

Better for One Man to Die

(John 11:45-57)

Expository Lessons from the Gospel of John

I. Background

- a. Jesus had just raised Lazarus, the brother of Mary and Martha, from the dead after he was four days in the tomb.

II. Aftermath of Raising Lazarus

- a. Read **John 11:45-57**.
- b. Overview of the story
 - i. Many believe. Some spread the news to the Pharisees.
 - ii. Chief priests and Pharisees gather a council.
 - 1. The word for “*council*” here in the NKJV is literally “*Sanhedrin*”. It is translated as *Sanhedrin* in some other translations here and elsewhere in the New Testament
 - 2. At this time in Jewish history, historical sources indicate that the Sanhedrin in Jerusalem was a council of 71 rabbis or Jewish religious leaders (men), that may have been led by the High Priest.
 - 3. In the **gospels** and **Acts**, the Sanhedrin is prominent in judging Jesus and the apostles.
 - iii. Caiaphas the high priest hates Jesus; utters a true statement (a prophecy) but does not realize the significance of what he says.
 - iv. Jewish leaders decide Jesus must be killed. Jesus lays low with his disciples.
 - v. The Passover feast approaches. Jews gathering there in Jerusalem wonder if Jesus will arrive there. Chief priests and Pharisees send out orders to have Him seized if He shows up.
- c. The prophecy made by Caiaphas
 - i. Jewish leaders are afraid that
 - 1. Jesus’ popularity is growing, due to miraculous signs He performs. It is getting out of control.

2. If they don't do something to stop this soon, EVERYONE will follow Him. If that happens...
 - a. The Romans will "take away" the Jewish nation. Their nation will perish.
 - b. The Romans will "take away" their place, referring to the temple in Jerusalem. The temple will be destroyed or be desecrated and rendered unusable.
 - c. In other words, they risk losing everything.
- ii. Caiaphas interrupts the debate of the Sanhedrin. He essentially calls the others ignorant and offers a solution, saying, "nor do you consider that it is expedient for us that one man should die for the people, and not that the whole nation should perish." (**John 11:50**, NKJV)
- iii. Logic of the position of Caiaphas (who hated Jesus):
 1. BETTER for just *one man* (Jesus) to die, to save the entire nation.
 2. The other alternative: do nothing and the entire nation and temple will be destroyed.
- iv. This was a true statement, a prophecy, *but not in the way Caiaphas had intended*.
 1. God's plan was, in fact, for one man to die (voluntarily giving up his life) in order to save all the people.
 2. Jesus had said, "the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many." (**Matthew 20:28**, NKJV)
 3. This idea of one man suffering and dying so that many others could be saved points back to the Suffering Servant of **Isaiah 53** (written c. 750 B.C.) This was the passage that the Ethiopian eunuch puzzled over, in **Acts 8:26-35**.
 - a. Read **Isaiah 53:3-12**
 - i. One person would suffer and die to save the lives of others.
 - ii. He would bear the sins of others.
 - iii. Our peace was purchased through His suffering.

4. Also similar to the story of the scapegoat in **Leviticus 16:20-22**
 - a. One goat bears the sin of all the people.
 - b. The term “scapegoat” as used today refers to someone who (generally unjustly) *receives all the blame* for something bad.
5. Paul said that one did die for all, with consequences for the rest: “For the love of Christ compels us, because we judge thus: that if One died for all, then all died; and He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again.” (**2 Corinthians 5:14-15**, NKJV)
 - a. One died for all; therefore, we participate in that death.
 - b. That voluntary death on our behalf motivates us, by love, to live the rest of our lives for the one who died for us.
- d. There is *irony* in the fears of the Jews regarding Jesus.
 - i. The Jewish rulers wanted to kill him (unjustly) out of *fear that they would lose their nation and temple* if they let Him continue.
 - ii. HOWEVER, in the end God took away their nation and temple *because* they killed Jesus!
 1. Read Parable of the Wicked Vineyard Tenants (**Mark 12:1-12**)
 - a. The vineyard, with hedge around it, tower, etc. represents *Jerusalem and the Jewish nation* (a walled city, in which the temple is located).
 - b. The servants (who were beaten, abused and killed) are *the prophets*. The last one sent is the beloved son of the owner.
 - i. It is important to share the lessons from this parable with those from Muslim backgrounds. Muslims do accept Jesus as a great prophet and even as being the Jewish Messiah (the Christ). *However*, they:
 1. deny that Jesus was *God’s Son*;

2. reject the idea that Jesus was *put to death* on the cross by the Jews; and
 3. hold that *after Jesus came, God sent yet another, greater prophet* to follow: Mohammad.
- ii. The owner (God) has *a son*, who is sent last.
 1. Jesus is the Son of God.
 2. There will be no more servants sent by the Owner, after his son is sent. His son is sent last (in the parallel account in **Matthew 21:37** it says, "last of all").
 - iii. The beloved son is killed by the wicked tenants, and then cast outside the vineyard.
 1. Mohammad claimed in the Koran that Jesus did not actually die on the cross; he said *it only appeared that way*. However, Jesus plainly said He would be killed.
 - c. As a result of their crime (abusing the good servants, then killing the son of the Owner), the following happens:
 - i. The wicked tenant vinedressers are destroyed.
 - ii. The vineyard is given to others.
 - d. Jesus tells this parable against the Jewish leaders to reveal in advance that they will lose their nation, their city and their temple as a result of their wickedness, *after they kill God's Son!*
2. The terrible destruction of Jerusalem after death of the Christ, the Son of God, by the Romans in the year 70 AD also was prophesied by Daniel, about 550 years before the birth of Jesus. (Read **Daniel 9:20-27**.)
 - a. Vision revealed by the angel Gabriel to Daniel, while the Jews were in captivity, during the time of the Medo-Persian empire. At this time in history, Jerusalem had been destroyed (by the Babylonians), and the temple and city walls were still in ruins.

