

Reactions to Jesus

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[0 : 00] Please turn back in your Bibles to the passage we read, John chapter 11 at verse 45.

I'd like to look at this passage with you under the title, Reactions to Jesus. Reactions to the passage of Jesus.

Reactions to the passage of Jesus.

They flag up who Jesus is and why he came. They're signposts to his identity and mission. In John chapter 9, Jesus heals a man who was born blind.

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

[1 : 51] And that's not all. The miracle is a sort of acted parable. Jesus gave physical sight to a man who was physically blind.

And that points to the fact that even more profoundly, Jesus' mission in the world was to give spiritual sight to men and women who were spiritually blind.

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

But Jesus raised him to life again. Only God can bring the dead back to life. But that's what Jesus did. Again, John wants us to see that Jesus is God.

And the miracle also nudges us to see that even more amazingly, Jesus gives spiritual life to those who are spiritually dead.

[3 : 03] Lazarus had been dead four days when Jesus arrived in Bethany. Lazarus' sister Martha protested when Jesus asked for the stone covering the entrance to the tomb to be removed.

She knew the body would already have begun to decompose. Both she and her sister Mary were sure that Jesus could have healed Lazarus if he'd arrived in time.

But now it was too late. Nothing could be done. The situation was hopeless. But Jesus called Lazarus 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. What a sight that must have been.

Imagine the excitement. The people of Bethany had known Lazarus well. They'd been aware of his illness. They'd attended his funeral. And now before their very eyes.

[4 : 07] 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 witnessed the miracle. Believed in Jesus. They'd witnessed something extraordinary. 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 some of those who'd witnessed the miracle had reservations about what had happened.

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

Perhaps they were disturbed by the excitement Jesus was generating. After all he operated outside the recognized religious structures. He didn't have the right kind of religious pedigree.

[5 : 11] He was a relative nobody from Nazareth in Galilee. Perhaps they felt uncomfortable in his presence. They simply didn't like what he was doing.

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

We need more miracles in the supermarket. Well actually this passage shows that even when Jesus raised a dead man to life again.

He didn't win universal acclaim. Some people certainly 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.

[6 : 21] That's interesting, isn't it? The same sun which melts wax hardens clay. The fact is that Jesus divides.

The Pharisees were the conservative religious leaders of their day. When they were told that Jesus had raised Lazarus to life again, their reaction was one of hostility.

They and the chief priests called a meeting of the Sanhedrin, the Jewish ruling council, to decide what should be done. Verse 47. 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 that the religious leaders acknowledged that Jesus was performing many miracles. They didn't question the authenticity of the miracles.

[7 : 28] 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 unless something was done, he would attract so many followers, there would be a popular uprising, and as a result, the Romans would intervene.

The Romans might well come down hard on the Jews, they might end the semi-autonomy which Palestine enjoyed within the empire. Perhaps the Romans would impose religious sanctions. They might even bring temple worship to an end. Perhaps Palestine would lose its separate identity and be subsumed in a different administrative setup.

A fundamental issue for the Pharisees was that they saw a threat to their own position and status. They had a vested interest in defending the status quo. Religious, political, and personal considerations weighed heavily with the Pharisees.

[8 : 51] These things mattered 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 sadly mattered little. They weren't disposed to consider whether he might be the long-awaited Messiah.

The evidence of his teaching and miracles that he was God in human form counted for nothing when what they saw as their personal interests were at stake.

The religious authorities weren't unbiased observers. Nor are we unbiased when it comes to weighing up the claims of Jesus.

The Bible says 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.

[10 : 02] I really am very open-minded. I just need a little more evidence to believe. Jesus did say some good things, but to say he was unique, I think that's going a bit far.

I respect people who find Christianity helps them, but personally I don't need God to lead a happy and fulfilled life.

I'm fine as I am. It all sounds so reasonable, but what lies behind all these comments is a heart that is prejudiced and unbelieving.

That's what the Bible says. Not even miracles constrain belief. They may be explained away, or we may look for some way to blunt their impact.

Look with me 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 often to see Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead.

[11 : 19] 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.

Do you see what's happening? Lazarus was living proof that Jesus had power to raise the dead. And so for that reason, the religious establishment was prepared to kill him and get rid of the evidence, because Jesus divides.

You may be here this evening and you're not a Christian. What do you make of Jesus? He gave a blind man his sight.

He raised a man who'd been dead to life again. Do you recognize that the evidence points to Jesus being more than just a man? And are you prepared to follow where the evidence leads?

Or do you explain the evidence away? Do you refuse to recognize Jesus for who he is? Make no mistake, there's a choice to be made, because Jesus divides.

[12 : 42] Secondly, the religious authorities plot. The religious authorities plot.

As they saw, Jesus posed a threat to them. And following the raising of Lazarus, that threat became so much greater. What was to be done?

