



The Gospel of John

Session 24: The Plot to Kill Jesus

THE LESSON AT A GLANCE

If last's week's miracle, raising Lazarus from the dead, was the pinnacle of Jesus's public displays of His power, this week's meeting of the Sanhedrin was the pinnacle of exercising their power. The religious leaders were convinced that Jesus should die, and they began to publicly call on others to find Him and bring Him in.

No matter how much power the Jewish leaders held, it paled in comparison to God's sovereign plan. Jesus did not go to the cross because of man, but God, who sent His Son to die for our sins.

At times, we may feel like life's circumstances, or even the evil intent of others is in control. However, in today's text, we'll see how even the high priest's evil command that Jesus should die would be used to bring about God's plan. Likewise, we can trust God's sovereign control over our lives.

TODAY'S SCRIPTURES

John 11:45-57

THE MAIN IDEA

After Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, some believed, but the Pharisees became more convinced than ever that He should die. No matter what happens in life, we can rest assured that God is ultimately in control, and nothing can stop His plans.

QUESTION TO EXPLORE

What does it mean to rest in God's sovereignty daily?

SCRIPTURE IN CONTEXT

John 11:45-48 After Lazarus was raised from the dead, many put their faith in Jesus, yet others went directly to the Pharisees to report what had happened. As believers, we are responsible for faithfully witnessing to what Jesus has done for us, but we are not responsible for other people's responses.

John 11:49-53 The high priest, Caiaphas, influenced the Sanhedrin to demand Jesus's death. He prophesied that Jesus would die for the people and that his death would reunite the scattered Jewish people. What the high priest meant for evil, God would ultimately use for good. Jesus would indeed die for the sins of the people, and through him the Gentiles would be invited into God's Kingdom.

John 11:54-57 As the Jews rushed to Jerusalem to prepare for the Passover, they had no idea the ultimate Passover Lamb was being prepared for His death. They used traditions, rituals, and ceremonial cleansing to prepare for Passover. Today, we rest in the completed work of the true Passover Lamb, Jesus—the only thing we need to bring is our hearts.



START HERE

In any courtroom trial, witnesses present evidence and testimony. Attorneys present arguments, and the judge oversees the process. Yet when all the evidence has been presented, the responsibility ultimately falls to the jury to reach a verdict.

Jurors may hear the same testimony and review the same evidence, yet they do not always reach the same conclusions. Some may believe the evidence proves guilt beyond a reasonable doubt, and others remain unconvinced. The evidence itself may be clear, but each juror must decide what to do with it.

The raising of Lazarus functioned in a similar way for the people who witnessed it. The miracle provided powerful evidence about who Jesus is. Yet the crowd did not respond in the same way. Some believed immediately. Others rejected Jesus and reported Him to the religious authorities. Still others began to actively plot His death. John showed that the miracle of Lazarus did not merely reveal Jesus's power—it forced people to render a verdict about His identity.

DISCUSS

When did you become convinced of the identity of Jesus? Was there one event or piece of “evidence” that persuaded you?

REVIEW AND DISCUSS THE TEXT

1. Jesus's followers are responsible for sharing—not controlling the response.

John 11:45-48: Therefore, many of the Jews who came to Mary and saw 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 convened the Sanhedrin and were saying, “What are we going to do since this man is doing 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.”

Unpacking John 11:45-48

In a trial, witnesses testify about what they have seen or personally witnessed. Their role is not to determine the verdict; it is simply to tell the truth about what happened.

The people who saw Lazarus raised from the dead functioned in a similar role. They had witnessed something extraordinary. Some reflected on what they had seen and believed in Jesus. Others reported the event to the Pharisees. The witnesses did not control how others responded to their testimony. They simply passed along what they knew.



The raising of Lazarus was impossible to ignore. In John's Gospel, this seventh and final sign was the culmination of Jesus's miracle-working during His earthly ministry. Imagine, a man who had been dead four days was up alive and walking. It was extraordinary! For many who witnessed the miracle, the conclusion was clear: Jesus has divine authority over death and life.

