

April 12, 2015  
Sunday Morning Service  
Series: John  
Community Baptist Church  
643 S. Suber Road  
Greer, SC 29650  
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*To Ponder . . .*

Questions to ponder as you prepare to hear from John 11:45-57.

1. Why did some people report the resurrection of Lazarus to the Pharisees?
2. How or why would God use an evil man to prophecy the grand event of the Christ dying for sinners?
3. Think about the irony of the Jews going to Jerusalem to purify themselves for Passover where they would cry out for the death of God the Son.
4. Who are the children of God who are scattered abroad (v.52)?

**RELIGIOUS LEADERS WERE DOING THE WORK OF  
THEIR FATHER THE DEVIL  
John 11:45-57**

In our previous study, we learned that Jesus was staying in Galilee because the Jewish leaders were seeking to kill Him (John 7:1). The time would have been just before the Feast of Tabernacles. That would have been about five or six months before the gathering of the council mentioned in our text. Then shortly after the feast began, Jesus went up and taught at the temple. This would have been around the last days of our September and the first few days of October. As He taught, Jesus asked the Jews, the scribes, and the Pharisees why they sought to kill Him (John 7:19). The crowd responded that no one was trying to kill Him, and, therefore, He must

have a demon (John 7:20). And yet there were people in that very crowd who asked, “Is not this the man whom they seek to kill?” (7:25).

Again a few days later Jesus said, “You seek to kill Me because My word finds no place in you” (8:37). In the same discussion, Jesus accused the people, “You seek to kill Me, a man who has told you the truth that I heard from God” (8:40). And while Jesus was uncovering the truth about the people, the Pharisees and chief priests had sent officers to arrest Jesus—which they failed to do (7:45).

It was in that setting that Jesus accused the Jews of doing the work of their father. They claimed that their spiritual father was Abraham. But Jesus rebuked them and pointed out that their spiritual father was actually Satan himself (8:44). We would probably be a bit offended if a backwoods, country preacher (like they considered Jesus to be) said that kind of thing to us. Offended? Yes. But what if He was right? Consider how specific Jesus was in describing the kind of work their father the devil does, and, therefore, the kind of work they were doing:

*“You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father’s desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and has nothing to do with the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies”*  
(John 8:44).

Jesus spoke these words to people who were proud to be part of God’s chosen nation. These were the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Some of them could trace their lineage back to Moses and Aaron or King David or maybe even some of the faithful prophets of God like Jeremiah, Isaiah or Daniel. These people had DNA that flowed from the very people God chose to be part of His one unique, personal nation above all the people of the world.

The saddest part of this picture is that Jesus was not in error. He was exactly right. The very descendants of God’s chosen nation really were planning to kill the Messiah God sent to redeem them from sin. When Jesus pulled back the curtain and revealed their dastardly plans, they lied about it. They responded just like their real spiritual father Satan.

Now our narrative here in John 11:45 picks up somewhere near the first days of April. It was fairly close to where we are on the Gregorian calendar right now. It was just a few days before Passover. A few days earlier Jesus had commanded Lazarus to stop being dead and the dead man came out of the tomb. Some folks were amazed and believed various things about Jesus. Other folks were amazed and went and told the religious leaders who had vowed that they were not interested in killing Jesus. But again, in truth, they were doing the work of their lying, killing father Satan. So we are not surprised to find them quickly calling a council to decide how to do what they swore they weren't doing.

What a picture of the wicked human nature that has fallen into sin and under the power of Satan. Even in our day, many religious leaders and teachers are so brazen that they look inquiring people in the eye and say, "Jesus was a wonderful man, a wonderful teacher, and a person who was really in touch with God." And then in council with other false teachers they reaffirm that Jesus was not who He claimed to be. They are convinced that He could not have been God the Son co-equal with God the Father. But if Jesus wasn't who He said He was, He could not have been a good man, a good teacher or in touch with God. Someone is lying. And it's not Jesus.

