

An Exposition of the
GOSPEL OF JOHN



“One for All”

John 11:45-53

Theme: God sovereignly uses even human opposition to accomplish His redemptive purpose.

Introduction: As we return to our study of the Gospel of John, it is helpful to remember where we have been. John has been building a case. From the opening words of his Gospel, he wants us to understand **who Jesus Christ is**, why He came, and why we must believe in Him.

John begins not in Bethlehem but in eternity: *“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God”* (John 1:1). Jesus Christ is the eternal Son of God. He is the Creator through whom all things came into being. He is **life**, and that life is the **Light of men**. Then John announces the wonder of the incarnation: *“the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us”* (1:14).

From there, John begins presenting the evidence.

In **chapter 1**, John the Baptist identifies Jesus as *“the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!”* (1:29). The first disciples begin following Him, and Nathanael confesses, *“Rabbi, You are the Son of God; You are the King of Israel”* (1:49).

In **chapter 2**, Jesus performs His first sign at Cana, turning water into wine. John tells us that through this sign Jesus *“manifested His glory, and His disciples believed in Him”* (2:11). Then Jesus cleanses the temple and identifies Himself as the true Temple—the One who will die and rise again.

In **chapter 3**, Jesus meets Nicodemus and tells this respected religious leader that morality, religion, and heritage are not enough: *“You must be born again”* (3:7). Eternal life comes only through faith in the Son of God: *“whoever believes will in Him have eternal life”* (3:15).

In **chapter 4**, Jesus travels through Samaria and deliberately engages an immoral Samaritan woman. The Savior of the world offers her “living water.” By the end of the chapter, Samaritans are confessing that Jesus *“is indeed the Savior of the world”* (4:42).

Then the opposition begins to intensify.

In **chapter 5**, Jesus heals a man who had been disabled for thirty-eight years. But because He does it on the Sabbath and calls God His Father, the Jewish leaders begin seeking to kill Him. Jesus responds with an extraordinary claim: He has the same authority, performs the same works, deserves the same honor, and has the same power to give life as the Father. *“For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son also gives life to whom He wishes”* (5:21).

That statement becomes increasingly important as the Gospel unfolds.

In **chapter 6**, Jesus feeds five thousand men with five barley loaves and two fish. He walks on the water. But then He explains that the greatest need of mankind is not physical bread. **Jesus Himself is the Bread of Life.** *“He who comes to Me will not hunger, and he who believes in Me will never thirst”* (6:35). Many who appeared to be disciples abandon Him, but Peter says, *“Lord, to whom shall we go? You have words of eternal life”* (6:68).

In **chapters 7 and 8**, the conflict escalates. Jesus goes to Jerusalem for the Feast of Booths and declares, *“If anyone is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink”* (7:37). Then He announces, *“I am the Light of the world”* (8:12). And the confrontation reaches its climax when Jesus declares, *“Before Abraham was born, I am”* (8:58). He is the One who frees the sinner from sin. They understand exactly what He is claiming, and they pick up stones to kill Him.

In **chapter 9**, Jesus gives sight to a man blind from birth. But John uses the miracle to expose an even greater problem: **spiritual blindness**. The man who had been blind increasingly sees who Jesus is, while the religious leaders who claim to see become increasingly blind.

That prepares us for **chapter 10**, where Jesus declares, *“I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep”* (10:11). His sheep hear His voice; He knows them; they follow Him; and He gives them eternal life. No one can snatch them out of His hand. Then Jesus makes the unmistakable declaration: *“I and the Father are one”* (10:30).

Again, they pick up stones.

And then we arrive at **chapter 11**.

Lazarus becomes sick. Mary and Martha send word to Jesus: *“Lord, behold, he whom You love is sick”* (11:3). But Jesus deliberately waits. Lazarus dies. Four days pass. And Jesus explains that this tragedy has a divine purpose: *“This sickness is not to end in death, but for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified by it”* (11:4).

Jesus finally arrives in Bethany, and Martha meets Him with grief. Jesus tells her, *“Your brother will rise again”* (11:23). Martha knows the theology of resurrection. She believes Lazarus will rise on the last day.

But Jesus does not merely promise resurrection. **He claims to be resurrection.** *“I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me will live even if he dies”* (11:25).

