

Oil in Our Spiritual Journey



We have been looking at some metaphors that help us understand the nature of the Holy Spirit. Oil is another great image for the Holy Spirit. Oil can also be cleansing. Sometimes when I paint and get oil on my hands and don't have turpentine, I take cooking oil, pour it on my hands, and use a paper towel—all the paint comes off. Oil also penetrates and softens dry places. Think of how a mechanic uses oil to grease the inside of a machine. The oil penetrates, softens, and releases.

Oil is a valuable resource. When you burn oil, it brings light. It's also a source for energy; oil brings power. In the Bible, the oil isn't Texas crude; it is olive oil. That is the kind oil that was used in Biblical times for anointing. A person in authority literally poured oil over someone to anoint them for a particular task. In 1 Samuel 16, Samuel pours oil on David to anoint him to become king. When Samuel poured the oil, the Spirit of the Lord came mightily upon David. So connecting the metaphor dots: to pour out oil is to pour out the Holy Spirit.

In Luke 4:18-21 at the beginning of his ministry, Jesus made an astounding claim from chapter 61 of the book of Isaiah. "The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free those who are downtrodden, to proclaim the favorable year of the Lord. When he finished reading he sat down and declared, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." The word "Christ" and "Messiah" both mean "the anointed one." Jesus claimed to have been anointed for ministry by God, anointed by the oil of the Holy Spirit to enable Him to serve and accomplish His life's tasks. He is the anointed one.

There is another great visual image of the anointing oil in Psalm 133: "It is like the precious oil upon the head, coming down upon the beard, even Aaron's beard, coming down upon the fringes of his robe." The oil doesn't stop with just Aaron's head, it dripped the whole way down to the fringe of his garment. He was immersed in the oil representing the Holy Spirit.

I don't often hear the word anoint used in secular settings, so it may be hard to understand what it really means. When I hear the word "anoint" or "anointing," I like to think of the word "enabling." The Holy Spirit is enabling by giving the person the power

to do their job. When a woman sings a beautiful song of praise, you may hear someone comment "Oh, her voice was so anointed." What they mean is when she sang, the Holy Spirit enabled her to sing the song so that she touched my heart." Or if someone says my pastor is an anointed preacher, they means the Holy Spirit enables my pastor to preach in such a way that I am touched by the Spirit of God.

Think about the parable of the ten virgins. Five of them took oil for their vessels and five did not. Then they waited for the bridegroom to come. When he finally came the five with the oil could not share, the five without oil had to get their own. No one else can get the oil of the Holy Spirit for you. You must get it yourself. Just because your mother was a wonderful person who loved the Lord and knew the power of the Spirit, you can't get it from her. You have to go to the Lord to get it. We have to go for ourselves to the Lord to receive the Spirit. It doesn't just come through our family line. But you can have as much of the Lord, of the Holy Spirit, as you want. You can have more—there is always more.

Think about that story in 2 Kings with Elijah and the widow. Elijah tells the widow to go and gather as many containers as she can. Then he gives one very pertinent instruction: in verse 3, he says, "Do not get a few." So she needs to pay attention. She has to get prepared; she has to get ready to receive. Then the Lord does His part by filling all those vessels with oil. I love it that when the vessels were full, she still wanted more, and she says to her son, "Bring me another vessel." And he says to her, "There is not one more vessel." Then the oil stopped. I believe if there had been one more vessel, there would have been more oil.

So the message for you and me is to become receptive, welcome the Holy Spirit, ask for Him, prepare your heart for Him. Turn to Him and open your heart.

Oil is also a symbol for healing. We anoint someone with oil and we pray for them for healing. James 5:4 says, "Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord." Healing is one of the wonderful joys of the Holy Spirit. It's one of His ministries. He loves to heal when He is poured out. Sometimes, He heals people spontaneously without them even asking. And then sometimes, of course, we take someone to Him in prayer and He brings healing. I've seen it happen before—He loves to heal.

Reflection

Let's take a moment to think about oil and what it represents. What comes to your mind when you think of oil? Jot down some of the qualities or characteristics that stand out to you.

What Do the Scriptures Say About Oil?

Exodus 27:20, 29:7, 30:30 and Psalm 133:2

These verses talk about the use of oil in different contexts. Spend a few minutes reading them and reflect on why oil was used. What was its purpose in these scriptures?

1 Samuel 16:11-13

Here, we see an important event involving oil and David. What happened when oil was used in this passage? Discuss the significance of this moment.

Isaiah 61:1-2 and Luke 4:18

Isaiah speaks of anointing, and Jesus quotes this passage when He begins His ministry. The term "Christ" means "Anointed One" in Greek, and the Hebrew equivalent is "Messiah." Let's talk about what this anointing means and why it's so significant.

Oil as a Symbol of the Holy Spirit

If we think of oil symbolizing the Holy Spirit, what lessons can we draw from the parable in Matthew 25:1-13? How does this story speak to our readiness and the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives?

Mark 6:13

In this verse, oil is used by Jesus' disciples. What were they doing, and what was the outcome? Reflect on the power and purpose of anointing with oil.

2 Kings 4:1-7

The story of the widow and Elisha gives us another powerful image of oil. How much oil did she have initially, and what did she do to receive more? This story can inspire us to think about how we might limit or encourage the activity of the Holy Spirit in our own lives.

Reflect on these stories and share your thoughts on how oil, as a symbol, can deepen our spiritual understanding and walk with God. How can we be more open to the Holy Spirit moving in our lives?