

John, Part 46: "It is to Your Advantage that One Man Should Die"

John 11:45 ESV Many of the Jews therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what he did, believed in him, **46** but some of them went to the Pharisees and told them what Jesus had done. **47** So the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered the council and said, "What are we to do? For this man performs many signs. **48** If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation." **49** But one of them, Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, said to them, "You know nothing at all. **50** Nor do you understand that it is better for you that one man should die for the people, not that the whole nation should perish." **51** He did not say this of his own accord, but being high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus would die for the nation, **52** and not for the nation only, but also to gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad. **53** So from that day on they made plans to put him to death.

54 Jesus therefore no longer walked openly among the Jews, but went from there to the region near the wilderness, to a town called Ephraim, and there he stayed with the disciples.

55 Now the Passover of the Jews was at hand, and many went up from the country to Jerusalem before the Passover to purify themselves. **56** They were looking for Jesus and saying to one another as they stood in the temple, "What do you think? That he will not come to the feast at all?" **57** Now the chief priests and the Pharisees had given orders that if anyone knew where he was, he should let them know, so that they might arrest him.

- I. In the last two weeks, we have looked at the resurrection of Lazarus by Jesus. This miracle served as a proclamation of his own coming resurrection from the dead, and his status as Israel's messiah and the Savior of the whole world.
 - A. But we also saw that everything that Jesus did in the working of this 7th sign in John's gospel was for a specific, stated purpose...that the people who would witness the sign would believe that Jesus was who he said he was.
 1. **John 11:14b ESV** "Lazarus has died, **15** and for your sake I am glad that I was not there, *so that you may believe.*"
 2. **John 11:25b ESV** "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever *believes in me*, though he die, yet shall he live, **26** and everyone who lives and *believes in me* shall never die. *Do you believe this?*"
 3. **John 11:40b ESV** "Did I not tell you that *if you believed* you would see the glory of God?"
 4. **John 11:41b ESV** "Father, I thank you that you have heard me. **42** I knew that you always hear me, but I said this on account of the people standing around, *that they may believe* that you sent me."
 - B. After Christ prayed this, he called Lazarus out from the grave. The effect of seeing this miracle on the people who witnessed it was as Jesus intended. **John 1:45 ESV** Many of the Jews therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what he did, *believed in him*...You might think that if someone demonstrated so much authority as to raise the dead that you would be

compelled to believe everything they said, but that is not how our story continues...

- C. On the contrary, we find that some of those present, instead of responding with belief, worship, or allegiance to Christ, went straight to the Pharisees to inform them of exactly what their nemesis, Jesus, was up to now.
 - 1. Bible commentators are divided as to why some went to the Pharisees. Some say that they went to vindicate Christ's identity, but after the treatment the man born blind received from them in John 9, this would seem to me to be highly unlikely. He was excommunicated for defending Jesus!
 - 2. It is more plausible that several of them, loving the praise of men, and knowing how the Pharisees would feel about such a sign, wanted to be the first to carry the tale, and thereby garner the favor of the religious big shots.
- D. Four preachers once gathered for a time of confession and accountability. The first said, "I must admit that from time to time, I watch movies that I shouldn't watch." The next said, "Well, to be honest, sometimes I'll make my way to a casino and gamble away some money." The third reported, "When I'm alone, I'll have a few beers and smoke a few cigarettes." The fourth said, "I, for one, am unusually prone to gossip...and I can hardly wait to get out of this meeting."
 - 1. Many people love to be the first to share a story, especially if it make themselves look good at the expense of others. The people who rushed off to tell the Jews what the current score was in the feud between themselves and Jesus were trying to earn favor and make a name for themselves.
 - 2. We are told at the end of our passage today that "the chief priests and the Pharisees had given orders that if anyone knew where he was, he should let them know, so that they might arrest him." (John 11:57). It was this kind of loyalty that the Jewish leaders expected from the masses.
- II. So when they get the report, they call a special meeting of the ruling council (Sanhedrin) to once again address the Jesus problem. We are told in our passage today that they all, Pharisee and Sadducee alike, shared a three-fold concern.
 - A. First, they express concern that Jesus is performing a lot of signs.
 - 1. The word used for sign means "an event which is regarded as having some special meaning; something that points to a reality with even greater significance". Here they don't accuse him of deceiving, or otherwise taking advantage of the people. We have no indication from this scripture that they doubted what they were seeing. This led to a similar problem...
 - 2. None of them suggested that they should wrestle with what all these signs meant about Christ's true identity!
 - a) While the people openly wondered whether Jesus was the prophet Moses had said was coming into the world, or at even the long-awaited Messiah; their religious authorities could not see past how he consistently broke their rules, refusing to validate their claims of authority.
 - b) This exposes for us the deeper and more insidious problem that is going on with them. They're nervous about the signs, but that's not all...
 - B. The second thing addressed was the effectiveness and success of the ministry of Jesus, representing a diminishing of their influence. **John 11:48 ESV** "If we let

him go on like this, **everyone will believe in him...**" To them this was a bad thing, because they wanted to be the center of Jewish life.

