
Why the Jews Plotted

John 11:38-57

Pastor Russ Kennedy

Intrigue, politics, maneuvering, plotting... All a part of our work places...

Religious institutions are not exempt from this...

Being plotted against is a difficult place to be...

So, this leads me to a question: why did the Jews plot to kill Jesus?

Frightening Power

(v. 38-44)

Our text this morning flows out of what has happened at a tomb with a dead man. Jesus has demonstrated a power that has now frightened the religious and national leaders of Israel. Listen and think about seeing this event through jealous and power mad eyes.

³⁸ Then Jesus, deeply moved again, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone lay against it. ³⁹ Jesus said, "Take away the stone." Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, "Lord, by this time there will be an odor, for he has been dead four days." ⁴⁰ Jesus said to her, "Did I not tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God?" ⁴¹ So they took away the stone. And Jesus lifted up his eyes and said, "Father, I thank you that you have heard me. ⁴² I knew that you always hear me, but I said this on account of the people standing around, that they may believe that you sent me." ⁴³ When he had said these things, he cried out with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out." ⁴⁴ The man who had died came out, his hands and feet bound with linen strips, and his face wrapped with a cloth. Jesus said to them, "Unbind him, and let him go."

A Dead Man

(v. 38-39)

This dead man was a good friend of Jesus. Lazarus' sisters were standing there. And so were Jesus' enemies. Four days ago, this friend, Lazarus, died from an illness. A message had been sent. A reassuring word returned. Yet, while Jesus "dithered", this dear one died. Now, Jesus has found out upon his arrival in town that they have buried him. So, here we are standing at the tomb.

A Penetrating Question

(v. 40)

Wow, Jesus said, "Didn't I tell you?" to two of his closest friends. "I told you that your belief in what I said would glorify God." Not what He was about to do as stunning as it was going to be. If they believed they would see the glory of God. There is more here than can be imagined. If they, if we, if you, believe, you will one day look on the glory of God, face to face. Do you believe that?

An Illuminating Prayer**(v. 41-42)**

Jesus' prayer illuminates the purpose for this moment, this event. He is saying what He is saying and doing what He is doing so that people will come to life and will believe. Once again, the needle's eye of this text is threaded through John's purpose. Jesus words, through which His power goes out, bring life and grant faith.

A Resurrecting Word**(v. 43-44)**

A loud command calls to Lazarus by name. The word, the command, the call He speaks carries life giving power into the dead and deaf ears of Lazarus. His soul leaves its resting place and runs in obedient haste into the body. His heart starts. He takes his resurrection breath. His eyes pop open. Loosed from death he is bound in grave clothes in life.

Alive – he is alive. See the surprise, joy, awe and fear. See saving belief rise up and grasp salvation's hand. See transforming belief gain new strength in souls. Alive. We are alive.

An irony, Lazarus is unbound, given freedom in death. Jesus' story now turns to His own being bound over to death.

Two Responses**(v. 45-46)**

Can't you see the news crews crowding around to interview the sisters and the Jews to get their response? "How did you feel when..." John's perspective on these two responses is very different.

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.

Saving Belief**(v. 45)**

Did you see that? "Many of the Jews..." Many of the people who were Jesus' skeptical and cynical enemies believed in Him. Here it is. Here is the glory of God. The Jews believe. This is what the resurrection power of Christ produces – a Lazarus raised from the dead and the Jews come to saving belief.

Destroying Unbelief**(v. 46)**

"But..." Well, you had to know it. Turning sharply away, cloaks aswirl, beards vibrating, teeth grinding, some of the Jews stomp off. They go to the Pharisees. They tell them what has happened. They are going to tell on Jesus. "You know what He has done now? It isn't enough that He fed 5,000, interrupted an important feast, made fools of you in public, now He has gone and raised a dead man."

Whaaat?!? Raised a dead man? You're sure? You were there. You know for certain he was dead? Yeah, 4 days. Helped wrap him up ourselves. He was definitely a corpse. But we are telling you, Jesus called out his name, commanded him to come out and voila' – there he was. Most amazing thing we've ever seen.

So, what are going to do about this? After all, what do you do about someone who has the power to multiply bread and raise the dead? Believe in Him? No way.

An Accidental Prophecy

(v. 47-53)

Now we've bumped into a group of people in this text and now we are the fly on the wall in a meeting.

Who are these guys?

⁴⁷ So the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered the Council... Caiaphas, who was high priest that year...

First, who are these guys?

The Pharisees were a group of the most conservative Jewish leaders - similar to the ultra-orthodox Jews of today. They were distinguished from a liberal group in Judaism called the Sadducees.

The Chief priests were the leaders of the priests in the Jewish religion who were responsible for the Jewish worship and rites. They had formed a council that coordinated the political rule of the nation with the Rome appointed rulers, both Roman and Jewish.

Caiaphas was the name of the high priest that year. The chief priests served as High Priest on an annual rotation. Later, he will preside over the trial of Jesus before the full religious governing body of Israel, called the Sanhedrin.

So, there's your room of people. Plotters, prophets, politicians, purists...

Self-Centered Concerns

(v. 47-48)

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."

What are they concerned about? They are concerned lest they lose their power, place and position. They are first, politicians. Jesus' miracle working power is going to cause everyone to believe - not true, they don't believe neither do most of the people. But they are fearful that Rome will accuse them of not keeping control and will replace them with people who will. They don't care one whit for welfare of the people or the nation - they are only concerned about themselves.

