

Find Life in the Son: The Plot and the Plan John 11:45-57

Introduction

It was a turbulent time. Great excitement. Great danger. Great significance. And Jesus was at the center of it all.

Jesus' raising Lazarus from the dead sent shock waves through the whole Jewish community in and near Jerusalem. No one was denying it happened. There were too many eyewitnesses. Many considered the resurrection of Lazarus good reason to trust in Jesus as the promised Messiah. His enemies were alarmed. They had decided over a year earlier to kill Jesus, but this event galvanized them into making sure it happened sooner than later.

It was now springtime, nearing the Passover season when the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world would be slain. Darkness and light were in deadly conflict. The salvation of the world at stake. The conspiracy to kill Jesus was strong, but its success would end up fulfilling the foreordained plan of God to redeem the lost.

Human history continues the conflict. Darkness may seem to be gaining the upper hand, but God is ever turning the darkness

into a means of advancing the light. The enemies of Christ may plot, but the plan of God will prevail.

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.

The Plot and the Plan

1. Lifegiver or Threat (45-48)
2. Conspiracy and Prophecy (49-53)
3. Hidden Away but Close By (54-57)

1. Lifegiver or Threat (45-48)

Lifegiver to be trusted or threat to be neutralized

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."

Many Jews believed in Jesus because that had seen what Jesus did when He raised Lazarus from the dead. And Lazarus continued to live

among them as a living testimony to the resurrection power of Christ.

While many believed, others went and told the Pharisees what Jesus had done. They had seen the miracle too, but they saw it as a problem the Pharisees would want to know about. They were right.

The chief priests and the Pharisees convened the council of the Sanhedrin. Many of the Pharisees were scribes, who made their living copying the Scriptures and teaching what was there. They were the current guardians of the Word of God. They believed in inerrancy, miracles, angels, and resurrection. The chief priests were Sadducees, theological liberals who denied the existence of angels and the possibility of resurrection. Lazarus was a living contradiction to their dogma of naturalism and unbelief. Jesus pinpointed their problem—they knew neither the Scriptures nor the power of God. Nonetheless, as the chief priests, they ran the temple precincts, and as such were guardians of the worship of God. These two groups—the guardians of the Word of God and the guardians of the worship of God—were normally at odds with each other, but they found common cause in trying to kill Jesus. Jesus had been a problem for them a long time. His raising the dead made matters worse. Jesus was doing many signs. They

were worried that in time everyone would believe in Him.

The greater the numbers of people following Jesus, the more their power and prestige as leaders of the Jews was threatened. Jesus consistently exposed their hypocrisy and unbelief and demonstrated Himself to be more worthy of trust than they were. But what they feared even more was that an increase in Jesus' followers would catch the attention of Rome. If Rome perceived Jesus to be stirring up a Jewish insurrection, Rome would take action that threatened the entire Jewish nation. Even though they hated the Roman occupiers, they enjoyed their positions of power and wealth by staying in the good graces of Rome.

Ironically, roughly 40 years after they murdered Jesus, Rome would do the very thing they feared. Under the emperor Vespasian the Roman general Titus would besiege Jerusalem in Passover season of A.D. 70, allowing pilgrims coming to Jerusalem for the festival to enter, but not to leave. By August, Rome broke through the city defenses, massacred many of the inhabitants, and burned down the temple, tearing it apart stone by stone, to get at the gold that had melted down between the stones. Jesus Himself had prophesied these very events

that would follow Jerusalem's rejection of Jesus as the promised Messiah.

So despite all the Scriptural words and miraculous works that pointed to Jesus as the promised Messiah, these men rejected Him to preserve what would be destroyed a few decades later. It is ever that way, *the idols that keep your heart from yielding to Jesus will one day be stripped from you. You will lose them all. They will not save you from God's judgment.* They were shortsighted in what they pursued. They traded in what was eternal for what was temporary. People still choose this foolish course.

Roman armies may not be looming at the city gates, but we are all mortal, and we do not know what the next day brings or when our life on earth will be done. Jesus has furnished more than ample proof of His being the promised Savior-King, the Messiah, Son of God. The reward He offers lasts forever, but the time to yield to Him and trust in Him is now, before it is too late. Whatever treasures you desire instead of Him will be gone like the wind in only a few short years at best.

Applications

- What do you value more than trusting and following Jesus?

- Do you view Jesus as the eternal Lifegiver or a threat to what you value more?
- If you see Jesus as the Giver of Life, how does your day-to-day life pattern display that conviction?

2. Conspiracy and Prophecy (49-53)

Conspiracy to murder and prophecy re substitutionary atonement

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.

Although Caiaphas served as the chief guardian of temple worship, the position of high priest was one of political power dependent on the favor of Rome. The Roman prefect Valerius Gratus appointed him high priest in A.D. 18, and Caiaphas served in that role till he was deposed in A.D. 36. He was the son-in-law of Annas who had served as

high priest from A.D. 6-15 and still retained a great amount of power.

To his mind, better for Jesus to die than for the whole nation to perish at the hands of Rome. He had no idea that his statement of political strategy was in fact a prophecy. Jesus would die to save not just Jewish believers, but also to gather in all the children of God, Jew and Gentile.