1. No surprise here. Jesus had pointed out before that these hypocrites were obsessed with the praise, adulation and attention of people.
 - a) In Matthew 6 (the Sermon on the Mount) Jesus mentions how they loved to give financially while sounding trumpets so everyone would know that they were pulling out their wallets and purses.
 - b) He said they loved to pray loudly and publicly in the synagogues and on street corners, to be seen and admired by other people.
 - c) He said they loved to disfigure their faces when they fasted so everyone would know how miserable they were in their sacrifice for God. Jesus said that in all of these things, their self-satisfied pride was the only reward they would receive for all of their pretended godliness.
 2. Jesus continues this theme in Matthew 23, saying that they loved the place of honor at the annual feasts; and that they were thrilled when they heard others call them rabbi, teacher, father, doctor, pastor, elder, or any such religious title.
 3. **Matthew 23:12 ESV** **Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted.**
- C. But thirdly, the Jews in John 11 express concern that unless this rabble-rouser Jesus is stopped, the Romans, under whose occupying rule they lived, would come and "take away both our place and our nation." In saying this, they display for all the world to see exactly what it is that they idolize.
1. Every person is inherently a worshipper. If you are ever unsure what or who it is exactly that you are worshipping, take careful stock of your words and pay close attention to longings of your heart. Any priority that you pursue or desire that isn't born out of a heart for God above all is a potential idol.
 2. Don't be surprised when you discover this! **"Man's nature, so to speak, is a perpetual factory of idols."** -John Calvin
- D. But what do the Scribes and Pharisees mean they express the fear of losing their "place" and their "nation"?
1. Their "place" could refer to the temple, which had become something for them that God never intended. When King Solomon had built the original temple, he wanted it to be a representation of God's choice to dwell among the Jews; and from his temple, through his chosen people, He would shine a light of grace and glory to the rest of the world.
 - a) But that is not how the leaders treated it. They used it to stack more rules and regulations upon their own people, and to set up barriers to the gentile world from coming near to the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.
 - b) Because of this abandonment of God's purposes, the Temple that stood in Jesus' time was the third version!
 - (1) The original had been destroyed by the Babylonians in 587 B.C.
 - (2) The second was blasphemously desecrated by Antiochus Epiphanes 170 years before Christ's birth.

- (3) This third temple was a renovation by Herod the Great, completed in the first century, and prepared prophetically (yet unwittingly) for Jesus to occupy during his earthly ministry according to Haggai 2:9.
2. The “nation” that they so feared losing meant the semi-autonomous rule they enjoyed; in which the Romans didn’t force them to worship pagan gods, but allowed them to continue observing the traditions of the forefathers.
- E. It is interesting to note that despite their best efforts to preserve their temple and their rule, in AD 70, the Romans destroyed their temple and obliterated them as a nation, just as Jesus predicted in Matthew 24.
- III. But the meat of our passage today is found in what Caiaphas, the high priest, says in response to their concerns about Jesus’ ministry success. Caiaphas was a Sadducee, the liberal counterpart to the more conservative Pharisees. He is the one who would initially try Jesus, and find him guilty, and subsequently drag him to Pilate the Roman to get approval to carry out the death penalty against him. Listen again to what he says to the nervous Jews on the San Hedrin ruling council:
- A. **“You know nothing at all. Nor do you understand that *it is better for you that one man should die for the people, not that the whole nation should perish.*”**
 1. Caiaphas tries to re-focus this bunch of lily-livered clerics. He is convinced that they are making a mountain out of what is surely only a molehill.
 2. “If the blood of one man must be spilled to keep the Romans at bay and the people in check, so be it! If the people think he is a prophet, let’s see what happens to their enthusiasm as they watch him die, naked and beaten, nailed to a cross! If the signs, wonders, and allegiance of the riff-raff make Rome nervous, fine! Let’s make an example of him by sacrificing him to the god of Roman law and order. No big deal!”
 - B. The plan was so neat; so orderly. If Jesus is a problem, then it was up to them to eliminate the problem! They would do what had to be done. But there was one thing they understand...Caiaphas was speaking for God! **“He did not say this of his own accord, but being high priest that year *he prophesied...*”**
 1. Caiaphas thought that he was simply pointing out the quickest route to resolving the “Jesus problem”; but the scriptures tell us that God was working to glorify himself by causing his own enemy to prophetically utter his amazing plan! What God intended was proclaimed by unclean lips!
 - a) I can hear you protesting that God would never do such a thing, but let me assure you that it is not without precedent in scripture. Twice in First Samuel 10 and 19, we are told that evil, eventually demon-possessed King Saul prophesied, proving that he was not out of the controlling hand of a God who is Sovereign over the affairs of men.
 - b) Earlier, in Numbers 23-24, the wicked Moabite seer Balaam is hired by King Balak to curse the children of Israel. But try as he might to do what he was hired to do, God will only allow Balaam to bless Israel and not curse her, even predicting the coming of her Messiah!
 - C. The Bible commentator Matthew Henry once said about this verse in John 11 that, **“Words of prophecy in the mouth are no infallible evidence of a principle of grace in the heart.”** This should be a strong warning to us that the accuracy of a man’s utterance isn’t always an indicator of God’s approval.

