

*Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript*

**Lazarus, Come Forth**  
**John 11:45-57**  
**Part Six**

If you are a disciple of Christ, everything that is happening around you, to you and in you is being used by God to accomplish His eternal purpose for your life.

Let me read for you **Romans 8:28**. “**And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.**”

But what is God’s purpose? Is it to make sure that we are healthy, wealthy and prosperous? Let me continue to read **Romans 8:29-30**. “**For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the first-born among many brethren; (30) and whom He predestined, these He also called; and whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.**”

God’s ultimate purpose for those who love Him and who are called according to His purpose is glorification. What is glorification? Glorification occurs when we are finally and fully delivered from sin and all of its consequences. In other words, glorification occurs when we are finally and conformed to the very image of Christ.

So until this purpose is accomplished, we can be confident that God is working all things together for good; or in other words, we can be confident that God is very methodically using everything that is happening around us, to us and in us to move us ever that much closer to what He has from eternity past purposed for us. In other words, God is using everything that is happening around us, to us and in us to move us ever that much closer to be conformed to the image of Christ.

God is using your wife. God is using your husband. God is using your children. God is using your job. God is using your neighbor. God is using your health. God is using your victories. God is using your defeats. God is using your accomplishments. God is using your disappointments. God is using your heartaches. God is using everything that is happening around you, to you and in you to move you toward the goal that He has purposed for you.

This should be a wonderfully comforting thought! Our lives might be difficult, but our difficulties are being used by God to accomplish His eternal purpose. Certainly this is something that we should be giving thanks for, not only at this holiday season, but throughout our lives.

God is causing all things to work together for good for them that love Him. Does this even include our enemies? Does this even include those who would want to harm us? Absolutely! It even includes those who want to harm us.

We will see this in the passage that we will be examining this weekend. We are presently studying John’s account of the resurrection of Lazarus.

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The first part of the story was the preparation for the miracle (John 11:1-16).

The second part of the story was the arrival of Jesus and His disciples in Bethany (John 11:17-37).

The Third part of the story is the raising of *Lazarus* from the dead (John 11:38-44).

We are now ready to look at the final part of this story, the response of the Jewish people to the resurrection of Lazarus (John 11:45-57).

The response of the Jewish people to the resurrection of Lazarus, as with all the miracles and teachings of Christ, was division. A division between those who believed in Christ because of the miracle and those who did not believe in Christ in spite of the miracle.

The apostle initially focused on those who chose to believe in Christ *because* of the miracle (John 11:45).

Let me read for you **John 11:45**. “**Many therefore of the Jews, who had come to Mary and beheld what He had done, believed in Him.**”

This certainly should not surprise us that many of those who had come to console Mary and who had witnessed the miracle believed in Him. In fact, I am sure this is what most of us would have expected.

But what exactly did they believe? It does not specifically tell us, but in light of Christ’s prayer of thanksgiving in **John 11:41-42**, I think we can figure it out.

Let me once again read for you Christ’s prayer. “**And so they removed the stone. And Jesus raised His eyes, and said, ‘Father, I thank Thee that Thou hearest me. (42) And I knew that thou hearest Me always; but because of the people standing around I said it, that they may believe [Believe what?] that Thou didst send Me.’**”

So, what did many of the eyewitnesses of the miracle who had come to console Mary believe? In light of John 11:41-42, the many who believed in Christ must have believed that His Father had *sent* Him into this world.

Christ did not simply want people to believe that He was able to raise Lazarus from the dead. He wanted more than this. He wanted them to see the great truth behind this miracle. He wanted them to see that no one could have performed the miracle that He had just performed unless the Father had, in fact, sent Him into this world and **John 11:45** tells us that this is exactly what happened.

Unfortunately, though many who had come to console Mary and who witnessed the miracle did, in fact, believe this very thing, there were others who did not. So, after initially focusing on those who chose to believe in Christ because of the miracle, the apostle then focused on those who chose not to believe in Christ in *spite* of the miracle (John 11:46).

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Let me read for you **John 11:46**. **“But some of them** [some of them who had witnessed the miracle but did not believe] **went away to the Pharisees, and told them the things which Jesus had done.”**

Not only had these individuals, who had witnessed the miracle, chosen not to believe that Jesus had been sent from God, **John 11:46** tells us that they went to the Pharisees to tell them what Christ had done.