Likewise, every person who refuses to accept Jesus as God the Son, the only Savior from sin, is guilty of the same crime as those real people who rejected Jesus in His lifetime. Let's consider how grievous an offense that is.

### **God the Son Caused Mixed Reactions (vv.45-48).**

The opening words of our text are some of those very encouraging words. We read that *Many of the Jews therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what he did, believed in him (v.45)*. These were people who had come to be sympathetic with Mary, or more precisely as verse nineteen put it, *many had come to console Mary and Martha (v.19)*. Probably many of these people had come out of Jerusalem which was only a couple miles to the west. If so, those people in particular would have been under much influence of the most powerful religious leaders in Israel. They would have worshiped at the temple and been taught by the best teachers

available—which means that they would have been familiar with the prophecies in the Old Testament that promised the Seed of the Woman, the Prophet like Moses, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the King in David's line, the Christ, the Messiah. The point is, many of these people, who came out to console Mary and Martha because of the death of their brother Lazarus, would have been looking for the Christ and hoping for His soon appearing.

In light of the foregoing conclusion, we are not surprised to read that many of the well-wishers believed certain truths about Jesus in response to Him raising Lazarus from the grave. But as in other reports in the Gospel accounts about the people's "belief," we must understand that there was belief on various levels. In fact, there are at least 117 statements in the writings of Matthew through John that indicate someone believed something or should believe something. Often people believed something in response to one of Jesus' amazing miracles of healing or feeding or storm-stopping. Often there were various expressions of faith in response to His authoritative teaching.

But what did the people believe and to what extent did they believe? Sometimes the people believed that Jesus of Nazareth was a unique prophet sent by God. But that does not make Him their Savior from sin. Sometimes they believed that Jesus was the promised Messiah. But because their concept of Messiah was only an earthly king who would rule a typical kingdom, Jesus was not their Savior.

This wide range of "belief" about Jesus is not unusual still. Many believe that Jesus was a real historical figure. Many people believe that Jesus was a miracle worker who enjoyed a special relationship with God. Many of our peers believe that Jesus was a good man, a good teacher, and a good example to follow. But none of those beliefs depends wholly on Jesus of Nazareth to atone for my personal offense against God.

At the same time, we like to think that in light of this statement that many believed that there were some people who believed unto salvation. In those cases, God was working in their circumstances to change their hearts. God was drawing them to Jesus for salvation. They believed that He was the promised Seed of the woman who God promised would defeat Satan and offer salvation from sin's penalty

and power. Therefore, we would conclude that some of the people believed that Jesus was who He said He was—God in the flesh whose sacrifice is the basis for wiping away their guilt of sin against God. It is easy for us to love people like that. We believe Jesus and love Him. Therefore, we love other people who believe Jesus and love Him. But what about people who don't love Jesus? How do we feel toward them?

While some of the people believed Jesus, there were some of the Jews who contributed to the killing of God the Son (vv.46-48). They were the ones who went and reported what Jesus had done. Some believed, *but some of them went to the Pharisees and told them what Jesus had done (v.46)*. Here is a picture of real life and the breadth of associations we often experience. The overall picture reveals several friends of Mary. That statement causes us to stop and ask if the people were friends of contemplative Mary and not Martha who was less friendly and more about being productive?

At any rate, back to the point at hand. Some of the friends believed Jesus because He raised Lazarus from the dead. In that report of belief, we have already acknowledged various levels of belief. In contrast to them, some of the friends immediately ratted to the religious leaders. We all should have associations that broad. We should know some folks who are religious and believe things about Jesus. We should associate with other people who are born again because they trust Jesus for salvation. That is a no-brainer. At the same time, we ought to have some association with people who reject Jesus and betray Him.

This is the case because of the natural division that comes through Jesus. The works and words of Jesus always did and always will cause divisions among people. Some will believe stuff, some will be redeemed, some will reject. We should associate to some extent with all of them. Of course, we could argue that Mary's friends who went to the authorities were not rejecting Jesus. We could choose to believe that they were trying to convince them that Jesus' raising of Lazarus proved He is Messiah. However, the overall tone of the passage indicates these people were sympathetic with the religious hypocrites.

