

An Exposition of the
GOSPEL OF JOHN



“The Passover Celebration”

John 11:54-57

Theme: The One sinners reject is the very Savior whose sacrifice alone can make them clean.

Introduction: Imagine a family preparing an elaborate celebration for their father's seventieth birthday. For weeks, they work on every detail. The invitations are beautiful. The room is perfectly decorated. Pictures from seventy years of life are enlarged and displayed. His favorite food is prepared. A video celebrating his life has been produced. Family members travel from across the country. Everyone dresses for the occasion.

The evening arrives, and the room is full. But there is one problem. No one invited Dad. In fact, imagine something even worse. Dad arrives at the door, but because of longstanding family resentment, they refuse to let him in.

Think about the absurdity of that scene. His pictures are everywhere—but they don't want him. They tell stories about him—but they don't want him. They celebrate what he has done—but they don't want him. They enjoy everything associated with him while rejecting him.

You would say, **“What kind of celebration is this? The entire event is meaningless without the person it was intended to honor.”**

That is something of the tragedy we encounter at the end of John 11. Jerusalem is preparing for Passover. The people are coming. The purification is underway. The sacrifices are being prepared. The religious leaders are in place. Everything appears ready for a great celebration of God's redemption. **Except they don't want the Redeemer.** The Lamb to whom every Passover had pointed for nearly fifteen hundred years was finally among them—and rather than receive Him, they were preparing to kill Him.

They wanted the feast without its fulfillment. They wanted purification without the One who could truly cleanse them. They wanted the sacrifice while rejecting the Lamb. Before we condemn them too quickly, there is a searching question for us:

Is it possible for us to love the things associated with Christ while our hearts grow cold toward Christ Himself?

We can love the church. Love theology. Love Christian music. Love ministry. Love our traditions. Love being with God's people. We can even love studying the Bible. But none of those things is the ultimate object of our faith. They are meant to bring us to **Christ**.

And that is the tragic irony John places before us as Jerusalem prepares for Passover. [Read the Text]. In these verses, we see three emphases:

- i. **The Sign of Suppression – 11:54**
- ii. **The Seeking of Sanctification – 11:55**
- iii. **The Selection of a Sacrifice – 11:56-57**

The main idea throughout these verses is that ***“the One sinners reject is the very Savior whose sacrifice alone can make them clean.”***

I. The Sign of Suppression – 11:54

A. The Scheme against Christ

1. As we saw last time, the Jewish leaders and their followers were completely committed to killing the Lord Jesus – cp. [v. 53](#).
2. The sinful hearts of men had completely rejected Christ and had become possessed of an intention that now drove them as a master would his slave.
3. Because they had willingly yielded to the wicked hearts and impulses within them, they were every bit as enslaved to their reprobate plans as Israel ever was to any physical oppressor – [John 8:34](#).
4. Their pitiful state was more tragic because it wore the disguise of religious or spiritual fervor, when all it really was was a dramatic suppression of truth.
5. They are **religious men preparing to celebrate Passover while conspiring to kill the One to whom Passover pointed.**
6. Throughout the ages, some of the most wicked pursuits and atrocities have been committed in the name of religion – for example, the English Crusades or the Spanish Inquisition.
7. The resurrection power exhibited by Christ had so infuriated those in darkness that the long prophesied enmity of the Serpent working against the woman's Seed came to a clear plan – he must die! – cp. [Genesis 3:15](#).
8. The **religious establishment deliberately rejected Christ**, while the broader population exhibits varying degrees of curiosity, misunderstanding, superficiality, and unbelief. But collectively, the scene powerfully exposes the bankruptcy of external religion apart from faith in Christ.
9. So Christ withdrew to avoid any prematurity in the unfolding of the events of this Passover celebration.

B. The Seclusion of Christ

1. In response to this prevailing intention of those in league with Satan, ***“Jesus 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.”***
2. Jesus's withdrawal is an indication of how totally independent the Jews were of God – that they were under the dominion of something totally hostile to God.
3. Jesus didn't withdraw in fear of death – when the time was right, he would

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face death down as fearlessly as the joy that was set before Him could produce – cp. [Hebrews 12:2](#).