At the emergency meeting of the Sanhedrin, a significant contribution was made by the high priest Caiaphas.

Caiaphas was a Sadducee. The Sadducees were a sect within Judaism. They had a more liberal theological outlook than the Pharisees.

They had keen political antennae. They were in very good terms with the occupying Romans. And Caiaphas, who was one of them, began by rubbishing the other members of the council, verse 49.

[13:47] You lot know nothing at all. You don't have a clue. And then he went on to make a proposal in 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.

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 within the empire, then it's better to get rid of him.

It's better to get one man out of the way than to suffer that kind of fate. What is one man's life compared with our continued existence as a nation?

In the interest of the greater good, Jesus' death is a price worth paying. Caiaphas clearly thought that Jesus should be got rid of.

[15:05] And that was how the Sanhedrin understood his words. We read in verse 53 how from that day they made plans to put him to death.

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

What he said had some logic to it, but it was the logic of the pit. Let's step back for a moment.

For 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.

And here he 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.

[16:12] How shocking is that? There can be no greater sin than to kill God's Son. And yet it's God's representative who is calling for it.

Doesn't that underline the fact that it's never enough simply to be religious? Religion and the most serious sin can go together.

We can be extremely religious, and yet at heart be an enemy of God. That's what Caiaphas demonstrates. But more generally Caiaphas shows how dark the human heart really is.

That's something John, the writer of this gospel, is at pains to bring to our attention. In chapter 1 of the gospel he writes of Jesus 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.

[17:27] Here we have the maker of the world, a stranger in the world he has made. Later in chapter 3 John writes, this is the judgment, the light has come into the world and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil.

Rejecting the light of God, preferring darkness rather than light is of the essence of sin. That's why way back in the garden of Eden our first parents Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit in an act of willful disobedience.

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

Caiaphas, the high priest, 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 really were being exposed and judged.

[18:51] In rejecting the one who was the light of the world and choosing the darkness of sin and rebellion Caiaphas was condemning himself. Do you know the negro spiritual were you there when they crucified my Lord?

It asks us to recognize that in a sense we all had a hand in Jesus' death. Sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble.

We weren't there in person but if we had been we would have acted no differently. By nature we all have sinful unbelieving hearts.

We all love darkness rather than light. The religious leaders plotted to get rid of Jesus and the question for you and for me is what will we do with him.

Jesus divides the religious leaders plot. Thirdly God overrules.

[20 : 10] God overrules. Please look with me at verses 51 and 52. through. 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 is making the comment that when Caiaphas said it would be better if Jesus died rather than let the whole nation suffer. He was actually saying something that was profoundly true in a sense of which he himself was totally unaware.

With worldly calculation and with sinful intent Caiaphas was calling for Jesus to be put to death. But unwittingly he was expressing a profound truth, a profound spiritual truth, the truth that Jesus would indeed die to save others.

He would die in the place of others. His death would be substitutionary save. And it wouldn't be just the Jews he would save, but the worldwide people of God.

He would save them not from the vengeance of Rome, but from the wrath and judgment of God. Caiaphas spoke wiser than he knew, because God was overruling in what he said, just as he would providentially overrule in the circumstances of Jesus' actual death.

[22 : 11] You see, God had a plan, and that plan was being worked out even through the wicked plotting and evil actions of men. Caiaphas was calling for the death of Jesus, and the religious leaders were plotting to that end.

they were fully responsible for their actions. They crucified the Son of God. As the Apostle Peter says elsewhere, Jesus died at the hands of lawless men, 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. Jesus' death was in accordance with God's plan and purpose. it was God's will that Jesus should be a substitute.

We saw that this morning, that he should bear the punishment of human 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 wickedness and the greatest victory that was ever achieved.

[23 : 27] It was a victory over sin and Satan, a once for all victory that wouldn't need to be repeated because God overruled the actions of evil men and used them to accomplish his grand plan of unimaginable blessing for the world.

God overruled here in chapter 11, the words convey a double meaning. They highlight human intention on the one hand and divine purpose on the other.

Verse 52 describes Caiaphas' words as a prophecy and says, he did not speak of his own accord. God. Why, you may ask, would God speak through a bad man?

But that's precisely the point. God used the hostile words of Caiaphas to highlight the significance of Jesus' death, just as later he used the culpable actions of the religious and political establishment 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.

[24 : 59] For example, in chapter 6, Jesus highlights the Jews' unbelief. He says, I said to you that you have seen me and yet you do not believe.

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

Despite human opposition, God's purposes will be fulfilled. They will not be thwarted.

These are not easy issues to grapple with. There is a profound mystery as to how human will and divine purpose interact. We cannot understand how it all fits together.

But just as you don't need to understand electricity to flick a switch and get the benefit of light, so you don't have to understand the complexities of God's overruling to derive comfort from it.