The leaders to whom the friends reported were deeply concerned about future opportunity to lead. That Jesus was doing

God-kind of work was obvious to them. *So the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered the Council and said, "What are we to do? For this man performs many signs" (v.47)*.

The people mentioned in this statement made up the Sanhedrin, the ruling religious body for the Israelites. It was comprised of seventy members. The majority of the members were priests taken from the Chief Priest's family who were virtually all of the Sadducee persuasion. The very influential minority party was the scribes (teachers) who were of the Pharisee persuasion. The ruling body also included a small number of elders who were important, successful men of mixed theological positions. While the Sanhedrin numbered seventy, there were actually seventy-one who were part of the group. The seventy-first member, who was necessary to cast the deciding vote in case of a tie, was the Chief Priest who in this case was Caiaphas.

This gathering of the most important religious minds and authority was in a dilemma. They were a powerful group of men. The Roman authorities allowed them to render decisions that impacted all Jews. Rome gave them great authority up to the point of exacting capital punishment. They could determine that a criminal was worthy of execution, but they could not carry out the sentence.

Now before them was the case of this man from the hills of Galilee who had been doing amazing miracles for about the past three years. That He consistently amazed people because of His miracles was not up for debate. How or by what power He did the miracles was debated by these leaders. Some of them had personally accused Jesus of working with Satan's power. But would Satan raise Lazarus from the dead after Jesus had just prayed that God would glorify Himself in the miracle? The facts were very clear that Jesus was doing the work that God the Father had sent Him to do—just like He had been teaching for three years.

The council members really were not against Jesus doing wonderful deeds that benefitted the sick and needy. Something else was the issue. That Jesus was stealing their thunder was also obvious to them. They worried, *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 (v.48)*. They feared that a popular uprising would compel Jesus to be declared as King of Israel. If that happened,

the powers of Rome would descend on semi-autonomous Israel and they would lose all their liberty to worship God. That is probably true.

However, these council members were not leading the people in worshipping God anyway. If the Romans took away the temple ceremonies, God would not be affected. All glory and honor that these members feared losing was their own. It was their supposed position of influence and authority over the people that they feared losing. Jesus from the hills of Galilee was really messing up their party, and it was about to cost them money, power, and prestige.

### **Satan Inspired a Solution (vv.49-53).**

An evil priest had a brilliant idea. The man named Caiaphas was obviously superior to the other leaders in his humble opinion. *But one of them, Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, said to them, "You know nothing at all" (v.49).* Caiaphas was an evil man, but he was also a religious man. That has been a common mix throughout human history. God intended for the high priest to be born in the tribe of Levi in the family line of Aaron. None of that was true of this man. Also, God's plan was for the high priest to serve for life, which also was not the case for Caiaphas. For many years the office of high priest was a political appointment. The Roman prefect Valerius Gratus had appointed Caiaphas to the position in AD 18. His father-in-law Annas had held the job in the years AD 6-15. Caiaphas continued to occupy this office after the death of Christ (AD 30) until AD 36 when Rome threw both him and Pilate out of office.

This Caiaphas arrogantly accused the other council members of being dull. It was like saying, "You don't know what you are talking about." Instead of whining about Jesus' popularity, Caiaphas challenged them to do something about it.

He boldly recommended the death of God the Son. *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 (v.50).* This is a prime example of the brilliance of human wisdom. The chief religious leader of the people proved that he was a powerful leader, but a leader with no fear of God at all. He was trying to convince the other

members that the best thing for "you," the leaders, the council members is that one man would die. Of course that man was Jesus.

Here was the choice for the members. They could let Jesus keep doing His work and, before too many days, the people would declare Him king. When that came to pass, the Romans would come charging in and take away the temple, take away their jobs, and the whole nation would suffer. Or, a second response would be for them to kill the problem named Jesus and the people would forget about the potential king, everything would quiet down, and the rulers could get back to their easy lifestyle. That truly is the wise path to take according to human wisdom.

