

October 2nd, 2016

# THE DEATH OF DEATH IN THE DEATH OF CHRIST

John 11:45-57

## **John 11 is a turning point in this gospel**

The raising of Lazarus from the dead is a cataclysmic turning point in the gospel of John. Jesus' ministry is not the same after this chapter. We can see this very clearly in a couple of verses. In v.53, we see the ruling council of Israel make a calculated decision "So from that day on they made plans to put him to death." Yes we have seen attempts on Jesus' life be made up to this point, however these have been mostly instigated by the mob. But *now* there is a calculated conspiracy. The sign of raising of Lazarus was the straw that decisively broke the proverbially camel's back.

Secondly, in v.54, we read that "Jesus therefore no longer walked openly among the Jews." The raising of Lazarus is the last act of Jesus' public ministry. That's not to say we don't see Him in public anymore. We will. But now the Jews have given standing orders to report Jesus' whereabouts (v.57).<sup>1</sup> And because of this, Jesus avoids the public. He will go to the cross when it is His time, and not a second before.

But we should ask: why does John 11 end so drastically? Because this last sign that Jesus performs puts the gospel on display more clearly than anything else except for the cross itself. And this gospel must be silenced.

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<sup>1</sup> As D.A. Carson says: "In short, Jesus is not to be arrested in order to be tried; he is to be tried because he has already been found guilty." D.A. Carson, *The Pillar New Testament Commentary: The Gospel According to John*, (Grand Rapids, MI.: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1991), pg. 423

### **The raising of Lazarus is a sign**

The resurrection of Lazarus is a picture<sup>2</sup> of how people are awakened to Jesus Christ. Salvation is not by human effort. Salvation is not *decisively* by human choice. Salvation is from the LORD! If you have been saved, it is because you were raised from the dead. **John 5:25** “Truly, truly, I say to you, an hour is coming, *and is now here*, when the dead will *bear the voice of the Son of God*, and those who hear will live.”<sup>3</sup>

### **In order for us to live, Christ must die**

But this being raised from the dead came at the cost of Jesus’ own life. In order for Jesus to conquer death, He must die. This is what the Caiaphas prophesied in our passage this morning, v.51 “...but being high priest that year he 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.” Jesus’ death defeated death for all the children of God.

## *The Big Idea...*

The death of Christ was the death of death for all of God’s children

- ☆ The Death of Boasting
- ☆ The Death of Death

<sup>2</sup> There are seven signs in this gospel: 2:1-11; 4:46-54; 5:1-18; 6:1-15; 6:16-21; 9:1-41; 11:1-57

<sup>3</sup> Contrast this with v.28 when Jesus does not include the words “...and is now here.” Two resurrections that Jesus has in view. The first is regeneration, and the second is final resurrection (v.28-29).

## I. The Death of Boasting

### Shocking ~~unbelief~~ belief

Our passage picks up immediately after Jesus calls forth “Lazarus, come out.” v.44 “The man who had died came out, his hands and feet bound with linen strips, and his face wrapped with a cloth. Jesus said to them, “Unbind him, and let him go.” Shockingly that’s the end of the story. We don’t hear any testimony from Lazarus. We don’t witness any of the conversations or celebrations that occurred after. John is determined to show us how this sign disturbs the religious establishment and how it disturbs us.

v. 45-46 “Many of the Jews therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what he did, **believed in him**, [46] but some of them went to the Pharisees and told them what Jesus had done.”

Two groups. One group believes, the other group doesn’t. The other group reports Jesus’ miracle to the Pharisees. And if we look at the Pharisee’s speech, they do not deny the miracle. v.47 says “What are we to do? For this man performs *many signs*.” They were so convinced at the authenticity of this miracle that, in the next chapter, they make plans to put Lazarus to death. **John 12:10** “So the chief priests made plans to put Lazarus to death as well, *because* on account of him many of the Jews were going away and believing in Jesus.” **And yet they did not come to saving faith in Jesus Christ.** How is that possible? Can you imagine the conversations behind those closed doors? “Hey guys, Jesus just raised someone from the dead!” What do we expect to happen? We expect belief. We expect repentance. That’s what the rich man in Luke 16 expected would happen if someone were to rise from the dead and tell his unbelieving brothers. He said in **Luke 16:30** “No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent.”

