

John 11:45-54

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[0 : 0 0] is taken from the book of John chapter 11 verses 45 through 54 found in pages 995 in the white bibles again our scripture reading for the day is John chapter 11 verses 45 through 54 I guess everyone is standing so I will begin to read many of the Jews therefore who had come with Mary and had seen what he did believed in him but some of them went to the Pharisees and told them what Jesus had done so the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered the council and said what are we to do for this man performs many signs 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 but one of them Caiaphas who was high priest that year said to them you know nothing at all 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 he did not say this of his own accord but being high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus would die for the nation and not for the nation only but also to gather and to one the children of God who are gathered abroad so from that day on they made plans to put him to death 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 this is the word of the Lord you may be seated good morning good morning it's uh incredibly surreal to be here what Dave did not mention was the fact that uh we got to know each other through a random series of events mainly because I wrote a totally random email saying uh I've stolen a lot from the simian trust could I please steal some more um

Dave taught me most of uh what I know about preaching which is to say if this goes poorly it's Dave's fault uh the title of my sermon this morning is a glorious tragic irony I love listening to stories I love telling stories especially ones that involve irony and even more ones that involve tragic irony tragic irony could be defined as a relationship of contrasts between a character's limited understanding of his or her situation and what the audience at the same instant understands the character's situation to actually be this misunderstanding inevitably leads to tragedy let me give you an example uh there's a famous play called Oedipus Rex in the play in one of the climactic moments

Oedipus calls down a curse on the murder of the slain king yet the audience knows that Oedipus himself is the murderer therefore hearer understands the irony of what is happening and watches the play unfold as Oedipus himself comes to understand that he is the murderer leading to rather tragic consequences now I'll take that to make it a little more down to earth for those of you who like me couldn't spell Oedipus to save their lives in the movie Titanic there is a person in there we go I got a shout out for that one there is a person who is watching off the deck of the ship icebergs go by and they say it's so beautiful

I could just die right before they hit the tragic life ending iceberg that will take the Titanic down sorry if I spoiled the movie for you tragic irony is a powerful way to tell a story and this week we see what I believe to be the most profound tragic irony in all of the Bible one that is infinitely tragic and yet infinitely glorious at the same time the story before us is a simple yet deceptively complex one there is level upon level of irony going on in the story before us but before we get there a bit of context leading up to the story Jesus has done what is in all reality something impossible he has brought his friend Lazarus back from the dead he did this in order to show himself as as it says in verse 25 the resurrection and the life in other words

Jesus is not just doing something nice for a friend Jesus is entering into tragedy to demonstrate his power over tragedy so that people might believe him in the midst of tragedy which brings us to our passage this morning lo and behold verse 45 many people believe and just to be clear from the outset this morning that is my goal this morning I want to convince you to believe now you might be thinking I already believe the reality is I don't care and neither does John John constantly throughout this book does not care about if you have believed in the past his whole goal is to get you to believe in the present to always be believing in this Jesus there's all kinds of people who believe in Jesus for a moment and then just end up walking away so whether you have believed your whole life or whether you don't even know who Jesus is my goal is to convince you to believe this morning while some do believe others go in verses 46 to 48 to tell the religious leaders who proceed to call a council and freak out their chief concern is that

[6 : 40] Jesus must be stopped if he's allowed to continue then according to them verse 48 everyone will believe and they will lose everything they're not crazy they're not speaking so much about religious belief as nationalistic fervor all the Jews during this time had messiah fever they were longing for one that would come who's promised in the old testament to set them free and the religious leaders are like yeah we can't really do that because that's going to anger the Romans and they're going to take us off the board you see the Romans tolerated the Jews they tolerated all the people that they had conquered as long as they didn't make trouble and Jesus looks like trouble and notice that the leaders do not disbelieve the signs that Jesus has done like look he's done many signs everybody's believing in him they tried disbelieving the sign back in chapter nine with the blind man that didn't go so well for them now they're not so much disbelieving the signs but worried about the consequences what a tragic situation they don't care about truth but simply what

Jesus actions might cost them personally they're willing to appease the Roman powers that are oppressing them whatever the cost I wonder if you might be in a similar situation this morning it's easy to look at these what in reality we can only call fools and say I can't believe that they would do such a thing and turn so quickly away from the mirror and not examine ourselves and go am I willing to just get rid of Jesus because of what it might cost me everything the religious leaders do and say in this section is ironic Jesus proving he is the resurrection and the life is the sign that breaks the Pharisees backs demanding ultimately in his demanding his execution in verse 53 now there's every indication in

