

# G R A C E

Reformed Baptist Church

Soli     ♦     Deo     ♦     Gloria

## THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

### Sermon Notes

*The Resurrection of Lazarus and Rising Tension*

John 11:45-57

December 4, 2005

### INTRODUCTION / OVERVIEW

- ❑ Jesus has just revealed through the “sign” of raising Lazarus from the dead, that He is truly God. For nothing encapsulates the very power of God more than the **creation of life**.
- ❑ For Jesus Christ is the great **ego eimi, ego ei mi**, the great I AM. As the very name of God [YHWH] suggests, “He is,” He exists, and He has life **in Himself**. Therefore, ONLY God [and Jesus Christ, being fully God] can **create life from nothing**.
- ❑ However, as is true in so many places in Scripture, this account is a great paradox. For the climatic sign in the ministry of Jesus Christ, the raising of Lazarus from the dead, will **directly** lead to His capture, trial, and crucifixion.

### Verses 45 – 46

- ❑ Just like nearly every miracle Jesus has performed up to this point in the Gospel of John, the miracle creates division.
- ❑ “Many of the Jews...believed in Him.”
- ❑ However, “some of them went to the Pharisees.”
  - Once again, the Pharisees [see below] were those [as opposed to the Sadducees] who emphasized **obedience** to the Law of God [the Old Testament]. However, the Pharisees also emphasized **obedience to the extra-biblical rabbinical oral tradition** as much as they did obedience to the Old Testament.
  - Therefore, since Jesus kept the Law, but often broke the “hedge,” or extra-biblical tradition, the Pharisees were seeking to capture Him on grounds of blasphemy, an offence punishable by death.

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- ❑ NOTE: In this account, the distinction between the Pharisees and the Sadducees is quite important.

- **Pharisees** (“separated ones”)
  - The “popular” party
  - Emphasized obedience to the Law
    - Legalistic in the development and adherence to Rabbinical (extra-biblical) law
  - Example of the Law vs. the Rabbinical Tradition
    - Law: Remember the Sabbath and Keep it Holy.
    - Rabbinical Tradition: Is it lawful to eat an egg layed on the Sabbath?
  - Obeyed the Law as far as appearances were concerned; however, their hearts were far from God
    - See Isaiah 1
  - Believed in the immortality of the soul, final resurrection with rewards and punishments, and angels.
  - Related to modern-day Hasidic Jews
  
- **Sadducees**
  - High ranking priestly class
  - Aristocratic sect
  - The High Priest was a Sadducee
  - Viewed only the Torah (Genesis through Revelation) as authoritative
    - Read the rest of the Old Testament but did not use it for legal norms
    - Rejected the Rabbinical Law as absurd
    - What the Torah did not address, they felt free to accommodate
  - Did not believe in a resurrection of the dead, immortality of the soul, future rewards and punishments, or angels.
  - Enjoyed privileged positions in society and managed to get along well under Roman rule
  - Any movement that might upset order and authority was bound to appear dangerous in their eyes
  - Deistic characteristics
    - Believed that God was not actively involved in the universe; man controls his own destiny
    - Likely were influenced by Greek philosophy
  - Enemies with the Pharisees
  - Focused their attention on the Temple and ceremony
  - No longer existed after the Temple was destroyed in A.D. 70
  
- **The Sanhedrin**
  - The highest ruling body and judicial court in Israel at the time of Christ
  - Organized similar to the body of elders under Moses in the Old Testament
  - Granted limited authority over certain religious, civil and criminal matters by the foreign nations that dominated Israel throughout its history

