

5-Day Devotional

Belief, Surrender, and the Sovereign Plan of God

Based on John 11:45–57

Day 1: A Miracle Demands a Response

Read

John 11:45–46

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

— John 11:45–46

Devotional Thought

Jesus had just raised Lazarus from the dead. This was not a small miracle. Lazarus had been in the tomb for four days. Everyone knew he was dead. And yet Jesus called him out of the grave.

You would think everyone who saw this would immediately believe. Many did. But some did not. Some saw the same miracle and still rejected Jesus.

This shows us something important: unbelief is not always about a lack of evidence. Sometimes the issue is not what we know but what we are willing to surrender. The people had proof right in front of them, but some still refused to bow their hearts to Jesus.

Every time we encounter Jesus, we are invited to respond. We cannot stay neutral forever. He is either Lord, or we reject His lordship. He is either the resurrection and the life, or we keep trusting ourselves.

The miracle of Lazarus reminds us that Jesus has power over death. But it also asks us a question: **Will we believe?**

Application

Take a few minutes today to honestly ask yourself:

Am I responding to Jesus with belief or resistance?
Is there anything I know is true about Jesus but have been ignoring?
Where have I seen evidence of God's work in my life?

Belief is not just agreeing with facts about Jesus. It is trusting Him, surrendering to Him, and resting your full weight on Him.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, You are the resurrection and the life. Help me not to ignore what You have shown me. Give me a heart that responds with faith instead of resistance. I believe; help my unbelief. Amen.

Day 2: Unbelief Loves Control

Read

John 11:47-48

“So the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered the council and said, ‘What are we to do? For this man performs many signs. If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him...’”

— John 11:47-48

Devotional Thought

The religious leaders did not deny that Jesus was performing signs. They knew something powerful was happening. Their problem was not that they lacked information. Their problem was that Jesus threatened their control.

They said, “If we let him go on like this...” That statement reveals what they believed about themselves. They thought they were in control. They thought they could stop Jesus. They thought they could manage the situation.

But they were not in control. God was.

We often fall into the same trap. We want to control our plans, relationships, image, finances, future, and comfort. We may say we trust God, but when something threatens our sense of control, fear rises up.

Unbelief tells us, "You need to stay in charge." Faith says, "God is already in charge, and He is good."

The religious leaders rejected Jesus because they wanted to protect their own kingdom. We must ask ourselves if we are doing the same.

Application

The sermon asked this question: **What is your "place and nation"?**

In John 11:48, the leaders feared losing "our place and our nation." For us, that may be the area we are afraid to surrender to Jesus.

Ask yourself:

What am I afraid God might change if I fully surrender?

What area of life do I try hardest to control?

Where am I saying, "Jesus, You can have everything except this"?

Name that area before the Lord today.

Prayer

Father, I confess that I often want control. I want to protect my comfort, my plans, and my way of life. Help me surrender every part of me to You. Teach me to trust that Your rule is better than mine. Amen.

Day 3: The Fear of Losing What We Love

Read

John 11:48

"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."

— John 11:48

Devotional Thought

The religious leaders feared loss. They feared losing their position, power, influence, and way of life. Jesus was not simply inconvenient to them. He was a threat to the life they had built.

This is one of the reasons people resist Jesus today. We fear what obedience may cost us. We wonder, "If I fully follow Jesus, what will I have to give up?"

Maybe we fear losing popularity. Maybe we fear losing a relationship. Maybe we fear giving up a habit or sin that has become comfortable. Maybe we fear Jesus will change our dreams, our priorities, or our lifestyle.

But here is the truth: anything Jesus asks us to surrender is not worth more than Him.

The tragedy of the religious leaders is that they stood in front of the Son of God and chose their temporary kingdom over His eternal one. They clung to what they could not keep and rejected the only One who could give them life.

Jesus does call us to surrender, but never to harm us. He calls us to lose what is killing us so we can receive what truly gives life.

Application

Make two lists today.

List 1: Things I am afraid to lose

Examples: approval, comfort, control, money, relationships, habits, plans.

List 2: What I have in Christ

Examples: forgiveness, eternal life, peace, purpose, identity, adoption, hope.

Now compare the lists. Ask God to help you see that Christ is better.

Prayer

Jesus, forgive me for clinging to things that cannot save me. Help me believe that You are better than anything I am afraid to lose. Give me courage to surrender what I have been holding back. Amen.

Read

John 11:49–52

“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.”

— John 11:50

Devotional Thought

Caiaphas was not trying to preach the gospel. He was making a cold political calculation. In his mind, Jesus needed to die so the religious leaders could preserve their power and keep Rome from interfering.

But John tells us something amazing. Caiaphas did not say this on his own. Without realizing it, he prophesied that Jesus would die for the nation, and not only for the nation, but also to gather God’s scattered children into one.

Caiaphas meant one thing. God meant something far greater.

This does not make Caiaphas’ motives good. His plan was evil. But God was sovereign even over that evil. The cross was not an accident. It was not plan B. Jesus was not a victim of circumstances. God was accomplishing His eternal plan of redemption.

