

“Behind and Above the Scenes”—John 11:47-53

The text for this sermon, the theme of which is, “Behind and Above the Scenes”, is John 11:47-53 → *The chief priests and the Pharisees gathered the council and said, “What are we to do? For this man performs many signs. 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.” But one of them, Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, said to them, “You know nothing at all. 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.” He did not say this of his own accord, 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. So from that day on they made plans to put Him to death.* This is the text.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ Jesus:

Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord (cf. 1Timothy 1:2). Amen.

It’s difficult to imagine a world without a screen. There are many who can recount the days when your only two options for being drawn into an

adventure or drama were reading a book or listening to the radio. Any visual scenes could only happen in your imagination. Aside from the fact that we've come to depend upon a screen or monitor of one kind or another in our work context, the movie industry has visually brought the dramas and adventures to life for us in a huge way. They do it in such a seamless manner that you're drawn into the story with very little effort on your part.

“So, what was your favorite part of the movie?” That's a common question after viewing a movie. How would you respond if you received this answer: “The credits.” The credits? Aside from maybe sticking around in the theater to see the names of the main actors, who cares about the credits? Most people walk out during the seemingly never ending list of people who have played some part behind the scenes to make the movie an adventure for you to enjoy as if you were in it yourself. And yet, without all those people bringing all the bits and pieces of the audio/visual cuts together, you wouldn't have a movie which makes such an intense impact on your senses. Those people who work behind the scenes actually “set the stage” and make the action happen for you.

Our text reveals what was happening “behind the scenes” in another drama of life. It is in connection with a sinister plot to take control of Jesus' life. Like any plot this one also had a motive. It involved *plans to*

put Him to death (verse 53). These *plans* were put in place by *the chief priests and the Pharisees* who *gathered the council* together to discuss this “Jesus problem.” *The council*, also known as the Sanhedrin, was made up of seventy lay elders, the presiding chief priest, and the scribes who functioned as legal experts in the religion of Judaism. They oversaw the religious and some civil matters in Judea.

The Pharisees had been dealing with Jesus for some three plus years by this time, listening to His claims of being God (cf. John 5:18; 10:30;) and hearing His pronouncements of judgment upon their hypocrisy (cf. Matthew 13-36). The chief priests had experienced the force of God’s Law when Jesus told them that *the tax collectors and the prostitutes* would *go into the kingdom of God before* them (cf. Matthew 21:31) because they refused to repent of their sins and believe in Jesus as the Christ. Our text follows the record of Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead. It appears to be the miracle which was kind of like “the straw that broke the camel’s back” for these religious leaders.

John 11:45-46 tells us, that as a result of this miracle, *many of the Jews . . . who had . . . seen what He did, believed in Him*. There were also some who *went to the Pharisees and told them what Jesus had done*. Verse 48 of our text records why they considered Jesus such a threat. *If we let Him go on like this, they said, everyone will believe in Him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our*

nation. The Roman government allowed the Jews to govern themselves through the Sanhedrin in Jerusalem. Jesus' ministry could possibly "upset the cart" and they may lose what little bit of national identity and control they did possess. While the Sanhedrin made a distinction between Jesus and Judaism the Roman government would simply see this as a Jewish problem or uprising causing civil disturbance requiring government suppression.

In the midst of their discussion, we have these words from *Caiaphas*, *who was high priest that year*. You do not *understand that it is better for you that one man should die for the people, not that the whole nation should perish* (verses 49-50). He proposed Jesus' death in such a manner that it appeared to be advantageous for the whole nation. Apparently he viewed the dilemma as involving a choice between "the lesser of two evils" rather than an issue of faith. In all fairness, this was a legitimate governing body, entrusted with the duties of the protection of the Jewish people.

Don't you just hate politics? I've heard one person after another complain about "politics" and it's not just in reference to the government. I've heard people talk about the "politics" at work, in school, in organizations, in the church . . . in virtually every area of life where people need to function with each other. It seems like the term in most contexts is used negatively to describe the ways in which people,

outside forces, regulations, guidelines, policies and so forth try to “micro manage” others or . . . manipulate them for selfish, self-centered reasons. They may actually be describing the sin of idolatry without even knowing it. When selfish control and manipulation become the issues, sin and satan become the instigators.

Sinners are “control freaks” with “control issues” who struggle to “turn over control” to Jesus. In fact, it is the nature of sin to **refuse** to turn over control to Jesus. The place where Adam & Eve lost their righteousness was the place where they tried to gain control (cf. Genesis 3:1-19). Just as the men in our text thought they were in control in their circumstances you can fall into the same faithless trap. Faith recognizes while navigating through life that God is control, working above the scenes to work your eternal good in the midst of it all. God doesn’t simply work behind the scenes of your life but active works above the scenes of your life!

When it comes to the unfolding of your relationship with the LORD and your eternal life, fortunately you do not have to depend upon those working “behind the scenes.” You have One Who works above the scenes of your life—Yahweh, *the LORD, Who made heaven and earth* (cf. Psalm 124:8). What went on “above the scenes” was the LORD’s divine plan of redemption for mankind coming to it’s fulfillment through Jesus’ death and resurrection in the midst of the scene placed before us in our

text and the scene of all human history.

Notice that even during this strategic meeting the LORD turned the plotter into a prophet who didn't even realize the full impact of his words. Verses 51-52 tell us that Caiaphas *did not say this of his own accord, 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*. Even as they plotted, thinking they were in control, God was in control. Through these men *this Jesus was delivered up according to God's definite plan and foreknowledge to be crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men* (cf. Acts 2:23).

The benefits of Jesus' death and resurrection extend beyond spacial and national limits. The forgiveness of sins which His atoning sacrifice on the cross *by the hands of lawless men* brought is for all, including you. The new life now and eternally which Jesus' resurrection from the grave brought is for all people, including you. God's working above the scenes of human history was aimed at changing your life forever! Romans 6:10-11 says: *The death Jesus died He died to sin, once for all, but the life He lives He lives to God. So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.*

Therefore, Jesus' death actually was *better*, not in a political sense but rather in a spiritual sense. Why? Because God turned an evil scheme into a divine plan of salvation. Working from faith in rather than

fear of Jesus, you no longer have to live like a desperate person. Instead you are motivated by a complete dependence upon the LORD as expressed by His continual love for you in Christ, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you can continue serving Jesus in the “scenes” of your life and watch the LORD do His work, in His way, for your eternal good, in His time. Amen.

*Many are the plans in the mind of a man,
but it is the purpose of the LORD that will stand.*

(Proverbs 19:21)

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