John that such a plan will not work this whole idea of killing Jesus especially coming on the heels of the Lazarus story you see Lazarus is still walking around living proof that in the immortal words of Claude Ellie there ain't no grave gonna hold his body down despite all the evidence the religious leaders don't care to believe they're too busy thinking about themselves again how often just like you and me what's most ironic is the background that John's audience knew well and that we must keep in mind if we are to understand the full irony of what is about to take place in this chapter you see the political pragmatism of the religious leaders in this section does not work in 70 CE the Romans will come in and will take their place and will take their nation killing

Jesus doesn't work but the even more profound irony that all of John's readers have always known is simply this friends Jesus is alive so in reading this story what we are doing is listening in on failure you see they had a plan to kill Jesus but we know already that it didn't work and so as we listen to this story we ourselves are being confronted with this question what will you and I do with Jesus because you and I must make a decision we must either believe like many of the Jews in verse 45 or we must do anything we can to get rid of Jesus which we already know won't work this is all the setting that leads to the dramatic tragic yet glorious irony of our passage this morning I have three quick points number one we have an ironic person number two we have an ironic prescription and number three we have an ironic prologue here's my argument it's very simple

I want to convince you this morning and show you that the death of Jesus is a glorious tragic irony very simple the death of Jesus is a glorious tragic irony I'll spend the bulk of my time in that third point we'll begin with the first one an ironic person this is in verse 49 here we're introduced to a man named Caiaphas Caiaphas is John's representation of all that was wrong in Judaism in Jesus day it's highlighted in that little phrase that he'll repeat twice in this section he was high priest that year now high priest appointments were supposed to be for life the high priest serving as the lead mediator between God and God's people yet by this time it was a political position it was one that was decided upon year by year you got to keep your job essentially if you didn't cause too much trouble and we know from external sources that

[12 : 24] Caiaphas was part of the cultured elite and he was incredibly good at keeping his job he held it for 19 years but you see John is writing remembering the year that he was the high priest for by the time he writes Caiaphas had faded into the mist of memory see he was high priest that year but he was also high priest that year and no more friends here's the irony of the powers they seem so effective and mighty right up until the moment that they don't do not trust in the powers they will inevitably fail you it's an ironic person giving an ironic prescription here's our second point in the latter part of verse 49 and verse 50

I'll read it it is quite a speech by Caiaphas you know nothing at all which is always a way to win friends and influence people 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 here is a very simple idea of sacrifice a scapegoat if you will one dies for the many so that the many might be saved this makes all the sense in the world it is a politically expedient idea an ugly if necessary way to remedy a problematic situation it might not be pleasant but hey here's the thing somebody's got to do something who better than the high priest to take care of this situation one who had shown himself to be effectively ruthless through time this not only fits Caiaphas' character it just makes sense like just just take Jesus out of the way and life can go back to being normal sure it's terrible life for the Jews was no walk in the park the Romans were not benevolent dictators!

it was a mighty hand of oppression but Caiaphas is like look let's just let's just kill him it'll be fine and we can all keep going on our merry way the irony is that Caiaphas is completely wrong in his thinking yet at the same time he is entirely right in point of fact you see it is indeed better that one man should die for the people not that the whole nation should perish just not for any of the reasons that Caiaphas has in mind and John sees this irony plainly and will reveal it in the third point this morning an ironic person giving an ironic prescription with and here's our third point an ironic prologue in verses 51 through 53 John sees Caiaphas' statement as prophetic and particularly ironic in light of the position Caiaphas held repeating the idea in verse 51 that he was high priest that year among other things it was the high priest job to bring the sacrifice of atonement into the holy of holies in the temple once a year to remove the sins from the people

