

The Aftermath

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[0 : 00] Well, last Sunday we heard about one of the greatest miracles that Jesus ever did, raising Lazarus from the dead. And we continue that story this morning.

I'm reading from John chapter 11, verse 45 and 46. Therefore, many of the Jews who had come to visit Mary and had seen what Jesus did, believed in him.

But some of them went to the Pharisees and told them what Jesus had done. So now we come to the response to this great miracle of raising Lazarus from the dead.

As we heard last Sunday, it wasn't just Mary and Martha who witnessed this. There was a whole group of witnesses. And let's just go back and trace this out quickly.

Back to verse 19 of chapter 11. When Jesus first arrived in Bethany, John tells us that many Jews had already come to Martha and Mary to comfort them in the loss of their brother.

[1 : 05] Now, if Jewish funerals were like some of ours, we might have assumed that these visitors had all gone home already before Jesus even arrived. Lazarus had already been buried for four days.

But then we come down to verse 31. And we discover that at least some of these visitors were still there with Mary and Martha. There were some who were in the house comforting Mary, John tells us.

And these Jewish friends follow Mary out to the place where she meets with Jesus when he arrives. John tells us that these friends, at least some of them, were weeping along with Mary in verse 33.

And some of them remarked at how Jesus himself wept. But some of them said, Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?

Then we finally come to the moment of the miracle. Jesus prays to his father and says at the end of his prayer, I've said what I said in this prayer for the benefit of the people standing here, so that they may believe that you sent me.

[2 : 24] Literally, it's on account of the crowd standing around. So these Jewish friends who had been with Mary are all here at the tomb with her, and with Martha, and with Jesus.

And then Jesus does the miracle and raises Lazarus from the dead in the sight of all of them. So we've had this group of witnesses, and now we find out about their response to the miracle.

What's their reaction? John tells us in verse 45 and 46. He tells us that many of them who had seen what Jesus did believed in him.

The miracle that they saw with their own eyes sealed the deal. Yes, you really are, just as Martha says, the Messiah, the Son of God.

But John tells us also that some of them went to the Pharisees and told them about what Jesus had done.

[3 : 33] Now, this is kind of an ominous statement. On the one hand, we might think, well, that's great. You go tell those Pharisees what Jesus did. Give them some more evidence that Jesus really is the Son of God and the Messiah.

But on the other hand, the Pharisees have been plotting to kill Jesus. They are his enemies, his opponents. They've been looking for opportunities to get their hands on him.

So why are they going to Jesus' enemies? Now the Pharisees will know where Jesus is. And he's not far away.

Bethany is just two miles outside the city of Jerusalem. So this is almost kind of like reporting Jesus to the local police. As if he just committed a crime or something.

Well, this report triggers a big meeting. Verse 47. Then the chief priests and the Pharisees called a meeting of the Sanhedrin.

[4 : 37] The Sanhedrin is the ruling council in Israel. It's also the highest judicial body in the land. Except for the Roman authority, which was over them at the time.

So you can maybe think of it a little bit like the legislative assembly and the Supreme Court of Canada merged together into one. But a religious version. Made up of chief priests.

Pharisees. Scribes. Sadducees. Elders. Wealthy. Individuals. So big meeting.

And now we hear a little from John about what was said at this meeting. What are we accomplishing? They asked. Here is this man performing many signs.

If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him. And then the Romans will come and take away both our temple and our nation. Can you hear the frustration that they have about Jesus?

[5 : 42] What are they so worried about? They're worried that everyone will come to believe in Jesus. That's what they don't want to see happen.

People are coming to believe that Jesus is the Messiah. And Messiah means king. And if the whole nation gets behind this man as their king, their Messiah, then it would almost certainly be perceived as a revolt.

And cause the Romans to come hard against them. It would ruin this whole little bit of freedom that we have underneath the Romans to be our own nation that we've got going here in our little corner of the Roman Empire.

So these were the kinds of things being said at this high-level meeting. And we can't help but wonder, where, O leaders of Israel, is your faith in God?

He promised that the Messiah would come and reign on David's throne. And if Jesus is that Messiah, which the signs are overwhelmingly pointing to, if Jesus is that Messiah, then why should we fear the Romans?

[7 : 00] If God is with this man, then who can be against him? So there's not a lot of faith in God happening amongst this group of religious leaders and political leaders.

And there's something else that's dark and ugly here. Is it really just Rome that you're worried about? Is it really for the greater good of the nation that you are worried?

Or is it your own positions of power and influence and wealth over the people of Israel that you're worried about? If Jesus does become king, where does that leave the Sanhedrin?

