

# What are We to Do?

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[ 0 : 00 ] Well, I want to echo James' welcome. It's very good to see you this morning and to be preaching on this sermon series on John.

It's a short, fairly short sermon series compared to what we've been doing on 2 Corinthians. But I think it's a great follow-up to 2 Corinthians because what we see in the last few days, the last couple of weeks of Jesus' life in this sermon series, which is John 11 through 17, is really God's power made perfect in weakness.

It's all leading to the death of Jesus Christ. All of these chapters are, and we see it before us as we're moving towards us, and what we see is the meaning of it.

What does it mean for us now? What does it mean for the disciples then? And so this is a good thing for us to do as we are in this Easter season as well because it tells us what has God accomplished for you and for me in the death and resurrection of Jesus.

And it was amazing to see last week that scene that David Short preached about. We saw Jesus' love and his power in the most striking way when Lazarus was raised from the dead.

[ 1 : 21 ] Jesus' friend, Lazarus. We saw Jesus' love because in his love he weeps. He weeps with and for Lazarus' friends that were gathered there who were in deep grief, who were experiencing the darkness of death.

Jesus went through that with them. He is angry at death, in fact, and what it does to the people that he loves. And it's not a helpless anger.

It is a wrath, a protective wrath against this force of sin and death that so corrupts and so brings grief and pain into people's lives.

But then you also saw his power last week, that Jesus goes into the tomb and he speaks to the body of Lazarus. And those words are just like the words of God at creation when he says, let there be light.

It is words that create. And what happens for Lazarus is that he walks out and that word, come out, Lazarus. Lazarus walks out of that tomb.

[ 2 : 32 ] It's unimaginable power. Death is reversed. And God makes life return to the dead body of his friend. This is what Jesus is doing.

But as powerful as that was, and we talked about this on Easter last Sunday, the verses that follow, that we're looking at today, show that something far greater than the miracle of Lazarus was going to take place.

That miracle was a sign, a preview of Jesus' own death when he is laid in a tomb like Lazarus and then raised by the power of God.

But the death on a cross and Jesus rising to a life that will never end, that will be forever, deeply affects every person in history, including you and me, as we are meeting together this Sunday morning, as we hear these words.

Because in that death and the resurrection, God's purposes for mankind, for all of humanity, are brought into effect in that cross, in that empty tomb.

[ 3 : 50 ] And it is something that is received by faith. And that's because our reading today reveals that Jesus' death, the thing that was being pointed to by Lazarus' own death and resurrection, is a substitution in which he dies in our place.

There is this intimate, living connection with each of us in that death. Judgment Day, in a sense, comes early for each of us on that cross.

And a great exchange happens. And here's what the exchange is. That the condemnation that is rightfully ours because of our own sin, Jesus takes on himself.

And the life, the perfect life, in loving, open, obedience, and relationship with God forever, that rightly belongs to him, he gives to us.

So, he does it all for us, taking what is rightfully ours, sin and death, and instead giving us his life, that relationship with God forever, that rightfully belongs to him.

[ 5 : 08 ] It is love and it is power beyond our comprehension. I think that's why in the letters that Paul says that, I pray that you know the height and depth and width, length of God's love for you.

You need that prayer because it is so big. And so, I want to look at substitution today and how it reveals the heart of God and his powerful plans for each person in this world and for you and for me.

Look first at verse 45. You see that many people who saw Lazarus come out of the tomb, they believed in Jesus. They believed that he was sent by God, that he was God's anointed Messiah who's worth following, he's worth depending upon for something, for goodness to come to their nation.

It's not a complete faith, it's a beginning faith, but it is a belief that Jesus is sent by God. Now you see the very opposite reaction as well in this passage.

And you see as the verses go on in verse 46 that some of them went to the Pharisees and told them what Jesus had done.

[ 6 : 25 ] And there's an extraordinary reaction. It is certainly not one of belief into Jesus. It is panic. And it is fear.

There's this sense of being threatened. It's amazing, isn't it, that Jesus, who Jesus is, can be seen by two people, two types of people, and have two completely different responses to him.

That's what we're seeing here. And I think you see this in our society today as well. There are many people, certainly if you read the internet, you see it, who reject Jesus strongly.

There is a feeling of threat to one's agenda, to their ideology, or their place, or their lifestyle. And it's a fear that's full of half-truths.

Because believing Jesus does indeed change us. It transforms every part of a person, our agendas, our ideology, our lifestyle, the place, how we identify ourselves.

[ 7 : 36 ] There is a deep change that happens. But, and there is a loss, in a sense, that can come with that. But all of our fears, all of those fears that are there, those anxieties, as well as all the hopes, and all of the desires, are met in Jesus Christ.

Who, as we know from the gospel, is all about our greatest good. But of course, to trust that is not an easy thing. This is why faith is a gift from God.

This is why we pray for those who don't know him. This is why the gospel, the good news of Jesus, needs to come with power to meet those fears, and those anxieties.

Because what Jesus does, is he redeems those fears, so that we fear no evil, even death. He redeems our hopes, so that our desires, and what we look for in the future, our will, becomes in him. That they are formed, that they align with who he is. And there is this certainty of God's good plan for all creation. These are the different ways of responding to the Jesus of this chapter.

