her faith. He said, ***“Against the day of my burying hath she kept this”*** (John 12:7).

Yet, years before Jesus was born, there was a group of men who *did* understand, and believe, that the King of the Jews would one day die. These men weren't even Jews; yet, they understood this truth about the Messiah! They had studied the Old Testament Scriptures, and they knew that it had been foretold that the Messiah would be ***“cut off.”*** This remarkable group of men, who apparently knew so much about the Messiah, are the ones whom we know as “the wise men.” The gifts that they gave to the young child Jesus were prophetic pictures of who Jesus is, and of what He would accomplish.

Most people have heard about the gold, frankincense, and myrrh that the wise men gave to Jesus; but few realise the deep meaning of these gifts. **Gold** indicated that Jesus is the King of Kings; **frankincense** indicated that Jesus is our High Priest; and **myrrh** foreshadowed that Jesus would be our Sacrifice for sin.

It is this very spice, **myrrh**, that we read about in last week's message from **Psalm 45**. As you'll remember, **Psalm 45** is a prophetic psalm pointing to Jesus as King, Bridegroom, Warrior, Messiah, and God. **Verses 6 and 7** portray Him as the Anointed One of God, who shares the heavenly throne with God the Father, because He *is* God. Yet, despite the fact that He is God, in **verse 8**, we see Him as descending from ***“out of the ivory palaces”*** to come into our world; and as He does so, He is wearing garments that are perfumed with three particular spices. Those spices are **myrrh, aloes, and cassia**.

Read Psalm 45:6-8.

Myrrh, aloes, and cassia were sweet-smelling spices which were highly valued in the ancient world. It is only fitting that the King of Israel, and the King of Kings, should wear garments that are scented with these costly and fragrant spices. Yet, the rich smell of these spices is not the only reason why the Messiah wears them. These spices have prophetic meaning. In this morning's message, we will see how the first two of these spices point to Jesus' saving, atoning work on the cross. The title of this morning's message is ***The Saving King***.

Read Matthew 2:1-11.

There are couple truths that the spices of myrrh and aloes teach us about the Lord Jesus Christ. First, myrrh teaches us that...

I. Christ had to be “bruised.”

Read John 19:38-40.

As our **John** passage reveals, myrrh and aloes were sweet-smelling spices which were used to embalm the body of Jesus. This myrrh and aloes mixture was applied to Jesus’ body quite heavily. One Roman pound was equivalent to about 12 English ounces; thus, 100 Roman pounds was about 75 English pounds, about 34 kilograms. Strands of cloth were wound around His body; and myrrh was packed in between the layers of cloth. Like cement, the myrrh soon hardened, thus making a sort of “cocoon.”

By the way, there is a theory which unbelieving atheists and agnostics perpetuated for many years in order to explain away Jesus’ resurrection. It is called the “Swoon Theory.” In 1802, a man named **Heinrich Paulus** proposed that Jesus didn’t actually die, but merely fell unconscious on account of His beating and crucifixion, and then “revived” in the cool, damp air of the tomb, and then came out of the tomb. The disciples then saw Him, and mistakenly believed that Jesus had risen from the dead. (A few small sects of Islam try to explain away Jesus’ death by way of the Swoon Theory, as well.) I don’t think I need to point out that this idea is absurd! There is no way that a mere man, after having been lashed to pieces 39 times with a Roman cat-o’-nine-tail whip, and after having gone through the brutal torture of crucifixion, could be strong enough to break out of a heavy, cement “cocoon,” and then push back a stone which required many strong men to move! (Even if He *could* have gotten out of the tomb somehow, why would anyone be inclined to worship a man who was barely alive?)

Now, to be sure, myrrh and aloes were not used merely for embalming the dead. They were used as a costly perfumes, as well. (For example, in **Song of Solomon 4:14**, King Solomon compares his bride to a “*garden*” of fruits and spices; and he specifically names pomegranates, camphire, spikenard, saffron, calamus, cinnamon, frankincense, myrrh, and aloes.) However, the most common use of myrrh and aloes was to embalm the dead. The very name “myrrh” was associated with death in the ancient world. The Messiah was born in order that He might die for our sins; and the wise men understood this.

Now, there is an interesting fact about myrrh that illustrates Christ’s death for our sins. Myrrh was a sort of gum resin, which was extracted from the *Cammiphora* shrub; and it was used as an ingredient in perfumes and spices, and even incense. Myrrh is sweet-smelling, but bitter-tasting. In fact, the very word “myrrh” means “bitter.” However, here’s the interesting part: in order for the plant to release its fragrance, it has to be *crushed*.