So, why would these particular Jews go to the Pharisees? Why would these particular Jews go to the sworn enemies of Christ? The unbelieving eyewitnesses went to the Pharisees because they apparently shared, to some degree, the same concern about Christ’s growing influence as the Pharisees themselves. Though this is not clear from the text, it seems the only logical explanation in light of the fact that the Pharisees’ hostility toward Christ was common knowledge.

So, how will the Pharisees respond to their report? Let me read for you the first part of **John 11:47**. **“Therefore the chief priests and the Pharisees convened a council.”**

The Pharisees, with the cooperation of the chief priests, convened the council of the Sanhedrin, which was the highest judicial body in Israel (John 11:47).

Getting the cooperation of the chief priests under normal circumstances might not have been a very easy thing for the Pharisees to pull off. Why?

The chief priests were ex-high priests, mostly of the politically oriented sect of the Sadducees, who were theological liberals who didn’t believe in resurrection or angels. In other words, they were the polar opposite of the Pharisees.

Hopefully you now can appreciate why I said under normal circumstances it would have been difficult for the Pharisees to get the chief priests to cooperate with them. But they were not operating under normal circumstances.

Jewish leaders, both secular and religious, were getting very concerned about Jesus and His growing influence among the Jewish people and where all this might lead. Let us now continue to read **John 11:47-48**. **“Therefore the chief priests and the Pharisees convened a council, and were saying, ‘What are we doing? For this man is performing many signs. (48) If we let Him go on like this, all men will believe in Him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation.’”**

This expression by the chief priests and the Pharisees was the outflow of total frustration. They had tried to persuade individuals not to follow Jesus through threats and intimidation. They had challenged His teachings in public forums; some of them had even on several occasions been participants in impromptu attempts on His life. But in spite of all these things, the influence of Jesus continued to grow. They are totally frustrated.

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This led them to question their own effectiveness as leaders. What did they say in **John 11:47?** **“What are we doing?”** Implying, of course, we are doing nothing, at least nothing of consequence. And then they seem to bemoan the fact, that if Jesus continues to perform miracles, there will be terrible consequences.

Let us continue to read **John 11:48**. **“If we let Him go on like this, all men will believe in Him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place [most likely referring to the temple] and our nation.”** The fear that they expressed seems very clear. The Sanhedrin was afraid that if people believed that Jesus was, in fact, their Messiah, the rightful king of Israel, and acknowledged Him as such, then Rome would destroy the temple and Israel.

But let me ask you a question. Was this a reasonable fear on their part? I believe that the answer is no. It was not a reasonable fear.

Were the Romans particularly concerned with the growing popularity of Jesus and His disciples? No! Jesus and His disciples were peaceful law abiding individuals. They were causing absolutely no problem for the Romans. It was not the Romans who were concerned about the growing influence of Jesus. It was the religious leaders of the Jews.

The religious leaders were concerned about the growing influence of Jesus because it would diminish their own influence.

The Jewish leaders’ fear of their diminishing influence, I believe, led them to *erroneously* entertain the thought that Rome might destroy their temple and nation because of Christ.

So, what happened next? Caiaphas, apparently listening to the frustration of various members of the council in their inability to deal with the growing popularity of Christ, led him to take action and fill the leadership vacuum.

Let us now look at **John 11:49**. **“But a certain one of them, Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, said to them, ‘You know nothing at all.’”** He was rebuking them for their ineptitude and lack of insight. He was not really saying any thing to them that they had not already felt. In effect, he was preparing them to receive his leadership.

Let us continue to read. **“But a certain one of them, Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, said to them, ‘You know nothing at all, (50) nor do you take into account that it is expedient for you that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation should not perish.’”**

Caiaphas, in essence, was telling the Sanhedrin in John 11:50 that Jesus needed to be *sacrificed* so that the nation of Israel and its people could be spared from Rome’s wrath. His argument for putting Christ to death had nothing to do with justice but with political expediency. Caiaphas truly believed the old adage, “The end justifies the means.” He was an evil man working out an evil agenda, but this was not all that the apostle records for us. He also records for us how God used Caiaphas’ words to communicate a message of hope.