"Therefore, many of the Jews who came to Mary and saw what he did believed in him. But some of them went to the Pharisees and told them what Jesus had done" (vv. 45-46). The raising of Lazarus provided the most compelling testimony to date of the power of Jesus. It would have been impossible to deny the impact of having attended the funeral of a man only to see him days later walking around the marketplace. This was not a healing or provision of daily bread—this miracle gave credibility to Christ's divine nature, and many who saw it put their trust in Jesus. The people had witnessed a sign that was impossible to ignore.

It's important to note that we cannot command signs before we put our faith in Jesus. Many people throughout history have tried, and failed, to command God to act on their behalf in exchange for belief in Him. In Matthew 12:38-41 the Pharisees tried just that, saying, *"Teacher, we want to see a sign from you."* Their curiosity, however, was driven by a desire to control and topple Jesus's influence more than a sincere desire to encounter God. Because of their lack of faith, Jesus replied, *"An evil and adulterous generation demands a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For as Jonah was in the belly of the huge fish three days and three nights, so the Son of Man will be in the heart of the earth three days and three nights."* Jesus's death, burial, and resurrection was the last and ultimate sign of His divinity and raising Lazarus from the dead was the precursor to it.

For those in attendance, this sign was more than enough to put their faith in Christ, and many believed in Him. Notice, however, the attitude of the people in Bethany. Even Martha and Mary did not demand Jesus raise their brother back to life, they merely expressed their grief alongside their belief that he would be raised in the last days. The mourners in attendance certainly did not make demands on Jesus. Yet, He worked in His perfect timing to bring about His ultimate plans. Last week we examined Jesus's words to the disciples when they were confused about His delay to visit Lazarus who was sick. *"This sickness will not end in death but is for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it . . . Lazarus has died. I'm glad for you that I wasn't there so that you may believe. But let's go to him"* (John 11:4,14-15). We cannot demand a sign from Jesus, but we can trust that He knows our needs and responds to our pain.

The same miracle that prompted faith in some produced rejection in others. Some who witnessed it went to the Pharisees to report what Jesus had done. Instead of asking whether the miracle proved Jesus was the Messiah, they focused on the potential disruption His growing influence might cause. *"So the chief priests and the Pharisees convened the Sanhedrin and were saying, 'What are we going to do since this man is doing 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'"* (vv. 47-48).



The Sanhedrin (the Jewish ruling counsel led by both Pharisees and Sadducees) recognized their grip on power in Jerusalem was tenuous at best. Herod Antipas had allowed them to remain, functioning essentially as a religious entity without political power, because their allegiance to him downplayed revolt and strengthened his position with Rome. He had even completed the temple project begun by his father, Herod the Great, to garner good will from among the Jews.

The ruling council was more concerned with maintaining their own power than they were with welcoming the Messiah. Rather than rejoice that a dead man had come back to life, their jealousy blinded them to Jesus's messianic message. In their eyes, if everyone believed in Jesus, who often acted outside of societal norms, Rome might sense rebellion and take away both their positions and the temple they so loved. Ironically, the very positions of power they were holding onto and the temple they were trying desperately to protect would indeed fall by the Romans during their lifetimes in AD 70.

Jesus warns against putting our faith in anything other than God. He said in Matthew 6:19-21, *"Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."* Anytime we put our confidence in our own abilities or influence, or we spend our energy protecting things (like the temple) rather than caring for people, we risk missing God's heart for humanity and our own need for a Savior. The Sanhedrin was focused on the wrong things, and ironically, the things they desperately sought to hold onto would be taken from them.

Jesus warned His disciples that His message would divide people. In Luke 12:51-53, Jesus quoted the prophet Micah saying, *"Do you think that I came here to bring peace on the earth? No, I tell you, but rather division. From now on, five in one household will be divided: three against two, and two against three. They will be divided, father against son, son against father, mother against daughter, daughter against mother, mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law, and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law."* No amount of arguing would persuade them.

Our responsibility as believers is to share the good news of Jesus and what He has done in our lives—how people respond is outside of our control. Some people will hear the gospel and accept Christ enthusiastically. Others will hear, harden their hearts, and look for reasons to deny Christ. In Matthew 13:1-9, Jesus taught the parable of the sower. The farmer spreads the seed, and it goes where it will. Some falls on rocky or shallow soil and fails to germinate and grow. Other seed falls on good soil where it takes root and produces an abundant harvest. We are not responsible for the quality of the soil (the condition of human hearts). We are responsible for spreading the seed of the gospel and trusting God with the outcome. When we share our own encounters with Christ, and the difference He has made in our lives, we can trust that God will use our testimony to spread the seed of the gospel with others.



