

The Passover Plot

That You May Believe

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Heavenly Father, we thank you very much for your word, without it we would be lost. Father, we thank you that we can come and read it in languages that we understand and we can hear your servant preach it to us. Father, we pray that your Spirit would make it very near to us, we pray that we would be diligent and prayerful in hearing your word, we pray that we would receive it with faith and love, that we would lay it up in our hearts and practice it in our lives and, Father, we pray that you would send your Spirit to convince and convert sinners to build us up in holiness and comfort through saving faith. And we ask all this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Please turn with me in your Bibles to John 11 which can be found on page 898 in the black pew Bibles in front of you, to John 11, page 898. We will be reading from verse 45 to the end of the chapter, section immediately following Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead. John 11 from verse 45.

45 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.

Well, keep your Bibles open at that passage we read. We're going to be looking at a larger passage here in John 11. We humans are always intrigued by the disappearance or death of some public figure, especially if that disappearance or death has involved secret meetings, political corruption or covert operations by unspecified government agencies. Who killed JFK, for example. Have governments simply buried the truth about UFO's. One suspects that we know all there is to know about these events but conspiracy theories abound. In fact, conspiracy theories become the stuff of humor. "It's not that I'm paranoid, they really are out to get me," you've heard that. To conspire means to join in a secret agreement to do an unlawful or wrongful act or use such means to accomplish a lawful end. According to the political scientist, Michael Barkin, conspiracy theories once limited to a kind of fringe audience have now become commonplace in the mass media, and he argues that this has contributed to a conspiracism emerging as a cultural phenomenon, especially in the United States in the late 20th and early 21st centuries. In fact, he even goes on to say, speak about a possible replacement of democracy by conspiracy as the dominant paradigm of political discussion and action in the public mind. Back in 1936, American commentator, H. L. Mencken, wrote, quote, "The central belief of every moron is that he is the victim of a mysterious conspiracy against his common rights and true deserts. He ascribes all his failure to get on in the world, all of his congenital incapacity and damned foolishness to the machinations of werewolves assembled in Wall Street or some other such den of infamy."

So, of course, plots, counterplots and conspiracies are in the air and they are the stuff of Hollywood movies but we know that some plots and conspiracies are all too real. There really was a gunpowder plot to blow up the British Parliament in the 17th century by a man called Guy Fawkes, and there really were conspirators who were plotting to attack significant public buildings in the eastern United States on September 11, 2001. Whatever we think about conspiracy and intrigue among terrorist groups and the machinations of political interest deep within the ruling elites, there is however no plot that has ever been as successful or has had such far-reaching effects than the plot to kill Jesus and John is introducing us to that plot here. But he will do more, he will take us deeper in and further on. He will show us the plot behind the plot, and I'm using the word "plot" in two different ways. I'm using the word of the sinister plotting of evil people to achieve an evil end, and I'm talking about the other kind of plot which is the kind of dramatic plot scripted in this case by the Trinity before the world began, for we are going to see in this little section and now in the passages that follow it because this is the preamble to what is to come, we're going to see God, the three persons, in their one presence becoming all the more in the foreground of the story in the chapters that follow.

Two things are happening here in parallel. On the one hand, we see the enemies of Jesus freely choosing and conspiring to have him killed. On the other hand, we have the purpose of God in sending him, his own stated purpose in coming into the world being

furthered to its proper conclusion in spite of and even through the machinations of men. The turning point of the book, actually, is in chapter 13 and verse 1, and this passage hints at these two levels of drama, the divine and the human, that are going on. I'll read it to you. It was "before the Feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end." Here the events of Jesus' betrayal and death are set in their temporal and eternal context.

The word "Passover" works at various levels to remind us of the contemporary setting of the plot by the authorities, and the mighty act of God in Israel's past in the sacrifice of the Passover lamb that foreshadowed the even greater sacrifice that Jesus is going to accomplish here. That reference to the Passover, which is first made here in the passage we read today, that reference to the Passover is more than a passing note of some historical interest, it is actually crucial to our understanding of the drama as it will unfold from this point on in the gospel of John.

