

John 11-45-57
The plot to kill Jesus

Preamble:

Adult SS
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Sermon introduction:

On September 11th, 2001, I lived in St. Louis Missouri while attending Covenant Theological Seminary.

That beautiful fall morning a student burst into my Hebrew classroom and yelled, "An airplane just flew into one of the twin towers in New York City and it may collapse at any moment."

Right after class twenty of us rushed across campus and then crammed into a small apartment to watch the tragedy unfold. Our eyes were glued to the television for the next three hours.

When the hijacked airliners brought down the twin towers, nearly 3,000 people lost their lives, making this the deadliest terrorist attack on US soil in US history.

How did the world respond to these tragic events? Most people were horrified. Others danced for joy in the streets of the middle east, as they burned American flags. From their perspective, brave jihadists had just dealt a mighty blow to the great white Satan (i.e., U.S.A.).

There were two very different responses to the same event. Some were horrified and some rejoiced.

Something similar happened 2,000 years ago. Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead by the power of his word (John 11:1-44). This event was a spectacular display of divine power.

When Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, there were at least very different responses to the exact same event.

Ever since the first century, people have responded to Jesus in similar ways.

In our story, we see...

The believing response

The dismissive response

The hostile response

As our text unfolds, we are meant to ask ourselves, which response best describes us?

First, the believing response

Why did some believe? They saw the evidence!

John 11:45 (ESV) — 45 Many of the Jews therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what he did, believed in him,

These people were eyewitnesses to the resurrection of Lazarus. In other words, they heard Jesus utter the words, "Lazarus come forth." And then, to their great astonishment, a few seconds later, they watched with their own eyes as a dead guy named Lazarus stumbled out of the tomb. This was not a parlor trick, this was not an illusion, and this was not acting. They all knew that Lazarus was dead for four days and now he was alive, all because of the words of Jesus.

The resurrection of Lazarus convinced them that Jesus was he said he was. He was the divine son of God. But this is not the only evidence in John's gospel. In fact, this is just the tip of the iceberg. There are mountains and mountains of evidence in John's gospel alone that prove beyond reasonable doubt that Jesus is the divine son of God.

In light of this evidence, we read in verse 45 that "many Jews... believed in him,"

Application:

Contrary to popular opinion, Christians don't resort to faith (i.e., believe Christianity's claims) when we run out of evidence. We believe the claims of Christ because of the evidence.

Over and over again in the NT we see the apostles pleading with people to examine the evidence for Christianity, specifically the evidence of the resurrection.

Christianity is not a blind leap of faith into the pool of the unknown. On the contrary Christianity is a leap into a massive pool of evidence with eyes wide open.

What is the evidence for Christianity's truthfulness?

We could catalogue all the evidence in John's gospel culminating in the resurrection of Jesus from the grave.

The evidence of fulfilled prophecy.

The evidence of answered prayers.

The evidence of miracles performed in the name of Christ.

The evidence of changed lives.

The evidence of spiritual warfare.

The evidence of Christianity's effect on the world. Jesus followers have done more good for the human race than any other religious leader in the history of the world and it is not even close (Read the book Jesus Skeptic).

There is much more evidence... (I don't have enough faith to be an Atheist by Geisler).

We should believe that Jesus is the savior of the world because of the evidence!

Illustration:

When I was in the 5th grade Steve Largent was my sports hero. Steve Largent played wide receiver for the Seattle Seahawks. He wore number 80 on his jersey. During college, he was good, but everyone thought he was too small and too slow for the NFL.

He proved everyone wrong...

At the time of his retirement, he held six major career pass receiving records – most receptions (819), most consecutive games with a reception (177), most yards on receptions (13,089), most touchdowns on receptions (100), most seasons with 50 or more receptions (10)

and most seasons with 1,000 yards or more on receptions (8). All this by a receiver who the Houston Oilers thought was too small and slow to make it in the pros.

When I was in sixth grade, I wrote him a letter. And to my astonishment he wrote me back, which means that I have a signed Steve Largent letter.

Maybe some of you doubt me... I get it. I'm making a bold claim. But what if I showed you the letter! Then would you believe me? Yes, because we trust eyewitness testimony, especially our own eyewitness testimony.

The people in John 11 believed, because they saw Jesus raise Lazarus from the dead with their own eyes. They were the eyewitness testimony. Paul appeals to something similar in 1 Cor. 15.

Because of the evidence, not despite the evidence, many Jews believed in him. Which raises the question, do you believe in him? We have even more evidence today.

When you believe in him you experience life in his name (John 220:31—the purpose of this book).

Sadly, not everyone believed, which brings us to the second response.

First, the believing response.

Second, the dismissive response

What did some dismiss? The evidence!

John 11:46–47 (ESV) — 46 but some of them went to the Pharisees and told them what Jesus had done. **47** So the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered the council and said, "What are we to do? For this man performs many signs.