Ephesians 2:12-19

12 Remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. **13** But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. **14** For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility **15** by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, **16** and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. **17** And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near. **18** For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. **19** So then you are no longer strangers and

aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God.

So Caiaphas and those conspiring with him to murder Jesus were doing so to neutralize what they perceived as a threat to themselves and the nation. What Caiaphas and his co-conspirators did not realize is that in pursuing their own goals, they were in fact, carrying out the plan of God established before the foundation of the world for Jesus to be crucified for the salvation of God's children.

Acts 2:23

This Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men.

Acts 4:27-28

²⁴ And when they heard it, they lifted their voices together to God and said, "Sovereign Lord, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and everything in them, ²⁵ who through the mouth of our father David, your servant, said by the Holy Spirit, "Why did the Gentiles rage, and the peoples plot in vain? ²⁶ The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers were gathered together, against the Lord and against his Anointed'— ²⁷ For truly in this city there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus,

whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, ²⁸ to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place.

Whatever the plots of human beings may be, the redemptive plan of God prevails—to the degree that God’s plan can and does make use of even man’s sinful plots.

If you think about it, there really could be no good news of salvation if God cannot work this way. The sinful behavior of man cannot thwart the redemptive power of God else no sinner by birth and by choice could ever be saved.

It is right to grieve over the sins of humanity, whether they be sins of others or of ourselves. And it is understandable that we may be wary, angry, or alarmed about the evil plots of those in places of power. But *because of the redemption plan of God in Christ Jesus, we are never ultimately at the mercy of political plots and sinful agendas.* We may even suffer as martyrs for the gospel, but no one can stop God’s rescue of us. God uses even sinful plots to execute His. And here, He actually speaks prophetic truth through the mouth of a chief enemy of Jesus.

History as recorded by the Bible and beyond demonstrates that God at times brings His

faithful servants to serve in the arena of political, military, religious, and cultural leadership. It is a difficult calling. But whether we serve in such a field nor not, our confidence is always in the redemptive plan of God to prevail over the strategies, good or bad, of mere human beings. For that reason, we do not fret as those who have no hope. *Our future and our happiness are not dependent on whatever humans wield power at the moment, but in the eternal God who not only turns all things to the good of those who love Him, but even uses the mouths and bodies of evil people to accomplish His perfect plan.*

Applications

- What plots of powerful men and women cause you anxiety?
- Where do you see God at work using even the evil efforts of human beings?
- What are ways you can share the gospel with fretful people by pointing them to God's using the conspiracy to murder Jesus to accomplish His plan for our salvation?

3. Hidden Away but Close By (54-57)

Hidden from enemies but near disciples

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.

Jesus was not in the meeting of the council, but He knew of their decision. He's already demonstrated He can read their hearts. As God, He knows all things. And even if during His earthly humiliation He limited Himself from full use of all His divine attributes, there were secret disciples of His among the Jewish leaders, such as Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea. It's possible they got word to Him.

John has repeatedly told us of Jesus' avoiding arrest and execution early on because His hour had not yet come. It was now much closer, but not the right time just yet. His atonement for the sins of the world would come at precisely the time God had planned, not a day early.

So Jesus moved out of the immediate vicinity until the week of Passover arrived. The next

chapter records His coming back to Bethany, just two miles out of Jerusalem, where He raised Lazarus from the dead.

As Passover nears Pilgrims from outside Jerusalem head there to purify themselves for the festival. Religion goes on as usual, but among those engaging in the purification ceremonies are religious leaders plotting murder. For now, they are looking for Jesus but He is not to be found. He is hidden away. But not from everyone. The text says that He was staying with the disciples.

The contrast is striking, and it continues to this day. Those who have grown to hate Jesus often cannot find Him. It is actually a common judgment God brings on those who reject Him. He is hidden from those who don't want Him. *Do not think that if you push Jesus away, you will always have the option to call Him back. You can miss your day of opportunity. You are not in control. He is.*

Those who love and trust Jesus as His followers, however, find Him close by. They enjoy close fellowship with Him. His invitation has ever been a call to those who are weary and heavy laden to come to Him for rest for their souls.

1 John 1:1-3

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life— ² the life was made manifest, and we have seen it, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us— ³ that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ.

Jerusalem cannot stop talking about Him. Some are looking for Jesus to arrest Him. Others are speculating whether or not He will show up. Neither the enemies of Jesus nor the mere curiosity seekers can find Him. He is hidden away.

But at the same time He is close by. He is staying with His disciples. He will end up with disciples in Bethany, next door to Jerusalem. But His enemies will not be able to arrest Him until it is exactly the day and hour God planned for it to happen.

Applications

- Jesus had powerful enemies, but they could not get to Him until God brought it to pass. What does that tell you about

God, the course of history, and His plan of redemption?

- In what ways are you enjoying close fellowship with God because of your relationship with Jesus through the testimony of His apostles (and the work of the Holy Spirit)?

Conclusion

We read the headlines and hear the podcasts about what is going on in the world. But *behind all the politics, economics, and social movements, God works His plan for the good of His people. All the plots of human beings cannot thwart the perfect plan of God.* God is still at work, just as He was in the final days of Jesus on earth.

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Closing Song: God, the Uncreated One

Applications Summary

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- Jesus had powerful enemies, but they could not get to Him until God brought it to pass. What does that tell you about God, the course of history, and His plan of redemption?
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