So with that all in mind, if you can keep all that in mind for a moment, we're going to look tonight at the context of the plot, the pretext of the plot, and the subtext of the plot. Let's look, first of all, at the context of the plot and famously the context of the plot in this chapter is this miracle of the raising of Lazarus. John in his brief summary of his book, which you'll find in chapter 20, verses 30 and 31, refers to the signs that Jesus performed. "Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name." And the gospel of John can very easily be seen to fall into two parts, one in which the focus is on who Jesus is, the person of Jesus; and in the other part, what did Jesus come into the world to do, that is, the work of Jesus. And part 1 has been focused on Jesus' person beginning with that very bold prologue, you might remember, "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God, and through him all things were made." Very bold introduction to Jesus and he goes on to say, "We've seen his glory, the glory of the only one, the only Son from the Father full of grace and truth." That's in chapter 1 and that profile is rounded out by a reference to the Passover as John the Baptist twice in that first chapter of John's gospel identifies Jesus as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

So there's, if you like, there's the proposition, Jesus is eternal, he has always been with God, Jesus is God, Jesus is God with skin on, the Word became flesh, Jesus is the Lamb of God who will take away the sin of the world. That's the proposition and then from chapter 2 we have that proposition confirmed by a series of confirming signs; that's the word that John uses. We might use a different word, we might have used the word that's used, for example, in the other gospels, a miracle or a mighty work. John chooses this word, semeion or sign. It's a symbolic thing. It was a real event but it pointed to something far greater, far more real, far more life-changing, and we see these signs unfold.

The very first sign was the turning of water into wine to the amazement of the guests at a wedding, and the summary of that sign is in chapter 2, verse 11, "This, the first of his signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and manifested his glory. And his disciples believed in him." That was the first sign. Now this last sign here in chapter 11, we have a similar reference to this in chapter 11 and verse 4 when he's talking about the death of Lazarus or he's talking about the illness of Lazarus, he says this, "This illness does not lead to death," in other words, it's not going to end with death. "It is for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it." And then after he's performed the miracle in verse 40, Jesus said to Martha, "Did I not tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God?"

So the signs are demonstrations of the glory of God in Jesus the Messiah, in Jesus the Christ, and the raising of Lazarus demonstrates Jesus' power over death itself and foreshadows his own resurrection from the dead. Now every one of these signs demonstrates that Jesus has creative and restorative power equal to God himself; that's why he can say that the Son of God is glorified. God does not give his glory to anybody else. God is glorified and the Son is glorified. It becomes clear that what God can do, Jesus can do. The power that God has, Jesus has and that is demonstrated in these signs that Jesus performs.

Well, the story of the raising of Lazarus moves very quickly. Jesus comes into town. He meets first Martha, then he meets Mary in the course of it there, meetings. He makes this astounding statement, "I am the resurrection and the life." He comes straight to the grave. The people are there, the professional mourners are crying their eyes out. Others are there because they know this family which is a well-known family. There are some of the elite from Jerusalem just two miles away who've come to comfort the mourners. There are many many people there. This is a very public event. There are crowds of people forming and Jesus comes to the tomb and you will know that as he arrives at the tomb in verse 33, he is deeply moved. Actually the word is used of a horse that's snorting in anger as it's pounding its foot ready to move against an enemy. Jesus comes to that grave and he is angry, he is furious, he is indignant at the reality of what sin has done in the world, introducing death into the world. He looks around him and he sees everyone weeping and Mary weeping and Martha weeping, and he is troubled, it says, and then he weeps. He weeps with them. He weeps in his humanity because in his humanity he feels with these people. He is sensitive to what they are feeling. He shares with them the grief of a loved one who has died and is buried.

He knows what he's going to do, of course, but that doesn't take away the grieving that he has, and for all time we go back to this verse as the Apostle Paul does in 1 Thessalonians and he says to believers, "It's okay to weep. It's okay to grieve even though you know what God is going to do in the future, even though you know God is going to raise us all from the grave, even though you know there will be a reunion one day" It's okay to grieve. Jesus wept knowing that he was going to raise Lazarus from the dead. It's okay for you to weep at the graveside.