More than He Knew

(v. 49-50)

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 [people] should perish."

The High Priest that year was someone named Caiaphas. No, he is not some Brazilian or Spanish soccer star. He is the head of Judaism. He appears and sounds arrogant. He looks around the room at the most powerful religious and political rulers of his day and calls them ignorant. Don't they understand that it is better for one man to die than for the whole nation to be destroyed? It is better for Jesus to die for the nation.

Remember, in the story itself, we are still before the cross. At this point in time, they are still living in the Old Testament. Here is an Old Testament priest speaking as an Old Testament prophet.

Cross-centered Interpretations

(v. 51-52)

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.

John is writing his book in the New Testament era. He is writing after the death and resurrection of Jesus. So he comments on Caiaphas' statement. In Caiaphas' mind, he is simply saying it is better to kill Jesus than to let the nation go down. But the way he has said it has turned it into a prophecy. John helps us then to identify and to interpret this prophecy.

John identifies this statement as a prophecy. God had spoken through this man. This plan and these plotting words actually are a prophecy. Through his plotting, God has caused him to predict the death of Jesus.

John also detects something larger. The exact way Caiaphas has said this is important. "It is better for one man to die for the nation, than the whole people perish." John then interprets this prophecy, not just in terms of Jesus dying for Israel, but also on behalf of all the people God saves. John's living through the expansion of the church from Israel into all the world is seen in this simple prophecy.

There is something important for us here. For John, it is important to understand Caiaphas' words *from the perspective of the New Testament*. He interprets this Old Testament statement in the light of the New Testament reality. This is not unusual for the apostles to handle the Old Testament like this. It is so common that it is a principle for how Christians ought to read their Bibles. Jesus' coming is the single most important key to understanding the Old Testament.

Evil Plans

(v. 53)

⁵³ So from that day on they made plans to put him to death.

The raising of Lazarus from the dead was the final straw. At this point, they cannot merely challenge Jesus and try to undermine His influence. He is too powerful, if not too popular. So, they understand what Caiaphas is proposing. Now, they begin to make plans to put Jesus to death. Quickly. Publicly. At Rome's hands.

All-Points-Bulletin**(v. 54-57)**

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.

Some Wise Caution**(v. 54)**

In the face of these plots, Jesus exercises some wise caution. The disciples thought that coming to Judea to see Lazarus was not a good idea. Thomas had said, "Well, let's go with him. If we die, we die." I am sure that at this point they quite glad that Jesus decides to retreat to a safer place. He decides that He will no longer walk openly among those who are plotting to kill Him.

A Curious Seeking**(v. 55-56)**

The Passover is a religious celebration in Judaism. God required that all Jews celebrate this feast. It was in memory of the time when Israel had been held as slaves in the land of Egypt. After 400 years, God sent Moses to lead them out. Moses conducted a long and deadly confrontation and contest with the ruler of Egypt, the Pharaoh. God had warned that the last plaque, the last contest would be dreadful. He was going to kill all the first-born sons in the land of Egypt. Anyone who killed a lamb and sprinkled blood over the door post and lintel would be spared. Israel were to be packed, ready to leave. At midnight, the wailing and mourning swept across Egypt reaching even to the Pharaoh's first born son.

Israel was ordered out. They fled from Egypt, crossing the Red Sea, and pursued by the Pharaoh and his army. God parted the waters of the Red Sea and Israel passed through but the water walls collapsed, drowning and destroying the Egyptians.

This great event was a picture of God's redemption of His people. As a means of commemorating that great event, God required this religious celebration. It was both a serious and happy time. It was a time of ritual purifying and personal offerings. The Passover was one of the most important celebrations in Judaism.

Vast crowd would be in Jerusalem on this feast. They would arrive a week early in order to make arrangements. But the news of Lazarus' resurrection had spread like wild-fire. Now, many who wanted to see this amazing miracle worker were wondering if He would show up at the feast. John portrays this as a hubbub of murmuring and talking. All across the Temple mount, people were wondering if He would come and they would get to see Him.

A Wide Net**(v. 57)**

But the religious leaders were escalating their search for Jesus. They were casting very wide net. They have put out an all-points-bulletin on Jesus. If anyone sees Him, they are to report immediately to the Pharisees. The hunt is on in earnest. The religious leaders intend to bring Jesus' life to an end. All it will take is... Well, that's for another day.

Reflect and Respond

What does it take for people to be saved? What does it take for you to believe? If you were standing at Lazarus' tomb and saw him raised from dead, would you fall down and worship Jesus? Would you believe? Are you sure? Why do many of the people walk away from an empty tomb and not only don't believe, but in fact side with Jesus' enemies? Because belief is not a merely human action. Saving belief is a gift from God. It comes to those He has given life to.

Unbelief is not neutral. We have seen this clearly here. Unbelief poises you against God. It is an affront to God. So turn away from your unbelief. Believe in Christ. Trust in Him alone for your salvation. Throw yourself on His mercies.

Jesus did not die as a good teacher, a great moral example, a man who cared for the poor, the downtrodden, the sick, the lame. He did not die for His good deeds. Jesus earned the hatred of the religious leaders of His day because He claimed to be God. He raised the dead. His power threatened theirs. So at the human level, Jesus died at the hands of religious hatred.

But that is not the whole story. Jesus died for sins and sinners. He died to bear the wrath of God against sin. He died to bring the people of God back to God. That is why He died. His death then has made reconciliation and relationship with God possible. The issue for you is to believe in Christ and bow to Him. Will you, today?