



John 11:45-54

But God Meant it For Good

45 Then many of the Jews who had come to Mary, and had seen the things Jesus did, believed in Him.

46 But some of them went away to the Pharisees and told them the things Jesus did.

47 Then the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered a council and said, "What shall we do? For this Man works many signs.

48 "If we let Him alone like this, everyone will believe in Him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and nation."

49 And one of them, Caiaphas, being high priest that year, said to them, "You know nothing at all,

50 "nor do you consider that it is expedient for us that one man should die for the people, and not that the whole nation should perish."

51 Now this he did not say on his own authority; but being high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus would die for the nation,

52 and not for that nation only, but also that He would gather together in one the children of God who were scattered abroad.

53 Then, from that day on, they plotted to put Him to death.

54 Therefore Jesus no longer walked openly among the Jews, but went from there into the country near the wilderness, to a city called Ephraim, and there remained with His disciples.

Kids, I bet most of you are familiar with the story of Joseph, from the book of Genesis. You remember he was the one with the coat of many colors whose brothers sold him into slavery in Egypt. Now selling your own brother into slavery that would be a very wicked thing to do wouldn't it? It was a very, very wicked thing for them to do. But while Joseph was extremely sad that his brothers had done that to him, years later when he finally met them again, and if you remember the story you'll remember that when they are finally reunited, Joseph is second in command of all Egypt and his brothers are very scared, Joseph shows an amazing insight into what had happened to him and he says this to them:

Gen. 50:20 "But as for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive.

Joseph saw that God had decided in advance or foreordained that his brother's wicked decision to sell him into slavery would be the means by which thousands of lives would be saved from starvation, and by which his family would be brought into Egypt and prosper and be built-up until they were a mighty nation of over a million. What they meant for Evil, God meant for good. And in the bible we see God overruling the wicked plans of men and using them to bring about good for His people again and again. But here in the gospel of John we see the greatest and most glorious example of that principle as God uses the greatest of all evils, the murder of His only begotten Son Jesus, to be the means by which He saves all who would believe in Him.

Now the Sanhedrin, that is the ruling council of the Jews, didn't realize that at the time of course. All they knew when they met was that this man Jesus, who irritated them so much, had done yet another mighty

miracle. And this one was the most impressive yet. Before many impeccable witnesses from Jerusalem, Jesus had raised a man from the dead. And not a man who had just died, but a man who had been dead for four days. If he kept doing miracles like this, then despite their threats to believers out of the synagogue, everyone would end up believing He really was the Messiah! And if the Romans saw that the people were following Jesus as their king, then they'd assume the Jews were in rebellion and destroy both the nation and the Temple and take them into slavery and exile just like the Babylonians had. We'll lose our place at the top of the Jesus social pyramid! No more greetings in the Market Places, no more being given the best seats at parties and in the synagogue. So the Pharisees are wringing their hands and saying what are we going to do about this guy, nothing we've done so far has worked to put a stop to Him!

Now once again, brothers and sisters, I hope you see the power of unbelief here. They freely admit Jesus is doing miracles, that he's just raised a rotting corpse from the dead, and yet no one even thinks of saying, "hey, maybe we were wrong about this guy!" Friends if you ever thought evidence alone could make someone a believer, I hope that verses like these will persuade you otherwise. As JC Ryle put it ***"man's unbelief is a far more deeply seated disease than it is generally reckoned. It is proof against the logic of facts, against reasoning, against argument, against moral persuasion. Nothing can melt it down but the grace of God."***

Anyway, from this point on, the Pharisees aren't often mentioned, it will be the Saducees and in particular the chief priests who take over plotting to murder Jesus. Now the Saducees were the theological liberals of their day. They didn't believe in an afterlife or resurrection, they didn't believe in prophets or any but the first five books of the bible, they certainly weren't expecting nor did they want a Messiah. Like most liberals, they just loved the ceremonies and ritual of religion and certainly they liked the power that came with it.

Now this particular High Priest, Joseph Caiaphas, had been appointed by the Roman Prefect Valerius Gratus. He had succeeded his father in law Annas in 16 AD, but Annas continued to maintain a great deal of influence, so much so that they almost function as a team.

John's comment that Caiaphas was High Priest "that year" refers to the fact that the High Priesthood, which was supposed to be for life had become a political football, with the Romans appointing and removing men at will. To become High Priest at this point in time had far less to do with Godliness than an ability to play the political game. Caiaphas is a pragmatist. He will do whatever works, whatever is expedient to maintain the status quo. So he stands up at this point and says ***"You really don't have a clue do you? If we have to kill this man Jesus to maintain our position, then that is what we are going to do. It's expedient."***

This exchange reminds me of Naboth's Vineyard 1 Kings 21 [Explain] Wicked leaders always think in terms of ***"what did I need to do to get what I want"*** not ***"what is the right thing to do?"***

But I hope you see that even in the midst of this terrible plotting, God's plans are still being carried out. What Caiaphas means for Evil, God is going to use for God. An unwittingly this evil man even prophesies at God's command. Isn't amazing the instruments that God sometimes uses to proclaim his word? Balaam's donkey and even Caiaphas. God's sovereignty is seen in that He is not only in control of events but men as well.

