

The Word Became Flesh
Week 34
John 11:45-57 (CSB)
“Why Many Refuse to Believe”

Introduction

You adulterous people! Don't you know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? So whoever wants to be the friend of the world becomes the enemy of God.
James 4:4

Jesus public ministry came to an end after the resurrection of Lazarus. The last few weeks before going to the cross He spent in the company of His disciples and friends. The Passover was growing near, and He knew that His time had come to give His life as the Sacrificial Lamb, offered up for the sins of the world. He had devoted the past three years of His life to teaching any who would listen and believe about the kingdom of God. Even at the tomb of Lazarus, many had placed their faith in Him.

Therefore, many of the Jews who came to Mary and saw what He did believed in Him.
John 11:45

This verse should not surprise us. After all, when is the last time that you attended a graveside memorial service and saw someone show up and raise the dead body from their casket and send them on their way?! Needless to say then, when the people saw Jesus raise Lazarus from the dead, they were convinced that He truly was sent from God.

But others that day were frightened and confused by what they had just seen. So they did what a lot of people do when confused about a particular verse of Scripture, or something preached, or even mentioned in casual conversation, that they are unsure of. They went to their religious leaders. Surely these “learned men of God” would explain to them what they had just witnessed. After all, hadn’t the Pharisees condemned Jesus as a heretic? How then, could He have performed such an amazing miracle right before their eyes? Surely the teachers of The Law of Moses would set them straight. And so they rushed back to Jerusalem to inform them as to what had happened.

There are many today who refuse to believe the gospel of Christ. It seems that some, no matter how many times they hear it, reject its Truth. For those of us who believe, we are often astounded when people refuse to see the light, that to us seems so very obvious. After all, only a crazy person would look around creation and assume that there is no Creator (***Romans 1***). And if there is a Creator, then Who is He? And when Jesus is presented as such, He is the obvious choice. So why then, do people refuse to believe when they see the truth? Why did those Jews refuse to believe, when they witnessed The Creator Himself breath life into His creation at the tomb of Lazarus? The answer to these questions may be much simpler than you might think. May people refuse to believe in Jesus... because they do not **want** to believe.

There are many things that “hold someone back” from faith in Christ. And in this passage today, we see a few of them. All of these excuses can be overcome by faith. However, many do not come to faith because they do not wish to “get over” these things. In short, they embrace what they can see over what they refuse to see. There is an old saying, “a bird in hand is worth two in the bush”. This simply means that the things a man already owns, are thought to be more secure than those things he dreams of having. It is a proverb that encourages us to “play it safe”, as it were. But when it comes to eternity this is a very bad strategy.

For what does it benefit someone to gain the whole world and yet lose his life?
Mark 8:36

This being said, today we will examine a few of the reasons that many refuse to believe the gospel. This passage clearly demonstrates that those who reject Christ often do so for worldly, not spiritual reasons. **John 11:45-57** shows us that **Panic** (fear), **Power**, **Profit**, and **Prestige** are some of the motives behind unbelief. But even amidst this world's rejection of The Son of God, The Word of God (**Prophecies**) regarding His Son will not be silenced or altered in any fashion. Please allow me to explain.

Panic (vs. 45-47)

Therefore, many of the Jews who came to Mary and saw what He did believed in Him. But some of them went to the Pharisees and told them what Jesus had done. So the chief priests and the Pharisees convened the Sanhedrin and were saying, "What are we going to do since this Man is doing many signs?"

Fear, good old fashioned fear, is one of the many reasons that people reject the gospel of Jesus Christ. When some of the Jews at the tomb of Lazarus saw a man rise from the dead, they overcame the terror that must have consumed them all at first, and placed their faith in The Savior. Others needed more convincing, and I am certain that this is why they ran to report the miracle to the Pharisees. Of course, had the religious leaders of Jerusalem been the Godly men that they should have been, they would have assured the confused Jews that only God can raise the dead. After all, the Prophet Elijah had done so. The law was clear on this matter. Elijah was most definitely a man of God, and when the widow woman's son had died, Elijah called upon the power of God and raised him back to life (**1 Kings 17:17-24**).

The Pharisees were the more conservative wing of the Sanhedrin (ruling council). They most certainly believed in a resurrection. So, as they had thus far, been unwilling to believe in Jesus based upon His prior signs and testimony, this particular miracle should have convinced them. For only God can raise the dead! And yet they continued to reject the Savior. Rather than repent of their prior hostility toward's Jesus, they became fearful. So they doubled down.

