

John 11:38-12:11

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[0 : 0 0] and we're going to read into the following chapter to verse 11. Now we've been looking at this story of Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead.

And we've seen already, we've had three sermons on this already, how he didn't come to help Lazarus when he was sick, but delayed his coming until he was dead.

And we've seen how he dealt with Mary and with Martha, each in different ways. And today we really should have been looking at Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead.

But because this is communion time, we need a special sermon about the death of our Lord. And that's what we're going to deal with, is skipping over the story of Jesus raising Lazarus and looking at the plot to kill Jesus.

And that will be our theme for this morning in our sermon. But we'll read from verse 38, which speaks of the death of, the raising of Lazarus from the dead.

[0 : 5 9] And then goes on to speak about the plot to kill Jesus and so on. John 11 at 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 odour, for he has been dead four days.

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.

[2 : 1 0] 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 into one the children of God who are scattered abroad. So from that day on, they made plans to put him to death.

[3 : 21] 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 his 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.

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 his disciples, he who was about to betray him, said, Why was this ointment not sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor?

[4 : 41] 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.

Jesus said, Leave her alone so that she may keep it for the day of my burial. For the poor you always have with me, 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 priest 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. Just reading to there, and may God bless to us this reading.

And if we want one particular verse to look at, it will be verse 50. Here is Caiaphas, the high priest, speaking.

He's saying more than he realizes in doing this, but this is what he says. Nor do you, 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.

[6 : 05] Now, you know how you can Google things like, I want to look at Ukraine. So I Google Ukraine map, and up comes a number of items that I can look at.

And I can click something, and there's a map of Ukraine. And I can zoom out, and I'll see the countries around it that are its neighbours, and I can see it in relationship to the surrounding countries.

Or I can zoom in, and I can focus on this place, or that place, or the other place, where there is conflict, or where there is special interest. And I can see it at both levels, as you might see.

And that's what we're going to do with this passage here. First of all, we're going to zoom out, and we're going to look at the big picture. We're going to look at the place of this particular incident in the storyline that John has been following.

And then we're going to zoom in, and we're going to look at this particular incident, and certain details we're going to focus on to bring out the meaning of this particular incident.

[7 : 14] And then later on, when we come to the Lord's table, we're going to zoom out again, and look at the relationship of this incident to the Lord's Supper itself. So, for our sermon, let's zoom out first of all, and look at the storyline that John is following here, and the way that this fits in to the plot that he's developing here.

Now, it's quite well known, if you know the Gospels well, that in the other Gospels, Jesus comes into Jerusalem on a donkey, and is acclaimed as the great king that had been promised.

And that was an event that stirred up the authorities so that they plotted against him, and they put him to death. And the importance of that triumphal entry, as we call it, is found also in John's Gospel.

But there's something preceding that, that John sees to be important to explain the events that led to his death. And what happens, first of all, is this story of Lazarus.

This was the thing that triggered the opposition that led Jesus to be crucified. The first incident in a line of incidents that led to the cross.

[8 : 36] And it's really quite interesting that we should look at it in that way. The story starts with Jesus being told that Lazarus is ill. And he's expected to go and heal the man.

But he doesn't go. He waits until he's dead. And that's a very important thing that sets off the whole process. So when he goes there, he doesn't go to a home where there's sickness.

And in the quietness of the home, he heals the sick man. He goes when the man has died.

So that the miracle that he does is a big, big miracle. And the way it happens is it's public. It's outside, not in the quietness of the home. And there's a crowd of spectators to see this great miracle that Jesus did.

Raising a man who has been dead and buried for four days, raising him from the dead. And the crowd that has gathered isn't an ordinary crowd. Because this is in the backwater, the backwater of Galilee, where most of his miracles have been done.

[9 : 48] This is just a few miles from Jerusalem at the very centre of the nation. And the people that have gathered to comfort Mary and Martha are Jewish women from the city.

Women of some sophistication, we might say. Of some prominence. Of some influence even. And they go back to the city and they tell what has happened and they are believed.

And some people go and tell the Pharisees what's going on here. And so this incident is brought to the Pharisees' attention. And they're stirred up to wonder what they can do about this.

And this is what stimulates them to think about putting Jesus to death as we see. And even after this, the importance of raising Lazarus from the dead is brought out in the concluding bit of our reading.

Mary anointing Jesus. Which we'll look at maybe someday on its own. But we're told this. 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 who he had raised from the dead.

[11 : 05] 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. So there you see again. And evidence that the raising of Lazarus from the dead was the thing that stimulated the Jewish authorities to put Jesus to death.