Now the story picks up pace. Jesus, deeply moved again, comes to the tomb. He bears down upon the tomb, that's the picture, he is bearing down, he's a man on a mission, he has a purpose. His face is intent, he is intent. And the grave was a cave and a stone lay against it and everything starts to move quickly. His command is gruff, "Take away this stone," he says. "Enough with weeping. Now is the time for action." Martha is horrified that he should interfere, "Lord, by this time there will be an odor." That's an understatement. By this time he's rotten, he's decomposing, there will be a smell. "This is a hot country, Jesus." There's no refrigeration. He's been dead for four days. She's horrified and Jesus pauses for a moment in his march towards the tomb, he pauses to gently remind her, verse 40, "Did I not tell you that if you believed, if you believed, you would see the glory of God?"

And people do what Jesus tells them to do. Whether they like him or believe in him or not, they do what he tells them to do. They took away the stone and Jesus lifts up his eyes to his Father and he prays. He prays not for his sake but for your sake and for my sake so that we might overhear the relationship that's going on. One of the key things in John's gospel is this intercommunication between Jesus and his Father, the Son of God and his Father. And he says, "Father, I thank you that you've heard me. I know that you always hear me but I said this on account of these people standing around listening in, so that they would know and come to believe that you sent me."

And having said his prayer, he cries out with a loud voice, John's going to tell us that he will do that again, he will cry out in a loud voice four times on the cross. So there's a direct link between what he is doing here and what's going to happen on the cross. What he's doing here at this graveyard is going to have a direct effect on his destiny. They're going to use this in evidence against him. The raising of Lazarus, giving life to this man, is going to lead to the taking of Jesus' life on the cross. This is how much it's going to cost him to come there and comfort Martha, Mary, and raise Lazarus, their brother, from the dead.

The using of a loud voice is another reason, it's distinguishing Jesus from the witch doctors, not that they had witch doctors then but the people who were into magic or into spiritualism. There's no sense of Jesus muttering an incantation or a spell. What he says is very public, very open, very clearly heard by everybody all around, and what he has to say is to issue a command. He does it clearly. He does it authoritatively. He does it in an uncluttered way. Let me read you precisely what it says in the Greek that Jesus says at this point. "Lazarus, here, outside." Seriously just those three words. "Lazarus, here, outside." There is raw authority. He will take no prisoners. His words express the power of God by which the dead are brought to life. He has said earlier on the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and live.

He identifies who he's talking to, Lazarus. Why does he do that? Because if he said to the dead, "Here, outside," all of them would have risen. Every dead person ever would have risen. That's what's going to happen one day when Jesus returns again in power and great glory. He's going to say to the dead, "Here, outside," and they will rise, and he gives us a foretaste of that here as he calls Lazarus from the dead.

And the command did the trick. Out comes the dead man shuffling along, bound in his robes. The first thing Jesus says is, "Take the robes off him. He can't move. Untie him." And that's really the end of Lazarus. There are no interviews with Lazarus. You would have thought that CNN or Fox News would have been there to interview him and ask him how he felt, "What was it like to be alive when you've been dead for four days?" All the human interest questions that come into our mind, none of them are even addressed in the drama. All we have here is an action, an action that is so publicly performed, that everybody knows about it. It's becoming the news, the thing that's being talked about all over the capital city two miles away because key people are here to talk about it.

And they've heard Jesus' amazing claim to those women earlier, "I am the resurrection and the life." There are three "therefores" in verse 45, verse 53, verse 54, which link directly the resurrection of Lazarus with the coming death of Jesus. Life for Lazarus would mean death for Jesus, and what was true literally and physically there, is true actually in many ways for all of us. Spiritual life, eternal life, for you and for me means the death of Jesus. That's the reality and the great paradox is that his greatest triumph over death makes it clear that this victory will only be accomplished through his own suffering and death.