Remarkably, the religious leaders acknowledge Jesus has supernatural power to raise the dead. Even their word choice is remarkable. They used the word sign (semeion). The word sign means "an event which is regarded as having some special meaning; something which points to a reality with even greater significance" (Louw and Nida, Lexicon, 33.477).

They acknowledge that the works of Jesus are so remarkable that they must point to something great, yet they refuse to follow the evidence where it leads.

Their desire to dismiss the evidence is even more startling when you consider who these men are. They each had years, if not decades, of religious service. They would have opened the meeting in prayer. They were known and revered as great theologians, spiritual leaders, and pious men.

Application:

All this means that one can be religious and be lost. You can memorize Scripture and still be ignorant of its truth. You can say all the right things and be blind to the glory of Christ and his transforming power.

All of this raises the question...

Why did these religious men dismiss evidence? They feared losing control!

John 11:48 (ESV) — 48 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."

"Our place" is probably a reference to their positions of power.

"Our nation" is a reference to the freedom the Jewish nation had to worship their own God.

What does this verse mean? The religious leaders were terrified that the masses would believe in Jesus. This was a legitimate fear since Jesus just raised Lazarus from the dead.

They then reasoned that these same masses who were about to follow Christ would turn into a violent and revolutionary mob. As soon as the Romans discovered this mob, they would squash it with their armies. When they squashed the mob, they would also squash the control of the religious leaders, since they would associate the religious leaders with Jesus's followers, since they were all Jews.

The Jews were terrified of losing control of their power.

They were terrified of hardship.

They were terrified that Jesus followers would cause them all kinds of problems.

As a result, they conveniently dismissed the evidence for Christ's divinity.

This still happens—all the time.

People dismiss the evidence for Christ's divinity because they want to maintain control of their own lives.

Illustration:

A number of years ago a lady was invited by a friend to go to a gospel meeting. "I am afraid to go for fear I will get converted," she answered. Imagine! She was afraid that she might get straightened out with God. On another occasion a minister said to a certain woman in his congregation, "I have not seen your husband lately. Has he lost interest in the gospel?" She answered, "Well, he is afraid to come; for when he comes and hears the Word, it takes him nearly two weeks to get over it." (Boice)

Tim Keller illustration— "Who are you sleeping with?"

Application:

Lack of evidence is rarely the issue. The religious leaders had plenty of evidence, but they did not want to believe, because if they did, they would lose control of their lives.

Maybe you have had similar temptations. You think, "If I follow Jesus, I will lose control of my finances. God tells us to give generously to others and to his church."

Or maybe you think,

If I follow Jesus, I can't sleep with whomever I want anymore.

If I follow Jesus, I can't drink to excess anymore.

If I follow Jesus, I can't hold onto bitterness anymore.

If I follow Jesus, I will have to pay my taxes, stop lying on my expense reports, and stop complaining about my boss...

If I follow Jesus, I will need to come to church most Sundays...

If I follow Jesus, I will need to let other Christians into my life...

If I follow Jesus, I will need to start telling others about him...

If I follow Jesus, I will need to work really hard and loving and serving my spouse or roommate.

We can't follow Jesus half-heartedly. If we are going to follow him, we need to be all in.

Matthew 16:24–25 (ESV) — 24 Then Jesus told his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. **25** For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.

If I really go all in, my life will change...

Here is a really tragic fact—many people see the evidence for Christianity's truthfulness, but they think that sin is more satisfying than Jesus. They don't want to give up control of their lives.

What an awful trade (90 years of the fleeting pleasures of sin in exchange for an eternity in paradise).

What area of your life are not willing to hand over to Jesus?

Here is the irony... following Jesus is the best life! It leads to the most joy here and now and it is not a joy based on circumstances, health, wealth, or vacations.

Don't dismiss the evidence because you mistakenly believe that your life will be better without Jesus!

The dismissive response is fatal, but so is the next one. Which brings us to the third and final response.

The believing response.

The dismissive response.

Third, the hostile response

Who led the hostile response? The high priest!

John 11:49–50 (ESV) — 49 But one of them, Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, said to them, "You know nothing at all. **50** 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 was the high priest, which meant that he was the leader of all the religious leaders in Jerusalem. Having been high priest for sixteen years, he was highly educated, intelligent, ruthless, and condescending (he says to his peers, "You know nothing at all").

Roughly translated he said, "You fools! If you had any intelligence at all, you would see that the answer is very simple. It is better that one die rather than a whole nation perish."

One scholar writes,

"He was a cold, calculating, capable, self-sufficient, shrewd, self-satisfied ecclesiastical climber. (K. Hughes)

Who led the hostile response? The high priest!

What was the result of this hostile response? Salvation by substitution!