And even in the story that comes next, which is the triumphal entry that we've mentioned, there's a reference to Lazarus' death there as well. The crowd that had been with him when he called Lazarus out of the tomb and raised him from the dead continued to bear witness.

The reason why the crowd went to meet him was that they had heard he had done this sign. So the Pharisees said to one another, you see that you're gaining nothing. Look, the world is good after him.

So the raising of Lazarus was the big event that stimulated opposition and that ultimately led him to be put to death on the cross. And that's the way we're meant to see this story in its context.

It's not a story simply about Lazarus being raised from the dead. It's a story about opposition leading to Jesus' own death. And therefore it's the first incident in a line of incidents the first link in a chain that led to Calvary.

[12 : 27] And that's the way we should understand this. And that's quite an important thing to see. Who would have thought that a simple decision I'm not going to go to heal the man I'm just going to wait some days?

Who would have thought that a decision of that nature would have such big repercussions? Who would have thought that a simple thing like that was so important in the outworking of God's plan and purpose?

Who would have thought that by delaying the miracle of raising the dead occurred that stimulated such interest and enthusiasm on the part of many and such opposition on the part of others that it led to the plan to put Jesus to death?

That's the way God works out his purpose. We things are big things when they're part of the chains that God forms in fulfilling his purpose still.

Everything's linked together in the plan and purpose of God and what seems insignificant to us can be important to him. We do not know. We cannot understand until perhaps later but not even then sometimes.

[13 : 45] But we can believe this. God works his purposes out in a wonderful way and I think that this is an illustration of that. Well, that's the story in its over setting, zooming out and getting the big picture.

Now, we're going to zoom in and see the meaning of this particular incident here where the high priest says this prophetic thing. It's necessary that one man should die for the people and not that the whole nation should perish.

Now, in looking at this incident itself, there's three things we're very briefly going to see. The crisis anticipated, the solution suggested, and the plan reinterpreted.

And that last thing is the main thing here. But let's look at the crisis anticipated first of all. Here, the matter has been brought to the authorities' attention.

Jesus is stirring, Jesus has healed, has raised Lazarus, people are going after him, the thing is wonderful and the matter has been brought to the attention of the Jewish authorities.

[14 : 57] And the question is, what are they going to do about the matter? Because they undoubtedly recognise that if they let things run, then there's going to be a disaster.

There's a real critical situation here that they anticipate through what is happening in this case. And the way that they see it is this, that what will eventually happen is that they'll become more and more popular amongst the people at the centre of the nation in Jerusalem.

Generally, he's been ministering in Galilee in the north of the country, a province. But here at the very centre, at the capital, he's becoming more and more popular.

And they foresee that if things go on like that, people are really going to become very enthusiastic about him. And that will produce another problem.

And they say this, the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation. And it's not perhaps immediately obvious what the connection is between the popularity of Jesus and Romans coming against them.

[16 : 11] But I think what the Pharisees have in mind is this, or the council have in mind is this, that if Jesus becomes more and more popular, he's going to be acknowledged as the Messiah, as the expected king that had been promised.

And if he's acknowledged by the people as the king, they're going to rise against the Roman authorities in support of him. And so, there's likely to be disturbance in favour of Jesus by the crowds who support him.

And if there's a disturbance of that nature, and if they're saying Jesus is the promised king, Jesus is the king of the Jews, then there's going to be trouble from the Romans who were the imperial authorities.

And so, they have this idea in mind. The Romans will come because already they own the land and they're going to take away both our place and our nation.

The place that they're speaking about, of course, is the temple, the holy place where they conducted worship. the central religious place of the nation.

[17 : 19] And they're going to destroy it. And they're going to do away with the worship of God as had been laid down in Moses' law. And they're going to destroy the nation as well.

They're going to take away the powers that the people of the Jews still have over their own affairs. And the nation is going to be destroyed, maybe wiped out, ethnically cleansed, perhaps, that's the crisis that they anticipate.

Here we are, and with the popularity of Jesus such as it is, it's going to provoke trouble and the Romans are going to come and destroy us. That's the crisis anticipated.

And the suggested solution is pretty obvious as well. The remedy suggested is given here, what the high priest says.

People seem to be discussing what will we do. There's a critical situation here. What can our response to that be? And it seems there have been different opinions expressed.

[18 : 25] And the high priest comes in with a fair deal of arrogance. You know nothing at all. Here's the man in charge, the man in authority, laying down the law. And he says, you know nothing at all.

it seems the idea of killing Jesus has been mooted. And people are not too keen on the idea for whatever reason. But he's entirely in favour of it.