So there you have the context of the plot, but then secondly we have the pretext of the plot because the raising of Lazarus was both the last sign and the last straw as far as the authorities were concerned. Performed as it was in full public view, involving a well-known family that apparently had connections, happening as it did only two miles away from the capital city, it had a maximum impact. Look at verse 45, "Many of the Jews therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what he did, believed in him, but some of them went to the Pharisees and told them what Jesus had done." The events that follow show that no amount of evidence will convince those whose minds are already made up.

So the chief priests were told, verse 47, and the Pharisees gathered the council, and this is an amazing feature, they gathered the Sanhedrin together. The chief priests, the Sadducees and the Pharisees, these were people who were poles apart morally, spiritually, poles apart and yet here they are united. Winston Churchill once said that if Hitler invaded hell, he would have a good word to say about the devil in the House of Commons. In other words, he would work with anyone. He actually did, he worked with Stalin. Anyone, no matter who they were, how much he hated them, in order to overthrow the dictator Hitler, and we have that happening here. Here are the Pharisees, orthodox, Bible-believing, conservative, moral, generous, kind, apolitical, and here are the Sadducees who are everything opposite from that, highly politicized, very secularized, unorthodox, liberal in their views of morality and so on, and here they are combining together, joining together, collaborating together in order to get rid of Jesus.

What was their big concern? Well, the big concern was civil disorder. Apparently they were afraid that Jesus' teaching would lead to civil disorder. That would rock the boat with Rome. That would bring an end to their privileges and their place. You see the preoccupation they have with verse 48, their place and their nation, that is, the temple and

all associated with that, their jobs, for example, and the nation. That was what was on their mind. They hated Jesus not for his religious views primarily but only because his religious views exposed their hypocrisies and his religious views threatened their position.

They said to each other, "What are we going to do for this man performs many signs," verse 47. Now do you see their unintentional admission of Jesus' power? There's no attempt to deny the undeniable; the miracles of Jesus were a matter of public record. People saw them publicly. Crowds were there, about 10,000 people were there when he fed 5,000 men, woman and children besides. Wherever he went, he was crowded with people. They saw what he did. They heard what he said. Jesus was a public figure. Nothing was done in a corner. Nothing was done behind closed doors. Everything was done very much in the public eye including this last great miracle.

What are they afraid of? Look at verse 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." They were afraid of a wholesale popular movement that may lead to an uprising that would bring down the full weight of the Roman power upon their heads. The reference, as I said, to our place is to the temple which was the most concrete example of Jewish identity there in the capital city in the Promised Land, the place where God was meant to dwell. They had lost the temple and the city and the land once before to the Babylonians. They had seen the temple destroyed. They had seen the city flattened. They'd seen the torched earth policy destroy the land. They were living in a paranoid fear of God doing this all over again and they were driven by that fear. And yet the amazing thing is, in historical hindsight, that it was precisely their decision to save their own skin and save their place and their nation that led, within 40 years, to the destruction of the temple, and the destruction of Jerusalem, and the scattering of the people, and the end for nearly 2,000 years of a recognizable political entity called Israel there in the Middle East.

Caiaphas, we're told, verse 49, was the high priest that year. Actually, he was one of the longest serving high priests but John's point is that he was the one in office on that eventful year.

Pilate is one of these people who doesn't take fools gladly. He was used to power, he had it for a long time. His family were entrenched with power. He had become very wealthy by using his office and he said to them, notice the dismissive way in which he talks to everybody else in the council, he's dismissive of everything they've been talking about so far and he says to them, "You know nothing at all. You are absolutely ignorant, you people. Why don't you just don't talk and listen to me?" That's what he's saying. "You don't understand, do you? You don't understand that it's better for you that one man should die for the people, not that the whole nation should perish." Now listen to what he's saying here. There's no justice in what he's saying here. He is talking in terms of self-interest and experiencing. Actually, he sounds very modern. He sounds like the kind of argument that might go on behind closed doors in a business, a corporation, a government agency somewhere, driven not by a concern to do the right thing, to be seen to do the

right thing, but in covert ways behind the scenes to manage the situation in such a way as to get their will done. That's what we see happening here.