Out of a job. Out of the spotlight where they love to be. It leaves them under authority instead of over the people like they're used to.

No longer the ones who decide what's true and how things will go in the land. It leaves them with people not believing in them anymore and instead believing in Jesus.

[8 : 10] That's what's really going on here beneath the surface. We see Jesus as a threat, they say. And we cannot, we must not let him go on like this.

Because if we do, everybody will believe in him. That's how compelling the signs were. Verse 49.

Then one of them, named Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, spoke up. You know nothing at all. You do not realize that it is better for you that one man die for the people than that the whole nation perish.

He did not say this on his own, but as high priest that year, he prophesied that Jesus would die for the Jewish nation. And not only for that nation, but also for the scattered children of God, to bring them together and make them one.

So from that day on, they plotted to take his life. So Caiaphas, the high priest, the top dog, interjects at the assembly, and he gives his own evaluation of what we should do here.

[9 : 28] And it seems that what he says is accepted by the group. Decision made. What's best here is that this one man, Jesus, die.

It's better that than the alternative, which is that he puts the whole nation in danger, and the whole nation perish. So this is the solution that the high priest puts forward.

But notice who the primary benefactors are here. It's quite something how he words it, isn't it? He says, you all do not realize that it is better for you, and that's a you plural, as in it's better for you guys, here at the meeting, that Jesus die, than the whole nation perish.

So whose interests come first here? Those of the nation? Or those of the Jewish leaders at the meeting? He could have said, it's better for the nation.

But no, it's better for you guys if it goes this way, if Jesus dies. This is the man in the highest religious position in Israel.

[10 : 48] What a sad solution. And it's clear that this is what Caiaphas meant, because look at what John says next in verse 53.

He says, so from that day on, they plotted to take his life. Now the NIV translation and a few others, I don't think get it quite right here.

Plotted is probably not quite the right meaning of the word that's used in the original language. The word used here means to reach a decision about a course of action.

It means to resolve, to decide something. And here's why this is so important. This moment is not just the Pharisees doing more of what they've been doing all along, plotting and scheming.

This moment is the moment that the decision was made official by the Sanhedrin to take Jesus out. The Pharisees have been plotting and scheming for a long time, but now this is more than just the Pharisees.

[11 : 52] This is the whole Jewish ruling council. Pharisees, Sadducees, scribes, teachers of the law. It's now official. Decision made.

This man needs to go. They resolved. They decided to take his life. And notice what's missing.

This is not a decision to bring him in so that we can question him some more. There's no mention of any need to put Jesus on trial or examine him.

The decision is made to take his life, as in to kill him. This is not good. Now let's go back for a moment.

What are we to make of this statement that John makes, that Caiaphas prophesied that Jesus would die for the Jewish nation? This is kind of a strange, maybe a little bit unexpected remark.

[12 : 56] And we're probably wondering here, did Caiaphas even know that he was prophesying, that God was speaking through him? Because it sure doesn't seem like Caiaphas is speaking from God.

It seems like he's proposing a very human and even sinful solution to the problem of Jesus that the leaders have. It's better for you guys that Jesus die than for the whole nation to perish.

And it seems obvious by how the council responds that this is how they understood Caiaphas' words. We got to figure out a way to take his life, to put an end to him.

But then John tells us that Caiaphas did not say this on his own. Literally, he did not say this from himself.

Amazingly and mysteriously, Caiaphas was also speaking from God. Or maybe we might say, rather, that God was speaking through him. And I'll be honest, I'm still trying to wrap my head around this a little bit.

[14 : 08] John makes special mention that he was the high priest that year. And the high priest, at least in Israel's history, was responsible for, partially for revealing God's will to the people.

He had the urim and the thummim, those kind of dice that would be rolled to consult with the Lord. In some ways, the high priest is a mediator between God and man.

And so prophecy, or speaking from God, was something that we might expect to hear from the high priest. And so, it seems, as John is saying, that because he was the high priest, God deliberately chose to speak through him.

But as Caiaphas spoke, surprisingly, it seems that what Caiaphas intended and what God intended were two different things.

Caiaphas predicted that Jesus would die as a substitute on behalf of the nation. And that's exactly what happened. But Caiaphas intended Jesus' death so that the nation wouldn't be wiped out by the Romans.

[15 : 16] Yet God intended Jesus' death to save his people from their sins, to save them from perishing in a much greater and a much different sense.

maybe what Caiaphas envisioned was that somehow, in the midst of all this, the scattered children of God, Jews from all over, would come together now and be united, even though this Jesus turned out not to be the Messiah that they had been hoping for.