DISCUSS

- *What two responses did people have after witnessing the miracle of Lazarus?*
- *Why do you think people who see the same evidence about Jesus sometimes reach completely different conclusions?*
- *How does this passage encourage you when someone rejects the message of the gospel?*

2. Even plans that oppose God ultimately accomplish His purposes.

John 11:49-53: *One of them, Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, said to them, “You know nothing at all! You’re not considering that it is to your advantage that one man should die for the people rather than the whole nation perish.” He did not say this on his own, but being high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus was going to die for the nation, and not for the nation only, but also to unite the scattered children of God. So from that day on they plotted to kill him.*

Unpacking John 11:49-53

In a courtroom, a judge’s statements often share the direction of the case. A single ruling or statement from the bench can influence how the entire trial unfolds.

In the Sanhedrin, Caiaphas was the ruler who held tremendous power. As high priest, his words carried significant influence, and when he spoke during the council meeting, his statement shaped the decision that followed. However, John revealed that his words carried meaning far beyond what he intended.

Caiaphas served as high priest in Jerusalem from approximately AD 18 to 36 and served during Jesus’s earthly ministry. His father-in-law, Annas, served previously as high priest, and both men appear in the narrative again during Jesus’s trial. Caiaphas’s goal was to maintain power and subvert a potential uprising among the Jews. Any unruly or aggressive behavior threatened the Jewish leaders’ good standing with Roman officials and could ultimately weaken their own power. Their power was tenuous at best, and the actions that followed were aimed at maintaining a sense of control.

“One of them, Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, said to them, “You know nothing at all! You’re not considering that it is to your advantage that one man should die for the people rather than the whole nation perish” (v. 50). Caiaphas proposed eliminating Jesus for political stability. He believed eliminating Jesus would prevent unrest and preserve the nation from Roman intervention. This was not the first time the Jewish authorities attempted to neutralize the threat they believe Jesus presented.

In Luke 4, Jesus entered the synagogue of his hometown of Nazareth and read from the scroll of the prophet Isaiah. The people were impressed with His speech but wanted Him to perform miracles on demand to prove Himself. When he rebuked their lack of faith, the Jews became furious with him. *“When they heard this, everyone in the synagogue was enraged. They got up,*



drove him out of town, and brought him to the edge of the hill that their town was built on, intending to hurl him over the cliff. But he passed right through the crowd and went on his way” (Luke 4:28-30).

In John 5, when Jesus healed the man at the Pool of Bethesda on the Sabbath, and called God His Father, the Jewish leaders began plotting to kill him. *“Therefore, the Jews began persecuting Jesus because he was doing these things on the Sabbath. Jesus responded to them, ‘My Father is still working, and I am working also.’ This is why the Jews began trying even more to kill him: not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal to God” (John 5:16-18).* From His earliest days of teaching and ministry, the Jewish leaders felt threatened by Jesus’s influence, but also from His claims regarding His standing before God.

In John 7, after Jesus fed the 5,000 and referred to Himself as the Bread of Life, He retreated to Galilee because the Jewish leaders in Judea were trying to kill Him. (John 7:1) Later in that same chapter, when Jesus taught publicly during the Festival of Shelters, the Pharisees sent temple servants to arrest Him. However, the servants wouldn’t lay a hand on Jesus, saying, *“No man ever spoke like this!” (John 7:46)* As Jesus’s influence grew, so did the Pharisees’ desire to subdue it.

In John chapter 8, the Jewish leaders picked up rocks to stone Jesus for claiming *“before Abraham was, I am” (John 8:59)*, and in John 10:31 they tried to stone Him for claiming unity with the Father. Each time Jesus performed a miracle, the Pharisees would demand to know by what authority He acted. In each instance, Jesus would plainly state that His authority came from God, and that the miracles themselves served as evidence of His relationship with the Father. However, the Jewish leaders would then threaten to kill Jesus for answering their questions honestly! As His influence grew and His miracles crescendo with the raising of Lazarus, the Jewish leaders moved from *attempting* to kill Jesus to overtly plotting His assassination.