This gives us deep hope. God is not confused by the brokenness of the world. He is not powerless when people make sinful decisions. He is not absent in dark moments. He is able to work even through what is painful, unjust, and evil.

The greatest evil ever committed—the crucifixion of the Son of God—became the very means of our salvation.

Application

Think about a situation in your life that feels confusing, painful, or unfair.

Ask yourself:

Do I believe God is still in control here?

How does the cross help me trust Him?

What would it look like to surrender this situation to God today?

You may not see the full picture yet, but the cross proves God can bring redemption from darkness.

Prayer

Sovereign God, You are in control even when life feels out of control. Thank You that the cross was not an accident but Your plan to save us. Help me trust You in the things I do not understand. Amen.

Day 5: One Man Died for the People

Read

Isaiah 53:4–6

“But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities... and with his wounds we are healed.”

— Isaiah 53:5

Devotional Thought

Caiaphas said it was better for one man to die for the people. He meant that Jesus should be killed to protect the nation politically. But God was revealing something much deeper: Jesus would die as a substitute for sinners.

Jesus did not die for His own sins. He had none. He died for ours.

He was pierced for our transgressions.

He was crushed for our iniquities.

The punishment that brought us peace was placed on Him.

By His wounds, we are healed.

This is the heart of the gospel. Jesus stood in our place. The death we deserved, He died. The judgment we earned, He carried. The separation from God that our sin caused, He endured so that we could be brought near.

The right response to this kind of love is not casual appreciation. It is worship. It is surrender. It is faith.

If Jesus gave Himself fully for us, how can we keep holding parts of ourselves back from Him?

Application

Spend time today thanking Jesus specifically for what He has done for you.

Complete these sentences in prayer or journaling:

Jesus, thank You for dying for my...

Jesus, I surrender my...

Jesus, help me believe that You are better than...

Jesus, I want to follow You in...

End this devotional by choosing one practical act of surrender today.

Prayer

Jesus, thank You for dying in my place. Thank You for taking the punishment I deserved and giving me grace I could never earn. Help me respond with faith, worship, and full surrender. You are worthy of my whole life. Amen.

Weekly Missional Challenge

Who in your life is resisting Jesus, even though they have seen evidence of His goodness or truth?

Pray for that person each day this week. Ask God for an opportunity to show them Jesus through your words, your love, your patience, or your testimony.

Prompt:

This week, I will pray for _____ and look for one opportunity to point them to Jesus.

When Jesus Threatens Our Control

A Sermon Blog on John 11:45–57

After Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, it seemed like the obvious response would be belief.

Lazarus had been dead for four days. His body had been placed in the tomb. The grief was real. The mourning had begun. And then Jesus stood outside the tomb and cried out, “Lazarus, come out.”

And Lazarus came out.

This was not a small sign. This was not a private moment that could easily be dismissed. Jesus displayed power over death itself. Surely everyone would believe now.

But that is not what happened.

John tells us:

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

— John 11:45–46

Some believed. Some reported Him.

The same miracle produced two very different responses. That is where this passage presses deeply into our own hearts.

The Miracle Required a Response

When Jesus reveals who He is, neutrality is not an option.

The raising of Lazarus demanded a response. Either Jesus is who He says He is, or He is not. Either He has power over death, or He does not. Either we bow before Him in faith, or we resist Him in unbelief.

Many who saw the miracle believed. But some went straight to the religious leaders. They did not go to celebrate. They went to report Him.

That is a sobering reminder: unbelief is not always caused by a lack of evidence.

These people had evidence. They had seen Lazarus come out of the grave. They knew he had been dead. They had witnessed the power of Christ. But seeing was not enough, because the issue was not only in their heads. It was in their hearts.

The same is true today.

People often say, "If God would just show me more, then I would believe." But Scripture shows us that the human heart can stand in front of overwhelming evidence and still refuse to surrender.

Creation declares the glory of God. The Word of God reveals the truth of God. The resurrection of Jesus stands at the center of history. Changed lives testify to His grace. Yet many still resist.

Why?

Because true belief is not merely agreeing with facts about Jesus. True belief means surrendering to Jesus.

It means bending the knee.

It means trusting Him.

It means resting the full weight of your life on Him.

And for sinful people, surrender is often the thing we resist most.

The Leaders Rejected Christ's Reign

After hearing what Jesus had done, the chief priests and Pharisees gathered the council. This was the Sanhedrin, the highest governing and judicial body in Israel.

Their question was revealing:

"What are we to do? For this man performs many signs."

— John 11:47

They did not deny the signs. Behind closed doors, they acknowledged that Jesus was performing miracles. They knew something undeniable was happening.

But instead of repenting, they panicked.

They said:

“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.”

— John 11:48

There it is. Their fear was exposed.

They were afraid of losing control.

They were afraid of losing their place, their power, their influence, their comfort, and their way of life. Jesus was not merely challenging their theology. He was threatening their kingdom.

This is where the passage becomes uncomfortably personal.

We may not be members of the Sanhedrin, but we know what it is like to cling to control. We know what it is like to fear what Jesus might change if we fully surrender to Him.

