

The Plot to Kill Jesus (John 11:45–12:11)

By Pastor Alexander (2/27/2022)

Introduction

1. Jesus explained to the disciples that His purpose in going to Lazarus was to glorify the Father (v. 4). He reminded Martha that if she believed, she would see the glory of God (v. 40). Jesus did glorify the Father in raising Lazarus, but the miracle was only part of a larger plan that would now unfold.
2. Jesus responded to the Sanhedrin's plans to put Him to death by leaving Bethany for the town of Ephraim (Ephron), twelve miles northeast of Jerusalem in a wilderness area. This closing section of John 11 also begins the section that continues into John 12 describing the events leading to His death on the cross.

John 12 opens to continue the current movement to bring the Lord to the "hour" appointed by the Father, fulfilling the purpose of His coming into the world. There is no miracle sign or sustained discourse in this section.

3. In a dramatic contrast to the Jews' plot to destroy Jesus, John inserts the anointing of Jesus by Mary. Six days before the Passover, Jesus returned to Bethany from Ephraim. They were asking that anyone who knew the whereabouts of Jesus should inform the authorities. In the face of this, "they" (unidentified but presumably the family of Lazarus) prepared a supper in Jesus' honor, held at the home of Simon the Leper, according to Matthew 26:13. John puts this incident here to contrast it with the plot of the Jews to kill Jesus. However, this true act of worship also became the source that God used to provoke Judas' betrayal of Jesus to the Jewish authorities.

I. The Decision of the Sanhedrin (11:45–57)

1. A little background on the Sanhedrin and its members

The Sanhedrin was dominated by the chief priests, who were temple-oriented. All priests were Sadducees who kept themselves aloof from others. They were also more willing to compromise and to make concessions to the Romans. The Pharisees were the minority party, consisting of scribes, teachers, and synagogue leaders. They were synagogue-oriented, having the most contact with the people. They were also more resistant to Roman domination.

2. The problem Jesus presented to the Jewish authorities

The raising of Lazarus provoked the two parties to come together and ask, "*What are we to do?*" (v. 47). They could not deny that Jesus performed many notable miracles (vv. 47, 48). They demanded signs, and Jesus gave them. However, their resistance to Jesus' words made them blind to the significance of His signs. His words were sharp, exposing and rebuking their hypocritical ways.

The Pharisees were unwilling to reconsider their position on Jesus because they were still stinging from their episode with the man born blind (Chapter 9). The Sadducees, on the other hand, feared that Jesus would fan the fire of popular Messianic hope to such an extent that the people would rebel, provoking the Romans to take away their place (temple) and nation (quasi-autonomy).

3. The prophecy of Caiaphas, the High Priest

Joseph Caiaphas was an arrogant man, as seen in his critical response to the question (v. 49). The Jewish historian, Josephus, confirms the judgment that the Sadducees were openly critical even of members of their own party. He was also very opinionated (v. 50). His opinion was clearly self-serving—what was best for the ruling party. What resulted of their getting Jesus crucified? The nation perished anyway. Justice was sacrificed for political expediency.

John explains that there was another meaning behind his words (vv. 51, 52). His language is filled with sacrificial terminology. Caiaphas used words that were later applied to the *church—nation (ethnos) and people (laos)* (1 Peter 2:9).

II. The Anointing by Mary (12:1-3)

1. A little more background (comparing Matthew 26:6–13; Mark 14:3–9 Luke 7:36–38)

Matthew and Mark have an anointing at Bethany in the house of Simon the Leper (apparently healed). In their account the woman is not named, but she anoints Jesus' head with nard from an alabaster jar. The dis-

ciples are indignant at the seeming lavish waste. Jesus defends the woman with the focus on His coming burial.

In a similar scene recorded in Luke's Gospel (Luke 7:36–38), the anointing occurred at the home of an unnamed Pharisee. John's account clearly differs from Luke's but agrees largely with Matthew and Mark. This passage brings up a couple of questions: (1) Why would anyone wipe off perfume that was just applied? (2) Why would any respectable woman such as Mary let down her tresses in male company? John's emphasis was that Mary understood Jesus' mission and indicated her sacrifice in light of it.

2. The anointing itself

The supper was a village dinner honoring a celebrated guest. John informs us that that the event was held six days before the Passover, making it on a Saturday evening after the close of Sabbath, after six o'clock (Sabbath was from Friday evening to Saturday evening). Many were there, including Lazarus.

The perfume was *nard*, an oil extracted from the root and spike (hence, *spikenard*) of the nard plant from India. John modified the description by the adjective meaning "genuine"—pure nard. The quantity used was approximately eleven ounces in a bottle of alabaster. Nard was a very expensive perfume worth better than a year's wages of a common laborer.

Mary's act of worship was, at the very least, an utmost humiliating self-sacrifice of love and devotion. Her letting down her hair further argues that Mary did not care what others thought. Her sacrifice of love was true spiritual worship as extravagant as the perfume she poured out.

3. The reaction of Judas

John focuses on Judas for a special purpose; although others, particularly the disciples, reacted with indignation: "*And when the disciples saw it, they were indignant, saying, 'Why this waste?'*" (Matthew 26:8; Mark 14:4). Judas' objection was hypocritical. He feigned concern for the poor, but his indignation reflected in his own greedy lust and materialism.

4 The rebuke of Jesus in defense of Mary

The Greek of verse 7 is very difficult: "*Leave her alone that she may keep it for the day of my burial.*" What does she keep? Certainly not the perfume. If she has already poured out most of it, how does she keep it? It is more likely that Jesus was revealing the fact that, like Caiaphas, Mary did not understand what her act triggered. What she did prefigured what Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus would do in the near future as they buried Him.

The Lord's statement that the poor are always present is not to be taken as a lack of concern for them, but only that He was to be the primary interest. Believers' faithful obedience to the Lord would benefit the poor far more than Mary's offering, if sold, would help the poor. Further, it was Jesus' rebuke of Judas that pushed him to seek out the Jews so that he might betray Him.

Lessons

1. The glory of God was not so much seen in the raising of Lazarus but in that the event brought about the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, which was clearly John's message (12:23). Observe the awesome greatness of God in bringing about His purposes. Are you, as a Christian, more like Caiaphas—self-serving, or like Mary—self-sacrificing?
2. Mary's act of devotion should not be seen as making her faith superior to that of Martha's. John focuses on her act only as it focused on the sacrifice of Jesus for our sins on the cross, pointing to His burial. Mary's devotion is, nevertheless, something that we all should desire to emulate. How she worshiped and honored her Savior! How she gave her all! How she cared nothing for how others might see her! Jesus was her Savior and her Lord. That is all she cared for.
3. The poor are always with us, but that also means we have a responsibility to help them. Judas was hypocritical in his concern, but the substance of his concern was accurate. We are to give to relieve the poor.
4. Beware of your response when rebuked. Judas' reaction to Christ's rebuke led him to betray Christ. Let us pray for grace to humble ourselves, accept the truth of our condition, and seek His power to change for the better.