But what God intended was that through his son Jesus, all of his children, who are scattered all over, both Jew and Gentile would come to believe in Jesus and would be made into one flock, one people of God, united in Christ, their Lord and Messiah.

So that's my best guess at what's going on here. There is one word of prophecy spoken, and yet it seems two different intentions. There's Caiaphas' intention, and there's God's intention.

And amazingly, even though there are two different intentions, there's only one result and one outcome. We might sum it up in the words of Joseph to his brothers.

[16 : 35] What Caiaphas intended for evil, God intended for good, to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives.

That's what the death of Jesus is all about, by God's intention, salvation, the saving of lives.

So Jesus will die for the nation as a substitute, and it will result in salvation for people and a bringing together of all the children of God so that they may be united.

Prophecy fulfilled. But you know, the more I thought about this, the more I realized, isn't this something? Here they are in the middle of this meeting trying to decide what to do with God's Son. Plotting, scheming, and now coming to a decision to kill Him. And yet, in that very meeting, God is there. And God is speaking.

[17 : 39] He even uses one of them to declare what He will bring about. through their plotting, through their decision, something good.

Something much more necessary than the salvation and the unification that they have in mind. God is able to bring about His plan, His good purpose, through the plotting and scheming of wicked men. the very word that sealed Jesus' fate at this meeting, at least on the human level, was ultimately spoken by God to bring about salvation for His people.

And this is what the apostles came to realize after Jesus had ascended into heaven. Maybe you remember later, Jesus' followers come to have some conflict with these same leaders in Acts chapter 4 and they're threatened.

Don't you talk about Jesus anymore. And they gather together and they pray. And this is what they say in Acts chapter 4. You spoke by the Holy Spirit through the mouth of your servant, Lord, our father David.

[19 : 04] Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth rise up and the rulers band together against the Lord and His anointed one.

Indeed, Herod and Pontius Pilate met together with the Gentiles and the people of Israel in this city to conspire against your holy servant, Jesus, whom you anointed.

But now listen to what they say. They did what your power and will had decided beforehand should happen. Isn't that something?

Do you hear that? Here in this meeting of the Sanhedrin, even though powerful men are at work against the Lord Jesus, plotting and scheming and planning and deciding to bring Jesus down, God is totally in control and He is even bringing about His good purpose and His will through their decision.

Something He's already decided should happen. I think there's a word for us in this for our day, isn't there? I've seen and I've heard such concern from Christians all over the world about what is happening right now in our days, about powerful people in positions of leadership, people who have great influence and are wealthy, who are working hard to bring about what they want to see and it seems that they're succeeding.

[20 : 51] Now don't get me wrong, we should be sad when laws are made that are unjust and immoral or when people are harmed or hurt by the powerful or people are taken advantage of by the wealthy.

But let's not forget that today, just as then, God is still totally in control of the situation. It's not just that he's off to the side and only occasionally intervenes just to make sure that things still go according to plan.

No, he is working through what these people are doing to bring about his good purpose, his will for his people and nobody can stop him.

Nobody can thwart him. So things are heating up for Jesus. It's now official.

The religious leaders are maybe thinking, now we can finally start printing the wanted posters and putting them up on the walls here in Jerusalem and in every town in Israel. verse 54.

[22 : 07] Therefore, Jesus no longer moved about publicly among the people of Judea. Instead, he withdrew to a region near the wilderness to a village called Ephraim where he stayed with his disciples.

So again, Jesus gets out of town. He puts some distance between himself and them. he finds a small village on the edge of the wilderness and he stays there for a while with his disciples.

I want to encourage you to put yourself in the shoes of Jesus' disciples in this time. How are they feeling right now as they follow Jesus through all of this?

Did they feel safe? Perhaps they're feeling like fugitives, men on the run. But even though from their perspective it probably looked like things were spiraling downward and out of control, all this time God was totally in control and all they needed to do was trust him and keep following Jesus.

God and his son Jesus are seated right now on heaven's throne and no matter what happens in our world they are personally seeing to it that everything goes just as it should even in our day today.

[23 : 51] and so I want to encourage you this morning to trust and obey. Keep following Jesus. He is the way, the truth and the life.

Let's pray. it's such a privilege Lord Jesus to know your story to know you to belong to you and to know that we are safe because we have you for our shepherd our king our lord and we long for that day when you will return.

We long to see the fullness of the kingdom of heaven, the kingdom of God that you spoke so much about. I pray that you would help us to be patient and to trust you.

Even though we don't know just what or when all of this will unfold. May you be glorified in us. In Jesus name.

Amen.