[ 8 : 56 ] And that gift, redeeming our hopes, is something that we experience here in this congregation now. We, and I was talking to several people after the service last, at nine o'clock, we know that in our church we are experiencing lots of grief.

That there is death in our extended family. And so if you look at the bulletin, you see condolences to the Top family, to the Worrell family. We prayed for the Clucas family last week as well.

And many of you are experiencing this in your own lives, in your own families as well, in some way. the real power of death to affect us.

But there is a massive difference because of Jesus Christ in going through that grief. There is a true and certain hope. It's not a rationalizing hope in the face of death, which we often see around us.

Because even in our deep sense of loss and grief, we grieve with hope, with the reality of Jesus who has conquered death, as we just sang about a few minutes ago, and who walks with us in the midst of our darkness, in the midst of our grief.

[ 10 : 18 ] And there is really a transformation, a total change in the way that we go through grief because of belief in the one who has all power and all love, even in the face of death.

But of course, the chief priests and the Pharisees don't see this. They see fear and threat to their power. And so they gather their counsel together.

You look there in verse 47. That counsel is a big deal. It's called the Sanhedrin. It is like the combination of Supreme Court and Parliament. all combined in a group of 70 men. It's the most powerful entity in Israel outside the Roman military and they have the endorsement of the military power of Rome. And it's made up almost entirely of Sadducees who are very wealthy landowners often and interestingly, they are people who think there is no such thing as a resurrection. [ 11 : 25 ] Which made Jesus last miracle not go over too well with them. So you see, there's this deep anxiety about Jesus because people were believing he was the Messiah. That he was one who is the hope of Israel. He was becoming well-known. And it was very difficult to refute Jesus because he was actually doing and saying the things that Messiah was prophesied to do and to say. And so it had now reached official alarm stage. And there is this feeling of helplessness amongst the religious leaders. What are we to do? That's the question. Nothing is working in other words. For this man performs many signs, they say. Now this is an amazing admission because they are saying he is performing those signs of Messiah. They know that he is doing those signs. They're not denying the fact. They are admitting it. And the problem for them was a fear that what it would mean for them personally. [ 12 : 30 ] What they would give up. It was a loss of what they feel belongs to them. So verse 48 is not this great concern for the nation of Israel when they say this. Look closely at what it says. It says, if we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him and the Romans will take away our place. Which actually means our temple. The place that is the center of power and identity for them. They will take away our place and they will take away our nation. The nation that Rome is allowing them to govern on their behalf. So there's this feeling of desperation among these leaders. But the chief priest Caiaphas, who is a person who gets things done, he cuts through things, he's the strong leader, he steps into the hand wringing and he takes charge. He says, you know nothing at all. It's very diplomatic of him. Very rude, which was not uncommon. Very much like our question period probably in parliament. [ 13 : 36 ] But a little bit more extreme. So he says, 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 would perish. Well that stopped the conversation. Those words brought them all together and they said yes. It was a very cynical, evil thing to say. We have to understand this. he's saying take Jesus out and the threat is gone. Kill him so the Romans won't kill us. And from that day on it says here that they made plans to put Jesus to death. It's astonishing isn't it? The leaders of God's people, those who worship God, take this step that they know is morally wrong. Because they know they have to lie to the Roman governor to get them to execute Jesus because they weren't allowed to. They knew that they would have to make false accusations against Jesus in their own court. But they united around this memorable sentence that Caiaphas said. [ 14 : 49 ] But then we have this amazing verse that follows. After the resurrection, John and many Christians hearing Caiaphas' words thought those words actually say what is the true meaning of what is going on for Jesus. There is a purpose far greater than anything Caiaphas could come up with at work here. God makes those evil words that Caiaphas is not thinking of as prophecy at all. He makes those evil words into his prophecy. God makes them into his word. And so it says in verse 51, he didn't say this of his own accord, but being the 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. That's the last thing that Caiaphas would have wanted. But what he is saying here is actually words that speak of the beautiful, powerful gift of substitution. That is the word that is at the heart of the gospel of Jesus. Jesus. Because it means that Jesus dies for the nation, which means he dies in place of the nation.

[16:09] One commentator said, it's probably good to say, Jesus' death will be the instead of himself for his people. Terrible grammar, but it actually really says what is going on on the cross.

Jesus takes humanity's place. Jesus wants us always to know this atonement, that he dies in our place. That's why in the Lord's Supper, which we do regularly, Jesus says this.

In fact, I'll read what's going to happen. We're going to read it again. But he says this on the night of the Last Supper. He says this, take, eat, this is my body which is given for you.

And then he says, take this cup, drink this, all of you, for this is my blood of the new covenant which is shed for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins.

It is in our place that this atonement, this substitution happens. And Jesus wants us to know this and understand this. It changes the way we live.

[17:14] It changes our faith. So this is something that is said not of Caiaphas' own accord. Jesus says it through him. And the interesting thing is that this is done just before the great feast of substitution which is the Passover.

And this is an important thing because Passover meant that the Hebrew people understood something about substitution already. Do you remember Passover?

