



IMMANUEL BAPTIST CHURCH

SERIES: JOHN (GOSPEL OF TRUTH)

LESSON: ETERNAL PROFILES

JOHN 11:45-12:11

AUG 22, 2021

MAIN POINT

Despite growing belief in Jesus among the Jews, there was also growing opposition to Jesus. In the midst of opposition, Jesus' life will not be taken from him. Rather, he will give it up. His death is part of the sovereign plan of God.

JOHN CONTEXT

Our story falls in the aftermath of Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead. Last week's account entails the friends of Jesus in a dire circumstance. Mary and Martha send request to Jesus for him to heal their brother Lazarus. Yet, rather than go immediately to heal him, Jesus intentionally waits and allows him to die so that he might raise him up again.

In the account, no one expected Jesus to raise him from the dead. Because of hostility between Jesus and many Jews, the disciples assumed that going to Mary and Martha meant they would perish along with Lazarus (11:16). Martha, while remaining steadfast in her faith in Jesus, assumed that Lazarus would be raised into eternal life, not in the immediate (11:24). When having the opportunity to speak to Jesus, Mary grievously questioned why Jesus did not come sooner to heal him (11:32). And the Jews, many of whom sought to arrest or kill Jesus (10:39; 11:8), also questioned his love for Lazarus (11:36).

Why did Jesus choose not to heal Lazarus, and wait to raise him back to life? His motive seems to be so that everyone might believe. John references Jesus' motive on multiple occasions:

- Jesus told [the disciples] plainly, "Lazarus has died, and for your sake I am glad that I was not there, *so that you may believe.*" (11:15)
- Jesus said to [Martha], "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believe in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. *Do you believe this?*" (11:25)
- Jesus said to [Martha], "Did I not tell you that *if you believed* you would see the glory of God?" (11:40)
- So they took away the stone. And Jesus lifted up his eyes and said, "Father, I thank you that you have heard me, I knew that you always hear me, but I said this on account of the people standing around, *that they may believe that you sent me.*" (11:42)

In the raising of Lazarus, Jesus is seeking for the disciples, Mary and Martha, and the Jews to believe in him. As word spreads about Lazarus' raising back to life, we will see who believes and who grows in their unbelief.

INTRODUCTION

Our story records several responses to Jesus' astounding miracle of raising Lazarus back to life. Many Jews who witnessed the event with Mary decided to believe in Jesus. The Pharisees, however, continue in their blindness and stubbornly resolve to put Jesus to death. Mary anoints Jesus. Judas is subtly revealed as one of the Twelve who will betray him. And large crowds of Jews are curious to see Jesus and Lazarus. Perhaps these Jews are interested in believing in Jesus.

Can you explain why some people might believe and others not when presented with the same evidence?

In your opinion, are the miracles of Jesus enough for you to believe?

EXPLANATION // ...believe Jesus is the Christ...

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says.

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ JOHN 11:45-53

Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead is the last of John's seven signs. It appears that his last miracle was viewed as the greatest, as if John saved the best for last. Certainly, turning water into wine, healing the lame and blind, calming storms, and multiplying bread were all amazing. For they show that Jesus had power over nature and illnesses. But, more so, raising Lazarus back to life showed that Jesus had power over death. For some Jews, it provided undeniable evidence that they could believe in Jesus.

And while some Jews believed, others did not. The "but" that John introduces verse 46 with seems to contrast the Jews who believed and those who did not believe. And those who did not believe reported to the Pharisees what had happened. And the Pharisees and chief priest go into crisis mode. What are they going to do with Jesus who professes to be God (10:30-39) and continues to perform many signs?

It is interesting to note the chief priests and Pharisees do not deny that Jesus did miracles. Perhaps some people today would try to discredit belief in Jesus saying his miracles were made up legends and not actual events. However, it is important to note the Pharisees who were resolute in denying Jesus as the Messiah did not deny his miracles.

Their concern at this point is to save themselves. They conclude, "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." It seems as if the Pharisees and chief priests were concerned about losing their place of prominence and authority. In effort to save themselves, they knew they had to stop people from believing in Jesus. Their stance shouldn't surprise us. In fact, the Pharisees are confirming what Jesus concluded about them in John 9:39-41: "For judgment I came into this world, that those who do not see may see, and those who see may become blind. . . If you were blind, you would have no guilt, but now that you say, 'We see,' your guilt remains." Following the report of Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead, the Pharisees have seen and heard the evidence of Jesus' divinity. Yet they stubbornly remain blind to the truth.

At the same time, their blindness appears to be in sync with God's sovereignty. Due to their blindness, they will seek to put Jesus to death. And Jesus' death is part of God's plan. It is interesting how the story unfolds.

The high priest that year was Caiaphas. He applies reasoning to the council who had gathered. He essentially reasons it is better for one man to die than for the whole nation to perish. In this case, Caiaphas means that Jesus should die, so that the nation and their place of authority can continue.

John, our author, adds an interesting note. Earlier that year, Caiaphas 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.” There is a lot of irony in Caiaphas’ prophecy.

In Caiaphas’ understanding, Jesus’ death will allow the chief priests and Pharisees to continue in their place of authority. Furthermore, Caiaphas likely thinks “gather into one the children of God” means scattered *Jews* will return. However, in the prophecy God intends a different interpretation. Jesus will die for the nation in the sense that the sins of the Jews can be forgiven. Furthermore, the words “not for the nation only, but also, to gather into one the children of God” means that Jesus’ death is also for *non-Jews*. In Jesus’ death, Gentiles will be welcomed as children of God. To quote Jesus earlier:

“I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd. For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord...” (10:16-18a).