# The High Priest

**Priests**  
(Sadd. /

**Elders**  
(Sadduce

**Chief  
Priests**

**Scribes**  
(Pharise

**71 Total**

## Verse 47

- ❑ Verse 47 opens with the word “Therefore”... “Therefore the chief priests and the Pharisees convened a council...”
- ❑ In other words, because some of the Jews went to the Pharisees to inform them of Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead, “the chief priests and the Pharisees convened a council.”
  - Recall, John uses the term “chief priests” for the Sadducees since this Gospel was possible written after the fall of the Temple in A.D. 70 when the Sadducees ceased to exist.
- ❑ It is very possible that this “council” was an actual meeting of the Sanhedrin.
- ❑ The members of “the council” were saying, “What are we doing? For this man is performing many signs.”
  - When they ask, “What are we doing?” they likely mean two things:
    - What actions are we taking to stop Jesus [i.e. arrest Him]?  
ANSWER: Nothing!
    - What are *we* doing compared to what *Jesus* is doing?  
ANSWER: Nothing!
  - When they state, “For this man is performing many signs,” likely, they are referring to:
    - The healing of the man who was ill for thirty-eight (38) years [Chapter 5]
    - The healing of the man born blind [Chapter 9]

- The raising of Lazarus from the dead [Chapter 11]

**Few things reveal the sovereignty of God more than when God uses enemies of Him to unwillingly proclaim eternal truth. Such is the case in Verses 48 – 50.**

**Verse 48**

- This Verse begins with the word ‘If’ – “If we let him go on like this, all men will believe in Him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation.”
  - There are two profound truths in this statement which, today, have proven somewhat “prophetic”:

1.) First, **all men will believe in Jesus Christ.**

⇒ “And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to Myself.”  
John 12:32

⇒ “All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out.” John 6:37

2.) Secondly, **the Romans will come and take away both “our” place and “our” nation.**

⇒ “Our place” refers, most likely, to the Temple in Jerusalem.

- In the Mishnah it states, “Tithe and First-fruits require to be brought to the Place [the Temple]....”

⇒ In the year A.D. 70, the Romans laid siege to the city of Jerusalem and the city fell, and along with it, the symbol of Jewish national identity and the center of Jewish worship: the Temple.

- However, the tragic flaw in this statement in Verse 48 is this:

Jesus draws all men to Himself and the Romans took away the Jewish Temple and nation NOT because the authorities failed to act [“If we let Him go on like this...”]; but, rather, because they DID act, that is they crucified Him.

⇒ In other words, Jesus draws all men to Himself BECAUSE of HIS crucifixion [see again John 12:32]; and

⇒ The fall of Jerusalem and the Temple in A.D. 70 was, in a very real sense, God’s judgment on the nation of Israel, symbolizing the end of the sacrificial system.

⇒ Further, the words of the “council”: “If we let Him go on like this...” completely ignore the sovereign will of the Father with respect to the life of Jesus Christ. In other words, if the Father willed for the Sanhedrin to never arrest Jesus, there would have been nothing they could have done to capture Him.

- ◆ Note the clear influence of the Sadducees in the “council”: The Pharisees sought to arrest Jesus Christ because of His “blasphemy”; however, the reason for the Sadducee’s concern was not theological, but rather political. They wanted to “keep the peace” with the Roman occupiers. If the work of Jesus had not threatened their political and financial positions, the Sadducees, quite possibly, would not have should much concern. However, as the words of the “council” clearly show, the miracles of Jesus could potentially result in an uprising [so the “council” thought]
- ◆ Also, how amazing it is that the resurrection of Lazarus would to the crucifixion of Jesus...and the crucifixion of Jesus would lead to “all men” believing Him and to the fall of the Temple as well.