That the angel of death passed over all the homes that obeyed God's instruction to kill a lamb and to put that lamb's blood on the doorpost.

And in those homes the firstborn sons were spared. The angel of death passed over those homes.

And the next morning when parents heard the cries of grief from the Egyptian homes without that blood because their firstborn had died, they looked at the doorpost, they looked at the blood that was on there, and they said, my son lives because that lamb died in his place.

That was substitution. And it was something they rehearsed every year at this time of year. And that's why Jesus' purpose in going to Jerusalem at Passover is to be the lamb of God, the lamb whom God sends that takes away the sin of the world by dying in our place.

[18:49] that's why the timing is important here. And that's why if you look further down in the passage to 54, Jesus waits in Ephraim until five days before Passover.

He doesn't go around in public, it says here. And instead he waits until that coming into Jerusalem on a donkey as the servant king just five days before Passover.

Passover. That's because he comes not to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many. So here's what's going on.

This is why the timing, this is why it's at Passover. But we need to ask ourselves as we begin to leave the passage, what does it mean for you?

What does it mean for me this morning? Well there's two things it means about God and there's two things it means about us. Among many things but I'm just going to point out these two things.

[19:49] First two things it means about God is that first of all God loves us deeply. We saw that in the miracle of Lazarus as well but in this passage we see that none of the things we read about is an accident.

It's not a tragic event that get out of hand and evil wins out. Instead God the Father sends Jesus to serve us, to be our lamb, to die in our place.

And in this loving plan Jesus chooses to go to Jerusalem. He deliberately puts himself in the hands of these murderous men who plotted his death.

And he purposely suffers and he dies on a cross for the forgiveness of our sins. He takes our judgment on himself. And when he rises from the dead forever he chooses to give his resurrection life to us.

The eternal life of knowing God. And all of this he does why? So that where he is we may be also. That's what he says. That is the whole purpose of it.

[20:58] That is love. That is this deep desire to be in fellowship with us. For us to know him. For him to know us perfectly. That's love.

But it also means that God is powerful. You see it's only because Jesus is the lamb that comes from God. And who is God.

The powerful God who is the word of God become flesh. Who created everything. It's only because he dies. That his sacrifice and his resurrection utterly changes our lives forever.

It's only because he is the powerful God. The Lord. That we are forever accepted. That we are forever forgiven. That his sacrifice means we're forever loved by God.

And forever part of the life of God the Father. God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. An animal couldn't do that. Another person couldn't do it. Only the all powerful.

[ 22 : 00 ] loving Lord God. As our substitute could accomplish that. And so you see that God's power is made perfect in the incredible weakness of Jesus suffering and death.

That's God's glory. That's why there's so much praise of the lamb in the book of Revelation. As John glimpses into heaven he's always looking at this image of the lamb when they're talking about Jesus.

And he says this. He says, I looked and I heard around the throne and the living creatures and the elders the voice of many angels numbering myriads of myriads and thousands and thousands saying with a loud voice worthy is the lamb who was slain to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing.

He's worthy to receive everything in other words. And he's called the lamb that was slain. So as we leave this passage this is the power and the glory of that death as the lamb of God.

There are many ways that Jesus' substitution affects you and me this morning. And I want to mention two very, very briefly. The first is that this design of death of Jesus this substitution should give you an intense and personal sense that you are loved particularly personally and in the most intimate way that you can imagine.

[ 23 : 35 ] And the thing that we see here is that God is one who is pursuing you that he is after this saving work in your life. He wants to have you come in his very presence.

So you notice at the end of verse 52 what it said. It says Christ died not for the nation only but to gather into one the children of God. You see that substitution draws us in to him.

He gathers all those who will believe in and he believes he gathers all those who will believe in him into the children of God it says. Into that family of God together.

And that means he has pursued you that he has found you that he has gathered you into himself by his blood. That's the powerful work of the substitution.

And he did it by his blood. If you have trusted Christ he has gathered you to himself. He chose you. He bought you. He brought you. You in particular. So there's this deep sense of this personal love for us in substitution.

[ 24 : 48 ] But the second thing is how we understand the brokenness that we experience the darkness the death the times when evil seems to be winning out.

Because from the outside in our passage the words of Caiaphas simply look like a hostile human plan to get rid of the Messiah to bring him to ruin.

But from the inside John is showing us something very different. that those very words of execution that Caiaphas pronounces are not just his words but they are God's words.

And God has a totally different plan for these events than anyone could see who is looking on from the outside even his disciples. And so it will be in your life again and again and again as a follower of Jesus as one who is loved by him.

because you will see the outside. There are situations in your life where you will it will look hostile. It will look destructive. But inside if this pattern is true in Jesus inside God is at work for your good.

[ 26 : 06 ] That he is bringing his good plan into effect through it. This is what we trust God for. this is why we hold on to him as our rock and our salvation.

So today I invite you to thank God for his love and for his power for his powerful will in the midst of our broken world that's subject to death bringing into our lives his unimaginable goodness and mercy.

So we give him thanks and praise because the slain lamb of God deserves all honor and blessing and worship. Amen.