The actions of Jesus are called signs even by the authorities. It's the same word that's used in the Old Testament about the mighty acts of God that he performed through Moses at the exodus. And the reaction of the people in Moses' day was disbelief. They saw the signs but they didn't believe Moses, they didn't trust Moses. In spite of a display of God's power, they refused to believe in Moses. So in Jesus' day, the people were granted overwhelming evidence of his messianic identity culminating in the resurrection of Lazarus which foreshadows his own resurrection, that yet like the contemporaries of Moses, Jesus' contemporaries responded in grumbling and unbelief. It wouldn't matter how many signs he performed, they would never never be enough for them.

So the pretext of the plot is this: we let this man go on like this, he will threaten the temple and the nation. Well, it's at this point that we are introduced to the subtext of the plot. With the resurrection of Lazarus, we reach the climax of the signs which reveal who Jesus is, God himself in the flesh, and it's at this point that John begins to exposit, to expound for us the true meaning of a word that has come up over and over and over again in John's gospel, it's the word "hour, h-o-u-r," hour, the time, a time appointed by God, the hour that the Father had appointed for Jesus to do something. Now from this point on we're going to be coming back again and again to what that hour entailed and what it was that was planned for that hour.

So let's back up a moment, then. The high priest has spoken. The chief executive officer of the Jewish state and religion has uttered his judgment. He has meant one thing, that the words that he has chosen to use have actually expressed the purpose of God. Let me repeat what he said, "It is better for you that one man should die for the people, not that the whole nation should perish." We know what he meant, "Get rid of Jesus, we secure our position and the Romans will leave us alone." But at this point, John interjects this very exposition statement, verse 51, "He did not say this of his own accord, but being high priest that year," even though he was an unworthy man, remember a man can be a godless man but if he's a minister of the gospel God can use him to say godly things. The high priest was a godless man but God used him to say godly things. "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." Now this is an amazing statement. He tells us that while these people are plotting, while they're discovering the pretext on which they're going to arrest Jesus and get rid of him, there is actually a subtext that they are unaware of, there is another purpose, another plot in the sense of a dramatic script that has actually already been written before the foundation of the world, and they are merely actors in a drama. They're making their own choices, they're making their own decisions, they're saying their own words, but they're actually speaking lines that serve the purpose of this bigger story that lies behind it.

And it may surprise you to see that the clearest statement yet about the reason for Jesus' death should come from this source, Caiaphas, a political operator, a thoroughly bad

character. You think of how it is in the Old Testament, that God is able to speak to Israel through Balaam's donkey. Remember Balaam's donkey spoke to them, challenged them? If God can't find a person to preach his gospel, he'll use a donkey or something else to get through to people. And God uses here a self-seeking man and you see John is telling us that Israel's highest official with all the authority invested in that office, spoke of Jesus' death as the only way in which people could be saved. He meant it one way but his words standing alone actually articulated the gospel although he didn't realize that. He was speaking more than he knew and Israel is hearing from its own high priest two things: a recognition of the power of God through Jesus, they were recognizing the signs and miracles that he performed authenticating his person, and now through the lips of their high priest, Israel is hearing publicly attested why Jesus has to die. He has to die in order to be the Savior of people.

Isn't that amazing? This is very important in the unfolding relationship between Jesus and Israel in John's gospel. Here is an official moment when in public their own official high priest articulates God's purposes with respect to Jesus, and his words the significance deeper than they knew. They were thinking politically but here the gospel which has from the very beginning in chapter 1 proclaimed Jesus as the Lamb of God who would take away the sin of the world, is now showing us in what way he does that. He does that by dying for the people. The Lamb of God would take away the sins of the people and unbeknownst to him, he's articulating the heart of the Christian message, and while these authorities are thinking one thing, "Let's get rid of the menace," the sovereign purpose of God is working the salvation of his people so that when you think of the death of Jesus, and we're going when we get back into John's gospel after this summer, we're going to see this much more clearly because we're going to move into the period of his arrest and trial and so on, but at a human level what we're going to read about is a judicial murder with a view to securing the position of the powerful at one human level, but from a divine level, it is to be a sacrifice in the place of and for the benefit of sinners.