Without knowing it, Caiaphas declares that the death of the one man Jesus would be a substitutionary atonement for the sins of the many. Jesus knew that of course, He had even declared that He would voluntarily lay down His life for the Sheep that the Father would give Him:

*John 10:15 "As the Father knows Me, even so I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep.
 16 "And other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they will hear My voice; and there will be one flock and one shepherd.
 17 "Therefore My Father loves Me, because I lay down My life that I may take it again.
 18 "No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This command I have received from My Father."*

And although the Apostles, were very slow on the uptake prior to Christ's crucifixion, like Joseph afterwards they realized that what wicked men had meant for evil God has meant for good. Peter declared as much in His Pentecost sermon:

*Acts 2:22 " Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a Man attested by God to you by miracles, wonders, and signs which God did through Him in your midst, as you yourselves also know --
 23 "Him, being delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God, you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death;
 24 "whom God raised up, having loosed the pains of death, because it was not possible that He should be held by it.*

But when Jesus was said to be dying for the nation and those scattered abroad, who was being referred to? Well Christ and his apostles indicate that it was for His chosen people the elect, all those who would believe in Him. That was the nation, a people composed of both Jew and Gentile, from every race and tribe and tongue on earth:

*1 Peter 2:7 Therefore, to you who believe, He is precious; but to those who are disobedient, "The stone which the builders rejected Has become the chief cornerstone,"
 8 and "A stone of stumbling And a rock of offense." They stumble, being disobedient to the word, to which they also were appointed.
 9 But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light;
 10 who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy.*

Unfortunately, while the crucifixion of Christ was the means by which His Sheep was saved, it brought a terrible judgment down upon the disobedient, the builders who rejected Him. The very thing they most feared, that the Romans would come and destroy their nation, and burn the temple, and remove them from power, and send them into exile did in fact come to pass in 70 AD. And that precisely because they did the expedient thing by murdering the Messiah. Truly "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God."

Jesus hears of their plot and withdraws for a little while to a little town called Ephraim around 15 miles from Jerusalem. Christ is not going to be hurried to the cross. You remember Jesus had said of His life, "No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself" The time determined for Christ's death, the Passover, was not set by the Sanhedrin, but by the Father.

First application, this should be obvious, but the sovereignty of God means that the men may plot and plan and try to overthrow His purposes, but ultimately all of it will come to nothing. They are laughable. Perhaps nowhere is this more clearly set forth than in that great Messianic Psalm - Psalm 2 Turn with me there, and keep your bible open to this passage.

1 Why do the nations rage, And the people plot a vain thing?

2 The kings of the earth set themselves, And the rulers take counsel together, Against the LORD and against His Anointed (and that word literally means Messiah), ***saying,***

3 "Let us break Their bonds in pieces And cast away Their cords from us."

4 He who sits in the heavens shall laugh; The LORD shall hold them in derision.

We may quake in our boots when we hear about the plots of dictators, and presidents, and prime-ministers, to destroy Christ and His Church, but the Lord laughs. Brothers and Sisters the kingdom of Christ goes on. Where are those men now? Where are Antiochus Epiphanes, and Nero, and Muhammad, and Stalin, and Pol Pot and all of those men who have set themselves against the Lord and His Anointed? They are Dead and in Hell. Christ's church continues!

Friends in the end, there will only be one division, sheep and goats believers and unbelievers. So what does the Lord counsel you to do? Abandon your unbelief! Trust in Christ today, before it is too late. He warns:

Psalms 2:5 Then He shall speak to them in His wrath, And distress them in His deep displeasure:

6 "Yet I have set My King On My holy hill of Zion."

7 "I will declare the decree: The LORD has said to Me, 'You are My Son, Today I have begotten You.

8 Ask of Me, and I will give You The nations for Your inheritance, And the ends of the earth for Your possession.

9 You shall break them with a rod of iron; You shall dash them to pieces like a potter's vessel.' "

10 Now therefore, be wise, O kings; Be instructed, you judges of the earth.

11 Serve the LORD with fear, And rejoice with trembling.

12 Kiss the Son, lest He be angry, And you perish in the way, When His wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all those who put their trust in Him.

Someday every knee will bow at the name of Jesus. Bow yours here before it is too late!

Knowing that brings me to my second and main application: Brothers and Sisters, if we know that Romans 8:28 "all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose." And that includes in the worst that evil men can do. Then don't give in.

Christians don't give in to them, don't flee to expediency. In the coming years we are going to see hordes of so-called evangelicals caving into the culture left and right because it is expedient. You must not join them – "As Spurgeon put it: "***Expediency is the great Christ-killer. Many nowadays say to us, "Do not preach against error; it is not expedient to do so. Do not break away from evil associations; it is not expedient."*** How many there are of even good men who do certain thing, not because they are right, but because they are expedient! But, believers in Jesus, in the name of your Lord I implore you to hate expediency" If I can give you one verse for the future it would be Ephesians 6:13 ***Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.***

Because it is the New Year, believers, I want to leave you then with a word of encouragement to stand in this evil day from Spurgeon. ***"I do not think I need say more, unless it be to entreat you to keep up your courage when you know that you are engaged in the cause of Christ. There is a great struggle going on around us. This entire nation is from time to time convulsed with serious questions in which the honor of our Lord Jesus Christ is greatly concerned. Let all those that love him stand forth with unflinching integrity. Expediency is the mean word that describes the lax morals of the age; but righteousness is the undeviating, the eternal principle by which the universe is governed. The kingdom of Christ is not of this world. Be it ours to help the oppressed, to succor the weak, and to give liberty of conscience to***

all men. May God defend the right; Defend the right he will. If our names be cast out as evil, if we be misunderstood and misinterpreted, belied and slandered, let it be so; we are neither surprised nor dismayed. The right has always to be maintained in the teeth of slander and abuse. But, in God's name, let us not be cravens or cowards. Let us ever do our duty manfully and lawfully. Let us hold fast our profession cheerfully. Let us adhere with confidence and steadfastness to the kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ."