

PM John 11:45-12:8 Reactions to Jesus

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[0 : 00] of John, John chapter 11. We're going to be looking at the passage from verse 45 onwards, but perhaps we could begin our reading at verse 38.

The context is that Jesus' friend Lazarus, the brother of Martha and Mary of Bethany, has died.

The sister sent word to the Lord to tell him that Lazarus was unwell, but by the time Jesus arrived, Lazarus was dead and he had been in his grave for four days.

John chapter 11 verse 38. Then Jesus, deeply moved again, came to the tomb. It was a cave and a stone lay against it.

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.

[1 : 25] Jesus said to her, did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God? So they took away the stone and Jesus lifted up his eyes and said, Father, I thank you that you have heard me.

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. When he had said these things, he cried out with a loud voice, Lazarus, come out.

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.

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? What are we to do? For this man performs many signs.

[2 : 44] 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 into one the children of God who are scattered 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.

Now the Passover of the Jews was at hand, and many went up from the country to Jerusalem before the Passover to purify themselves.

[4 : 06] 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?

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. Six days before the Passover, Jesus, therefore, came to Bethany, where Lazarus was, whom Jesus had raised from the dead.

So they gave a dinner for him there. Martha served, and Lazarus was one of those reclining with him at table. Mary, therefore, took a pound of expensive ointment made from pure nard, and anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped his feet with her hair.

The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. But Judas Iscariot, one of the disciples, he who was about to betray him, said, Why was this ointment not sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor?

He said this, not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief, and having charge of the money bag he used to help himself to what was put into it.

[5 : 35] Jesus said, Leave her alone, so that she may keep it for the day of my burial. For the poor you always have with you, but you do not always have me.

When the large crowd of the Jews learned that Jesus was there, they came not only on account of him, but also to see Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead.

So the chief priests made plans to put Lazarus to death as well, because on account of him, many of the Jews were going away and believing in Jesus.

Amen. And may God bless to us that reading from his word. Please turn back with me in your Bibles to the passage we read, John chapter 11.

We will be looking at the passage from verse 45 through to verse 11 of chapter 12. The title is, Reactions to Jesus.

[6 : 49] Reactions to Jesus. What we need is more miracles in the supermarket.

What we need is more miracles in the supermarket. I remember a well-known charismatic preacher saying that in a meeting I went to in Southampton Guildhall many years ago.

The point he was making was that if only there were demonstrations of supernatural power in public places, the gospel would become irresistible and people would flock to become Christians.

Really? In the light of the passage we are looking at this evening, I am not at all sure that more miracles in the supermarket is what we really need.

In his gospel, John calls miracles signs. That's because they flag up who Jesus is and why he came.

[8 : 18] They are signposts to his identity and his mission. In chapter 9, Jesus heals a man who was born blind.

Only God can make the blind to see. But that's what Jesus did. The conclusion John wants us to draw is that Jesus must be God.

And that's not all. The miracle is a sort of acted parable. In giving physical sight to a man who was physically blind, Jesus was pointing to the more profound truth that his mission in the world was to give spiritual sight to the spiritually blind.

Here in chapter 11, we have the raising to life of a man who was dead. And Lazarus was dead. He had been in the tomb for four days.

But Jesus raised him to life again. Who can bring the dead back to life? Only God can. The raising of Lazarus is another sign that Jesus is God.

[9 : 38] And it also nudges us to see that even more amazingly, Jesus gives spiritual life to the spiritually dead.

Lazarus had been dead for four days when Jesus arrived in Bethany. His sister Martha protested when Jesus asked for the stone to be rolled away from the tomb.

She knew that the body would already have begun to decompose. Both she and her sister Mary were sure that if only Jesus had come earlier, he could have healed Lazarus.

But now Lazarus was dead. It was too late. Nothing could be done. The situation was desperate. It was hopeless. But Jesus called on Lazarus to come out of the tomb.

And Lazarus responded. He emerged in his grave clothes, his hands and feet bound with linen strips, and his face wrapped with a cloth.

[10 : 54] What a sight that must have been. Imagine the excitement. The people of Bethany had known Lazarus well.

They'd been aware that he was ill. They had attended his funeral. And now before their very eyes, he was stumbling out of his tomb.

No wonder, as we're told in verse 45, many of the Jews who'd come with Mary to the tomb and seen the miracle believed in Jesus.

They had witnessed something extraordinary. They had witnessed something extraordinary. And they realized that they were in the presence of someone who was more than a man.

Someone who did what only God could do. But there were others who witnessed the miracle who had reservations.

[11 : 57] Verse 46 introduces a but. But some of them went to the Pharisees and told them what Jesus had done.

We don't know exactly what their motivation was. Perhaps they were disturbed by the excitement that Jesus was generating. After all, he operated outside the normal religious structures.

He didn't have the right kind of religious pedigree. He was a relative nobody from Nazareth and Galilee. Perhaps they felt uncomfortable in his presence and they simply didn't like what he was doing.

But that brings me to my first main point this evening. Jesus divides. Jesus divides.

Jesus divides. We need more miracles in the supermarket. This passage shows that even when Jesus raised a dead man to life and there were plenty of witnesses, he didn't win universal acclaim.

[13 : 14] Yes, there were some who took note and believed. But others reacted adversely.

Jesus' exercise of supernatural powers provoked mixed reactions. He attracted some, but he alienated others.

He drew some, but he repelled others. Even a stupendous miracle for which the evidence was undeniable created division.

The same sun that melts wax hardens clay. The fact is that Jesus divides.

When the Pharisees, the conservative religious leaders of their day, were told that Jesus had raised Lazarus to life again, their reaction was very hostile.

[14 : 21] They and the chief priests called a meeting of the ruling council, the Sanhedrin, to decide what should be done. Verse 47. They were asked, 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.

It's interesting, isn't it, that the religious leaders accepted that Jesus did perform miracles.

They didn't question the authenticity of the miracles. They didn't dismiss Jesus as a fraudster. It was the potential impact of what he was doing that bothered them.

They were afraid that he would attract so many followers, there would be a popular uprising and the Romans would come down hard on the Jews.

[15 : 26] They might even end the semi-autonomy that the Jewish people enjoyed within the Roman Empire. Perhaps the Romans would impose religious sanctions.

They might even remove temple worship in Jerusalem. Perhaps Palestine would lose its separate identity and be subsumed in a different administrative setup.

And of course there was the fundamental issue that the Pharisees and the other religious leaders saw Jesus as a threat to their own status and position.

They had a vested interest in defending the status quo. Religious, political and personal considerations meant far more to them than who Jesus was.

Their religion, their nation, their status were all under threat. And compared with these things, the identity of Jesus was of little importance.

[16 : 39] They weren't disposed to consider whether he might be the long-awaited Messiah. The evidence of his teaching and miracles that God was in their midst counted for nothing when they saw what they regarded as their personal interests to be at risk.

You see, the religious authorities weren't unbiased observers. None of us is when it comes to weighing up the claims of Jesus.

Until he opens our eyes, we all have a natural antipathy towards God. We want to do our own thing. We want to go our own way. Our antipathy to God may be dressed up to look very respectable.

I really am very open-minded. I would just like a little more evidence to believe. Jesus did say some very good things, but to say that he was God, I think that's going a bit far.

It may sound reasonable, but at bottom our hearts are by nature prejudiced and unbelieving. That's what the Bible says.

[18 : 08] And not even miracles constrain belief. They may be explained away. Or we may find some way of blunting their impact.

Look at verses 9 to 11 of chapter 12. When the large crowd of the Jews learned that Jesus was there, they came not only on account of him, but also to see Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead.

So the chief priests made plans to put Lazarus to death as well, because on account of him, many of the Jews were going away and believing in Jesus.

Lazarus was living proof that Jesus had performed the miracle of raising a dead man. What were the authorities to do?

Why? They would get rid of Lazarus. They would get rid of the evidence. And in their eyes, that would solve the problem. The religious establishment was prepared to kill Lazarus in order to get rid of the evidence they didn't like.

[19 : 27] For the fact is, Jesus divides. And that poses questions for us too.

What do we make of Jesus? Do we look at the evidence and see where it leads?

Or do we prefer to explain the evidence away? There is a choice to be made. Jesus divides.

Secondly, the religious authorities plot. As they saw, Jesus posed a threat to them. Following the raising of Lazarus, that threat became so much greater.

And so they called an emergency meeting of the Jewish ruling council. At that meeting, a significant contribution was made by the high priest Caiaphas.

[20 : 41] Caiaphas was a Sadducee. The Sadducees were a sect, a religious party, with a more liberal theological outlook than the Pharisees.

They had keen political antennae. They got on well with the ruling Romans, the occupying Romans. It's interesting that Josephus, the Jewish historian, comments that a characteristic of the Sadducees was their rudeness.

That's perhaps borne out by how Caiaphas began his comments at the meeting of the council. Verse 49, he said to them, you know nothing at all.

You lot don't have a clue. You're all at sea. That's hardly the way to win friends and influence people. But of more significance is the proposal he makes.

Look with me please at verse 50. 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.

[22 : 10] Caiaphas seems to be saying, look, if this man Jesus poses a threat to our nation, if on account of what he's doing the Romans are likely to come down hard on us and deprive us of our privileged standing, then it's better to get out of the way, to get him out of the way.

What is one man's life compared with the continued existence of the nation?

In the interest of the greater good, surely it's better to get rid of this man. Surely his death in these circumstances is a price worth paying.

Caiaphas clearly thought that Jesus should be got rid of and that's how the Sanhedrin understood his words. We read in verse 53 how from that day on they made plans to put him to death.

Caiaphas was suggesting that instead of the Jews as a whole falling under the judgment of Rome, it would be better for judgment to fall on Jesus.

[23 : 34] what he said had some logic to it. But it was the logic of the pit.

Let's step back for a moment. Here we have the high priest, the most senior religious dignitary in Judaism. The man who was meant to represent God to the people and the people to God.

God's representative is calling for the death of the incarnate Son of God. He wants to get rid of him. He wants to liquidate him.

God's representative is calling for the God-man to be put to death. How shocking is that? There can be no greater sin than to kill God's Son.

and it's none other than God's representative, the high priest, who is calling for it. That underlines that it's never enough to be religious.

[24 : 44] Religion and the most serious sin, the most heinous sin can go together. They can go hand in hand. We can be extremely religious and still be an enemy of God.

Caiaphas demonstrates that. More generally, Caiaphas shows how dark the human heart really is.

That's something that the writer of this Gospel is at pains to bring to our attention. In chapter 1, John refers to Jesus as the light of the world, as the true light coming into the world.

And this is what he says. He was in the world and the world was made through him. Yet the world did not know him.

He came to his own and his own people did not receive him. Later, in chapter 3, John writes, this is the judgment.

[25 : 55] The light has come into the world and people loved darkness rather than light because their works were evil.

Rejecting the light of God, choosing darkness rather than light, is of the essence of sin. That's why back in the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit in an act of willful defiance.

They questioned the wisdom and goodness of God. They wanted to live independently of him. They wanted to be able to determine good and evil for themselves.

They preferred darkness to light. Caiaphas reflects in extreme form the anti-God bias we all have by nature.

He sat in judgment on Jesus. He regarded him as expendable. He wanted rid of him. He wanted him dead. But in reality it was Caiaphas and his hostility to God that were being exposed and judged.

[27 : 15] In rejecting the one who was the light of the world and choosing the darkness of sin and rebellion he was condemning himself.

The religious leaders plotted to get rid of Jesus and the question for you and for me is that's what they wanted to do.

What will you do with Jesus? Jesus divides the religious leaders plot but thirdly God overrules God overrules.

Look with me please at verses 51 and 52. Caiaphas he Caiaphas 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 into one the children of God who are scattered abroad.

John here is making the point that there was a depth of meaning to Caiaphas words of which he was probably himself completely unaware with worldly calculation and with sinful intent he was calling for Jesus to be put to death so as to save the Jews from the vengeance of Rome but unwittingly he was expressing a profound spiritual truth.

[29 : 13] Jesus would die to save others. He would die in the place of others. His death would be substitutionary and it wouldn't be just the Jews he would save but the worldwide people of God.

it wouldn't be the vengeance of Rome from which he would save them but the wrath and judgment of a holy God. Caiaphas spoke wiser than he knew because God was providentially overruling in what he said just as he would providentially overrule in the circumstances of Jesus death.

You see God had a plan. The religious leaders were plotting to that end.

They wanted to be rid of someone they saw as a threat and they were fully responsible for their actions. but God was also at work in the situation and for different ends.

the cross was no accident. It didn't take God by surprise. It was in accordance with God's plan and purpose.

[30 : 54] It was his will that through his death Jesus should bear the punishment of sin and secure forgiveness for all who would put their trust in him.

At one and the same time the cross was the supreme demonstration of human evil and the decisive victory of God over sin and death and Satan.

