

The Reaction to the Raising of Lazarus from the Dead

John 11:45-57

John 11:45-57 – *“Then many of the Jews who had come to Mary, and had seen the things Jesus did, believed in Him. ⁴⁶ But some of them went away to the Pharisees and told them the things Jesus did. ⁴⁷ Then the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered a council and said, “What shall we do? For this Man works many signs. ⁴⁸ 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.”*

⁴⁹ And one of them, Caiaphas, being high priest that year, said to them, “You know nothing at all, ⁵⁰ 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.” ⁵¹ Now this he did not say on his own authority; but being high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus would die for the nation, ⁵² and not for that nation only, but also that He would gather together in one the children of God who were scattered abroad. ⁵³ Then, from that day on, they plotted to put Him to death. ⁵⁴ Therefore Jesus no longer walked openly among the Jews, but went from there into the country near the wilderness, to a city called Ephraim, and there remained with His disciples. ⁵⁵ And the Passover of the Jews was near, and many went from the country up to Jerusalem before the Passover, to purify themselves. ⁵⁶ Then they sought Jesus, and spoke among themselves as they stood in the temple, “What do you think—that He will not come to the feast?” ⁵⁷ Now both the chief priests and the Pharisees had given a command, that if anyone knew where He was, he should report it, that they might seize Him.”

Background Notes

The council gathered by the chief priests and Pharisees (v3) was the Sanhedrin, the ruling body of the Jews as well as the high court of the Jews at that time. The Sanhedrin consisted of 71 members, including the high priest, who was the presiding member.

The high priest at this time was Caiaphas. The Romans had removed his father-in-law Annas and put Caiaphas into the office of high priest. We'll read more about Caiaphas in John 18, at the trial of our Lord. By the way, the tomb of Caiaphas and his family was recently discovered in Jerusalem. Again, archeology confirms the historical accuracy of the Bible!

In verses 47-48 the members of the Sanhedrin said, *“What shall we do? For this Man works many signs. 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.”* Notice that they didn't deny the miracles of Jesus Christ. They admitted that He was doing miracles – “many signs.”

In early Jewish literature, or early Rabbinic literature (the Talmud, for example), we can read about the miracles of Jesus of Nazareth. The miracles are not denied, but the rabbis attribute the power behind the miracles to a demonic source rather than God. To this day, Orthodox Judaism doesn't deny that Jesus of Nazareth did miracles, but they attribute His power to a different source than the power of God. They will not accept Jesus as Messiah, but they don't deny the miracles.

The Sanhedrin feared that the Romans would come and take away their Temple and nation if they followed Jesus Christ. Isn't it ironic that the very thing feared is exactly what took place when they **rejected** Him? In 70AD the Roman armies under Titus invaded the land, destroyed the Temple, and eliminated Israel as a nation.

The Lord left and went to stay in a town called Ephraim. We're not sure exactly where Ephraim was located, but there is a good possibility that it was near Bethel, about 15 miles north of Jerusalem.

Doctrinal / Teaching Points

1. The person of Christ and the work of Christ divide people.

Look at verses 45-46 once again: *"Then many of the Jews who had come to Mary, and had seen the things Jesus did, believed in Him. But some of them went away to the Pharisees and told them the things Jesus did."*

Can you believe it? Some people believed, but others did not. What does it take to convince a person that Jesus is who He said He is - the Son of God? A dead man, dead for four days, his body already in decay - and the Lord raised him to life! People won't necessarily believe, even if they see a miracle from God.

Do you remember the rich man in Luke 16? *"The rich man also died and was buried. And being in torments in Hades, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom."* He asked for someone to return from the dead to preach to his brothers who were still alive, so they wouldn't have to suffer the torment in Hades that he was suffering. What was he told? He was told that if his brothers would not believe Moses and the prophets (in other words, if they would not believe the Scriptures), they would not believe even if someone were to rise from the dead!

The point is, **belief is a matter of the will**. When the claims and deeds of Christ are presented, people either accept or reject - on the basis of their own will. Thus the Person of Christ and the work of Christ will always divide people. You may have heard this expression before: "A person convinced against his will, is of the same opinion still." You see, belief is the matter of the will.

Certainly the Spirit of God is involved, operating on that will to draw a person to faith in Jesus. And I don't mean "human willpower." Human willpower alone will not bring a person to faith! The Spirit of God must be working with a person's will to bring them to faith in Christ. What we are emphasizing here, however, is that people are not going to believe just because they see miracles. There must be a changing of the will!

Right now *you* are hearing about the person and the work of Christ. You must either accept and become a believer, or reject and remain an unbeliever. There is no middle ground. There is no neutral ground. The person of Christ and the work of Christ divide people.