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Let us now read **John 11:51**. “**Now this he did not say on his own initiative; but being high priest that year; he prophesied that Jesus was going to die for the nation.**” What is the apostle telling us? The apostle John is telling us that though Caiaphas was an evil man working out an agenda, God used him to speak *prophetically* of Christ and His atoning death.

Now, when John tells us that Jesus was going to die for the nation, we need to understand this as referring to all those faithful Jews who were living within the borders of Israel. John wants to make sure that we understand that Christ’s death would not only be for the Jews living within the border of Israel, but he wants us to expand our minds far beyond that so he goes on to share with us **John 11:52**. Let me read this verse for you. “**And not for the nation only, but that He might also gather together into one the children of God who are scattered abroad.**”

The children of God who are scattered abroad in a purely Jewish context would be referring to faithful Jews of the dispersion; or in other words, to faithful Jews living outside of the borders of Israel, but given the time period when this gospel was written, we cannot limit our interpretation of this passage simply to a Jewish context.

The children of God who are scattered abroad should be understood not only to be referring to faithful Jews living outside of Israel, but to future believing *Gentiles* as well.

Obviously, the words of Caiaphas in **John 11:50** were very weighty words. Caiaphas saw the words he used purely on a political level, but John certainly did not. He saw them on a prophetic level. Caiaphas meant his words for evil, but God mean his words for good. Can God work all things together for good? Absolutely! Does this include even the actions and words of our enemies? Absolutely!

If God is going to work all things together for good for those who love Him, does this mean that they will avoid difficulties? No. It means that they will be ever so methodically moving closer.

So, how did the words spoken by Caiaphas, an evil man with an evil agenda, impact the Sanhedrin? Let us now read **John 11:53**. “**So from that day on they planned together to kill Him.**” The words spoken by Caiaphas united the Sadducees and Pharisees for the first time in their efforts to kill Jesus. This was monumental. The religious leaders of Israel had now sanctioned the murder of Jesus based on nothing other than mere expediency.

This action on the part of the Sanhedrin effectively ended Christ’s public ministry. Let me read for you **John 11:54**. “**Jesus therefore no longer continued to walk publicly among the Jews, but went away from there to the country near the wilderness, into a city called Ephraim; and there He stayed with the disciples.**”

He had left Bethany and was now staying with His disciples in Ephraim which is probably the Old Testament town of Ephron which was 12 miles away from Jeruslaem.

But just because Jesus may have been twelve miles away, the fuse had been lit and we see the evidence of this in **John 11:55-57**. Let me read these verses for you.

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**“Now the Passover of the Jews was at hand, and many went up to Jerusalem out of the country before the Passover, to purify themselves. (56) Therefore they were seeking for Jesus, and were saying to one another, as they stood in the temple, ‘What do you think; that He will not come to the feast at all?’”**

Now why would the Jewish people be thinking in these kind of terms? Let me read for you **John 11:57. “Now the chief priests and the Pharisees had given orders that if anyone knew where He was, he should report it, that they might seize Him.”**

Was Jesus going to die for the nation? Yes! Jesus was going to die for the nation, but not as Caiaphas understood it. He was not going to die to save the nation from Rome; rather, He was going to die in order to save them from sin!

Everything that is happening around us, to us and in us is being used by God to accomplish His purposes for our life.

God is using your wife. God is using your husband. God is using your children. God is using your job. God is using your neighbor. God is using your health. God is using your victories. God is using your defeats. God is using your disappointments. God is using your heartaches. God is using everything that is happening around you, to you and in you to move you toward the goal that He has purposed for you.

Does this even include those who want to harm us? Absolutely! It even includes those who want to harm us! If God is able, through the words of Caiaphas, to unite the Sanhedrin into a legalized lynch mob while at the same time prophetically declaring His intention to surrender the life of His Son so that He might save the world from their sins, then what can't He use. And, of course, the answer is that there is absolutely nothing that the Lord cannot use in order to accomplish His purpose in our lives.

Everything that is happening around us, to us and in us is being used by God to conform us to the very image of Christ until that day when we will be fully and completely conformed to Him and this includes even the words and actions of our enemies.

May God give us the grace to understand that all things are being worked together for good to those who love God.