Because God overruled the actions of evil men and used them to accomplish his grand plan of unimaginable blessing for the whole world.

And here in John chapter 11 in anticipation of the cross Caiaphas' words convey a double meaning highlighting human intention on the one hand and divine purpose on the other.

Verse 51 describes Caiaphas' words as a prophecy. It says he did not speak of his own accord. God why you may ask did God use a bad man in this way?

[32 : 17] But that's precisely the point. God used the hostile words of Caiaphas to highlight the significance of Jesus' death.

Just as later he would use the culpable actions of wicked men in crucifying Jesus to secure salvation for lost men and women.

Throughout his gospel John balances human action and divine purpose. Alongside the opposition Jesus faces he sets God's settled will and purpose.

For example in chapter 6 Jesus highlights the Jews' unbelief. He says I said to you that you have seen me and yet do not believe.

But he goes on all that the Father gives me will come to me and whosoever comes to me I will never cast out.

[33 : 23] Despite human opposition God's purposes will be fulfilled. They will not be thwarted. There is profound mystery in all of this.

We cannot understand how human will and divine purpose interact but just as we don't have to understand how electricity works to be able to flick a switch and have the benefit of electric light so we don't have to understand the complexities of God's overruling to derive comfort from it.

The Bible says that even the wrath of man redounds to the praise of God. God's plan will not be derailed.

Jesus divides the religious leaders plot God overrules Jesus finally in verses in the opening verses of chapter 12 we see how Mary responds Mary responds Mary was Lazarus' sister John tells us how the family gave a dinner for Jesus when he paid a return visit to Bethany Martha Mary's sister mother she characteristically showed her devotion to Jesus by serving the meal but Mary did something quite different she lavishly anointed Jesus feet with expensive fragrant oil or perfume and wiped his feet with her hair it was an act of humble devotion but it was also an extravagant gesture

Mary and her family must have been very wealthy or perhaps the perfume was a family heirloom that had been passed down to her the perfume was worth a labourer's wages for a whole year Judas Iscariot the disciple who was shortly to betray his master he was quick to express his disapproval why was this ointment not sold and given to the poor he asked at one level Judas' question seemed reasonable but Judas wasn't motivated by concern for the poor John tells us he was a thief he had charge of the disciples money bag and he was in the habit of helping himself to its contents if the perfume had simply been given to Jesus it could have been sold and some of the proceeds could well have ended up in

[36 : 29] Judas' pocket with his hard heart and self-centred priorities Judas couldn't begin to understand what motivated Mary but Jesus came to Mary's defense leave her alone he said for in the words of the footnote in the ESV she intended to keep it for the day of my burial the poor you always have with you but you do not always have me just as Caiaphas spoke wiser than he knew Mary's anointing of Jesus had a significance which she herself possibly if not probably was unaware of it was pointing to his imminent death and burial

Mary was seizing the opportunity she recognized who Jesus was and she gave him her whole hearted devotion she loved Jesus and she acted accordingly what she did challenges all of us who call ourselves Christians how do we show our love for the Lord because devotion to Jesus trumps everything else we hear so much these days about the importance of having a social conscience and it's good to have a social conscience it's good to give to the poor but it's Jesus and the interests of his kingdom which should come first in our lives we need to seek first the kingdom of

God and his righteousness practical devotion to Jesus may be costly it may be seen by some as a waste but it's Jesus assessment that ultimately matters I think of a friend of mine who was destined for a career in law but he had been converted in his late teenage years and he decided to enter the ministry when an aunt of his heard what his plans were her comment was brief what a waste but that man has gone on to exercise a very fruitful ministry in a strategic congregation in the church of

England his aunt saw his decision to become a full time minister as a waste but in God's hands his life has been used to bring untold blessing to many people so do you think we need more miracles in the supermarket I think not what we need to do is to take on board what the Bible has to say about Jesus this Jesus who even raised the dead we need to believe in him and accept the forgiveness he secured by dying in our place and taking the punishment which our sins deserved and we need to offer him the devotion of our lives shall we pray oh lord we thank you for the realism of your word for the way in which it shows us how attitudes to your son when he was on earth could be very different help us to see the importance of responding rightly by your grace to the

Lord Jesus help us to respond to the salvation which he offers and help us live out lives of gratitude to him for all that he is and all that he has done we pray this in his name and for his sake amen do do do do