Coincidence? I don’t think so. Just as myrrh has to be crushed in order to release its sweet fragrance, so Christ had to be crushed in order to become an acceptable, sweet-smelling Sacrifice for our sins.

Now, it should have been no mystery that the Messiah would *die*. The Jewish people had read the Old Testament passages that promised the kingly reign of the Messiah; but somehow, they had overlooked (or found some other way to explain) all the passages that spoke of a Messiah who would *die*. Let's take a look at just a couple of those passages.

Read Daniel 9:25-26a.

Read Zechariah 12:10 and 13:7.

The Lord couldn't have been clearer about what the Messiah's mission would be: the Messiah came into our world to die. The passages we've just looked at make this abundantly evident. Yet, not only was the Messiah to die, but He was to die a *horrible death*. It would be an awful, brutal, bloody death.

An influential Catholic theologian named Alphonsus Liguori once wrote that it was not ultimately necessary for Jesus to go to the cross. According to Liguori, just *one* drop of His blood, pricked from the tip of His finger at any point in His life, would have been enough to atone for the sins of the world! (By the way... Liguori wasn't some "loose canon" priest, with ideas of which the Catholic Church did not approve. He is very highly respected in the Roman Catholic Church, and his writings are regarded as official dogma.) Folks, what Liguori taught is *not* what the Bible teaches! The Bible says that "***without shedding of blood is no remission*** (forgiveness)" (**Hebrews 9:22**). Jesus Christ had to be "crushed" for our sins. He had to be lifted up from the earth on the cross, and become a bloody Sacrifice.

It is recorded by historians of the first century that on the Passover evening, while hundreds of thousands of lambs were being slain in the Temple courtyard, the blood was so profuse, that the priests had to allow the blood to flow down the Temple Mount into the Brook Kidron below. The entire eastern side of Mount Zion turned crimson red; and the colour of blood could be seen from miles away. God intended this to be a vivid picture of the kind of death that He would require of the Lamb of God, Jesus Christ. God's justice demanded that His Son endure *that kind of death* in order to pay for our sins.

Read Isaiah 53:1-12.

You'll notice that in **Isaiah 53**, the word "***bruise***" was used two times (in **verse 5** and **verse 10**). Just so that you know, the "bruise" that Jesus received was not a little greenish-blue spot which He got by bumping His knee one day. The Hebrew word for "bruise" is *dakka*: and it means "to break in pieces, to crush, destroy, humble, or smite." It has the idea of something's being utterly smashed, or ruined. In relation to a person, it has the idea of a brutal, horrible, agonising death.

In the centuries before Christ's birth, the bruising of the Messiah was foretold again and again. The very first prophecy of the Messiah was given by the LORD Himself, to Adam and Eve, right after they had sinned. In **Genesis 3:15**, God spoke to the serpent that had deceived Eve (in reality, it was *Satan* to whom He was talking): and He told him, "***I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou***

shalt bruise his heel.” The Hebrew word for “bruise” here in **Genesis 3:15** is a different word from the one that is used in **Isaiah 53** (the word *shūph*); but it has the same meaning as *dakka*. Just like the word *dakka*, the word *shūph* means “to crush or destroy.” God was telling Satan that although he would succeed in “crushing” Christ’s *heel* on the cross, Christ would succeed in crushing *Satan’s head*. God was foretelling that the promised “Seed” of Eve, the Lord Jesus Christ, would destroy Satan’s kingdom, and his evil works, once and for all. Yet, this would happen only after Christ’s “heel” (in other words, His human life) had been crushed on the cross.

Now, why doesn’t the world like this message? Why is the message of the cross, and of the blood of Christ, shouted down? Why are people who talk about Christ’s death on the cross labelled as “nut jobs”? It’s simple: the horrible, violent nature of Jesus’ death reflects back on *us!* Particularly, it reveals the hideous nature of our sin, which caused Jesus to have to die such an awful death. People don’t like to think about this. This is not appealing to our pride. As sinners, we do not *want* to see ourselves for who we really are. We do not want to see ourselves as wicked, hell-deserving sinners.

If you want to know just how sinful you really are, just take a look at the cross of Calvary! *That* will give you an idea of what God thinks of your sin. Take a look at God’s wrath and judgment, as it was being poured out on His Son; and as you do so, think about this: those sins that you committed today—those sins that you thought so little about—required the crushing of the Son of God. Christ died an awful death in order to pay for *those* sins. If you were the only sinner in the world, and if you had committed only one sin, *Christ’s death on the cross* would still have been necessary for you to be forgiven of that sin!