Then Jesus goes to the tomb.

He sees Mary weeping. He sees the mourners grieving. He confronts the terrible reality of death—the enemy that entered God's creation through sin. And **Jesus weeps**. But He has not come merely to weep at the tomb. He has come to conquer it. The stone is removed. Jesus lifts His eyes to His Father. And then, standing before the grave of a man who has been dead for four days, Jesus cries out with a loud voice: *“Lazarus, come forth.”*

And John records the staggering result in verse 44: *“The man who had died came forth.”* That is where John has brought us. The One who turned water into wine, healed the sick, fed the multitude, walked upon the sea, gave sight to the blind, and claimed equality with the Father now stands before a tomb and **commands the dead to live**.

John has been asking us one question from the beginning:

Who is Jesus? John's entire purpose is to write these things *“so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name.”* – John 20:31.

He is the Word made flesh.

He is the Lamb of God.

He is the Son of God.

He is the Savior of the world.

He is the Bread of Life.

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He is the Light of the world.

He is the Good Shepherd.

And now we discover that **He is the Resurrection and the Life.**

But the raising of Lazarus forces everyone who witnesses it—and everyone who reads about it—to make a decision. **What will you do with Jesus Christ?** Because after Lazarus walks out of that tomb, no one can remain neutral. In these first 11 chapters of John, he has revealed Jesus as the Son of God who gives life to all who believe in Him.

And that is precisely what we see next. **[READ TEXT]** - The powerful grace of God displayed in the resurrection of Lazarus impacts everyone. We see three clear emphases in these verses:

1. **The Impact of Grace – vv. 45-46**
2. **The “Intrusion” of Grace – vv. 47-48**
3. **The Initiative of Grace – vv. 49-53**

The main idea is that God’s grace is something that cannot be thwarted – even by death. **God sovereignly uses even human opposition to accomplish His redemptive purpose.**

I. The Impact of Grace – 11:45-46

A. It Initiates Faith – v. 45

1. As we saw earlier in this account, God had sovereignly brought many Jews from the regions of Jerusalem together to comfort Mary and Martha – to serve as unbiased and credible witnesses to the miracle of Lazarus’ resurrection.
2. The impact of this miracle was powerful – in two very different ways.
3. **First**, we are told that *“many of the Jews who came to Mary, and saw what He had done, believed in Him.”* – cp. **v. 4.**
4. It is not to be understood that this “belief” was a final saving faith – something that does not result merely from seeing miracles.
5. “Saving faith” is something that results from hearing the message about Christ –cp. ***Romans 10:17.***
6. The miracle of resurrection served to call attention to the fact that Jesus was of God and that the people ought to listen to the truth He proclaimed – about their condition and about His own identity and purpose.
7. Most who *“believed”* likely came to an initial faith by seeing His glory, but needed to actualize it by considering His message about their sin and the emptiness of their souls – ***John 8:24.***
8. Sometimes God's quickening work is immediate upon hearing the Word; other times, it is a process of being drawn out of unbelief, skepticism, and

cynicism toward further consideration and a growing awareness of both who Jesus is and who we are before Him – ***John 6:44***.

9. It is the grace of God that works in our hearts to bring us all to a point of faith in Him.

B. It Infuriates Scoffers – v. 46

1. The **second** impact of this miracle is that, in contrast to those who respond positively to Christ's miraculous power, there are those who scoff at what Christ has to offer – ***“But some of them went to the Pharisees and told them the things which Jesus had done.”***
2. These are those who are under the firm delusion that the legalistic religious formalism of Judaism was true as perpetrated by the religious leadership in Israel.
3. ***“some of them ...”*** likely refers to those who had come from Jerusalem to observe that everything was “kosher” in the mourning process for Lazarus.
4. Jesus was viewed by them as an enemy of truth – believing the false narrative of religion that:
 - a) *Jesus was anti-Sabbath – John 5 / 7 / 9*
 - b) *He blasphemed by claiming to be God – John 5 / 10*
 - c) *He deceived people – John 7*
 - d) *He was demon-possessed – John 7 / 8 / 10*
 - e) *He was self-promoting and arrogant – John 8*
 - f) *He was a Samaritan or possibly illegitimate – John 8*
 - g) *He was not from God but Satan – John 9*
 - h) *He was a sinner because He showed attention and compassion to the worst – John 9*
 - i) *He was insane – John 10*
5. The term ***“went to the Pharisees”*** [ἀπέρχομαι] can mean to abandon an association or **to leave a place to become an adherent of someone**¹ - thus, to intentionally identify with the position of the Pharisees in opposition to Jesus.
6. In essence, these people complained that drastic action had to be taken against the “miracle-worker.”
7. What an incredible demonstration of the hardness of the human heart – that this most spectacular miracle yet could only further antagonize and infuriate those whose souls were closed and hardened.

