

John 11:49-57 “It All Comes Down to This: Kill Jesus”

JOH 11:45-53 Therefore many of the Jews who had come to visit Mary, and had seen what Jesus did, put their faith in him. 46 But some of them went to the Pharisees and told them what Jesus had done. 47 Then the chief priests and the Pharisees called a meeting of the Sanhedrin. "What are we accomplishing?" they asked. "Here is this man performing many miraculous signs. 48 If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and then the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation." 49 Then one of them, named Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, spoke up, "You know nothing at all! 50 You do not realize that it is better for you that one man die for the people than that the whole nation perish." 51 He did not say this on his own, but as high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus would die for the Jewish nation, 52 and not only for that nation but also for the scattered children of God, to bring them together and make them one. 53 So from that day on they plotted to take his life.

The last time we were together in this section of John we had witnessed the miracle of Jesus raising His friend Lazarus from the dead. And of course one might conclude that everyone who saw this amazing sign from Jesus would immediately determine and rejoice in the fact that the Son of God was most certainly in their midst.

This was apparently true of many who were there as we saw in verse 45.

JOH 11:45 Therefore many of the Jews who had come to visit Mary, and had seen what Jesus did, put their faith in him.

And yet, there were those who had no intention of believing on Jesus no matter what He did or said, as verses 46-48 demonstrates.

JOH 11:46-48 But some of them went to the Pharisees and told them what Jesus had done. 47 Then the chief priests and the Pharisees called a meeting of the Sanhedrin. "What are we accomplishing?" they asked. "Here is this man performing many miraculous signs. 48 If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and then the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation."

Most of the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem only saw Jesus as a threat, not the Messiah. And despite them admitting that Jesus did in fact

do many miraculous signs, including raising Lazarus from the dead, which their spies had personally witnessed, they were hell bent on preserving their own place of power and prestige at any cost; not believing on the One who had repeatedly told them He was the Savior sent from the Father.

But, it would appear that the entire Jewish leadership is in disarray and confusion as to what to do with this Jesus, with the exception of one man. He had a very clear vision as to what needed to be done.

JOH 11:49-50 Then one of them, named Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, spoke up, "You know nothing at all! 50 You do not realize that it is better for you that one man die for the people than that the whole nation perish."

Caiaphas was a man who never seemed to waver in his determination to make sure that both he and the rest of the Jewish leadership not only stay in power among the nation of Israel, but also stay in good standing with the Roman government who stood over them.

Caiaphas knew that if Jesus continued to grow in popularity the whole nation of Israel would side with His new and strange teachings which were supported with many miraculous signs. In other words, instead of the Sanhedrin leading the nation, one man would assume that role of King over Israel, and Caiaphas knew that Rome would never tolerate that.

He knew Rome would step in and squash any sort of uprising and rebellion. But more than that they would put an end to any sort of rule by the Jews and the entire nation of Israel would now be ruled exclusively by Rome.

And so, there is only one solution.

JOH 11:50 You do not realize that it is better for you that one man die for the people than that the whole nation perish.

Essentially what Caiaphas was saying was that the end justifies the means. Jesus had done nothing to warrant a death sentence according to the Law of Moses. And so what Caiaphas was suggesting was that in this case, since the whole nation was at risk, it was better to put the law to the side than to work within the law and lose the nation.

You can see his dilemma. And it is a legitimate consideration. We deal with this as a nation ourselves. Just go back to 9/11. When the terrorists attacked this nation it was soon discovered that they were not made up of blonde haired, blue eyed Scandinavians.

They were made up of dark skinned, dark haired Middle East men. And whether people in this country liked it or not, it was determined that the relatively small Middle East population in this country was going to come under closer scrutiny than other types of ethnic groups.

And the reasoning for this was essentially, 'it is better for a few to be inconvenienced than for the whole country to be destroyed.' President Roosevelt did this back in the 40's when an entire population of Japanese Americans were uprooted from their homes in this country and placed in camps where they were monitored by the U.S. government for the duration of the war with Japan.

It didn't make it right, but again the reasoning was that it was better for one group to be placed under house arrest than for an entire nation to potentially be destroyed. And so, on one level we can understand how Caiaphas was thinking.

The problem is that Caiaphas, along with the rest of the Sanhedrin, had totally ignored the truth. They had ignored all of the facts placed before them as it related to a man who was claiming to be the Messiah of Israel and was proving it with signs and wonders.

They had totally ignored their responsibility to be shepherds of Israel who were charged by God Himself to lead His people into the presence of their God and Savior. And so, instead of being spiritual leaders they became political mercenaries.