2. The death of Christ was substitutionary.

In verse 50 Caiaphas said, *"...it is expedient for us that one man should die for the people, and not that the whole nation should perish."* The next verse tells us that this was a true prophecy, predicting the substitutionary nature of the death of Christ. *"Now this he did not say on his own authority; but being high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus would die*

for the nation, and not for that nation only, but also that He would gather together in one the children of God who were scattered abroad” (v51-52).

Notice that this “substitutionary atonement” was not just for those of the nation of Israel who would believe, but for believers around the world: “ *and not for that nation only, but also that He would gather together in one the children of God who were scattered abroad.*”

Caiaphas was not a believer – not by any stretch of the imagination! From his perspective, the death of Jesus of Nazareth was strictly political expediency. However, God overruled in his statement, and it became a prophecy of the substitutionary death of Jesus Christ!

This prophecy is similar to the account of Balaam in the Old Testament. Balaam was a false prophet, a pagan “diviner,” but God overruled Balaam’s oracle and he uttered a true Messianic prophecy: “*I see Him, but not now; I behold Him, but not near; a Star shall come out of Jacob; a Scepter shall rise out of Israel, and batter the brow of Moab, and destroy all the sons of tumult.*” (Numbers 24:17).

Numbers 24:17 is a Messianic prophecy uttered by a false prophet - a pagan “diviner”! We have a similar situation here. Caiaphas was not a believer, but because he was the high priest, God overruled his statement and it became a prophecy predicting the substitutionary nature of the death of Jesus Christ!

Do you understand that Jesus Christ’s death was “substitutionary”? The Lord Jesus didn’t die for “a good cause” - He died as **our Substitute!** On the cross, He suffered the penalty of our sins. He suffered death as our Substitute, so we wouldn’t have to suffer the penalty for our sins. Commit your life to Jesus Christ as the one who died as your Substitute, and you will become a Christian. The death of Christ was substitutionary.

Practical Applications

1. Don’t make decisions like Caiaphas!

Caiaphas didn’t weigh the evidence to see what was true. No, he made his decision based entirely on politics – on political **expediency**. On what was best for **him**, politically. On what was best for **his** career. Sadly, he was wrong. Terribly wrong!

How do we make decisions? Even Christians can make wrong decisions based on financial, political or social expediency – just as Caiaphas did. When we make decisions, do we primarily consider, “What’s in it for **me**?” or “How will this decision benefit **me**?” From the world’s perspective, that’s the wise way to make decisions. The world’s expedient way is to look out for our own personal success and interests ahead of anything else.

But that’s the wrong way to make decisions. Christians have lost their marriages, or lost their children to the world, because they made decisions based on what looked beneficial or expedient for success in their own personal careers. Be careful! Don’t just assume that a lucrative job offer is God’s will for your life. College students - don’t assume that an athletic scholarship is God’s will for your future success! It may be - but why do we **assume** that a great job offer or a great athletic scholarship must surely be God’s will? It may be – **but it may not be!**

Don't make decisions as Caiaphas did, based only on what seems expedient or beneficial from this world's viewpoint! **Pray** through every decision! Make sure that your decision is in line with God's will. Even Christians can be caught up by the thinking of the culture that surrounds us. A situation may look like a smart choice - but that may be the world's way of looking at it. It may not be the right decision. Don't make decisions like Caiaphas!

2. Don't throw away your common sense!

In verse 53 we read "*Then, from that day on, they plotted to put Him to death.*" So what did the Lord Jesus do at that point? As the perfect Man, and certainly the Model that we are to follow, He used His common sense. He got away from the danger zone. It was not yet His time to go to the Cross.

"Therefore Jesus no longer walked openly among the Jews, but went from there into the country near the wilderness, to a city called Ephraim, and there remained with His disciples" (v54). He picked Ephraim, a town of the edge of the wilderness, where He could escape if need be.

Don't throw away your common sense! This is certainly a balancing principle to the previous practical application about not making decisions like Caiaphas. Using our God-given common sense does not indicate a lack of courage or loss of faith! Don't throw away your common sense.

Not long ago I was conversing with a young foreign missionary who was purposing to take his family into a dangerous area. My counsel to him was, "Wait a minute. Are you absolutely **sure** this is **God's** will? God's normal method of operation is that you, as a Christian husband and father, should be concerned about the safety and welfare of your family. Taking your young family into a dangerous area would not be God's *normal* way of operation for families. It may be God's will for you, but please go slowly, and continue to pray about this plan. Be sure that your decision is clearly in the will of God."

We are to use our God-given common sense. Don't throw away your common sense!