You doubt me? If so, then I would ask you this: “Why did an animal have to die as soon as Adam and Eve had sinned, in order to make coats to cover their nakedness?” Why couldn’t God have simply shown Adam and Eve how to make spin flax or wool, and weave a garment? Why did an animal have to die in order to cover their shame? (After all, their only crime was eating fruit from a forbidden tree, right? Why was that such a big deal?) Why, after they left the Garden, did God further command Adam and Eve to sacrifice of a lamb on a regular basis? Why all that death and bloodshed of animals--and all over a piece of fruit? The reason is simple: **the wages of sin is death.** *All* sin, no matter how small, is spiritual deadly and mortal. The sacrifice of lambs was a picture of the Lamb of God, Jesus Christ, who would one day take our sin upon Himself, and die an awful death in order to pay our sin-debt.

Which do *you* choose as the payment for your sin? Are you trusting in the Holy One who was crushed for you? Or will you deny that gift of mercy, trust in your own goodness, and end up having be punished for your sin in the Lake of Fire, for eternity?

Many of us have already placed our trust in Christ. However, I would ask this question of those who are saved: “Have you lost the sensitivity to sin that you once had?” Does it not bother you to go around with unconfessed sin? Does it not bother you to do something that your conscience, the Holy Spirit, and the Word of God, are telling you is an offence against God? If so, then take another look at Calvary! Jesus didn’t die merely for the sins that you committed before your salvation; He died for the sins you are committing right now! You

can't lose your salvation, because He already paid for it in full; but *love* for the One Who was crushed for you demands that you love Him with all your heart, soul, and strength!

Now, the second truth about Christ that we can learn from myrrh and aloes is this:

II. Christ had to be buried.

(Read Psalm 45:8 again.) The myrrh and aloes in the fabric of Christ's garments speak of His death and burial. As we've seen already, myrrh was a costly gum resin. Aloes was also a kind of gum resin, which was extracted from the bark of Aloe trees in East India; and it was worth its weight in gold. Both myrrh and aloes were costly commodities, which people used as perfume; but burial was the most common use of these spices. By giving the gift of myrrh to Jesus, the wise men were demonstrating their belief that this holy Child was going to die one day, and be buried.

How could they have come to the conclusion that the King of kings would die, when seemingly no one else at the time understood this truth? Well, that's what makes these men so special. These men had earnestly searched the Scriptures; and they took the Scriptures literally. They knew Isaiah's prophecy that the Messiah would "*wounded for our transgressions,*" and "*bruised for our iniquities,*" and that He would be taken "*as a lamb to the slaughter.*" They knew Daniel's prophecy that Messiah would be "*cut off.*" They knew David's prophecy that His hands and feet would be pierced, and Zechariah's prophecy that He would be "smitten." They probably also had a good understanding of **Psalm 16:10**.

Read Psalm 16:10-11.

It's important to understand that the word "hell," in this passage, does not refer to the place of fiery torment for the unsaved. The word "hell" is translated from the word *sheol*; and in Old Testament times, this word meant one of two things. It meant either "the grave" (for the body); or, it meant "the place under the earth where the spirits of the dead dwell." This place had two compartments—the compartment for the saved, and the compartment for the unsaved. The compartment for the saved was a place of rest, called "Paradise"; and the compartment for the unsaved was the place of fiery torment. The compartment for the saved doesn't exist anymore, because Christ took all of them to Heaven after His resurrection. Since their sins were now paid for, they could go to be in God's immediate presence in Heaven.

So, when David says, "*thou wilt not leave my soul in hell,*" he is talking about the place where the spirits of the *righteous dead* went—the compartment of *sheol* called "Paradise." With this in mind, I pose this question: "If the LORD would not leave His Son's soul in Paradise, nor allow His body to see decay, then how could David be the real speaker, here?" David *did* see decay. His body *did* rot and decompose. However, there is Someone who did not see decay, because His body was heavily embalmed for only three short days, and was then resurrected to immortality. His name is Jesus Christ! David was the *writer* of this psalm; but the real *Speaker* in this psalm is the Son of God, the second Person of the Trinity! Christ gave these prophetic words about Himself to David to write down. The Apostle Peter made this very point when He preached to the Jews on the Day of Pentecost.

Read Acts 2:25-35.

Peter knew that Jesus Christ was the real Speaker in **Psalm 16:10**. He knew that David couldn't be the real speaker in this psalm, because David is still dead and buried, and his tomb is still there for all to see. However, *Christ's* body was not in the grave long enough to decompose. He arose from the grave in three days; and He is now alive forever more, on His throne in heaven.