¹ William Arndt et al., [*A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*](#) (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 102.

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8. How foolish to think that all we have to do is demonstrate to a sinner's intellect the truth of Christ's miracles and works, and that he will then be converted!
9. Often, people do not react when they are told they are sinners, because it is an innate awareness. However, if you tell them that their supposed righteousness is sinful and inadequate, they will react vehemently.
10. Nothing but omnipotent and sovereign grace is of any avail to those who are lost – and the only thing God uses to quicken the dead is His Word.

II. The “Intrusion” of Grace – **11:47-48**

A. The Containment of the Savior's Influence – **vv. 47-48a**

1. When the religious “establishment” heard what had happened a few miles away in Bethany, *“the chief priests and the Pharisees convened a council and said, ‘What are we doing? For this man is performing many signs?’”*
2. They are aware of what Christ has done – demonstrating their unbelief is not an intellectual deficiency (they had all the facts); it is rather a moral rebellion – they did not want to believe it – cp. **Luke 16:31**.
3. *“What are we doing?”* – demonstrates that Jesus had become a problem for them to manage – they cannot continue to allow him to display the glory of God.
4. These two rival sects hated each other as bitter enemies, but in this evil work of persecuting the Lord Jesus, they set aside their differences and eagerly joined in the common crime.
 - a) The *“chief priests”* [ἀρχιερεῖς] – generally refers to the high priestly aristocracy, closely associated with the Sadducean establishment and in firm control of the “mafia-like” businesses on the Temple mount, friendly to the Roman political authorities who propped them up.
 - b) The *“Pharisees”* [Φαρισαῖος] – generally religious conservatives who were experts in the Law and its applications, which often superseded Scripture.
5. The same is true ultimately of Pontius Pilate (the Roman procurator of Judea) and Herod, the Roman-approved King of the Jews – cp. **Luke 23:11-12; Psalm 2:2**.
6. They fear that if no action is taken, Jesus' influence will spread and affect the way people believe – *“If we let Him go on like this, all men will believe in Him.”*
7. No matter how clearly Jesus was shown to be the Son of God, they would

refuse to believe in Him and would seek, in every possible way, to suppress the truth – in their own hearts as well as in the hearts of others – cp. *Romans 1:18-19*.

8. The raising of Lazarus should have produced faith, but instead, the undeniable evidence of Christ's power prompted competing factions to cooperate in eliminating Him.

B. The Continuation of the Status Quo – vv. 48b

1. Now we see their great foundational motive: *“... and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation.”*
2. They feared that, with Passover approaching and hundreds of thousands of pilgrims in Jerusalem, a disturbance sparked by the crowd's embrace of Jesus as their king would bring Rome's heavy hand down on them and cost them what little national autonomy remained.
3. Reasoning entirely with human wisdom, they concluded that to save their religious system (*“our place”* – most likely referring to the Temple), they had to act.
4. Thus, they imagined that if they shortened the “career” of Jesus, they could protect themselves from the Romans – just as people think they can reject the Lord today to enjoy a truly fulfilling life.
5. However, even as the Jews faced the wrath of Rome only a few years later, when Titus destroyed Jerusalem in 70 AD, those who believe they can find happiness outside the Lord will know destruction and death.