- b. Symbolic language is used in this prophecy, regarding “sevens” or “weeks”, a term which is used to represent periods of time in the future.
- c. In this prophecy it is revealed that four steps that will occur in the future, in sequence:
 - i. **Step 1:** Jerusalem and its wall (which had been destroyed) would be rebuilt.
 - ii. **Step 2:** The Christ (= Messiah = the Anointed One) would come.
 - iii. **Step 3:** The Christ would be put to death.
 - iv. **Step 4:** The prince who is coming will destroy the city (Jerusalem) and the sanctuary (the temple)
- d. Things to note here in this prophecy:
 - i. The city and temple were rebuilt under the Persian Empire, after the time of Cyrus who called for return of the Jewish captives to Jerusalem (see Ezra and Nehemiah).
 - ii. Since the city and temple were destroyed by Titus in AD 70, the Messiah had to come and be killed before then. Steps 2 & 3 had to occur before then.
 - 1. The Christ, the Messiah, *had to be killed* (this is a problem for the Jews as well as the Muslims).
 - 2. The Jews cannot be still waiting for the (first) coming of the Christ, the Messiah. According to Daniel’s prophecy, he must have come before AD70.
 - 3. Daniel’s prophecy explains the sequence (Christ coming before rebuilt city and temple being destroyed). Jesus’ parable explained the link (city and temple would be destroyed *because* the Jews killed their Christ).
 - iii. The bitter irony: the fears of the wicked religious leaders that drove them to kill Jesus ended up playing into God’s greater plan. In the end,

they reaped the very outcome (loss of city, nation and temple) that they were desperately trying to *avoid*!

- e. Other examples in Scripture where the Lord uses the very strategies and tactics of the wicked to bring *them* down in the end include:
 - i. **Genesis 3:14-15.** After Satan used a woman to introduce sin and death into the human race, God stated that it would be the offspring of the woman (not woman + man, pointing to the virgin birth of Jesus) who would crush and defeat Satan in the end.
 - ii. **Numbers 14:1-4 and 14:26-27.** After Moses sent out the 12 spies into the Promised Land while the Jews are still in the Wilderness, the people rebel. They protest that *their children will be lost* if they continue on this mission. For that reason, the faithless Israelites want to return to Egypt. The Lord responds that it will be *their children* who will enter the Promised Land; they will die in the Wilderness.
 - iii. In the defeat of the Egyptians in **first half of the book of Exodus**.
 1. Egyptians worshiped all kinds of animals, the sun, the river, etc. These were the elements God used to rebuke them through the 10 Plagues.
 2. Exodus begins with the wicked Pharaoh genocidally ordering that all the *Hebrew male babies* be *drown* in the river (**Exodus 1:22**). Eighty years later, it is the *men of Pharaoh's army who are drowned* by God when they attempt to cross the Red Sea (**Exodus 14:23-31**).
 3. In **Wisdom of Solomon (11:1-16 and 18:4-5)**, the writer points back the Exodus story to make a similar point. God punished the Egyptians by turning their own wicked devices against them.
 - iv. We see God's delayed but *perfect justice* in effect against the wicked. In the end, *they get away with nothing*.
 - v. We also see the *sovereignty of God*: working even through the plans of the most wicked people.

III. Can God Really Use Wicked People?

- a. **Question:** How can Caiaphas, a wicked man, be used by God to utter a prophecy? Does God use *wicked people* for his prophets?
 - i. Recall Balaam, who uttered four prophecies from God, including prophecies about the Messiah in **Numbers 23-24**. Yet he led Israel into sexual sin and died a wicked man (**Numbers 31:8 and 31:16**).

1. In **2 Peter 2:15-16** it says Balaam “loved the wages of unrighteousness”, and a donkey rebuked “his madness”.
 2. In **Jude v. 11** and **Revelation 2:14**, Balaam also is used as a classic example of a man who became horribly corrupt.
- ii. God even spoke through the mouth of a donkey. God can use anyone or anything. (**Numbers 22:28-30**)
- iii. Recall that Jesus had said, “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?’ And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!’” (**Matthew 7:21-23**, NKJV)
1. God can and will use anyone. Great signs of God’s power does not necessarily mean that a person is righteous, or has any real relationship with Jesus.
 2. People make the mistake of following spiritual leaders or religious movements based on indications such as:
 - a. Miraculous signs, including healings
 - b. Ability to cast out demons
 - c. Ability to issue prophecies
 - d. Ability to draw or convert large crowds of people
 - e. Ability to move large audiences with their rhetoric
 3. We must recall Caiaphas, Balaam, the donkey and the words of Jesus. God can issue a prophecy through a condemned, wicked man or woman. Signs are no guarantee of a spiritual person.
 4. Our standard always must be the Word of God and His righteousness. This is one more reason why it is essential for *all of us* to be deeply studying the Word of God every day.