Dear congregation, this tension that we feel in v.45-46 uncovers our *misunderstanding* the sign. We are shocked at the unbelief in v.46, and remain unshocked at the belief in v.45. Deep down we want to believe that man is still

able to come to God *on his own* if the conditions are right. “How could they not have believed? I would have believed if I would have seen Lazarus be raised from the dead.” What are we doing when we say that? We are transferring the credit for our salvation from God to man. We wrestle with the unbelief of these Pharisees because we think “they should have gotten it because I would have.” No we wouldn’t have. Dead men don’t get it. Dead men don’t believe. The most shocking thing about these two verses is that anyone believed!

When Lazarus was raised from his physical grave, many were raised from their spiritual graves to believe.<sup>4</sup> That is a miracle. v.45 is a miracle. v.46 is what we should expect will happen.

### **Boasting and the New Birth**

The raising of Lazarus is another way of testing our belief in the miracle of the new birth.

The new birth was introduced in **John 1:12-13** “But to all who did receive him [Christ], who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.” How do people become the born-again children of God? Not by belonging to a certain family, or by making the right choice, but by God’s decision alone. God makes the choice, and then we believe.

Jesus later tells Nicodemus in **John 3:3** “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.” Nicodemus basically replies back ‘How can man possibly do this?’ Jesus answers, ‘You can’t!’ **v.8** “The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the

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<sup>4</sup> Remember what Jesus prayed in John 11:42 “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.”

Spirit.”<sup>5</sup> It is the Holy Spirit of God who is *decisive* in salvation. When He blows on us we believe. If He doesn’t blow, we remain dead in our sin.

Jesus is so clear on teaching the new birth in this gospel. And now He gives us a test case in John 11. How do we look at these unbelieving Pharisees? Do we think that we would have believed if we witnessed this miracle? That’s why this sign is for us. It is meant to kill our boast.

## II. The Death of Death

### **The supreme court and the supreme threat**

So Lazarus was raised from the dead, and these unbelieving witnesses report what they saw to the Pharisees.

v.47-48 So the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered the **council** and said, “What are we to do? For this man performs many signs. [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.”

This council that was gathered was the highest governing authority in Israel. This was the equivalent of congress or the *supreme court*. These men were scared. No longer did they see Jesus as some wild-eyed miracle worker, *but a clear and present danger to their very existence*. They didn’t meet to discuss the truth of what happened. They met to discuss how they were going to survive. *Truth wasn’t even on the table*. They were concerned that if Jesus’ popularity and credibility continued to rise, more and more would believe that He was the Messiah. The king of Israel. And if Rome perceived that any kind of grab for power was taking place, then they would bring the sword. And that means that the authority and prestige that they enjoyed would be lost. So this council sees Jesus as a threat to their own glory. They didn’t care about the truth. Only

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<sup>5</sup> cf. 1 Peter 1:3; 1 John 5:1

their power, their place, their pride. Jesus threatened that. Therefore something must be done.

### **The pragmatic solution of substitution**

Caiphas the high priest comes up with a solution.

v.49-50 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 rebukes them for their inability to see the whole picture. ‘The answer is easy,’ he says, ‘kill him. If we kill Jesus, then Rome won’t kill us. Don’t you see how this is better for you? Jesus dies, so that the nation won’t have to.’

Caiaphas was urging the council to make a decision based on what pleased the most amount of people rather than what pleased God. Caiaphas was the ultimate pragmatist. Pragmatism is the worldview that doesn’t ask ‘what is true?’ but rather asks ‘what works?’ And prosperous Americans like us make the best pragmatists. We have so much stuff, so much wealth, so much peace, and we often become afraid to bring the gospel to the public square or to our friends because our stuff—*our idols* would be threatened. As long as we remain quite, and keep our faith to ourselves, then our stuff is not in danger. We’re just like Caiaphas. As R.C. Sproul has said

“We often make decisions out of fear. We don’t want to be non-conformists; we don’t want to have people think that we’re marching to a different drumbeat; we don’t want to provoke the hostility of the world.”<sup>6</sup>

We understand both historically, and currently, that whenever the gospel of Jesus Christ is preached truthfully and triumphantly in the world, there is persecution. Persecution is not pragmatic. It doesn’t work. It hurts. And so

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<sup>6</sup> R.C. Sproul, *St. Andrew’s Expository Commentary: John*, (Orlando, FL.: Reformation Trust Publishing, 2009), pg. 217

our inner Caiaphas says "...it is better for you' that Christ is not proclaimed, than for you to suffer." Better that He suffer shame than you.