Caiaphas had now set in motion an official agenda of Israel to put Jesus Christ to death. As High Priest he had a great deal of clout and it was his word which would be the final word as he was in charge of the Sanhedrin.

By the way, there is no mention made at all that the High Priest or the rest of the Sanhedrin made any attempt to seek God in this matter. But of course this is consistent with the leadership of Israel at this time because they have long since divorced God from their spiritual lives.

They certainly went through the motions of being spiritual as Jesus had pointed out for them on different occasions. You'll remember

when Jesus had accused the leaders of Israel as being hypocrites when it came to religious things.

MAT 6:5 "And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full.

And so, when it came to making decisions for the nation of Israel God was not invited to be a part of the process, despite the fact that it was He who had formed and birthed the nation of Israel.

One man was going to take responsibility for the entire nation and now the plan was set in stone, if you will, as they would plot to bring this plan to fruition. But what is interesting about Caiaphas' declaration is that on a different level it was absolutely essential and part of God's plan.

JOH 11:50-52 You do not realize that it is better for you that one man die for the people than that the whole nation perish." 51 He did not say this on his own, but as high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus would die for the Jewish nation, 52 and not only for that nation but also for the scattered children of God, to bring them together and make them one.

As the apostle John records this account for us, as he is inspired by the Holy Spirit, we get an insight into Caiaphas' statement that neither he, or anyone at the time, fully understood. In fact, what the Holy Spirit has made clear to John is that Caiaphas was being used by God to prophesy about the Messiah.

Again, Caiaphas didn't have a clue, but here is one more example of how God is not limited by anyone or anything when it comes to accomplishing His plans. We may ask how an unbeliever can be used by God in such a way, but the fact remains that God not only can speak to us through unbelieving men, He can speak to us through such means as a donkey if He chooses.

It was Balaam whom God had chosen to protect Israel and who decided to disobey the Lord as he got on his donkey to go with the princes of Moab. The angel of the Lord stood in Balaam's way, but he didn't see him, though the donkey did. When the donkey stopped Balaam beat the animal. Three times the angel stood in front of Balaam who didn't have eyes to see, but the donkey did and three times the donkey stopped and got beat by Balaam.

NUM 22:28-31 Then the LORD opened the donkey's mouth, and she said to Balaam, "What have I done to you to make you beat me these three times?" 29 Balaam answered the donkey, "You have made a fool of me! If I had a sword in my hand, I would kill you right now." 30 The donkey said to Balaam, "Am I not your own donkey, which you have always ridden, to this day? Have I been in the habit of doing this to you?" "No," he said. 31 Then the LORD opened Balaam's eyes, and he saw the angel of the LORD standing in the road with his sword drawn. So he bowed low and fell facedown.

By the way, despite Balaam being chosen to speak for God, it turns out that Balaam was not a follower of God. In fact, Balaam turned out to be the one responsible for leading Israel to sin against God. Both Peter and Jesus address Balaam and neither have a good word for him.

2PE 2:15 They have left the straight way and wandered off to follow the way of Balaam son of Beor, who loved the wages of wickedness.

When the risen Christ spoke to the church at Pergamum in the book of Revelation He said this.

REV 2:14 Nevertheless, I have a few things against you: You have people there who hold to the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to entice the Israelites to sin by eating food sacrificed to idols and by committing sexual immorality.

And so, for God to use such men to declare His will and purpose is not without precedent. Even Caiaphas will go down in history as one who played a role in confirming that Jesus Christ will indeed save His people when the only thing Caiaphas had in mind was to save his own place with Rome.

You'll also note that John tells us that what Caiaphas prophesied was more than saving the nation of Israel, but also the scattered children of God, to bring them together and make them one.

What this means is that not only did Jesus come to die for His people in Israel, but He came to die for His people outside of Israel, in other words, the Gentiles who would believe. This is consistent with the statement Jesus made earlier in this gospel.

JOH 10:16 I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd.

We're told that God so loved the "world" that whoever believes in Him will not perish but have everlasting life.

Both Jew and Gentile will benefit from the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. He will tear down the dividing wall and will make both of them one as they embrace the Lord by faith.

EPH 4:4-6 There is one body and one Spirit - just as you were called to one hope when you were called - 5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism; 6 one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

There is only one church; Christ's church, and there is only one way to be a part of this forever family and that is through Christ alone who is the way and the truth and the life, no man can come to the Father but through Him.

