

John 11:45-57

June 28, 2026

Jesus Prepares to Devour Death

Communion Sunday (K early) (Me, late)

Main Point: v. 51-52 are John's main point (and 1 John 2:2)

We sometimes see evil at work in the world and wonder where God is. This passage shows us, through paradox, double meanings, contrast, and irony that God uses evil for His own purposes – to bring life, even through death.

SI: A major transition point in John's account. The raising of Lazarus is the last sign Jesus performs to show who He is. He turned water into wine at the wedding in Cana to show that He is the source of all joy. He feeds over 5000 people from 5 loaves of bread and 2 fish to show that He satisfies all hunger.

From here on in John's Gospel, Jesus is headed to the cross as the fulfillment of the Jewish Passover lamb – the Lamb who takes away the sin of the world for all who will trust in Him, in His perfect life that earned God's favor towards us, and His atoning death that earned our forgiveness.

READ

Intro:

The Death Eaters in Harry Potter are the servants of Voldemort, The Evil Wizard. They are soul-takers, feasting on the lives of their prey. They take life away by feasting on the souls of their victims. They are terrifying.

Jesus is a different type of Death Eater and here begins His final journey to the cross where He will devour death forever. John records the background decisions made by the religious authorities. The word in v. 53 means determined, resolute, no turning back.

John is again, as he does throughout, inviting us into the story so that we ask ourselves - What do you really believe about Jesus? Not just who He is, but what He is and what it means... some believed, some rejected, and some weren't sure yet.

*The contrast John is showing us.

Something will die. Either human power & prestige / or a scapegoat, a substitute.

Something will be exalted. Either human power & kingdom building, or God's power & kingdom.

The tension building between Jesus the Authority and The Religious Authorities.

Jesus is going to subject Himself and be subjected to evil. He is going to become the scapegoat. We turn our face away. But let's look at what God wants us to see in His Word.

Let's look at this under 3 headings as we see Jesus confront evil.

1 – Jesus Gives Life to the Dead (v. 45)

For some, this is an undeniable sign of the Messiah – Jesus has raised a man who had been dead four days.

Jesus is confronting the last enemy – death. And John sets this up to help us enter into the account. He's asking all who hear and read this – Do you believe this? What do you believe about Jesus? How will you respond to Him?

Jesus had a private conversation with Lazarus' sister, Martha, just before this where He said, "I am the Resurrection and the Life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?"

Martha said – "Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Christ, the Messiah, the Son of God, who is coming into the world." (v. 27)

And so we start out here in v. 45 – many were there with Martha and Mary, saw what Jesus did, and they believed in Him as Martha said – believed that He is the Messiah as prophesied in the Hebrew Scriptures, our OT.

This is the last sign – Resurrection of Lazarus. It's Jesus confronting death, evil, pain, sorrow, the consequences of our own sin and rebellion and turning it inside out. This is what Jesus does! Yes, it's a foreshadowing of His own resurrection, and for us, in the here and now – Jesus gives life to the dead! Do you believe this? John is saying, Look at the evidence! Jesus gives life to the dead.

If this is true, then Prov 15:15 is true: All the days of the afflicted are evil, but the cheerful of heart has a continual feast.

In the presence of evil, because Jesus gives life to the dead, because He is the Resurrection and the Life, we can have a cheerful heart no matter our circumstances.

We could easily have a whole sermon on v. 45...

v. 45 – Many of the Jews believed in Him... b/c Jesus Gives Life to the Dead

2 – Jesus Threatens Power (46-54)

As Jesus confronts evil, He threatens human power.

v. 46 – but some of them went to the Pharisees...

What's going on here?

v. 48 – We are the rulers of religious and community life for our people. We live in an occupied land. The Romans have the military power and control, the empire. They allow us to have our own religious and community life and both of these are at risk. We could lose our power as rulers of the people, and we could lose the nation to the Romans – they could destroy Judaism. Much is at risk.

v. 48 – what was the threat if everyone believed in Him? If everyone believed in Jesus and started following Him? They wouldn't be following the Sanhedrin, the Temple life, the Jewish ceremonial laws, the sacrificial system. It's much to lose.

v. 49 – Caiaphas – actually was high priest for 18 years – an accomplished political player even though this comment shows he's not the most diplomatic in his language – rude, stark, blunt here.

But it's double meaning for John, for us. As John explains, it's Caiaphas, and the religious leaders who knew nothing at all.

God is using evil for His own greater, much higher purposes.

v. 51-52 - Jesus is a threat to the political authorities, but He turns the tables on evil – they are out to destroy Him, and He is out to destroy evil and the human rebellion that has earned punishment and condemnation. Yes, Jesus would die, but He would die so that death could die. Jesus is preparing to devour death itself.