4. It was a matter of timing – that Jesus had to die at the right time – something that had not yet come – cp. [John 7:8](#) (a reference to the Feast of Booths six months previous).
5. Faithfulness does not require unnecessarily exposing ourselves to danger; it requires being where God wants us, doing what God wants us to do, when God wants us to do it.
6. The Sanhedrin had determined that it was time to kill Jesus, but God the Father would determine when the Lamb would be slain; they could formulate their scheme, but they couldn't control the schedule – [Acts 2:23](#).
7. John specifically states that Jesus *“went away from there to the country near the wilderness ...”* – a possible positioning of the Lamb of God in a context reminiscent of the Passover lambs sacrificed during Israel's wilderness wanderings.
8. He goes to *“a city called Ephraim; and there He stayed with the disciples.”*
 - a) *It is interesting that the name Ephraim means “fruitfulness” – a tremendous contrast to the condition of the people.*
 - b) *Perhaps Jesus goes here for the weeks immediately prior to the week of Passion to prepare – a place far away from the hostility of the Jews where He can ponder the “joy set before Him” or the “fruitfulness” of what He was about to do.*



II. The Seeking of Sanctification – **11:55**

A. The Esteem for the Holiday

1. We are told that *“the Passover of the Jews was near.”*
2. Passover is an event that provided redemption for the people of God – cp. [Exodus 12:21-23](#).
3. The essence of the Passover celebration was the principle of substitution or a vicarious sacrifice; the death deserved by a sinner was paid by a lamb who died in their place.
4. The sinner's hope has never been that God will overlook his guilt, but that God will provide a sufficient sacrifice to satisfy God's wrath against his

guilt.

5. Not only was Israel delivered from the bondage of Egypt, but the event also brought them a national spiritual redemption.
6. It began the seasonal festivals that became perpetual feasts before the Lord, celebrating deliverance from bondage in Egypt.
7. *“... and many went up to Jerusalem out of the country ...”* - it was one of the 3 times each year that God required all the men of Israel (12 years old and up) to come to Jerusalem and bring a sacrifice.
8. Essentially, every Passover since the original one in Egypt was preaching Christ before Christ's arrival!

B. The Engrossment with “Holiness”

1. Here we are informed that people were concerned about defilement (a condition that disqualified a person from participating in Passover – cp. *Numbers 9:10-11*) and that they would arrive early to allow time for cleansing.
2. We are told that *“many went up to Jerusalem ... before the Passover to purify themselves.”*
3. This was essentially the same crowd that participated in what is commonly called the Triumphal Entry only days later.
4. The irony here is that these people are pursuing the shadow while rejecting the substance of the Passover focus – cp. *Colossians 2:16-17*.
5. Their religious zeal had become completely detached from the spiritual reality it pointed to.
6. They were interested in only one thing, and it was not the glory of God through spiritual renewal; it was political liberation from Rome.
7. Far too often, fallen man wants God to change his circumstances more than he wants God to change his heart.
8. Hence, their concern for purity somehow excluded their need for spiritual cleansing – and applied only to the ceremonial.
9. One may be scrupulous about outward behavior while harboring pride, bitterness, jealousy, lust, greed, unforgiveness, self-righteousness, or hatred.
10. This is the tragedy of the Jewish religious system – they had become so engrossed in the forms and features of their religion that the function of their faith had been lost – to bring them to God's Savior of men.
11. It was about finding the purity available in the Passover sacrifice – Jesus

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Christ Himself.

12. These people traveled to Jerusalem seeking purification, while what they truly needed was Christ. They prepared themselves for a sacrifice, never realizing that God's final Sacrifice was preparing Himself for them.