### Verses 49 – 50

- Now Caiaphas, the “high priest that year” steps up to speak and address the council.
  - Joseph Caiaphas was appointed high priest, by the Roman prefect Valerius Gratus, in A.D. 18 and served until A.D. 36. His father-in-law, Annas, who is mentioned in the Passion accounts, served from 6-15 A.D.
- The phrase “that year” is used by John, likely to mean “that fateful year [when the Savior was crucified].”
- Caiaphas said, “You know nothing at all...”
  - Certainly, he was correct – they knew nothing concerning the true identity of Jesus of Nazareth.
  - These words of Caiaphas come across as harsh and rude, which is consistent with the historical allegations of the Sadducees [of which he was one]. Jewish historian Josephus wrote, “The Sadducees ... are, even among themselves, rather boorish in their behavior, and in their intercourse with their peers are as rude as to aliens.”
- He, then, stated, “nor do you take into account that it is expedient for you that one man die for the people, and that the whole nation not perish.”
  - This statement by Caiaphas reveals two powerful truths:
    - First, **Jesus Christ was an innocent man.** The context of Caiaphas words clearly indicate, that as he sees it, either one man will die [although innocent] or an entire nation. Obviously, Caiaphas views the former as more preferable [although not necessarily ideal].
    - Second, **Jesus Christ does die for “the people”...they are His people.**
      - ◆ This point underscores the truth of the doctrine of **substitutionary atonement**.

- ◆ What an amazing truth to know that God uses all men, without exception, to bring glory to Himself...even His own enemies.

### Verses 51 – 52

- As is typical in this Gospel, John offers His [fully inspired] commentary following a deeply theological point.
- Just in case it was missed by the average reader, John states, “Now he did not say this on his own initiative, but being high priest that year, he prophesied...”
  - Once again, our Sovereign God used a corrupt high priest to communicate truth concerning our “great high priest.”
- John continued [with his commentary]: “Jesus was going to die for the nation, and not for the nation only, but in order that He might also gather together into one the children of God who are scattered abroad.”
  - This statement brings to mind the “shepherd” motif from Chapter 10. Jesus Christ, the Good Shepherd, on the basis of His sinless life, atoning death, and resurrection, would lead His sheep, from multiple flocks, into one flock with one shepherd” (John 10:16).
  - Further, the ultimate “nation” is the “holy nation” of God...the church, called by God to be holy and separate (1 Peter 2:9).
  - Also, the term “scattered” can refer to the Diaspora, that is the Jews who are spread throughout the Roman Empire at that time; or, it could refer to all sheep who had/have been scattered by “going astray.”
  - Lastly, John refers to certain people as “children of God” prior to their conversion/regeneration.

D.A. Carson states, “Jesus already has sheep in other pens whom he must bring (10:16); certain people have already been given to the Son by the Father (6:37, 44, 65), even if they have not yet become disciples.”

### Verse 53

- “So from that day on they planned together to kill Him.”
  - Many scholars/commentators believe that this was the *real* trial of Jesus.
    - According to Jewish Law, in capital cases [involving the death penalty] a guilty verdict could not be reached on the same day as the trial; and the defendant was to be present when the verdict was reached.

This would make sense in the Gospel of John, since he spends little time describing the actual trial of Jesus. Therefore, it may be that Jesus was found guilty on this day so that when He was arrested in the Garden of

Gethsemane, all that *technically* needed to be done, in the eyes of the Sanhedrin, was the reading of the guilty verdict.

#### Verse 54

- ❑ Jesus now leaves Judea, traveling to a small town, named Ephraim, possibly the Old Testament town of Ephron (2 Chronicles 13:19). This town was about twelve miles outside of Jerusalem.

#### Verses 55 – 56

- ❑ This was the third, and final, Passover of Jesus' ministry.
- ❑ John states that “many went up to Jerusalem out of the country before the Passover to purify themselves.”
  - According to the Jewish Law, each Jew had to be ceremonially clean in order to participate in the celebration of Passover. This purification process often took an entire week.
  - How ironic it is that, while the nation “purifies” itself, in order to participate in Passover, its leaders are plotting to kill the very One who perfectly fulfills the great Feast.
- ❑ In Verse 56, the phrase, “they were seeking for Jesus” implies a *continuous* search.
- ❑ The Jews, then, began asking one another, “What do you think; that He will not come to the feast at all?”
  - In other words, as one scholar put it, “Surely he won't come to the Festival?”

#### Verse 57

- ❑ The “curtain” now closes on this chapter as the tension has nearly reached its climax.
- ❑ The Sanhedrin has made up its mind...It **will** capture Jesus...