### **God was in these words!**

But oh! how God is in these words. Caiaphas, as the high priest in Israel, spoke the words of v.50 "...it is better for you that one man should die for the people, not that the whole nation should perish." But John our author, is telling us that God has a deeper meaning in these words than Caiaphas's pragmatism. Look at v.51-52

v.51-52 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.

Caiaphas said "It is better for you that one man should die for the people, not that the whole nation should perish" *but* John says this is a **prophecy**. v.51 — "...but being high priest that year he **prophesied**" Meaning, these are the words that *God wanted Caiaphas to speak*. So when Caiaphas spoke, *it was God speaking*. **God is the one who spoke v.50 "It is better for you that one man should die for the people, not that the whole nation should perish"** Let that sink in. The Father said that. 'The best thing for you is that if Jesus dies.'

And it was *these words* that convinced the council to actively conspire to kill Jesus. Because the word of the Lord came to Caiaphas.

### **The Divine solution of substitution**

Now Caiaphas meant something different than what God meant. Caiaphas had one *substitution* in mind, and God had a different *substitution* in mind. Caiaphas' desire was that the council would kill Jesus so that the Romans wouldn't kill them. Jesus' life was to substituted, so they could survive the Romans. That's the substitution Caiaphas had in mind.

But God had a different substitution in mind. The most fearsome thing in the universe is not the Romans. It's not ISIS or Al-Qaeda or Kim Jong-un or suicide bombers or the LGBT sexual revolution. **The most fearsome thing in the universe is the blazing white holiness of God.** How can sinners stand before a holy God? We can't. His eyes are "...of purer eyes than to see evil" and He "...cannot look at wrong," (Habakkuk 1:13). If we stand as sinners before Him, we will certainly be cast into hell, and justly punished for our sins. Forever.

When God spoke these words through this wicked prophet Caiaphas, the substitution He had in mind was this: "It is better *for* you, that My Son should die than for *you* my people to die." My Son will die, so that you won't have to.<sup>7</sup>

This is the most central truth of the gospel: **God put forward His Son Jesus Christ as our substitute.** Jesus died so that we would live. And this was God's doing. This was not a cosmic accident or the horrible mistake of evil men. This was the plan of God from the foundation of the world. It has been in the mind of God as long as He has been God that Jesus would be the substitute for sinners.

**Revelation 13:8** says that Christ is "...the Lamb who was slain *from the creation of the world.*"

Peter says to the Jews in Acts 2:23 "...this Jesus, *delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God*, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men."

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<sup>7</sup> John Piper said in his sermon on this passage: "I will kill my Son so I don't have to kill you." <http://www.desiringgod.org/messages/jesus-died-to-gather-the-children-of-god--2> At this point some people might struggle with the idea of the Father killing Christ. Alternative theories have been put forth in order to supposedly protect the reputation of God. That this was a 'cosmic accident,' or the 'horrible mistake of evil men.' But God doesn't need us to protect His reputation. He is God. It is impossible for Him to sin or do wrong. We affirm that God killed his own Son, because that is what Scripture affirms. Isaiah 53:4 says that Jesus was "smitten by God." Isaiah 53:6 says "The Lord laid on him (Jesus) the iniquity of us all" Isaiah 53:10 says that "It was the will of the Lord to crush him (Jesus); he (the Father) has put him (the Son) to grief."

## The death of death in the death of Christ

But God meant more than mere substitution. Much of evangelicalism could say Amen to everything that has been said so far. But the good news of this passage goes further than God *merely* putting forward His Son. Look at v. 51-52 again

“...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.**”

God has *Jewish* children—“the nation”; and He has *Gentile* children—“the children of God who are scattered abroad.” This is the same language we see Jesus using in **John 10:16** “And 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.”

God calls a people *His people* before they are *brought* (John 10:16); or before they are *gathered* (John 11:52).<sup>8</sup> This means election. God has chosen men and women and children from every nation who have not yet been regenerated, who have not yet been gathered. Jesus’ death guarantees that they will be. Look at v.52. Jesus died “...to *gather* into one the children of God.”