III. **The Selection of a Sacrifice – 11:56-57**

A. **The Search for the Lamb – vv. 56**

1. The lamb offered in commemoration of the great redemption provided in Egypt was the Lord Jesus – the One who would die to redeem the people
2. We are now at the point in time when Jesus is preparing to offer Himself as the sacrifice – the Lamb of God – cp. [John 1:29](#).
3. Here we are oriented to the people's interest in whether Christ will "show up" for Passover – ***"So 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?'"***
4. Without considering the relevance of Caiaphas' prophecy, their responsibility to partake by faith of what is offered through the genuine Passover Lamb of God, or their curiosity about how much fortitude Jesus actually had – they were eager to find out whether he would come.
5. This recalls that people can be fascinated by Jesus for a variety of reasons – historically, intellectually, culturally, politically, and even religiously – while still refusing to bow before Him in a saving way.
6. While they wondered whether Jesus was "risk" coming to the Feast, they had no idea of the absolute commitment Jesus had to serve as the "Lamb of God."
7. Jesus would not be coming to the Feast to attend the Passover, but to fulfill it!
8. Interestingly, searching for a special "unblemished" lamb was one of the responsibilities leading up to the Passover – cp. [Exodus 12:3-6](#)!
9. As God's Passover, Jesus would be repeatedly examined and found faultless:
 - a) *The chief priest questioned Him*
 - b) *The Pharisees questioned Him*
 - c) *The Sadducees questioned Him.*
 - d) *Pilate questioned Him – and brought the examination to a close – [John 18:38](#).*

B. The Selection of the Lamb – vv. 57

1. However, we are told that *“the chief priests and the Pharisees had given orders that if anyone knew where He was, he was to report it, so that they might seize Him.”*
2. The spiritual leadership (the Sanhedrin) had already decided that Jesus would die.
3. Israel outwardly prepared to celebrate the Passover while inwardly rejecting—and ultimately sacrificing—the true Passover Lamb, who alone could provide the righteousness and cleansing they desperately needed.
4. It is interesting that the Passover observance – the event that involved the shedding of blood and brought deliverance from death – all pointed to the event underway on this final feast of Jesus’ life.
5. Despite all the treachery and animosity toward the Lord Jesus at this feast, He is clearly identified as the Passover Lamb – cf. [1 Corinthians 5:7](#).
6. Hence, as we will see in chapter 12, Jesus declared that He came to this hour for this purpose – [John 12:27](#).
 - a) *The religious leadership of Israel killed Jesus because they hated God.*
 - b) *God gave His Son to die because He loved sinners.*
7. Every enemy of Christ was moving toward the cross for his own sinful reasons, while God was moving history toward that same cross for His holy purpose.
8. **At this Passover, Israel would select thousands of lambs—but God had chosen one.**

So What?

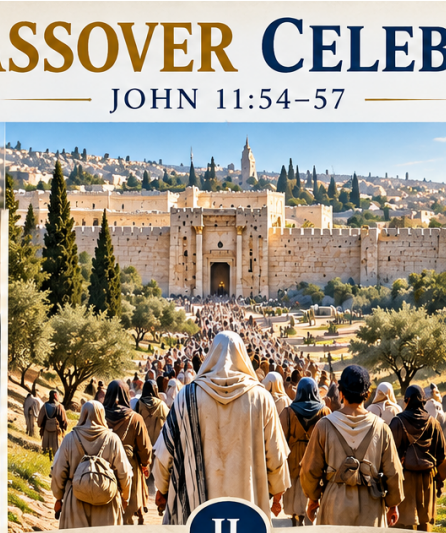
1. In what ways might my outward religious activity be masking an inward resistance to Christ?
2. What does my pursuit of Christ reveal about whether I want Him—or merely what I hope He will provide?
3. What sins am I attempting to manage outwardly rather than bringing them to Christ for genuine cleansing?
4. How can I truly honor Christ as MY Passover Lamb?

Theme: The One sinners reject is the very Savior whose sacrifice alone can make them clean.

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THE PASSOVER CELEBRATION

JOHN 11:54–57

		
I.	II.	III.
THE SIGN OF SUPPRESSION	THE SEEKING OF SANCTIFICATION	THE SELECTION OF A SACRIFICE
JOHN 11:54	JOHN 11:55	JOHN 11:56–57
Religious leaders reject the truth and scheme against Christ. Jesus withdraws until the Father's appointed hour.	People travel to Jerusalem to purify themselves ceremonially, while desperately needing the cleansing only Christ can provide.	The people search for Jesus, and the leaders prepare to seize Him, while God's sovereign purpose moves His Lamb toward the altar.