Myrrh. It was a gift fit for a Messiah who would die. However, if He had been a Messiah who *stayed* dead, he would be no Messiah at all! It was necessary for Jesus Christ to die, to be buried, *and* to rise again, so that we might be justified before God. Paul said that Christ was **“delivered for our offences, and raised again for our justification” (Romans 4:25)**. The wise men surely would have realised that the Messiah would not only die, but *arise* from the grave, so that He might deliver His people.

Let's see what Jesus Himself said about His impending death.

Read John 12:23-24.

What was Jesus saying? He was saying that it was necessary for Him to die (just as a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies), so that in rising again from the dead, He would be able to bring forth **“much fruit.”** That **“fruit” is those of us who are saved by trusting in Him!** If Jesus had not *died* as our Substitute for sin, and had not been buried, and had not risen again, there would be no hope for any sinner. Without Christ's death, burial, and resurrection, we would all perish in our sin, because nothing that we could ever offer God could pay the price for our sin!

The famous pastor of Moody Church in Chicago, H.A. Ironside, once made this comment:

“Jesus did not come to save men *by His instruction*; He did not come to save men *by His example*. He is not saying to men: ‘If you will try to live in the way that I live, and follow My steps, you will be saved.’ Let me say that again—as I have said many times before, and that at the risk of being misunderstood: *No one was ever saved by following Jesus*. It is *after* we are saved that we begin to follow Him. He left us an example that we should follow, but we need to know Him as Redeemer, we need to receive divine life from Him, before we *can* follow.”

Are you trying to follow Christ's *example* in order to get to Heaven? Are you trying to “*walk the walk that Jesus walked*” in order to get to Heaven? In other words, are you trying to earn your salvation by living a good life, and by doing good works? If so, then you are not saved. Trying to be holy in order to be saved cannot avail. Nothing *you* do is good enough to atone for your sins. Jesus *died* and rose again so that you might live. The only Way of salvation is Jesus Christ. Those who believe on *Him*, and in His death, burial, and resurrection, receive new life from Him, and are adopted into His family! Should you be trusting in anything other than the Lord Jesus Christ, please receive His gift today!

If you have already been saved, you understand this. *You* weren't following Jesus before you were saved. *You* weren't seeking Him at all. *He* was seeking after *you*. It was *after* you were saved that you began to follow Him. However, you mustn't forget the purpose of your salvation. Jesus died for you, was buried, and rose again, so that you might follow Him. That is His purpose for you. Are you conforming to that purpose?

Let's read on in **John 12**, and see what Christ has to say about those who follow Him.

Read John 12:25-26.

Jesus died that we might live. However, those who have received this new life from Him have, themselves, "died" in another sense: they have died to self. That is to be the believer's life henceforth—one of death to self and sin. Paul wrote to the churches in Rome, "***For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection: Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin. For he that is dead is freed from sin***" (Romans 6:5-7).

That is precisely what Jesus was talking about in **John 12**. Those who have been planted together with Him in His death (those have been saved) now look at their life in a whole new way. Lost people consider Christians to be fools, because, in their eyes, a Christian is "throwing away his life" by living it for Christ. However, the unsaved man has no concept of the incredible joy and peace that the Christian knows because he has lost *his* life in *Christ's*.

Conclusion: The King's garments smell of myrrh and aloes--the bitter-sweet spices of death and burial. These spices are a reminder of Christ's saving work for us. As we close this morning, I would ask, "Have you placed your faith in the One who died, was buried, and rose again for you?" Perhaps you are beginning to realise that you have not really been trusting in *Christ* for your salvation. Perhaps you've always thought that you were a "pretty good person"; but now, you are beginning to see that Christ's death and resurrection is your only hope. Maybe you are realising, for the first time, that you need to let go of your own righteousness, and embrace what *Christ* did for you. If so, you will have an opportunity to do so in our time of invitation, which we will have in a moment. Someone who cares for your soul would be happy to open a Bible and show you how you can be saved, and *know* that you're saved!

For those of you who have been saved already, I will close with this thought. **Jim Elliot**, a missionary who lost his life while attempting to take the Gospel to the Auca Indians of Ecuador back in the 1950's, said this: "He is no fool who gives up what he cannot keep in order to gain that which he cannot lose." There is much reward that God wants to give you, Christian. He has already saved you, and has given you a home in Heaven. Is your life so dear to you, that you cannot live it *wholly* for the one who gave everything for you? He was bruised for you. He was crushed for you. He was buried, and rose again, for you. He has given you eternal life. Can you not pour out your life for Him, just as Mary poured out the precious gift of spikenard, and anointed her Lord's feet?