John 11:51-53 (ESV) — 51 He did not say this of his own accord, but being high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus would die for the nation, **52** and not for the nation only, but also to gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad. **53** So from that day on they made plans to put him to death.

We learn in the OT that it was the high priests job to speak on behalf of God (2 Sam. 15:27). Caiaphas unwittingly spoke on behalf of God as he prophesied that Jesus would die "for the nation... and the children of God who are scattered abroad."

This is a reference to the cross of Jesus Christ—the focal point of all history!

One scholar says,

It is no exaggeration to say that, along with the resurrection, the cross of Jesus Christ stands at the center of Christianity. But it is also no exaggeration to say that few people really understand it. Few doubt that he died; indeed, all men must die... But why Jesus died or what his death means is a puzzle to them. Why did Jesus die? (Boice, John commentary)

Illustration:

Imagine standing on the very edge of a 700-foot cliff (some way on the grand canyon). As you stand on the edge of the cliff, admiring the exquisite view, you hear the sound of someone sprinting behind you—and toward you. You can hear the sprinter getting closer and closer and closer. You finally turn around just in time to see the sprinter flash by you and jump off the cliff. As he jumps, he yells, "I'm dying for you, because I love you."

Most people would wonder—how does this crazy person's death prove that he loves me. All that it proves is that he is crazy. I was not going to die! I was not going to jump. What is the connection between his death, me, and love?

I think this is how many people feel when they hear, "Jesus died on the cross for you because he loves you."

They wonder, what does some guys death 2000 years ago have to do with me?

Which raises the same question again—why did Jesus die?

There's a key word that's easy to overlook both in Caiaphas's prophecy (John 11:50) and John's interpretation of it (vv. 51-52). It is the word "for." You can also use the phrases "in place of" or "on behalf of." Jesus died for or "in the place" of someone else.

Why did Jesus die for us? Because we deserved to die (Rom. 6:23). This is what God's holiness demands. The penalty for sin is death. Since we sin, all the time, we deserve to die.

Whenever sin is forgiven, someone must pay. If I get angry and take a baseball bat to your car and you forgive me, someone still must pay to fix the car.

If our sin is not paid for, God can't forgive us because God is just! His justice demands payment for sin. Isn't this what we all want? We want others to pay when they offend us, we just don't want to pay when we offend others.

Jesus died "in our place" or "for us" taking the penalty that our sins deserve upon himself. As a result, we can be forgiven.

Illustration:

"In Charles Dickens's novel *A Tale of Two Cities*, two men—Charles Darnay and Sydney Carton—both love the same woman. Lucie Manette, but Lucie chooses to marry Charles. Later, during the French Revolution, Charles is thrown in prison and awaits execution on the guillotine. Sydney (who strongly resembles Charles in appearance) visits Charles in prison accompanied by a few friends. They knock Sydney out and drug him. Then Sydney changes clothes with Charles and then Sydney's friends drag the drugged Charles out of prison and to safety.

Charles goes free because Sydney took his place in prison.
Sydney was willing to pay Charles' penalty.
Charles gets to marry his love and Sydney suffers under the guillotine.

We were on death row; we were awaiting execution because we are guilty of breaking God's laws. We break his laws every day in thought, word, and deed. Yet, Jesus took our place on death row. He subbed us out and subbed himself in.

Objections...

I'm not that bad!!!

Is this really what the Bible teaches? You tell me...

Isaiah 53:5–6 (ESV) — **5** But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed. **6** All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

2 Corinthians 5:21 (ESV) — **21** For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

1 Peter 2:24 (ESV) — **24** He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed.

Application:

What Caiaphas meant for evil God meant for good. Caiaphas set plans in motion to murder an innocent man. God used this great act of evil to bring about tremendous good—the salvation of billions of people. God is working evil for good, like he always does (Acts 2:23, 4:27-28).

If God can bring good out of evil in this situation, God can bring good out of the evil in your situation. And he promises to do that very thing (Rom. 8:28).

Furthermore,

If Christ died in your place, the guilt for all your sins was paid for.

If Christ was punished for your sins, you will never be punished for your sins in the future.

If Christ died for your sins, you never have to fear God's wrath.

If Christ died for your sins, you have been reconciled to God, which means you are now a friend of God.

When all is said and done, there are only two options, two kinds of people, two eternal results.

Either you will experience something like crucifixion for all eternity or you will let Christ take crucifixion for you by repenting of your sins and trusting him. You can decide your fate!

Conclusion:

There was a presidential election not too long ago. There was a lot riding on that presidential election.

When Joe Biden won some were ecstatic with joy and others were devastated. They were at least two opposite reactions.

Rarely anyone remained neutral about this historic event.

In a similar sense, when Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, there were multiple responses.

The believing response

The suppressive response

The violent response

Which response best describes your response to King Jesus? Let's pray...