This is what makes the good news of this passage so good. God has a specific design in the death of His Son. The death of Christ does not *merely* provide an offer for people to be saved. The death of Christ *guarantees* that God’s people will invincibly be brought to Him. Christ’s death is what makes people Christians. It is not belief that makes people Christians ultimately. It’s Christ’s death. Jesus died to gather the children of God, and when He gathers they believe.

This text will not allow us to limit the death of Christ to *merely* an offer of salvation. It is that! (John 3:16). But it’s so much more than just an offer. **The death of Christ is the death of death for all of God’s children.** Christ’s death is what has overcome our rebellion *decisively*, and has purchased faith and

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<sup>8</sup> Just as God told the apostle Paul in the midst of bitter persecution in Macedonia “I am with you, and no one will attack you to harm you, for I have many in this city who are my people.” Acts 18:10

repentance, and adoption, and sanctification, and glorification, and every other grace that will ever need for all eternity. “For all the promises of God find their Yes in him. That is why it is through him that we utter our Amen to God for his glory.” (2 Corinthians 1:20)

No glory, no boasting, no credit is left for man in his own salvation. All is owing to Christ. That is why this passage ends the way it does. v.53 “...from that day on they made plans to put him to death.” Jesus was found guilty because when He raised Lazarus from the dead, He left no room for anyone to say anything except “Salvation is from the Lord.”

## Application

Our Doctrine: The gospel destroys all human boasting

The themes of new birth, election, and definite atonement are displayed all over John 11. And it is these doctrines—the doctrines of the gospel—that are most offensive to our natural sensibilities because they remove all our ability to boast. This is true in our day, and it was true during George Whitefield’s day in the mid 1700’s during the Great Awakening. Whitefield’s biographer reports:

“The one great truth which had been the foundation of Whitefield’s ministry from the first was that of the new birth. His most widely circulated sermon, *The Nature and Necessity of Our New Birth in Christ Jesus* could almost be regarded as the manifest of the movement. There can be no doubt that the man on the street in Bristol, Gloucester and London, had he been asked in 1739, ‘What [does] Whitefield...believe?’, would have answered ‘[He] claims everybody must be born again.’”<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Arnold Dallimore, *George Whitefield: The Life and Times of the Great Evangelist of the Eighteenth-Century Revival, Vol. 1*, (Carlisle, PA.: The Banner of Truth Trust, Reprint 2014), pg. 345

And the liberal clergy of his time hated Whitefield for this doctrine. They regularly preached and printed against the doctrine of the new birth.<sup>10</sup> Why? For the same reason that the Pharisees plotted Jesus' death over it: *it destroys all human boasting.*

As the Apostle Paul said in **1 Corinthians 1:28-30** "God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. And because of him you are in Christ Jesus."

### **The Scripture says that...**

All humanity is dead in **sin** (Ephesians 2:1)

That whoever sins is a slave to **sin** (Romans 6:16)

That the mind set on **sin** can never please God (Romans 8:8)

That the heart full of **sin** hates God (John 15:18)

That the wages of **sin** is eternal death (Romans 6:23)

This **sin** cannot be overcome by personal reformation, or by the 12 steps, or by moralism, or by good deeds, or by making good choices. All human effort outside of the new birth is only **sin**. The natural man does nothing but sin all his life.<sup>11</sup> Unless Jesus Christ calls you from your spiritual death, and you respond in saving faith, you will die in your sin. Salvation is from the Lord. His saving word is done in some and not others. **And those He works salvation in, are no different than the ones He does not work salvation in.** Lazarus was just as dead and rotten in that grave as all the other corpses. And Jesus chose to save Him and not others. When salvation is seen in this light, we must recognize that that we have no room to take credit for anything.

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<sup>10</sup> See pages 345-346 of the aforementioned book for a list of these sermons and pamphlets against it.

<sup>11</sup> Even the righteousness that natural men perform, the Scripture says is as polluted garments (Isaiah 64:6).

Our Duty: We need to kill our boast

Our duty flows from our doctrine. Because **the gospel destroys all human boasting, we therefore need to kill our boast.** That is our duty. And here is the problem with this duty: we love our ability to boast. Just like ancient Israel, we prostitute ourselves for it. We are credit whores.