These verses are John explaining for us substitutionary atonement and what he wrote in John 1:12 – “to all who did receive Him, who believed in His Name, He gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.”

How does anyone become right with God? By receiving the bad news and the good news. The bad news – you're dead, so you can't save yourself. The good news – there is One Savior.

What does God do when evil rises up? Psalm 2:1-4.

See Caiaphas, and Sanhedrin? The more you try to control, the more you lose. The more you try to keep, the more you lose. The more you double down on your own plans and ways, the more frustrated you will get b/c this is God's world. He is king and authority.

None of us get this all the way right, but how do you know if you are being threatened by Jesus? Will He take you down?

Ask: In my position of power, who am I serving? This is why this matters, and it is stark and blunt. Christianity at its core says it is evil to serve yourself, your power, your prestige. This is a great test to see where you are in relation to your own surrendered trust in God. Do I use where God has placed me to serve others or to serve myself? To serve God's purposes, or to serve my own? And when you are threatened with losing power, or place or position, how do you respond?

ILLUS It's about to be the 250th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence which would lead to a war for freedom from the English.

Scene in Braveheart where William Wallace who is leading an effort to free Scotland from oppressive rule of the English gives a speech to the Scottish nobility. Robert the Bruce, who is in line to be the next king of Scotland says to William Wallace – "I respect what you said, but remember that these men have lands and castles. It's much to risk." William Wallace says back to him, "And the common man that bleeds on the battlefield, does he risk less?"

Ah, clarifying what is at stake...

This is always a good question – what is at stake if I do this or don't do this?

What was at stake? Their place, their status, power, position. Did Jesus come to kill that? Yes and No. Yes – to kill human pride. No – to fulfill all the ceremonial, sacrificial, priestly roles – to give access to the throne of grace through His blood.

They knew nothing at all...

1 John 2:2 "He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world."

What about for us? Isn't much at risk? Much to lose? We are getting again to the core of why John wrote this, why we get to read it and hear it. John is inviting us to consider what it means to trust in Jesus instead of ourselves. What it means to allow Him to take on Himself your sin, your punishment, your punishment. To allow Jesus to devour your death that you have earned for yourself. V.26 "everyone who lives and believes in Me shall never die." Otherwise you will demonstrate that no matter what you say you believe, your core operating system is that you are still controlled by trying to perform your way out or hide your way out...

We all have this temptation towards moralism. Towards preserving our own human goodness at nearly all costs. This is why Christianity is not moral behavior modification. It is a new birth, a completely different person. This is Gospel Transformation not by who your parents are, not by how you were raised, not by trying harder, not by figuring it out, but only by what God alone can do.

This is why we need purification...

Trans to 3 – Many believed in Him as the Life Giver to the Dead

Some believed in Him as a Threat to their own power and place

None could yet believe that He was the Purifier

3 – Jesus Purifies All Who Hunger for the Feast (vs. 55-57)

v. 55 very strange to us... to go up to Jerusalem to purify themselves in preparation for the Passover. Uber important to Jews – the whole foundation of their history of a people, a nation was the Passover when the Lord passed over them and killed all the firstborn of the nation of Egypt as the 10th and final and most horrible plague. Without the Passover, they would not be a nation.

(Kids – ask your parents to watch *The Prince of Egypt* with you over the July 4th and to connect American history with the story of freedom told throughout the Bible)

Jesus, a Jewish man, came to be the Passover Lamb. Remember? Exodus 11 & 12. A lamb was slain, and the blood was painted on the doorposts of their houses. So that they were covered, protected from the wrath of God.

In the background are the laws of purification, the laws of clean and unclean. These were meant to lead us to see God's holiness and our need for cleansing.

Jesus' mission is to fulfill all of these laws, be the end of them, and unite all the children of God by faith in His work. Remember, "the work of God is this, that you believe in Him whom God has sent" (John 6:29).

The great contrast of v. 55 – many went up to purify THEMSELVES. John is again emphasizing what Jesus is about to do – Become the Purifier Himself.

Don't we often want it to be more complex? Don't we often want to earn our own standing before God and others? Humanity is driven towards earning, purifying OURSELVES instead of being purified by the blood of Christ for us! This is why the gospel is such stupendous good news, but oh, so hard to believe! And why we must fight to continue to believe it and feast on the right things – feasting on Christ and what He has done, and dying to feasting on ourselves and what we have done! Because the hunger always returns. This is how we are made. Our hunger is insatiable for affirmation, validation, worth and value. And only Christ, the work of Christ Jesus satisfies.

Purification is from the inside out, not the outside in. Outside in is easy for us. Inside out only God can do. This is what it means to be born anew, re-born, remade, this is

what we stake our lives on and why we glory in the cross, in faith, in desperation, in coming to the end of ourselves (like the younger prodigal son).