The religious leaders said, “our place and our nation.”

The question for us is: **What is our place and our nation?**

What are we afraid to lose?

Maybe it is comfort.

Maybe it is reputation.

Maybe it is control over our future.

Maybe it is a relationship.

Maybe it is a sin we do not want to let go of.

Maybe it is bitterness we have nursed for years.

Maybe it is the way we think life is supposed to go.

We may say Jesus is Lord, but there are areas where we functionally tell Him, “You can have everything except this.”

That is not faith. That is resistance.

Jesus does not come to be added to our lives as a religious accessory. He comes as King. He comes to rule and reign. And His reign is not a threat to our joy; it is the only path to true life.

Unbelief Gives a False Sense of Control

The leaders said, “If we let him go on like this...”

That phrase is almost shocking. They thought they could manage Jesus. They thought they could stop Him. They thought they were in control.

But they were not.

God was in control the entire time.

That is one of the great ironies of this passage. The Sanhedrin gathered to decide what to do with Jesus, but heaven was not nervous. God was not scrambling. The cross was not an accident. It was not plan B.

Humanly speaking, these leaders were plotting evil. But divinely speaking, God was accomplishing redemption.

Unbelief often convinces us that we are in control. It tells us that if we can manage our circumstances, protect our comforts, preserve our image, and hold tightly to our plans, then we will be safe.

But that is an illusion.

We are not in ultimate control. We are not promised tomorrow. We cannot govern the universe. We cannot even guarantee the next breath in our lungs.

The good news is not that we are in control.

The good news is that God is.

And He is good.

Caiaphas and the Sovereign Plan of God

Then Caiaphas, the high priest, spoke up:

“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.”

— John 11:49–50

Caiaphas was not trying to preach the gospel. He was making a political calculation. In his mind, Jesus needed to die so the nation could be spared trouble with Rome. One man dies, and everyone else keeps their place.

But John tells us something stunning:

“He did not say this of his own accord, but being high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus would die for the nation.”

— John 11:51

Caiaphas meant one thing. God meant another.

Caiaphas spoke out of selfishness and political fear. But God used his words to proclaim the heart of the gospel: one man would die for the people.

Jesus would die as a substitute.

He would not die for His own sins. He had none. He would die for ours.

Isaiah 53 says:

“He was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities... and with his wounds we are healed.”

— Isaiah 53:5

This is the beauty of the gospel. Jesus died in the place of sinners. The judgment we deserved fell on Him. The wrath we earned was absorbed by Him. The death that belonged to us was taken by Him.

Caiaphas thought Jesus' death would preserve their temporary kingdom.

God intended Jesus' death to gather His eternal people.

John continues:

“And not for the nation only, but also to gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad.”

— John 11:52

That includes all who would believe—Jew and Gentile, near and far, then and now. Jesus died to gather the children of God into one family.

God Is Sovereign Even in the Darkest Moments

From that day on, the leaders made plans to put Jesus to death.

That sentence is heavy. The plot is now official. The opposition has moved from hostility to conspiracy. The cross is drawing near.

But again, we must see the passage through the lens of God's sovereignty.

The leaders were responsible for their evil choices. Their motives were sinful. Their plotting was unjust. Yet God was not absent. He was ruling and reigning even through their rebellion.

This is not the only place Scripture teaches this.

In Acts 2, Peter says:

“This Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men.”

— Acts 2:23

Both truths stand together.

Lawless men killed Jesus.

God's definite plan was being accomplished.

The cross was the worst act of human evil in history, and yet it became the greatest display of divine love and redemption.

That means we can trust God even when life feels dark. We can trust Him when circumstances seem confusing. We can trust Him when people act sinfully. We can trust Him when we do not understand what He is doing.

God does not wring His hands in heaven. He does not need a backup plan. He is sovereign over all things, and He is able to bring redemption from what looks hopeless.

The Question for Us

This passage leaves us with several heart-searching questions.

Will we believe, or will we resist?

Will we surrender to Jesus, or will we try to preserve our own little kingdom?

Will we trust God's sovereign plan, even when circumstances feel out of control?

Will we hold tightly to “our place and our nation,” or will we lay everything at the feet of Christ?

The miracle of Lazarus demanded a response. The death and resurrection of Jesus demand one too.

Jesus is not merely asking for admiration. He is calling for faith. He is calling for surrender. He is calling us to trust Him as Lord.

If you are not yet a believer, the invitation is clear: come to Christ. There is enough evidence. There is enough grace. There is enough mercy. Jesus died so sinners could live. Do not reject Him.

If you are a believer, the invitation is also clear: surrender again. Bring Him the places you have been trying to control. Bring Him the fears you have been protecting. Bring Him the circumstances you do not understand.

He is King.

And His reign is good.

A Prayer of Response

Lord, I believe, but help my unbelief. Show me the places where I am resisting Your reign. Forgive me for trying to stay in control. Teach me to trust Your goodness, Your power, and Your plan. Thank You that Jesus died in my place so that I could have life. I surrender my place, my nation, my plans, and my heart to You. Amen.