A meeting of the Sanhedrin was quickly arranged, for the Pharisees at the time were not the majority party. The Sadducees were in the majority during the time of Christ, and Caiaphas, being a Sadducee himself, had been established as High Priest. The Sadducees were the more "liberal wing" of the council and did not believe in the resurrection of the dead. So, we can just imagine the panic that this "tale of Lazarus" had bought upon them! The theme of the meeting, therefore, became, "What are we going to do since this Man is doing so many signs?" To them, believing was not even a consideration. They were only concerned about what could be done to put a stop to it all!

This is how many today respond to the truth of the gospel. They don't want to believe it. They simply want it to go away. This is why the truth of Jesus Christ is met with such hostility by many. This is the reason that the liberal media in our country is interested in every view point except the one belonging to Christians. They will entertain every fringe element of this world, but when someone mentions The Word of God, or the Son of God, they do everything in their power to make it stop! Why is this? Because people prefer the darkness to light.

"This is the judgment: The Light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than the Light because their deeds were evil. For everyone who does evil hated the light and avoids it, so that his deeds may not be exposed."

John 3:19-20

As the council meeting continued, we are given the reason why these wicked men were so very afraid of Jesus and His kingdom. And none of the reasons for this fear and hatred had anything to do with spiritual things! Let that sink in for a moment, these "religious leaders" were not at all concerned with religious truth. No, their panic was based in something a lot more down to earth. They had considered what Jesus had offered, and they had counted up the cost. And for them, it was a price they refused to pay. For many in this world love their sin too much to follow Jesus.

Power, Profit, and Prestige. (vs. 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.

If anyone has ever wondered why the religious rulers of Jerusalem rejected their Messiah, John makes clear so that we will know. The Roman government had allowed these men to function in their “priestly roles” for one simple reason: to maintain peace within the Roman Empire. The Jews would have been nearly impossible to control had Rome not made allowances for them to observe their religious customs and festivals. Therefore, rather than have a continuous rebellion of the citizenry, Rome had installed religious leaders as administrators of the Jewish faith and traditions. Make no mistake. These were very lucrative positions, and to hold on to them, these so called “priests” had to remain loyal to the empire.

So, here we observe where the religious rulers’ loyalties were affixed. They may have worn ornate priestly robes and spoke eloquently on The Law of Moses, but in their hearts, they were consumed with holding on to their place at the table. This is why Jesus was such a threat to them. Rome would not be happy with someone walking around calling Himself “The Messiah, King of The Jews”. And, if this Rabbi from Galilee was not stopped, the members of the Sanhedrin stood to lose everything.

These evil men were in a panic that Rome would take away their “place”, meaning the Temple where they were able to make such a lucrative living on the backs of the religious Jews who faithfully brought their offerings to God. And they were concerned that those same Jewish followers (their nation) would abandon them and go over to Jesus. And if they allowed this to happen, how then would they be able to earn a living? They had grown accustomed to their lavish lifestyles. And not only that, they were admired as “Spiritual examples” by the people. Prestige and power, not to mention their profits, were at stake here! This is most certainly why the theme of the meeting became, “What are we going to do?” As the famous saying goes: “All power tends to corrupt, and absolute power, corrupts absolutely.”

We see the very same reasons for rejecting Christ in our world today. People are enamored with the pleasures of this world. They are unwilling to sacrifice even the least of their sinful indulgences in order to follow Christ. They prefer to live in immorality, greed, and self indulgence. Christ offers us peace and everlasting life, but *you cannot stay where you are and go with God*. You must count the cost and determine for yourself if what Christ is offering you today is “worth the risk”. There is a cost to becoming a Believer. This is why Jesus gave us the parable of the Pearl of Great Price.

“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls. When he found one priceless pearl. He went and sold everything he had and bought it.”

Matthew 13:45

Which brings us to the question: Is there anything in your life that is standing between you and following Christ? Nothing that this world has to offer will compare to the “pearl of great price”. Jesus is calling us to leave this world behind in order to have what He offers. It may cost you a few relationships, it may cost you financially. It may cost you geographically. You may be led to a completely different place to share His truth. I do not know what your sacrifice will be, but believe me, there will be a sacrifice. *You cannot stay where you are and follow Christ*. The decision that is yours, and yours alone, to make is simple. Do you believe that Jesus is worth it? The Pharisees, didn’t think so, and they were so very wrong. Do not make the same mistake that they did.

If you confess with your mouth “Jesus is LORD”, and believe in you heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.