That's the idea that was introduced back in chapter 1 twice when we were told Jesus is the Lamb of God and we're told here that the effect of his being offered as the Lamb of God to take away, carry away the sin of the world, is the salvation of people. He is going to act as a substitute. You may have heard the language of substitutionary atonement, that's a theological phrase that we use about the death of Jesus and what it accomplishes. Well, here is the very notion of substitution right here built into the language of this high priest. He is talking about one man dying for, the Greek word means "in place of; on behalf of; representatively but also substitutionally in place of the people." One man dies, the people are saved, that's the language, and that substitutionary death will be the basis and the grounds of life for many.

Now do you notice that the death of Jesus is very specific? Who is he dying for? You can't get away from this, that the death of Jesus is quite deliberate, it's quite definite, it's targeted, it's focused, it has a purpose, it has a people in mind. Look at the language, Jesus would die for the nation and not for that nation only but to gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad. Who is the target? Well, it's the children of God within the nation of Israel and outside of the nation of Israel. It's the children of God.

Jesus was not going to die to make salvation generally available to any who might want to plug into it. That wasn't why he was going to die. He was dying for all the children of God from among the Jews, that nation, and among the Gentiles, those scattered abroad. Here is the Good Shepherd, you see, dying for his own sheep which he talked about in chapter 10. Here is the Good Shepherd going out for the lost and bringing them back into the fold of God. Here is the Good Shepherd deliberately laying down his life with this definite intention that he would save his own people from their sins. We call that definite atonement, that Jesus dies for his people. He doesn't die to make salvation possible, he dies to make salvation effective for his people.

And from that day, they make plans to put him to death. The decision was made, the outcome was now certain, a line had been crossed, and as someone has written, from now on Jesus is not to be arrested in order to be tried, he is to be tried because he has already been found guilty. He has already been found guilty. They had already determined to get rid of him. The trial will be a mockery, as we shall see. And the chain of events that will now unfold that will lead to the loss of the very land they wanted to save and the temple they prized so highly, will lead to the salvation of men and women and boys and girls all around the world.

Now you can ignore God but you cannot make God go away. These authorities tried but he kept on doing his miracles, and even when they kill him, he didn't stop doing his miracles because three days later he rose from the dead. And some of you have tried to ignore God, you've tried to ignore Jesus and then this friend of yours has become a Christian, or you find yourself in a church tonight, you can't ignore God but you'll never make him to go away from you. And you can oppose God but you cannot frustrate God's plans. Do you know some of the biggest figures in history figure in the Christian story? There was Nero, the Emperor Diocletian, another emperor, Stalin, Mao Zedong. Where are they now? Nero built this great circus in Rome as a monument to his being Caesar. On Nero's circle today if you go to Rome, you'll find yourself in the precincts of St. Peter's on Vatican Hill. When Stalin reigned in the Christian church, when over 40 million people were killed in Stalin's purges, he was not to know that it would be the influence of Orthodox Christians in Russia that would eventually topple Communism. And when the Communist powers in China exiled the missionaries in the early 1950s, sending off all the Western and other missionaries who were working there, leaving perhaps a million Christians, they didn't realize that by this stage 50 years, 60 years later, Christianity is the dominant growing force within China. You can get rid of Jesus but you can't avoid him. You can oppose Jesus but you will lose in the end.

Let's pray together.

Father, we pray that tonight as we now come together around the Lord's Table, that Table at which he sat with his disciples on the night he was betrayed, we pray that we would sense and feel and know that he is with us by the Spirit at the Table tonight, and that he offers us, he offers us in the elements of bread and wine communion, fellowship with himself. He's going to be present here. He is present in the bread and the wine and

we pray that we would feel and sense and know that to be true, that we would feed on Christ in our hearts by faith. We pray in his strong name. Amen.