Caiaphas rejected this and will forever have his words ring in his ears as he came so close to the Messiah and was even used by God in declaring that the Messiah must die for God's people, and yet to have refused to consider that this Jesus could save him.

How many people come that close to the Messiah today? They associate themselves with religion; they associate themselves with spiritual things but when it comes right down to it they are only like Caiaphas as they negotiate with the world and do what is expedient for their own benefit in this world, all the while as they are perceived as spiritual and godly.

JOH 11:53 So from that day on they plotted to take his life.

What is intimated here is that from that day, to the day on which Christ actually was crucified, they were consumed with this Jesus as to how they might actually make His death a reality, not realizing that God had already ordained how it would all go down.

Of course, this particular meeting of the Sanhedrin was done in secret and yet Jesus, who is also the Sovereign and mighty God, knew what they were up to which is why He takes the action He does.

JOH 11:54 Therefore Jesus no longer moved about publicly among the Jews. Instead he withdrew to a region near the desert, to a village called Ephraim, where he stayed with his disciples.

Up to this point Jesus was in Bethany where Lazarus had died and where Jesus came to raise him from the dead. But after all of these events, which led up to the Sanhedrin plotting to kill Jesus, our

Lord knew that His life was in immediate danger. Knowing that His time was not yet at hand He does the prudent thing and goes to the region near the desert, to a village called Ephraim.

Now Ephraim is about 10 miles N.NE of Jerusalem, and so Jesus and His disciples could have traveled there in a day's walk. And evidently Jesus and His disciples stayed in Ephraim for a short time as things calmed down a bit in Jerusalem.

JOH 11:55 When it was almost time for the Jewish Passover, many went up from the country to Jerusalem for their ceremonial cleansing before the Passover.

This particular Passover was the third Passover associated with the ministry of Jesus Christ. It would turn out to be the last Passover in His three year ministry.

The first Passover associated with Christ, you might remember, was where Jesus went up to Jerusalem and saw all of the merchants in the temple area and made a whip and drove them all out. This was back in the second chapter of John's gospel. And this is where Jesus made that famous statement which would come back to be used against Him.

JOH 2:19 "Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days."

The second time Jesus went to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover is found in the sixth chapter of John which is in the context of Jesus feeding the multitude. It was at this time in which the Jews wanted to make Jesus their king.

And now, a year later, Jesus is about to be put on a cross with the inscription to be placed there by Pilate, King of the Jews. This will be the last Passover associated with Jesus Christ. And it was this Passover where we are told that many went up from the country to Jerusalem for their ceremonial cleansing before the Passover.

According to the Mosaic Law no one who was defiled at the time of this feast could partake of the Passover at its regularly appointed time. Interestingly enough a provision was made in the law that if you were defiled, or unclean, you had time after the regular Passover to celebrate the Passover one month later.

NUM 9:10-11 "Tell the Israelites: 'When any of you or your descendants are unclean because of a dead body or are away on a journey, they may still celebrate the LORD'S Passover. 11 They

are to celebrate it on the fourteenth day of the second month at twilight. They are to eat the lamb, together with unleavened bread and bitter herbs.

But no respecting Jew would want to observe one of the most celebrated days of the year a month after the Passover. It would be like you or I celebrating Christmas on January 25. It's simply not the same.

And so, for those Jews who wanted to make sure they were ceremonially clean before the Passover they went to Jerusalem a week earlier to go through the regulations of the law to make sure they were viewed as holy or pure. They didn't want to get into Jerusalem the day before the Passover and find out that the lines to get into the temple were like the lines you and I face at Disney World.

And so, there are a lot of people in Jerusalem during this week before the Passover, which we'll find out later is important as Jesus would make His entry into Jerusalem four days before the Passover, as He is hailed as King and is showered with Palm branches as He rides in on a donkey. But that's for a later time.

JOH 11:56 They kept looking for Jesus, and as they stood in the temple area they asked one another, "What do you think? Isn't he coming to the Feast at all?"

Most of the Jews in Israel, and particularly the Jews in Jerusalem, were following the ministry of Jesus Christ, whether they believed He was the Messiah or not. For the last three years Jesus has been doing some amazing things and teaching things which the Jews knew were not like the teachings of the Pharisees.

Add to this that Jesus had confronted the leaders of Israel and rebuked them for not being the spiritual leaders they were called by God to be, and even calling them white washed tombs full of dead men's bones. Christ's ministry was the soap opera of the Middle East in those days.

Every Jew in the surrounding area looked with anticipation for another confrontation between Jesus and the Jewish leaders. It was like going to the Daytona 500. Everyone knew there was going to be a crash and they wanted front row seats.