But what about God? No one seemed to wonder if God had a plan or a purpose. Who was appealing to the authority of Scripture? What is really amazing here is that in his evil recommendation, the evil leader actually touched on God's plan. One man—Jesus— would indeed die for the people. And scope of "the people" was far broader than they could imagine.

The sad reality is that this is the pattern for the visible church today. Religious leaders look to success on Wall Street, Broadway, and Hollywood and then try to shape the church in a similar fashion. But what if God is not interested in the success of the secular? What if God gets glory through what human wisdom considers to be failure? Is it possible that leaders of churches today are no more spiritual, no more aware of the Bible's authority than evil Caiaphas was?

The brilliant idea the evil priest hatched was actually God's plan for eternity. Here is an amazing story of how God revealed truth through an evil man. *He did not say this of his own accord, but being high priest that year 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 (vv.51-52).* God used the high priest as a prophet. The man had no intention of speaking for God, or even speaking about God's plan. But God had already determined the plan. Therefore, when the priest, who was supposed to represent God to the people, spoke, even though he did not intend it, he declared God's will.

The evil priest promised the greatest event in human history. Jesus would die for the nation. This is redemptive sacrificial

language. The people who made up the nation of God, Israel, needed a Savior who would provide the only acceptable sacrifice for sins. According to God's eternal plan, God the Son would provide that sacrifice through His death. All the people need to do is trust God, believe what He says He did, and ask God to apply the payment to cover their own individual sins. Jesus would die for all the children of God. Jesus paid the price required to redeem sinners from the power and penalty of sin. All the sinful person needs to do is acknowledge his or her offense against God and by faith receive the payment Christ offers to cover their sins.

And so God allowed the evil men to be evil. *So from that day on they made plans to put him to death (v.53)*. Here is a good principle for us to remember. God often allows us to do whatever we choose to do. But God never allows us to choose the consequences of what we do. Those conclusions are His choice. Ironically, that principle was born out in the history of the people in our text. Caiaphas recommended they kill Jesus in order not to lose the nation or their position. But within forty years, they lost the nation and their position anyway. And, because they killed Jesus, multiplied millions have gained eternal life. So guess who is in control of all these events?

### **God the Son Was in Control (vv.54-57).**

God our Creator and Sustainer left the sinners to their devices. Jesus walked away from the people who rejected Him. *Jesus therefore no longer walked openly among the Jews (v.54a)*. How does this fit with the shepherd going to find the one lost sheep? Jesus knows who the sheep are and who the goats are. He knows where the sheep are and goes to get them. The goats are left out. You and I do not decide how long Jesus deals with us. That is why we should respond quickly while God is convicting us.

Being in control of the situation, Jesus simply did the Father's work in a different place. He left the Jews in Jerusalem, *but went from there to the region near the wilderness, to a town called Ephraim, and there he stayed with the disciples (v.54b)*. How many people in that town were privileged to hear the good news to repent for the

Kingdom of heaven is at hand? As Jesus stayed with the disciples, they learned even more about Him.

The timing was critical. The Passover was at hand (vv.55-57). In reference to Passover, purification was a big deal. *Now the Passover of the Jews was at hand, and many went up from the country to Jerusalem before the Passover to purify themselves (v.55)*. It was necessary for out-of-towners to arrive early in order to be ceremonially purified before they observed Passover. How odd that they would be concerned about purity and in a few days cry out for Pilate to execute God the Son. It is a reminder that human nature is very fickle and undependable.

At the feast, it became obvious early on that much interest was focused on Jesus of Nazareth. Curious people were hoping to see Him. *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?" (v.56)*. Religious rulers hoped to find Jesus so they could kill Him. *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 (v.57)*.

Here is proof again that even though God is in control, He often allows His creatures to exercise their free will. But God determines the consequences of the choices His creatures make. You can reject Jesus Christ if you want to, or you can believe Him. In the process, don't forget who is in control.