Based off the chief priests and Pharisees’ faulty interpretation of the prophecy, they made plans to put Jesus to death.

It seems some Scripture passages tend to be taught more than others. My impression is this particularly story is less commonly referenced. Have you ever heard this story taught before? What are your initial reactions? What stands out to you?

Do you ever question whether Jesus’ miracles really happened? If you were a firsthand witness to Jesus’ miracles, do you think you’d be convinced of his claims?

Which do you think is a bigger reason why some do not believe: lack of evidence or pride?

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ JOHN 11:54-57

In reaction to the plans of the Pharisees and chief priests, Jesus withdrew to town called Ephraim. This location should not be confused with the *territory* of Ephraim as one of the twelve tribes, but as a *town*. Scholars estimate that it could have been twelve miles from Jerusalem¹--a safe distance for the time being but close enough to travel for when it is time for the Passover.

Meanwhile, Jews were making their pilgrimage to Jerusalem for the Passover. They were looking for Jesus. It appears there was a general buzz about whether Jesus would come or not. Apparently, the chief priests and Pharisees had given orders that if anyone knew of his whereabouts to let them know. Their intentions were to arrest Jesus.

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ JOHN 12:1-3

Jesus relocates to Bethany, about 2 miles from Jerusalem. He is nearing his entry into Jerusalem. He will not remain withdrawn in Ephraim. By his own will, he will come to Jerusalem despite the threats from the chief priests and Pharisees. Indeed, Jesus will give up his life, it won't be taken from him.

While in Bethany, he gathers with Mary, Martha, and Lazarus for dinner. Mary decided to do something astounding. She took an expensive ointment and anointed Jesus' feet and wiped his feet with her hair. The fragrance then filled the room. What is the significance of Mary's action? We'll make a few observations.

- First, anointing was an action that designated a person for a special task. One example of this includes Samuel anointing David. When anointing him, Samuel was designating David as God's chosen servant to be king (1 Sam. 16). In this case, Mary (whether she realizes the full extent of her actions or not) is anointing Jesus as king. And the timing of Jesus' anointing is telling. Mary anoints him a week before he will die. Jesus' journey of taking his throne will be through his death.
- Second, Mary anoints his *feet*. Matthew and Mark's account of the event says that Jesus' head was anointed. We do not need to worry about the difference in accounts because by John's account Mary used a significant amount of ointment/nard so that both the head and feet could have been anointed. As evidence that the nard could have

¹ D. A. Carson, *The Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 423-34.

been used for both head and feet, John describes that enough of the nard was used to fill the entire room with its fragrance. Likely, John highlights Jesus' feet in foreshadowing John 13 when Jesus will wash his disciples' feet. In a striking way, John communicates the faithfulness and insight of Mary's humility and willingness to serve. A lesson the disciples will be taught later on.

- Third, the cost of the ointment was expensive. Mary's actions express worship, sacrifice, and the worthiness of Jesus.

Do you think Mary's actions teach us anything about worship? If so, what?

Do you think Mary's actions teach us anything about humility? If so, what?

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ JOHN 12:4-8

Judas objects to Mary's actions.

He reasons the ointment could have had better use. He states it could have been sold for 300 denarii and then given to the poor. A denarius was a day's wage, so 300 denarii was close to a yearly wage if you account for not working on the Sabbath. Indeed, the ointment Mary used was expensive. However, John highlights for us that Judas' reasoning for selling the ointment was not really about helping the poor. Instead, Judas was a thief who often stole from the collective moneybag. Judas intended to make a personal profit from the selling the ointment rather than helping the poor.

It is interesting that Judas is introduced in the story as a disciple "who was about to betray [Jesus]." John has already pointed out Judas would betray Jesus in John 6:70-71 when he said, 'Did I not choose you, the Twelve? And yet one of you is a devil.' He spoke of Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot, for he, one of the Twelve, was going to betray him." Judas' betrayal would not come as a surprise to Jesus. Again, Jesus would give up his life, not have it taken from him. John also gives us a hint that Jesus' final days are approaching. For Judas is *about* to betray him.

Where Judas has scolded Mary (Mk. 14:5), Jesus scolds Judas. He tells him to leave her alone. The text can be interpreted two ways. One interpretation sees Mary intending to keep the ointment for Jesus' burial, meaning, that she held on to it for this particular moment in preparation for his soon to come burial. Or the text could mean that she has used a portion of it now but will use more of it when Jesus is later buried. Either way, Mary's anointing of Jesus (whether she realized it or not) was an appropriate use of the expensive ointment in light of the costly price Jesus was about to give.

Jesus corrects Judas by explaining the poor will always be among them. Of course, Jesus is not telling Judas to neglect the poor. Indeed, perhaps selling an expensive ointment and giving proceeds to the poor will be upright in the future. But for now, choosing to honor Jesus with the ointment in the short time that he remains is the better use.

Do you ever pass judgment on how other people give to God? How does this story teach us in this regard?

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ JOHN 12:9-11

The story concludes similar to how it began—with the report of Jews believing on the account of Lazarus and the chief priests' resolving to kill. More Jews were believing like before, but the chief priests double-down in their effort to prevent people from believing. Just like they resolved to put Jesus to death, now, they decide to put Lazarus to death.

APPLICATION // ...have life in His name.

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

In this story, opposition to Jesus grew, but also many Jews believed. Do you think there is a correlation between with an increase in people believing in Jesus, opposition also increases?

One point made in this lesson is that Jesus gave up his life, it was not taken from him. Do you think this distinction is important? Why or why not?

Mary gave up an expensive ointment. Judas questions whether her giving was the best use. Do you ever wrestle with the most effective way to give? Any insight in how to give not just generously, but also effectively?

PRAYER