But they also knew that the hatred of the Jewish leaders toward Jesus had reached a fevered pitch and so some Jews wondered if Jesus would show up at all. They were looking for Him but He was

nowhere to be found and so they questioned whether He would come to the Feast this particular year.

By the way, they knew that if Jesus had opted out of the Passover that He would have been viewed as someone less than serious about doing God's will. As a Jew He didn't have that option.

Passover was mandatory for every Jew. In fact, the first Passover was so mandatory that if a Jew had decided to opt out of it he would have been killed by the angel of death who came that night all throughout Egypt and killed the first born of every house where the blood of the lamb was not sprinkled.

No one in that day even thought of not obeying the Lord regarding the Passover. This ordinance was meant to be observed by every Jew since that time of coming out of Egypt.

And so, in a sense, as the Jews in our text question whether or not Jesus was going to come to the Passover that year, they were really questioning His very claim to be Messiah, the One sent from the Father. Would He put his safety ahead of His duty and love to obey His heavenly Father?

The irony in this is that the chief priests and the Pharisees seemed to think that Jesus would in fact show up. They placed more faith in His faithfulness to the Law of Moses than they would have. And so, they put out an order.

JOH 11:57 But the chief priests and Pharisees had given orders that if anyone found out where Jesus was, he should report it so that they might arrest him.

This must have been a dilemma for many of the Jews. On the one hand many of them were very sympathetic to Jesus, and yet they feared the Jewish leaders. We saw this earlier when Jesus had healed the blind man.

The parents of the blind man were finally called before the Jewish leaders to testify as to whether or not this man was their son and that he was really born blind. They truthfully said that he was their son and that he was blind from birth. But when it came to the question of who healed their son they weren't willing to give an answer.

JOH 9:21-23 But how he can see now, or who opened his eyes, we don't know. Ask him. He is of age; he will speak for himself." 22 His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jews, for

already the Jews had decided that anyone who acknowledged that Jesus was the Christ would be put out of the synagogue. 23 That was why his parents said, "He is of age; ask him."

To be put out of the Synagogue was the equivalent of being separated from the nation of Israel and all the protections that came with it. Very few Jews would be willing to give that up for another person.

And the leaders of Israel knew this. And so when they put forth the command to turn Jesus in it must have put fear into the hearts of many because many of them had nothing against Jesus. And yet, if it came down to turning in Jesus or being thrown out of the Synagogue, most of them would have opted for the former.

I wonder how many people today would do the same? I wonder how many people who claim to be Christian would be willing to stand up for Christ despite the fear of the world's accusations against us.

There are times in our lives when we need to take a stand for Christ and not worry about what other people think; be it on the job or leisure time among other people or wherever. We need to be ready and willing to give to people the hope that is within us, yet with gentleness and love, knowing that like these Jewish leaders, Satan would love to shut us up to the truth.

In fact, what is fascinating about this command from the Pharisees and chief priests, to arrest Jesus, is that it is really leading up to the culmination of what was prophesied so many years before to Adam and Eve.

It is here where Satan puts his plan into action to destroy the seed of the woman. Remember that?

GEN 3:15 And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel."

Satan is ready to strike the seed of the woman, the One promised in Scripture to be born of a virgin; to be born in Bethlehem; to live a life of sinless perfection; to grow to a man and take the penalty of sin we deserve to pay before God and pay it Himself on our behalf.

What we are witnessing here in our text is the fulfillment of that promise given to Adam and Eve who rebelled against God and as a result of Adam's sin we have all been born into sin and deserve to

die for our sin. God's plan was always to rescue His people, but it would be a rescue according to His plan, and now His plan is about to come to fruition.

But what Satan thinks as a crushing of the seed will only result in a striking of the heel of the seed of the woman according to Genesis 3:15. In other words, it will not be fatal, unlike the fatal blow Jesus will mete out to Satan, as our Lord overcomes the grave and death and gives the victory of eternal life to all who would believe on the Lord Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sin and resurrection life.

This was the picture Jesus graphically painted for us when He raised Lazarus from the dead as He told Martha that He is the resurrection and the life. And just as Martha was told that Lazarus' sickness would not lead to death, though Lazarus did in fact die, so too, though Jesus would be struck down it would not be a crushing blow but a striking of the heel as He overcame the grave.

This is the risen Christ we trust and the One in whom we must place our faith if we would not taste death; eternal separation from our God. This is the message of hope during this Christmas season, and as we approach the New Year.

It's a life we must live and share with the world. May we be found faithful in the power of the Spirit to the glory of God.