Romans 10:9

Simply put, if you believe that He is God, having the power over life and death, then confess Him as *your* LORD, which gives Him the right to ask of you anything that He will. As LORD, He has the right to require you to sacrifice, but He has promised that nothing you give up will be nearly as wonderful as what you will receive in return. This is the message of “The Pearl of Great Price”. The question is: Do *you* believe it? Sadly, many reject this truth today, preferring to go to so-called “churches” where so-called “preachers” tell them that they are fine just as they are and that God requires nothing of them. *Just because a lie can told convincingly, does not make it the truth*. God’s Word will not be compromised.

Prophecy (49-57)

One of them, Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, said to them, “You know nothing at all! You’re not considering that it is to your advantage that one Man should die for the people rather than the whole nation perish.” He did not say this on his own, but being high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus was going to die for the nation, and not for the nation only, but also to unite the scattered children of God. So from that day on they plotted to kill Him. Jesus therefore no longer walked openly among the Jews but departed from there to the countryside near the wilderness, to a town called Ephraim, and He stayed there with the disciples. Now the Jewish Passover was near, and many went up to Jerusalem from the country to purify themselves before the Passover. They were looking for Jesus and asking one another as they stood in the temple, “What do you think? He won’t come to the festival, will He?” The chief priests and the Pharisees had given orders that if anyone knew where He was, he should report it so that they could arrest Him.

Now Caiaphas, the Sadducee and High Priest, was a very arrogant man. We can see this in his response to his Pharisaic counterparts of the Sanhedrin. He considered them to be fools, and he felt the need to “straighten them out”, as it were. They were far too nearsighted and blind, in his opinion, to see the big picture. He felt that the best way to get rid of the problem was to have Jesus executed “for the good of the people”. After all, if this upstart from Galilee were simply made to disappear, the people would be spared from Roman wrath. So to his mind, Jesus execution would be a means of “saving the nation”.

John reminds us that as High Priest Caiaphas was actually professing a gospel that he did not even believe in! For you see, what Caiaphas had intended was to sell the idea that having Jesus killed would be a good thing for everyone involved. But the message that God was actually giving through the High Priest was the prophetic declaration that Jesus would die to deliver those who believe in Him from **God’s** wrath, and not the Romans.

This was not the first time that God has used a pagan to deliver His message. Do you remember the story of Balaam in *The Old Testament*? Balaam was a profiteering soothsayer, who was hired by the King of Moab to curse the children of Israel in the hope of preventing them from entering the promised land. While Balaam took the money that the wicked King Balak had offered him to curse the Israelites, every time he tried to do so, God put words in his mouth, and he blessed the people instead! This was quite frustrating to the old physic, as he repeatedly tried to earn his money, but each time he failed. He was finally even warned of the danger he was in by his own donkey (**Numbers 22:28-35**)! So you see, if God can speak through a donkey, He could speak through Caiaphas. In fact, the two of them weren’t all that different when it comes right down to it!

Jesus would indeed die for the nation, and not only that, He would die for the elect of God scattered throughout the world. I am so thankful that God so loved **the world**, that He gave His son to die in our stead! Caiaphas prophecy would indeed be fulfilled, just not in the way that he had imagined. And from this moment on, the Sanhedrin, who normally couldn’t get along with one another, were united together in a common cause; to incite the Romans to execute Jesus. They thought that they had come up with this “brilliant plan” all by themselves, but little did they know, that they were merely pawns in the hand of Almighty God. They were working in concert to do an evil thing, but just as Joseph had said of his brethren who had once meant to destroy him:

“You planned evil against me; God planned it for good to bring about the present result — the survival of many people. **Genesis 50:20**

The purposes and plans of God cannot be undone. Even the most pagan of unbelievers cannot hinder God's perfect will. Caiaphas was as evil as they come. He refused to accept the truth, even when it was obvious. He preferred his power, prestige, and profits, to the Son of The Most High. And he sold his very soul as a result. But God's Word would be kept. His prophecies of the suffering Messiah throughout *The Old Testament* were coming to fruition. And rather than stop God's wondrous plan, the Sanhedrin were actually helping to fulfill it.

So it all comes down to this: Would you be willing to sacrifice all that you have in order to obtain the Pearl of Great Price? Let go of this world and embrace the Kingdom of God. Entrust yourself fully to The LORD Jesus Christ, and by faith, be delivered from death unto life. Yes, there will be a price to pay. But no one has ever been sorry... for choosing life over death.

And let the Delivered say... TRUTH!!!