How else do we explain looking at a passage like this, and scoff at the Pharisees for not believing in Christ? Why do we do that? Because we think we would have. We from our 21st century armchairs take credit for believing if we would have been in that situation.

And it's not just in our initial salvation that we seek to take the credit. Don't we often seek to take the credit in many parts of our lives?

**How do we seek to steal credit from God in our parenting?** 'My kids are not like so and so's kids because I practice proper discipline.' Now of course we should apply proper discipline to our kids—that is a command (Ephesians 6:4) *But* "...what do you have that you did not receive?" (1 Cor. 4:7) Where do you think *the desire* for proper discipline came from? Where did that *holy energy* to raise your kids in proper discipline come from? Phil. 2:13 "... it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure."

**How do we seek to steal credit from God in our jobs?** Do we pad our resumes in order to get that new job or contract. Or do we hyperbolize our accomplishments in order to gain the accolades of our co-workers. Or do we hide embarrassing things from our past so that it won't endanger our employment.

**Whatever we flee to for comfort, or whatever we fear of losing is what we give credit to.** We are always chasing after other gospels. Ask yourself: What is the regular thing that I run to for comfort? What is the one thing that you fear to lose, such that if you lost it you would be undone? Those answers tell us

what our function gospels are. And these functional gospels always lash out at other people.

Dear congregation, did anyone argue or quarrel with others this week? Do you know why? Because we are running back to our functional gospels. **James 4:1, 4** says “What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you?...**You adulterous people!**” There it is. God calls his own people adulterous. Us. To the degree that quarrels and fights define our lives is to the degree that we spiritually adulterous. Chasing after other gospels, gospels that make us the center, that give us the credit, that feed our egos, are gospels in which we become adulterous.

You see the point of this passage is not to look at the Pharisees and say, look how bad they are. They are seeking to kill Christ in spite of the fact that He raised Lazarus from the dead. No. The point of this passage is to say, look how good Christ is, because if I were there and He didn't save me, I would be plotting His death right alongside of them. If you can't say that, you simply don't believe how bad the Bible says you are.

But if we really are this bad, then how can I get on in life? This type of evil is paralyzing.

## Our Delight: Christ's death was for the ungodly boasters

In spite of the fact that we are worst than we think we are, **Christ is better than we think He is.** It's been said that Christ loves us unconditionally. That is actually false. Christ loves us counter-conditionally. We give Him every reason in the world to not love us, and yet He laid down His life for ungodly and ruined sinners such as us anyway! Romans 5:6 says “For while we were still weak, at the right time **Christ died for the ungodly.**” He didn't die for the semi-godly, or the marginally godly, or the godly-when-everyone's-looking. He died for the ungodly. That means people who are exactly the opposite of God.

God is good. The **ungodly** are full of hate

God is righteous. The **ungodly** are full of debauchery and wickedness.

God is wise. The **ungodly** are the king of fools.

God is holy. The **ungodly** are full of every impurity and corruption.

God is true. The **ungodly** only spout out lies.

And yet what does God say in our passage this morning? “I will kill my Godly Son, so I don’t have to kill you my ungodly child.” v.51 “...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 no better gospel than this gospel. Jesus did not just die to offer us an opportunity to be saved that could ultimately fail if we didn’t make the right choice. No. v.51 insists that Jesus death would actually gather the children of God. Invincibly. And if you have trusted Christ, it is because He gathered you to Himself through His cross. This is why the gospel is so intimately personal. If you are a Christian, Jesus died for you personally, particularly, positively. He did not leave the final say up to you. He died to secure your actual, everlasting, unfading salvation. He wasn’t willing to leave your salvation to your own corrupted and decomposing will. He pursued you. He gathered you. How? By being crucified and condemned on the cross. He put to death your death, by laying down His life. **1 Corinthians 15:3-4** “For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures,”

Dear congregation, that is the gospel. We ought never to seek comfort in this life by telling ourselves we are better than we are. Rather we find comfort in the shock and awe that Christ would still love us even though we are worse than we believe.

O to grace how great a debtor, daily I’m constrained to be  
 Let thy grace Lord, like a fetter, bind my wandering heart to thee.  
 Prone to wander, Lord I feel it, prone to leave the God I love  
 Here’s my heart Lord, take and seal it, seal it to thy courts above.