I was talking this past week with some newcomers about the culture of our church. This is why we – avpc – are a welcoming, healing, grace-focused community! b/c we know, we glory, so many of us have experienced this desperation and the joy that comes from being rescued from the pit.

ILLUS of Monroeville Fire Dept – rescued from the flames ... did not rescue himself... David Katz, nephew of one of our church members, Peggy Katz. He had been warned not to do this, but he did it anyway. Kept smoking while he was on oxygen, and even did it while lying in bed. And yep, his bed caught on fire and he couldn't get out. Fire Dept arrived and one of the lieutenants with a lot of experience ran in there with the bed on fire and grabbed David and fireman carried him outta there.

This is a picture of all of us. We need someone from the outside to rescue us from what we have done to ourselves. Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin and so many were still so blind. They were so committed to their own self-purification and protection of their own place and position that they couldn't see their need for a Rescuer. Don't let that be you.

The literary irony of John's composition – v. 56 – maybe He won't show up?? Jesus, the bread of life, the lamb of God, came so that He could BE the feast.

CONC *Christianity thrives under duress. The gospel becomes sweet, it becomes good news, it tastes better when the bad news is prevalent.

There is a Savior in the midst of this mess! This brokenness, this hurt.

The machinations of man, the schemes of political powers that be cannot thwart His plan. I know it seems like that's not true. Hold on. Don't let go.

v. 49-50 – We now use the same words of Caiaphas and say them to him! And John says it to us in v. 52 – Look what Jesus came to accomplish! It is astonishing! Meant to take our breath away. Go deeper in. Marvel. Rejoice.

ILLUS – Jesus is a Death Eater – He eats it, takes it in, receives it, swallows it so that He can swallow it up and give life to all who will let their death be eaten by Him –

Jesus came to Devour Death, and He does it in such a way that He even uses evil to accomplish His good purposes. This in no way excuses evil from the judgement it deserves, but it does magnify the power and goodness of God who has the power to bring life wherever there is death.

Communion:

Make it very practical for you –

We approach a Table of Grace – Jesus gives us His body, His blood. He devoured death for us, so that as we partake, we are receiving the good news of His Life.

Partaking means this: I have hunger. I have need for purification. I can't do it on my own.

Will you let your own deathly ways be eaten by Jesus, devoured by Jesus? This is what communion symbolizes – His life given for you – v. 50-51. So that His life can be made manifest in and through you?

Will you open your heart to a deeper repentance – right now – as you hear this and apply it?

The whole nation of the Jews knew what it was to go through the rites of purification. To purify THEMSELVES. The ceremonial law was designed to show them their ongoing need for atoning for their sin to make them approachable to a holy God. This is hard for us to grasp b/c we don't do this anymore.

Jesus Himself would be the Cleanser. When He touches unclean things, they become clean, He doesn't become unclean. When Jesus touched the bier, the coffin and restored the son to the widow of Nain.

Same for us – we are clean b/c of Jesus' blood and righteousness by faith. When we encounter uncleanness, we affect the unclean. This is what it means to be the light of the world. This is what it means to protect the unity of the church (v. 52). This is what forgiveness is – absorbing the deathly ways and responding with life-giving, restorative truth and grace.

To all we are the aroma of Christ. Some to death, some to life.

To all we are the aroma of Christ. Some to death, some to life.

All we can do is offer. Be ourselves. We ARE the aroma of Christ b/c He lives in us.

John gets an eyewitness testimony from within the Sanhedrin to learn of this. What does this tell us? God has His people everywhere...

John's main point. His original readers needed to hear v. 51 & 52. Why did this happen?

And we need this, too.

What did it give the original readers?

What does it give us?

But wasn't this an evil thing that Caiaphas was prophesying? Yes. Can God use evil for His higher purposes? Yes. Can we understand this? Not completely. See Psalm 2.

Have you ever been fired unjustly?

Have you ever been betrayed?

Have you ever been the victim of bullying or abuse or a sales tactic that took advantage of you? Have you ever hit a pothole and it wrecked your suspension? Have you ever had something stolen from you? Do you wonder and cry out, How Long, oh Lord?

(3) [John 11:15](#) So that you may believe indicates that Jesus knows raising Lazarus from the dead will lead to deeper faith on the part of the disciples who witness this miracle. (ESV Study Bible notes) – helps us with our own slowness to understand and comprehend everything about Jesus, His work, and its implications

3What does purify mean? Make pure. Make worthy of presenting yourself to God. What did the Passover feast symbolize/memorialize/commemorate? Freedom from slavery in Egypt through the death of the firstborn, the death of the innocent pure lamb, the covering of the doorposts with the blood. Covered, protected, from the angel of Death by the blood of the Lamb.