And this is the solution suggested. It is better for you that one man should die for the people, not that the whole nation should perish. You see, that the whole nation should perish is what they anticipate in this crisis that they foresee.

they think the nation is going to be destroyed. The nation is going to perish. And what's the solution to that? Very simple. Put Jesus to death and all that won't happen.

And the nation will be preserved. So he's speaking at a very pragmatic fashion. He's not speaking in terms of justice. He's speaking in terms of what works best.

[19 : 28] And as far as he's concerned, he's a ruthless, insensitive man. And he's quite prepared to see Jesus put to death if it means that there won't be the trouble that will bring about the destruction of the nation.

And it's at that level that he's speaking, a political level. And he says, put Jesus to death on the cross. People can't therefore go after him. He'll no longer be recognised as the Messiah.

There'll be no trouble and the nation will be spared. If you don't put Jesus to death, the nation might be destroyed. So at a political level he says, put Jesus to death, it's necessary that one man die for the people and not that the whole nation be destroyed.

I think that's quite plain at that level, the solution suggested. But that leads us on to the third and last thing and the main point that we're making at this stage. And that is the plan reinterpreted.

Because quite obviously to anybody who knows anything of the gospel, this statement that the high priest has made is one that is capable of another interpretation.

[20 : 38] We could well use these words to describe the gospel. And that's the sort of thing that John here points out. This is an unintentional prophecy.

This is an intentional lesson in the truth. He only speaks at a political level in his arrogance and insensitivity and ruthlessness.

But he's speaking as a high priest that year. He's got an official function. And in this way he's been given words to speak whose meaning he himself did not recognize.

And that's what John therefore points out. And he does so in verses 51 and 52. He did not say this of his own accord but being high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus would die for the nation.

So he's saying there's a higher level of interpretation involved in this. And not only for the nation but also to gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad.

[21 : 42] So how is this statement how is this simple solution to be reinterpreted? The plan that the Pharisees made how is it to be reinterpreted?

Well it seems to me interesting to think about who makes the prophecy. And the answer quite simply is that it's a high priest who makes the prophecy.

Now every year a high priest was elected. They tended to be the same people from the same ruling family that was elected year after year after year. So Caiaphas and his family were in a very prominent position as a high priestly family.

So he's got some clout, he's got some authority as a popular family of priests. But he's got this special role and John thinks that because he's got this special role he's speaking in a special way.

priests sometimes could be prophets. Prophets couldn't be priests and kings couldn't be priests but priests sometimes could be prophets.

[22 : 50] priests and that's what we've got here according to John. But I think the thing is this, to me the explanation is this, he is one who understands the principles upon which sacrifice works and he is able to speak therefore in a way that sheds light on the meaning of what he is really saying.

That wasn't very well put. What I mean is this, he's high priest, what does high priest do? A high priest, any priest sacrifices animals. The worshipper comes and presents an animal and the priests take that animal and they shed its blood and they present that blood before God, the blood of atonement.

And that was the principle at which the sacrificial system worked. the animal died on behalf of the worshipper. The worshipper put his hands on the head of the animal frequently and the animal was then killed and killed in the name of the worshipper.

And the principle that was at work there was it was necessary that the blood of an animal be shed and not that the life of the worshipper be taken. That's the principle at work.

And the high priest in particular followed out that principle in the special function that he had once a year on the day of atonement. He took the blood of sacrifice into the innermost sanctuary and presented it there before God.

[24 : 31] And what was the mode of operation? What was the way of working that implied? It implied this. The people deserve to die.

The worshipper deserved to perish because of their sin. A sin that alienated them from God and brought them under the sentence of condemnation. But through the sacrifice offered, through the one being presented in their name, that person was therefore freed from that situation of destruction under God's anger.

And so one animal died for the people. The blood of the animal was shed in order that the nation might not perish. And that you see is what the high priest knew.

That was the principle on which he worked. And that's why it was so important that he be the one that is speaking on this occasion. He's speaking in virtue of his office as high priest.

And he's speaking in a way that lends itself to this interpretation that just as an animal had his blood shed in order that the people might receive atonement and go free from the destruction that was threatening them.

[25 : 52] So Jesus is the one who was to die, who was to shed his blood in order that the nation might not perish. And that's the plan reinterpreted at that level.

That's the big idea behind this. He said it's necessary that one man die for the people. Just as he used to say day by day in his ministry, it is necessary that this animal's blood be shed in order that the people may not die under God's anger.