Caiaphas unknowingly spoke a profound truth. When he claimed that *“one man should die for the people rather than the whole nation perish” (John 11:50)*, he likely believed that Jesus’s death would tamp down a potential uprising, quiet the people, and help the religious leaders maintain their power. His suggestion presented what seemed to be a pragmatic solution to the situation—if they eliminated Jesus, things would surely settle down. It’s hard for us to recognize the depth from which the religious leaders of Jesus’s day had fallen, that one of their leaders would openly suggest assassination and no one else spoke up against it.

God was moving even through Caiaphas’s evil suggestion. His sovereignty overrules human opposition. Throughout Scripture, God often used the actions of those who opposed Him to accomplish His purposes. God used Joseph’s captivity in Egypt to bring about provision for the entire region during famine and ultimately the reunion of Israel’s sons. God used Pharaoh’s hardened heart to eventually secure the deliverance of the Israelites from bondage. He used Haman’s wicked edict with King Xerxes to bring about deliverance of the Jews and the fall of



Jewish oppression. He even used the Babylonian exile to bring about repentance for His people.

Job was one of God's righteous servants who experienced unfathomable suffering. At the end of the book of Job, he confidently prayed, *"I know that you can do anything and no plan of yours can be thwarted"* (Job 42:2). He knew that God could use even the most difficult circumstances to bring about His plans. All of humanity, and indeed all of creation, belongs to God, and He moves in ways we cannot see to accomplish His purposes. As R.C. Sproul wrote, *"There is not a single maverick molecule in the universe."* Everything belongs to Him.

What Caiaphas demanded would occur, but it would accomplish far more than the high priest ever imagined. Rather than stamping out the Jesus movement, Christ's crucifixion and resurrection lit a fire of revival that has burned in human hearts for two millennia. Lee Strobel, in his 2000 book, *The Case for Faith*, wrote, *"The irony of the crucifixion is that the very act meant to silence Jesus became the event that proved who He truly was."*

"He [Caiaphas] did not say this on his own, but being high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus was going to die for the nation, and not for the nation only, but also to unite the scattered children of God. So from that day on they plotted to kill him" (vv. 51-53).

It's important to point out that while God can use the evil intention of others (God never does evil) to bring about His good purposes, that is not an invitation to justify our own evil choices to attempt to compel God to bring about something good. God's people are to *"stay away from every kind of evil"* (1 Thessalonians 5:22). Paul addressed this argument in Romans 6:1 when he wrote, *"What should we say then? Should we continue in sin so that grace may multiply? Absolutely not!"* (Romans 6:1-2a). God alone is sovereign. We should not attempt to force His hand in any way but live by faith that God is working all things together for our good and His glory (Romans 8:28).

When believers face circumstances that appear chaotic or unjust, we can take comfort in God's sovereignty. Even events that seem destructive may ultimately serve His redemptive purposes. Caiaphas had no idea how prophetic his words would be and that his evil plan would accomplish the very opposite of what he intended. The cross would not weaken the witness of Christ—it would amplify it.

DISCUSS

- *What solution did Caiaphas propose for dealing with Jesus? How had the Jewish leaders been building up to this moment?*
- *Why do you think John emphasized that Caiaphas spoke prophetically?*
- *How does remembering God's sovereignty help you trust Him in uncertain times?*



3. Religious preparation is not the same as preparing to receive

Jesus.

John 11:54-57: *Jesus therefore no longer walked openly among the Jews but departed from there to the countryside near the wilderness, to a town called Ephraim, and he stayed there with the disciples.*

Now the Jewish Passover was near, and many went up to Jerusalem from the country to purify themselves before the Passover. They were looking for Jesus and asking one another as they stood in the temple, "What do you think? He won't come to the festival, will he?" The chief priests and the Pharisees had given orders that if anyone knew where he was, he should report it so that they could arrest him.

Unpacking John 11:54-57

When authorities are attempting to locate someone suspected of a crime, they often ask the public to report information about the person's whereabouts. Informants or witnesses provide tips that help authorities make an arrest.