Caiaphas is speaking here on an absolutely political level that's all he's thinking of yet John knows and helps us to see that Caiaphas' words speak to spiritual realities Jesus will die for the nation not in order to save them from Rome but in order to bring them into God's family as John puts it here notice whom John assumes Jesus will die for in verses 51 and 52 Jesus would die for the nation and not for the nation only but also to gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad it is often asked not normally during Christmas so I love the fact I get to preach this passage on like December 1st beginning of Advent and we're all excited about the coming of Jesus just remember this every time you see that fat little baby Jesus he came to die we should still celebrate it just don't forget the way the story ends and then keeps on going it's often asked for whom did Jesus die did his death actually accomplish anything and here John seems to be rather clear it's perfectly in line with what Jesus has said thus far in John and it was the entire pattern of the Old Testament Jesus would die as a sacrifice for the people of God near and far his death being the catalyst that brings them together friends here's the good news Jesus's death does not make salvation possible it makes it actual Jesus does not open the door but he carries you over the threshold he does not merely call you forth but gives you life friends that's the best news I've got for you this morning if you're bored at this point nothing else is going to be any good from this point forward Jesus saves a people and this finds its reality not only in the New Testament which we're reading this morning but in this big fat part in the front called the Old Testament see in the Old Testament the sacrificial lamb was offered on the day of atonement for the people of God by the high priest himself leading to salvation for the nation a covering over of sins a removal of the stain of sin yet there are hints throughout the Old Testament that one day salvation was going to look a little different for example in Isaiah 43:5 through 7 we hear fear not for I am with you I will bring you your offspring from the east and from the west I will gather you I will say to the north give up and to the south do not withhold bring my sons from afar and my daughters from the ends of the earth everyone who is called by my name whom I created for my glory whom I formed and made the question that lingers throughout the Old Testament is okay yeah but how is this going to take place and when is this going to take place it's an unanswered question in the Old Testament and John here gives us the answer the way that the people of God are gathered from the ends of the earth is through the glorious tragedy of Jesus's death for in him all the people of God are brought together see the events of John 11 are both glorious and tragic in very different ways for Jesus and for those who are in opposition to Jesus I'll close by looking first at the tragedy that leads to glory in the life of Jesus

the leaders make their resolution in verse 53 to put jesus to death there is no need for a trial they have made up their minds it is as if they left the meeting and they all went home to teach their children a religious song it goes a little something like this i have decided to murder jesus i have decided to murder jesus no turning back no turning back what's most ironic is the fact that this plan will be accomplished jesus will hang on a cross in a public spectacle and die in agony a terrible tragedy and for three days the religious leaders will have peace that is until they get some news that the tomb in which jesus was placed is empty you see the glory in jesus tragedy is that he is victorious in death you know that phrase that people wear on their t-shirts when they go to the gym i don't go to the gym i know it doesn't look like it but i've seen movies i've heard stories of people in the gym that wear t-shirts that say what doesn't kill you makes you stronger which might be true i don't know jesus wears a different t-shirt jesus's t-shirt reads you can kill me but it only makes me stronger friends the good news i have for you this morning is that through the tragedy of jesus's death comes something glorious his resurrection and our being united into one in case you missed it this morning this church right now as jacked up and weird and as unimpressive as it is i know i just became a member but you know to be honest this gathered assembly bears witness to the unifying power of jesus's glorious tragedy don't ever discount what you see now if there's tragedy that leads to glory in the life of jesus then there is a glory that leads to tragedy for those who reject jesus and this is where we'll close while the leaders will think that they have won they're only enacting the plan of god and bringing about the end of themselves you see the glorious tragic irony of this passage is not only what happens to jesus but will soon place take place to those who reject jesus in the death of jesus is the religious leaders own destruction and demise caiaphas can tell off the others saying you don't know anything yet he throws himself under the same bus for he doesn't know anything either none of them knew that they in the decision to murder jesus were sealing their own fate in an ironic twist of biblical proportions their glory would turn to tragedy but it would be unloving and unwise to leave it there as simply tragic ironic tale for other people long ago you could leave here thinking that was an interesting story what's for lunch the tragedy is that the leaders lot in this story is the tragedy for all who reject jesus in fact the guilt for those

[23 : 59] who reject jesus today is greater than the tragedy for the leaders in this moment you see the leaders in this moment didn't know that their plan would work and that jesus would rise from the dead you do you might have never known it before now you do and what a tragic irony it would be to hear that jesus did die did rise again that these leaders who thought they were winning actually lost and go that's going to be different for me the greatest tragedy in the world would be to hear this story and walk away unbelieving friends what you have to understand is that the moment that i pray and end this sermon we are going to celebrate with this stuff behind me if you don't know what this is we're going to celebrate the victory of jesus we don't take these elements thinking i hope it's going to work we take them remembering that in the death of jesus is the death of death and is my life friends don't make the most tragic decision you could ever make and just walk away from here not believing for your story will end in tragedy but the good news for all who do believe is that through that tragic irony in john 11 that we see this morning comes a glorious future for all who would believe so regardless of how we entered here this morning we should all like the jews of verse 45 believe and keep on believing we've seen this ironic person giving an ironic prescription with an ironic prologue friends i think it's clear that the death of jesus is a glorious tragic irony let's pray lord give us eyes to see and hearts to receive the good news of what you brought about through the death and resurrection resurrection of our lord and savior jesus christ it's in his name that we pray amen