And that's what is really implied in the statement about Jesus dying for the people. Like a lamb, a sacrificial lamb, Jesus is to be offered up, his life is to be taken, death is to come upon him, that destruction should not come upon the people because he's making atonement for their sin.

And that's the full interpretation that is to be given to these words. He said it in a political sense, it's true in a spiritual sense, and that's the sense that John takes out of it here.

So it's the high priest that does this because he's a man who does this sort of thing, offering up a life of one for the life of another.

[27 : 17] The big idea is that the life offered up atones for the life that is now going to be freed from destruction. And who is it that are going to be freed in this way?

What's the scope of this? Well, John says, first of all, for the nation. He prophesied that Jesus would die for the nation. And then he adds, and not for the nation only, but also to gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad.

So John is enlarging this. Now there's a difference of opinion about how exactly he's doing this. The people of Israel, of course, were scattered abroad throughout many nations at that time, just as they are today.

Is he speaking therefore of the Jewish people as the nation, and speaking therefore of the scattered children of God as being the Jewish people who are scattered in different nations, so that what he's got in mind is the Jewish people in their diaspora.

Is that what is in mind here? Of course, as Christians, we tend not to think that that's the case, and of course, rightly so. Because John is the one who, in his gospel, who speaks so constantly about the worldwide influence of the work of our Lord, the Lamb of God, he says at the beginning of his gospel, who takes away the sin of the world.

[28 : 46] That was John's perspective, the sin of the world. Not just the Jewish nation, but the people of God throughout the world. God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son that whoever believes should not perish.

Not Jewish orientated, but worldwide orientated. That was the outlook of John. And remember, you may remember, that when the Samaritans came to believe in him, they said, now we know that he's not just the Messiah, but he's the saviour of the world.

And it seems to me that in the light of these passages, there can be no doubt about what John is talking about here. He's not come to save the Jewish nation as a nation, or there's scattered Jewish people scattered throughout the nations.

He's come to save the people of God throughout the world. The whole world is the scope of his saving grace. Not everybody individually, but the whole world in general.

Not the exclusive of one nation, not referring only to one nation, the whole world. That's what he's got in mind. Besides that, you see, he speaks here about the children of God.

[30 : 02] And already he's spoken in his gospel about the children of God. Early on in chapter one, I think it is, indeed he says, he came to his own, the Jewish people, but his own received them not.

But to those who received them, he gave authority to become the children of God. That's the outlook of John's gospel. The Jews rejected him, but he became, he came for the benefit of those, from everybody that would receive him.

They were the children of God. And that again suggests this idea that we're not talking here about the Jewish people exclusively. That's what the Pharisees, that's what Caiaphas was speaking about.

But in the prophetic sense, he was speaking in a much wider fashion to include the saving work of God that affected people from all nations of the world, so that they, by receiving him, would become the sons of God.

And so what we've got in mind here is the gospel message in its fullness as we know it. Go and make disciples of all nations, said Jesus, in departing from this world in physical form.

[31 : 17] All nations, that's the outlook that he's got here, and that's the interpretation given. Jesus is going to die so that the people will not perish.

And the people who will not perish are all who trust in him, all who believe in him, of whatever nation scattered throughout the world. These are the ones for whom Jesus is going to give his life.

As the lamb was offered in the Old Testament, so Jesus offers his life in the New Testament, presents it as a sacrifice to God, in order to bring redemption to everyone in the world who believes in him and puts their trust in him.

And that's the reinterpretation of this message. Now, we're going to say a bit more about that when we come to the Lord's Table, but I just want to sum up this part of things, to just reinforce again the extraordinary nature of God's providence.

We've seen it already in the way the story worked out. Where did it really begin? in Jesus deciding not to go and heal Lazarus. And little by little the story unfolds until the opposition arises that leads him to the cross.

[32 : 28] The overall providence of God, working out everything according to his purpose. We've seen that already. But here, you see, we've another aspect of the same sort of thing, which we should wonder at.

Here he is using as an instrument for declaring the gospel a man who doesn't understand it himself. Here he is using a high priest who is an uncaring, ruthless, political animal.

He's using him to tell us what the gospel is. An unintentional prophecy. God uses this man as an instrument to declare his purpose.

And that, to my mind, is a remarkable thing, which again illustrates to us the amazing nature of the way that God works out his providence. God.

And that's where we want to leave it for the moment. What a remarkable God we've got, who works out his plan of salvation through this instrument in his hand, through the opposition of the Jewish leaders, working out his own plan of salvation.