III. The Initiative of Grace – 11:49-53

A. It Accommodates Man's Antagonism– vv. 49-50

1. In keeping with this perspective, seeking a political solution to their dilemma, Caiaphas steps forward: *“But one of them, Caiaphas, who was the high priest that year, said to them, ‘You know nothing at all, nor do you take into account that it is expedient for you that one man die for the people, and that the whole nation not perish.’”*
2. Under the guise of “noble patriotism,” this corrupt man sought to eliminate a hindrance to his popularity, profitability, and preeminence.
3. He summed it up as follows: “Follow Jesus, the nation perishes --- put Jesus to death, the nation is saved.”
4. Caiaphas's reference to *“it is expedient”* [συμφέρει] carries the idea of what is advantageous or beneficial, but he does not ask: “What is true?”
5. He essentially asks: “What course of action best protects our interests?”

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6. His reasoning is that by killing Jesus, they can prove to Rome that they are not interested in seeing a “deliverer” come and lead them to freedom in an independent Kingdom – they would thereby prove their loyalty to Caesar – as verified in the confession before Pilate during Jesus’s “trial” – cp. *John 19:15*.
7. Here’s a principle for us all – spiritual position does not guarantee spiritual perception; a man in a high position who dismisses everyone else as *“knowing nothing at all”* understands least of all what his own words mean!

B. It Accomplishes God’s Agenda – vv. 51-53

1. However, Caiaphas's words have a deeper meaning than he realized: *“Now he did not say this on his own initiative, but being high priest that year, he prophesied that Jesus was going to die for the nation.”*
2. It had been decreed in the eternal counsels of the Godhead that Christ should die for the people – and when Caiaphas advanced his proposal, he demonstrated that even the fury of men is subject to the sovereign power of Almighty God – cp. *Genesis 50:20*.
3. Caiaphas said what his wicked heart conjured, but ...
“God’s will, without becoming even in the least degree defiled, so directed the choice of phraseology that the words which issue from the lips of this cold-blooded murderer were exactly the ones that were needed to give expression to the most sublime and glorious truth regarding God’s redemptive love. Without becoming aware of it, the villain had become the prophet!”²
 - a) Caiaphas said: “This man must die because His life threatens us.”
 - b) God’s Word: “This man must die because His death will save us.”
4. John elaborates, indicating that Jesus’s death was *“not for that nation only, but in order that He might also gather together into one the children of God who are scattered abroad.”*
5. This clearly indicates that the Gentiles are to be included in the work of Christ’s atonement.
6. He died not only for the Jewish people but also for the sins of the whole world – cp. *1 John 2:2*.
7. Thus, we see that God’s elect are not limited to one race or people but include men from all nations – cp. *John 10:16*.
8. The official decision had been made – *“So from that day on they planned together to kill Him.”*

² Hendriksen, p. 164.

9. The same event that sparked faith in some, melting hard hearts into belief, also sparked hostility in others, hardening those hearts into murderous opposition.

So What?

1. Am I submitting to the truth, or merely accumulating more biblical knowledge without genuine faith and obedience?
2. When God's Word exposes my sin, challenges my assumptions, or threatens what I value, do I bow before Him—or grow more resistant?
3. Are there areas of my life where I am trying to contain Christ's influence rather than fully surrender to His lordship?
4. What am I afraid I might lose if I fully surrendered to Christ?
5. When Jesus Christ threatens what I value, will I surrender what I value to Christ—or reject Christ in order to keep what I value?

Theme: God sovereignly uses even human opposition to accomplish His redemptive purpose.

THE IMPACT OF GRACE

JOHN 11:45-48

God's sovereign purpose advances even in the midst of human opposition.

1 THE IMPACT OF GRACE JOHN 11:45-46  <i>Grace produces a response.</i> • It initiates faith in many (v. 45). • It infuriates scoffers in others (v. 46). • Both responses demonstrate the power and controversy of Christ's work.	2 THE "INTRUSION" OF GRACE JOHN 11:47-48  <i>Grace cannot be contained.</i> • The leaders convene to stop Jesus' influence (v. 47). • They set aside their differences to oppose Him (v. 48). • Their response reveals moral rebellion, not lack of evidence.	3 THE INITIATIVE OF GRACE JOHN 11:49-53  <i>Grace turns opposition into purpose.</i> • God uses even their hostility to accomplish His redemptive plan (v. 49-50). • Caiaphas unknowingly prophesies that one man will die for the people (v. 51). • The crucifixion fulfills God's sovereign purpose (v. 52-53).
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GOD'S SOVEREIGN GRACE ACCOMPLISHES HIS PURPOSE. | JOHN 11:45-53