In John 11, the chief priests and Pharisees effectively issued such a request. Anyone who knew Jesus's location was supposed to report it so He could be arrested. The search for Jesus had begun. Killing Jesus was no longer a hypothetical discussion or a spontaneous response to teaching the Pharisees disagreed with. From this point forward, it was a calculated plan.

Under threat of arrest, Jesus and His disciples left Bethany and retreated to Ephraim, a small village on the edge of the Judean desert. Jesus was not surprised by the Sanhedrin's plot. He knew that others were planning His death. In Mark 10:33-34, He prepared His disciples, saying, *"We are going up to Jerusalem," he said, "and the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and the teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death and will hand him over to the Gentiles, who will mock him and spit on him, flog him, and kill him. Three days later he will rise."* His death, then, would be not a sneak attack, but a sovereign surrender.

Nearly 700 years before Jesus was born the prophet, Isaiah, predicted Jesus's death, *"For he was cut off from the land of the living; he was struck because of my people's rebellion"* (Isaiah 53:8). Even more astounding, the prophet went on to say that God was pleased for Jesus to die for our sins. *"Yet the LORD was pleased to crush him severely. When you make him a guilt offering, he will see his seed, he will prolong his days, and by his hand, the LORD's pleasure will be accomplished"* (Isaiah 53:10). God did not receive pleasure in watching His Son die. Far from it. While He was on the cross, the whole earth went dark in sorrow. But God is pleased to welcome us into His eternal family through Jesus's death—which was God's plan all along.

"Now the Jewish Passover was near, and many went up to Jerusalem from the country to purify themselves before the Passover" (v. 55). Jewish worshipers traveled to Jerusalem in preparation for Passover. Those preparations included removing all leavened bread from their



homes, carefully sweeping away every crumb. When they arrived in the city, they needed to procure a lamb for the sacrifice and participate in a ritual cleansing. They would also visit a mikveh, a ritual bath used for achieving purity. Immersion in the mikveh was required, and an attendant would supervise the bath, ensuring that every portion of a person's body was cleansed. Mikvehs still exist today in Israel and throughout the world, and observant Jews visit one after coming in contact with a corpse, recovering from certain illnesses or a woman's monthly cycle, or certain other conditions that makes a person ceremonially unclean.

As the city filled with people preparing to celebrate Passover—the deliverance of Israel through the sacrifice of a lamb—the true Passover Lamb was being targeted for death. In *The Cross of Christ*, pastor and writer John Stott said, “*Christ died not merely as a martyr but as the Lamb of God, offered for the sins of the world.*” He was the ultimate Passover Lamb, and as the festival drew near, so did the public discussion about His death.

Some of the Jews wondered where Jesus could be and discussed whether they thought He would make an appearance.

“The chief priests and the Pharisees had given orders that if anyone knew where he was, he should report it so that they could arrest him” (v. 57). The Jewish leaders' plan was no longer a secret. What had been plotted in the secrecy of the Sanhedrin became a public manhunt. They were counting on the public to discover Jesus and bring Him to them.

It's possible to observe religious traditions while missing the heart of what they meant. The Passover Lamb was provided, yet most people failed to recognize Him. In the same way, preparing decorations, meals, or travel plans can overshadow the real reason we celebrate days like Christmas and Easter. True preparation is not about house cleaning or ritual bathing. True preparation to receive the Passover Lamb begins with the preparation of our hearts. For the Jews who put their faith in Jesus, Passover was about to take on a whole new significance.

DISCUSS

- *Why was Jesus not surprised by the plot against Him?*
- *How was the original Passover, down to its preparations, pointing toward Jesus all along?*
- *In what ways can our preparation to meet with God, even the way we get ourselves and our family ready for church on Sunday, distract us? What would it look like to put Jesus in the center of our worship and lives?*



DEEPER FOCUS

REFLECT ON THE TEXT

DISCUSS

- *When have you seen God bring good out of situation that initially seemed destructive?*
- *What does it mean that God was pleased for Jesus to take the penalty for our sin?*

RESPOND TO THE TEXT

- *How does today's passage strengthen your confidence in God's sovereignty?*

APPLY

How should this truth motivate you to live with greater faith and courage?

REFERENCES

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