

The Resurrection and the Life Prepared for Death

John 11:45–12:11

Studies in John #25

WHENEVER we talk about life, we assume there's _____. Whenever we talk about death, we long for _____. We Southern Californians love life but we keep death on the down low! If you're not a native of SoCal you've probably noticed we don't talk about death much because as the saying goes, "life's too short." And the sun is always out! We don't like being reminded of death so we prefer to put cemeteries out in the hills where they're out of sight, or, if we have an old one nearby, it has a huge green lawn, lots of trees and flowers, and with a happy name: "Eternal Hills."

We saw last time that chapter 11 is a chapter about death and life—the death of Lazarus and the resurrection eternal life of Jesus himself. The story of the resurrection life that Jesus gave to Lazarus in verses 1–44 provide a contrast to what we are now going to see in the rest of the Gospel, and especially here this morning. On the heels of proclaiming himself, "I am the resurrection and the life" (v. 25), Jesus now begins the long march of preparation toward his own death.

PREPARED BY THE HIGH PRIEST'S PROPHECY

Look first at how our Lord is PREPARED for death BY THE HIGH PRIEST'S PROPHECY. The story picks up as **many of the *Judean*** family and friends of

Lazarus who came to console Martha and Mary (v. 19) and **who had come with Mary and had seen what Jesus did** in raising Lazarus, **believed in him** (v. 45). Of course they did! **But**, as we've seen so often in this Gospel and as we all know from experience, **some of them** did not believe and **went to the Pharisees and told them what Jesus had done** (v. 46). This is the stone cold reality of life and faith, isn't it? Evangelism: If you've not put your trust in Jesus this morning maybe you're thinking, "I still need more evidence." How much evidence would it take? What kind of evidence? The people in our story saw Jesus merely speak, "Lazarus, come out" (v. 43), and Lazarus arose. But some *still* didn't believe. "I still need more evidence." Do you know what Jesus says about your excuse for lack of evidence? Turn back to Luke 16:19ff. There was a rich man and a poor man, whose name also was Lazarus. The poor man was in glory with father Abraham. The rich man was in Hades, suffering. The rich man asked Abraham to dip his finger in water to temporarily satisfy him. Abraham said he couldn't. So the rich man asked Abraham to send Lazarus back from the dead to warn his five brothers of punishment after death. What did Abraham tell him? "They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them" (Luke 16:29). We have God's Word is what that means. But the rich man wasn't satisfied and said, "but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent" (Luke 16:30). If you're thinking today, "I still need more

evidence,” here’s what Jesus says to you: “If they do not hear Moses and Prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead” (Luke 16:31). You have all the evidence you need right here, my friend. Your call for more evidence evidences the problem is not with the evidence God has already given, but your hard heart! Humble yourself today, ask God for forgiveness, ask him to lead you into true understanding of what he’s said about the world, you, and his way of salvation. I’ll even help you!

The report of this group of unbelievers led **the chief priests and the Pharisees to gather[...]** **the ruling council** of the Israelites. John records their discussion: **“What are we to do? For this man performs many signs”** (v. 47). Did you hear it again? They just admitted Jesus performed signs just as they said back in chapter 10 that his signs were good works (v. 33). They were on the horns of a dilemma, one religious and one political: **“if we let** (this charlatan, as they considered him), **go on like this, everyone will believe in him** and not us but if we do nothing **the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation”** (vv. 47–48). **“If we let him go on like this.”** That’s a nice euphemism for something: “Jesus must die!”

Enter **Caiaphas** the **high priest that fateful year**. He had come into this office in 18AD and wouldn’t leave until 36AD. He knew exactly what they were

up to and he says, **“You know nothing at all”** (v. 49). I couldn’t have said it any better myself! Then he went on: **“Nor do you understand that it is better for you”**—and your religious and political power—**“that one man should die for the people, not that the whole nation should perish”** (v. 50). What’s he saying? Either we take this guy out as a sacrifice to appease the Romans or Rome takes us all out. What’s so fascinating is what John says next under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit: **He did not say this of his own accord, but being high priest that year he prophesied.** Application: This is one of those passing details that actually teach us a profound theological truth. Do you see it? As the sovereign God of the universe he uses even the most wicked as means to his glorious end. As the saying God, “God strikes straight blows with crooked sticks.” Never was there a more unlikely prophet, just as God once used the unlikeliest of means to speak to Israel in a donkey!

Caiaphas...prophesied...that—here it is: **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** (v. 51, 52). The irony of Caiaphas’ words is that he thought he was simply stating that Jesus was to be crucified so that everyone *wouldn’t* believe in him; yet he’s prophesying that by Jesus’ death life would come to more people than they could ever imagine! Amen?