1. Men on earth can fuss and fume, plot and plan, scheme and devise, but there is none of us who can withstand or alter the plans of God!
 - a) The most wicked pagan or atheist on earth may think he can shake his fist and spew venom at the plans of the almighty; but the Bible says in Psalms 2 that “he who sits in Heaven laughs” and “the Lord holds them in derision”.
 - b) Derision is defined as “contemptuous ridicule or mockery”.
 2. The Jewish leaders thought that they could protect their religious interests with the people, and their political interests with Rome, by making an example of Jesus. But God’s plans would not be hindered by their efforts.
- IV. **“he prophesied that *Jesus would die for the nation, and not for the nation only, but also to gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad.*”**
- A. God used a crooked stick named Caiaphas, against his stubborn will, to speak the redemptive purposes of God. He would use the brutal, unjust murder of his holy Son to do what the law, the temple and the priesthood combined could never do; to bring about the salvation of the chosen people of God as their King and their Messiah.
 1. Though they resisted him, and would soon arrest him, mock him, beat him and demand that their pagan occupiers put him to a brutal death on the cross, they would not understand that what they were conspiring to do, they were doing to the benefit of the entire world and their own undoing.
 2. Paul knew this when he wrote **1 Corinthians 2:7 ESV** *But we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glory. 8 None of the rulers of this age understood this, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.*
 - B. Caiaphas had said that it was better for one person to die **for** the nation. John says that Jesus would die **for** the people. This little word “for” means “in the place of” or “on behalf of”.
 1. Jesus would die in the place of and on behalf of the people. His death would be substitutionary. He would not only remove or forgive the sins of the people, but he would pay the penalty incurred by those sins as well.
 2. Suppose you and I got into a heated argument at your house. In my rage suppose I took a baseball bat to your windshield.
 - a) Now let’s say that, because you are a kind person and love me, you decide not to press charges and even forgive me. Though I would be grateful, only one half of the situation is resolved.
 - b) Someone still has to pay for the windshield to be replaced! My sin created a debt that cannot be ignored. Who is going to pay the bill?
 3. Many Christians spend their lives trying to pay for what sin shattered through right living or other means. They know theologically that they have been forgiven, but they still try to pay down the crushing debt of their sins. But the good news of the Bible is that Jesus died **for** you! He has not only forgiven you, but paid your debt in full. He did not cancel it, he paid it!
 - C. But the death of the Son of God was not on the behalf of the Jews alone, “but also to gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad.”

1. This meant that God's plan to have one people, comprised of both Jews and Gentiles, gathered from everywhere across the face of the earth to be his special, chosen people. They would comprise one holy church who would be his bride and body. He would no longer have just a select nation, religiously devoted to him.
 2. This speaks of a New Covenant that is completely unlike the Old one.
 - a) Originally, God created humankind to represent him and carry his authority in his creation, but humankind sinned and broke the vital link of fellowship with God by doing so.
 - b) So God found one man named Abraham and made his family into a great, chosen people (called Israel) to demonstrate his blessing and the way God makes us righteous.
 - c) As the nation grew, God gave them a series of laws that would show them how to live in order to reflect his holiness, but try as they might they would not (and could not!) keep that law.
- D. Regardless, throughout the centuries, God kept demonstrating his mercy and care of this stubborn and rebellious people, until finally they were exiled and dispersed and placed under the authority of foreign powers for all of their idolatry and spiritual adultery. And that's where Jesus comes in...
- V. When Caiaphas prophesied, he was merely giving voice to the plan that God had decreed from before the foundation of the world. Jesus' death was always destined to be the means of reconciliation for a fallen, sinful world to return to a holy and righteous God.
- A. **Acts 2:22 ESV** "Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know— **23** this Jesus, delivered up according to the **definite plan** and **foreknowledge of God**, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. **24** God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it.
1. Peter says that Jesus was delivered up by the "definite plan" and "foreknowledge" of God, but that God raised him up, having determined he would not see corruption in the grave.
 2. This is exactly what Caiaphas was prophesying (though he was unaware of it).
- B. So this jealousy of Jesus miracle power, their fear of losing their sway over the people, as well as their religion, traditions, and illusion of self-rule set in motion the greatest event in all of human history.
1. **John 11:53 ESV** So from that day on they made plans to put him to death.
 2. When we begin chapter 12, the setting will be the feast of Passover for the third time in John. This is where all of the centuries of shadowy symbolism of lambs slaughtered, and death defeated will be transformed into substance as the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world fulfills his destiny.