[33 : 35] That's what he does. Everybody's in hand. Evil people are in his hand, working out his purpose through him. That's God. He's an amazing God, a great God, and we should adore him and praise him for that.

May God bless to us his word. What connection is there between this and what we're doing this morning at the Lord's Supper? And two things I'm going to say briefly.

This teaching is what we remember in the Lord's Supper. What we've been talking about is Jesus giving himself so that his people may be freed from destruction, giving his life as an atonement for sin.

That's the basis of what we've been looking at. And that's of course very much at the centre of what we're doing here. We're remembering that event. We're not reenacting it.

We are remembering something that happened a way back in the past. And by remembering it in this particular way through the use of symbols, it comes more vividly to our minds and therefore more powerfully, hopefully, to our hearts.

[34 : 46] But that's what we are remembering. After all, he says, this is my body which is given for you. Now in a way, his body was given for us on the cross when he offered himself up as a sacrifice to satisfy divine justice.

And the giving of the bread to us is a reminder that he gave his body for us on the cross. more specifically, the cup that is passed round is a cup full of wine.

And that speaks of the blood of the covenant which was shed for many for the remission of sins. That's what we remember. The death of our Lord, the blood that was shed.

The cup helps us to remember that blood that was shed. And the significance given to that is that it was shed for the remission of sins. And that was at the heart of what Caiaphas was saying, although he didn't realise that that was at the heart of what Caiaphas was saying.

So the things we've been referring to are commemorated in this Lord's Supper and a reminder of that. So that's what has to be in our minds as we take part in the Lord's Supper.

[36 : 00] These take us back in geography from here to a place in Palestine. these take us back in time from now to about 2000 years ago when Jesus died on the cross.

These symbols help us to bridge that gap so that we see this event more clearly and appreciate it therefore more deeply. This is the teaching that we have to remember in the Lord's Supper.

This teaching is what we must experience in order to come to the Lord's Supper. Yes this is something that helps us to remember but how can we remember something of which we have no real experience?

And if this is simply a historical fact it will do us little good. We've got to see it as a living experience and it seems to me that that is partly what is in mind in the idea of bread being given to us because bread is what fortifies life.

Bread is what sustains life. The basic commodity in those days that sustained life and in giving them the bread which they then take and eat and giving them the wine which they take and drink.

[37 : 22] They are appropriating these things. They are making these things their own and spiritually speaking, spiritually speaking, they are feeding upon Christ. And if we don't have life how can we feed upon him?

If we are not used to taking him and depending upon him for everything how can we take that bread in any meaningful way? So what I'm saying really is that if this is something that not only speaks to us about the death of Christ on the cross but is also a symbol of the life that he gives to us then how can we partake of that unless we have experienced that life for ourselves.

So we need the work of the Spirit to bring us who are dead to life. We need the work of the Spirit so that we who tend to depend upon ourselves learn to depend upon him.

And so we take him as our saviour and we rest upon him for what we need and we find life in him. And when we find life in him then it can be meaningful for us, it will be meaningful for us if we come to the Lord's table and partake of these things that speak of us, feeding upon him by faith, feeding upon him spiritually by faith.

And if you don't have that experience, hold back until you do and then come to the Lord's table. And if you haven't been walking too closely with the Lord, renew your devotion to him and come that you might be fed because in a weakened condition, what is there better than a good feast like the Lord's Supper provides for us.

[39 : 00] That's the way we have to see things. So this teaching is what we remember in the Lord's Supper, this teaching is what we must experience in order to come to the Lord's Supper.

And if we come to the Lord's Supper in that attitude of mind, remembering these things on the basis of past experience of his grace, then surely this will be for us a real spiritual feast.

Christ. I'm to remind you that the Lord's table is for all who trust in the Lord Jesus Christ as their Saviour. Communicants will be invited to come forward to the front rows.

This is voluntary, depending on individual circumstances. On the table, there will be a plate with pieces of bread and a tray with individual cups, and an elder will oversee the serving, including those communicants who cannot come forward to the table.

Now, we're going to sing Psalm 118 at verse 19 from the Scottish Psalter on page 399. Page 399.

[40 : 08] Psalm 118 and at verse 19. O set ye open unto me the gates of righteousness, righteousness.

Then will I enter into them, and I the Lord will bless. And we'll sing on to verse 26, and as soon as we start singing, please come forward to the front pews, those that wish to take part in the Lord's Supper.

Let's stand to sing. Amen. Amen. Amen. I