Application: “But death is so, well, morbid. Don’t be such a Debby Downer; people want to hear things that uplift.” Brothers and sisters, as you know, ever since the first century the cross of Christ has been offensive and scandalous. It still is. Recently, a committee working on a new hymnal for the Presbyterian Church U.S.A. wanted to include “In Christ Alone.” They asked the authors for permission to change these words: “Till on that cross as Jesus died, *the wrath of God was satisfied.*” Instead, they wanted it to read: “Till on that cross as Jesus died, *the love of God was magnified.*” The authors refused the change and the committee voted nine to six not to include it. We will never downplay the cross in this church! Amen?

Caiaphas...prophesied. This is one of those verses the great theologians of old saw as teaching the twin truths that Jesus’ death was sufficient for all peoples in all times and in all places and that his death is efficient to save his people in all times and from all places. Jesus’ death is sufficient to satisfy the justice of God and to reconcile to God the **nation** of the Jews and **not for that nation only but...the children of God who are scattered abroad** in every nation. But notice the other side of the truth here, too. John doesn’t say Jesus’ death just provided reconciliation for everyone but left it there as available. Look at his language closely: **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. Jesus' death actually does something, what we call the efficiency of his death. Out of the nation of the Jews and out of all the nations of the world Jesus' death effectively gathers the children of God into one flock, reminding us of what Jesus said in John 10: "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep" (v. 11), he's speaking of his elect sheep of Israel. Then he says, "I have other sheep that are not of *this* fold (meaning, Israel). I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd" (v. 16). Our Lord was PREPARED for death BY THE HIGH PRIEST'S PROPHECY.

PREPARED BY MARY'S ANOINTING

Children: Time for an Old Testament Bible quiz. It's just one question: What were the Israelites to do on the night of the Passover? Tell me your answer outside, okay? Note the timing of this preparation: **the Passover...was at hand** (v. 55). This would be the final Passover Jesus celebrates. The Jewish leadership were **ma[king] plans to put him to death** (v. 53) thus he **no longer walked openly among them but went...to the region near the wilderness...and there he stayed with the disciples** (v. 54). This is the beginning of the end for Jesus so in this final week before the cross in chapters

12–19 he concentrates on preparing his disciples for his impending death. Because he was with his disciples the crowds that **went up from the country to Jerusalem...to purify themselves...were looking for Jesus and saying...“What do you think? That he will not come to the feast at all?”** (vv. 55, 56)

In the meantime, John shifts scenes in chapter 12. Now it's **six days before the Passover**, Jesus leaves Ephraim in the wilderness and **came back to Bethany where they gave a dinner for him where Martha served while Lazarus was one of those reclining with him at table** (vv. 1, 2). This episode shows how he was PREPARED for death BY MARY'S ANOINTING. While reclining Martha and Lazarus' sister **Mary...took a pound of expensive ointment made from pure nard, and anointed the feet of Jesus and wiped his feet with her hair**. John draws us in with his recollection of how **the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume** (v. 3). Mary is self-sacrificial. She's using expensive ointment. Mary is humble. She's on her hands and knees. Mary loves. She's wiping his feet with her hair. Will we give ourselves to Jesus in such ways? But it's a story about more than these virtues, right?

Judas Iscariot, one of Jesus disciples...who was about to betray him (v. 4) was worried that this was “money being poured down the drain”: **“Why**

was **this ointment not sold for three hundred denarii**”—that’s three hundred days’ labor for a common laborer—**“and given to the poor?”** (v. 5) He didn’t actually care[...] **about the poor, but because he was a thief, and having charge of the moneybag he used to help himself to what was put into it** (v. 6). Jesus interjects: **“Leave her alone”** (v. 7). Why? Jesus’ words affirm Mary’s and our serving Jesus and the poor—two necessary things. But his words affirm something more valuable. Why leave her and her ointment alone? **“So that she may keep it for the day of my burial. For the poor you always have with you, but you do not always have me”** (vv. 7–8). What Mary was doing was preparing in an anticipatory way he who is the resurrection and the life for his death. Her actions were a prophecy, you see.

I know we don’t like talking about death, but there is a death we need to talk about: Jesus’. One old hymn expresses our love of the cross like this:

On a hill far away stood an old rugged cross,
the emblem of suffering and shame;
and I love that old cross where the dearest and best
for a world of lost sinners was slain.

*So I'll cherish the old rugged cross,
till my trophies at last I lay down;
I will cling to the old rugged cross,
and exchange it some day for a crown.*

O that old rugged cross, so despised by the world,
has a wondrous attraction for me;
for the dear Lamb of God left his glory above
to bear it to dark Calvary.