

Teaching Points

Tonight, we move on with the aftermath of Lazarus' resurrection. We're going to pick up with the familiar themes of belief and unbelief. Remember, all throughout John's gospel we see the contrast between light/dark, life/death, and belief/unbelief.

In verse 45 we read that many of the Jews believed in Jesus after they saw Him raise Lazarus from the dead. At the same time, there were some who persisted in their unbelief. Notice the contrast - many believed in him (v. 45) but some went to the Pharisees (v. 46).

It's important to note how they all had access to the same signs. Remember, John describes Christ's miracles as "signs" that point to His divine nature and message. The chief priests and Pharisees were well aware of the signs Jesus had performed among them: **"What are we to do? For this man performs many signs."** (v. 47). They all saw the same signs - but they had very different responses.

Discussion Question: Since some saw the signs and didn't believe, does this mean the signs failed to accomplish their purpose?

Thoughts: *Not at all. God always accomplishes His purpose (Isaiah 55:10-11). The signs pointed many to salvation AND stood as a witness against the unbelief of others. Either way, they were effective in fulfilling God's design.*

Furthermore, remember the same sun that melts wax also hardens clay. The same word that softens our hearts also hardens the hearts of some. The seed is always the same - but there are different soils that receive it. BOTH the softening and the hardening are according to God's sovereign purpose. The point is - whether many believe or some reject - God's purposes stand.

Verse 48 reveals the motivation for the Jewish leaders' rejection of Christ. **"If we let Him alone like this, everyone will believe in Him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and nation."** Their rejection of Christ is described in political terms. They didn't want to lose their power and influence. They were afraid that Rome would further restrict their freedoms. So, part of their denial of Christ was because they loved their position and political power (which is ironic since they were subjected to Roman authority all the while.)

Then we get a fascinating description of the schemes of Christ's enemies. Verses 49-52 detail a conversation that took place at a council of Jewish leaders. Caiaphas, the high priest that year, was a prominent voice in this meeting. He was a staunch enemy of Christ and he wielded his influence to persuade others against Jesus as well.

His plan is revealed in verses 49-50, ***“You know nothing at all, nor do you consider that it is expedient for us that one man should die for the people, and not that the whole nation perish.”***

He just unknowingly preached the gospel! In fact, verses 51-52 state that these words were from God. In other words, Caiaphas’ plan, that he thought was his own, was actually the fulfillment of God’s eternal purpose.

Discussion Question: Caiaphas was a wicked man who hated Jesus. How can his plan to murder Jesus be described as coming from God?

Thoughts: *This statement is an incredible example of the doctrine of CONCURRENCE. Caiaphas speaks of Jesus dying for the whole nation in terms of removing a perceived political problem. But God is also at work in this statement - and He means it in terms of bringing salvation to many Jews and Gentiles.*

We call this concurrence because there’s only one act - but two wills at work. Caiaphas has one intention and God has another. This is the same thing we read in Genesis 50:20, “...you meant evil...but God meant it for good...”

Amazingly, God uses man’s evil for good. God works everything together for the good of His people (Romans 8:28) and that includes the sinful plans and actions of men. It’s important to understand that God is always at work for good. There’s never a circumstance in which man intends good but God intends evil.

The final verses of John 11 provide us with more of the same themes we’ve noticed throughout this Gospel: The leaders want Jesus dead (v.53), the people want to see more of Jesus (v.56), and Jesus exercises His prerogative and ability to go where He wants (v.54). Jesus is on the time-table that His Father has given to Him. He will be murdered on the cross. He will “die for the people,” but not until He chooses to lay down His life (10:18).

Prayer Focus

1. Thank God for His inscrutable wisdom in bringing about salvation. Praise Him that His Son has indeed died for the sins of His people. Praise Him for using even the sinful decisions of men to work all things according to His will. (Remember that this applies to corrupt governments and unfaithful politicians as well!)

2. Ask God to soften the hearts of those we know who are unbelievers. Ask Him to draw them to Himself and that He would break their hard hearts through the power of the Gospel.