[26 : 03] In a world of instability and uncertainty, certainty, it's good to know that God is never taken by surprise. He's never at a loss what to do. Not even the worst of human evil can stand in his

way.

Nothing and no one can ultimately resist his will. That's a great comfort for those who are his people. those who are his people.

It's also a salutary warning for those who are still his enemies. That was a lesson as we saw this morning that Pharaoh learned.

We may shake our puny fists in God's face but it will be entirely futile because God's plan will not be derailed.

In the closing verses of chapter 11 we see Jesus withdrawing from the environs of Jerusalem to a more remote area. He knew that the chief priests and Pharisees were looking for him.

[27 : 12] Did he go into hiding because he was afraid? No, he withdrew because it was not yet God's time for him to be handed over to his enemies.

You see, he was in control of the situation. He was not working to his enemy's timetable. When he was arrested, it was because he allowed himself to be arrested.

As he later said to Pontius Pilate, you would have no authority over me unless it had been given you from above. And even in the moment of death, he was in control.

Father, into your hands, I commit my spirit. Jesus divides, the religious leaders plot, God overrules. Fourthly and finally, in the opening verses of chapter 12, we see how Mary responds. Mary responds.

[28 : 24] Mary was Lazarus' sister. John tells us that the family gave a dinner for Jesus when he paid a return visit to Bethany. The other sister, Martha, characteristically showed her devotion to Jesus by serving the meal.

But Mary did something quite different. She lavishly anointed Jesus' feet with expensive oil or perfume and wiped his feet with her hair.

It was an act of humble devotion. But it was also an extravagant gesture. The perfume was very expensive.

It was worth a labourer's yearly wages. Presumably either Mary and her family were very wealthy or perhaps the perfume was a family heirloom that had been passed down to her.

And we see how Judas Iscariot, the disciple who was shortly to betray Jesus, was quick to express his disapproval. Why was this ointment not sold and given to the poor?

[29 : 37] Again, at one level, Judas' question sounds very 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, perhaps it could have been sold and some of the proceeds would have ended up in Judas' pocket. With his hard heart and self-centered priorities, Judas couldn't begin to understand what motivated Mary.

But Jesus comes to Mary's defense. He says, leave her alone so that she may keep it for the day of my burial.

You will always have the poor among you. but you do not always have me. It seems that what Mary did had a significance of which she was probably unaware.

[30 : 52] Just as Caiaphas' words had a significance of which he was unaware, Mary's anointing of Jesus pointed to his imminent death and burial.

Mary recognized who Jesus was. She wanted to give him her wholehearted devotion. She not only trusted in Jesus but wanted to demonstrate that trust.

And what she did should challenge all of us who call ourselves Christians. Christians. It raises for us the question how well do we live out our faith?

Are we prepared to put our money where our mouth is? after all devotion to Jesus trumps everything else.

Good works of all kinds. It's good to have a social conscience. It's good to give to the poor. But Jesus and the interests of his kingdom take precedence over these things.

[32 : 01] We need to seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness. practical devotion to Jesus may be costly.

It may even be seen as a waste. But it's Jesus' assessment that ultimately matters.

I think of a friend of mine who studied law at Cambridge. He then decided that instead of going into the law he would become a vicar.

His aunt wasn't impressed when he told her. All she said was what a waste. As far as she was concerned he was throwing away his life.

He was throwing away his opportunities. But that man has had a very fruitful ministry and he has brought blessing to so many people.

[33 : 09] The world may have seen what he did as a waste. But God blessed his devotion and made it a blessing to others.

love. So is it more miracles in the supermarket we need? I don't think so.

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 having done so we need to offer him the devotion of our lives. Let's not have hard hearts like the religious authorities.

let's not try and explain away the significance of Jesus. Help us to see him for who he is and let us offer him the worship the practical worship which is his due.

[34 : 37] Shall we pray? O Lord we recognize how much the Lord Jesus gave for sinners in coming into this sin-seek and broken world living our life and ultimately dying the death which our sins deserved.

help us to see what he did for what it is. Help us to see that he is indeed God in human form come on a rescue mission.

May we respond to him as our Lord and God and Saviour and may we live our lives under his lordship.

Help us to do that this week in the week on which we have already embarked. May we give him glory for his name's sake.

Amen. Amen. Our closing praise is Psalm 119 verses 53 to 40 which you'll find on page 159.

[36 : 12] verses 33 to 40 of page 159 Teach me to follow your decrees then I will keep them to the end give insight and I'll keep your law with all my heart to it attend.

Oh turn my eyes from worthless things give life according to your word to me your servant keep your pledge so that you may be feared O Lord.

The fifth section of the Psalm to God's praise teach me to follow your decrees. comprehend too estimated ■■■■ to 44 times keep your joue out there to theordre Texas to