

Sermon- Pivot to the Jesus End Game

Scripture: John 11:45-57

Sunday, March 31, 2019

Our journey through the Gospel of John has come to a very critical pivot point. We are in a pivot point because the events that follow from chapter 12 onwards are of a different character from what we have seen in the previous chapters. To fully understand the pivot in our text today we need to take a birds eye summary of the last 10 chapters.

You see the text of the Gospel of John from chapter 2 to 11 consists of Jesus' earthly ministry told in two cycles, the Cana cycle and the Festival Cycle. These two cycles included Jesus' revelations about Himself and teaching moments. This half of John includes all 7 of his sign miracles and 5 out of 7 of His I AM sayings. When you look carefully at the first 11 chapters a progression of other patterns begin to emerge.

The first thing I want you to see is the building up of the intensity of his opposition. When Jesus first started his ministry, with His first two signs, changing water into wine and healing the official's son face no opposition. Then when he healed the lame man at the pool of Bethesda in chapter 5, it is done on a Sabbath and the Pharisees take notice and begin to ask questions about Jesus. By the time you get to chapter 9 where Jesus heals the man born blind, they start calling Jesus a sinner and the opposition against him starts building up. By chapter 10 when Jesus reveals himself as the Son of God, now you have a bunch of people who accuse Jesus of blasphemy and are able to incite mob violence against Jesus. While they don't succeed the disciples are shaken by the fact that people were ready to stone Jesus. From no opposition to this man is a sinner to a mob ready to stone him, from chapter 2 to 11 we see a distinct ramping up of the opposition to Jesus.

As the opposition gathers we get to see something else. The accusations against Jesus. It starts out with saying he is a sinner. By chapter 10 we hear accusations of blasphemy. So while the opposition to Jesus is building, you have the accusations against Jesus building

up as well. I want you to pay close attention specifically to the accusations, because accusations give you an idea of the motives of the opposition. And when you look at the motives, if you think about the situation from the point of view of the pharisees who did not have the holy spirit to guide them and did not have the revelation of Jesus that you and I have, then you can see that initially at least, it is possible to sympathize with their initial accusations. For example, if the pharisees see someone do something on the sabbath that was going against the laws at the time, it is possible that they can see that as sin. Sure it was a made up religious law but if you did not realize that it was a fake law you would be forgiven for thinking that someone violating that was committing a sin, right? When you look at the blasphemy accusation, again, considering the fact that the pharisees did not have the guidance of the holy spirit and they did not have the full revelation of who Jesus was, you can imagine that if he calls himself the son of God, that they could possibly think that Jesus as committing a blasphemy. Hear me carefully, I am not saying there is truth to these accusations, but I am only saying that for them at that time, one can imagine that they felt that their accusations were true. So yes the accusations were ramping up as well but up to chapter 11 you could look at the accusations and say, it is possible that some people really believed these accusations against Jesus.

But that brings us to the third pattern in part 1 of John, the ramping up of Jesus' revelation. Back in chapter 2 when Jesus gathers his disciples, those 12 people thought that Jesus was the messiah.

When Jesus turns water into wine, very few people even realized that that a miracle had taken place. That anonymity slowly vanished when by chapter 6 he miraculously feeds 12,000 people. Then he opened the eyes of the man born blind, now not only a lot of people know about his miraculous powers but Jesus is being discussed at the temple. Finally, as Jesus raises Lazarus from the dead, revealing his power over death itself, the supreme council of the land is shaken by this man. What you are seeing in the first part

of John is Jesus' revelation of himself being amped from a small group of disciples to massive crowds and finally to the highest levels of the land.

In other words, over the last 10 chapters we saw Jesus over a period of three years reveal not only that he was the messiah but also he revealed with increasing brightness what that actually meant. But as the brightness of His revelation was increasing, two other things were also happening. The opposition against him emerged and grew in intensity. As the opposition knew, we also see the oppositions motives. They may have been invalid but it is possible to see ourselves thinking that Jesus was sinning or even blaspheming if we were to honestly put ourselves in the shoes of his accusers.

But the opposition to Jesus is about to take a new turn in our text today. Today's action begins when some people who saw Jesus raise Lazarus from the dead, do not care about the miracle but only see trouble and run to report this to the Sanhedrin. The Sanhedrin is a group of 70 high priests and lead by the chief priest. They had religious, civil and criminal jurisdiction over the people. Think of the Vatican, the US Supreme court and law enforcement, all rolled into one. These people had so much power that you had to wear a space suit if you wanted to come anywhere near them 😊 Now the discussion they have is this. This man Jesus is certainly doing many amazing miracles. They were absolutely not interested in what those miracles were revealing about Jesus. They had so much power, they did not mind being fairly open about their motives. This is what they say. If Jesus goes on like this, everyone will believe him. If they do, the Roman army will come and destroy both their temple and their nation. This requires some explaining. Couple things to clarify here. Firstly, the word Temple. Now in the Greek, the word used is topos, from where we get the word topography. Topos usually means "place" and only in rare instances is topos used to mean temple. So the leading priests even in their choice of words were pretending to care about the temple, but their real concern was actually for their place or position in society. Now why would their place in society be destroyed if everyone followed Jesus? Because up to that time,

they made the laws that everybody followed. If the people thought that they should be following Jesus instead of the pharisees. And who knows what the Romans would do to them if they lost control of the people. So that is why the Sanhedrin was very concerned about loosing power to Jesus. Well, everybody is afraid of loosing power over their lives, even if it is to Jesus right?

At that point Caiphas who was the high priest at that time jumped into the discussion with indignation and said, *“you don’t know what you are talking about. You don’t realize that it’s better for you that one man should die for the people than for the whole nation to be destroyed”*. The next verse then clarifies that the chief priest was prophesying that Jesus would die for the whole nation. The irony of this statement was that it was Caiphas who really did not know what he was talking about 😊 In fact not only did not realize that he was prophesying that it was better for them that Jesus died for them, but he was also being ignorant of the fact that Jesus was going to die not just for the Jewish people but for the whole world. The next verse then informs us that from that time on Jesus stopped his public ministry and left Jerusalem to go to the village of Ephraim in a wilderness area with his disciples.

This passage is a pivot point because it represents a dramatic shift from the events upto this point. Here are three things I want to point out about our passage today.

Firstly this passage is a turning point because the location of the opposition to Jesus is completely exposed. Before this point remember I was pointing out how the opposition to Jesus was rapidly increasing? And yet, it was not clear, if it was some regular people or some over zealous pharisees. That ambiguity is removed in todays passage. Because the opposition to Jesus is exposed as being right their in the high council of the temple, the Sanhedrin itself.

Secondly, our passage today, exposes the true motives of the opposition. Remember I told you that in the last 10 chapters the motive of this opposition was varied and not

very clear as to whether it was justified. For example some people thought Jesus was a sinner, but to be fair Jesus was violating a Sabbath law and they did not realize that it was a fake Sabbath law. Later they thought Jesus was blaspheming when he called himself the Son of God. But to be fair they did not have the holy spirit to help them see the truth about Jesus. But in our passage today, we see a different story. What we see the real motivation of the opposition to Jesus. You see, the Sanhedrin did not care who Jesus was. What they cared about was that Jesus was a threat to their personal power. That my friends is the real motive of every single person who opposes Jesus anywhere in history. The real motive for the opposition to Jesus was the fear of losing their personal power to Jesus and that was exposed in today's pivotal passage.

Thirdly, our passage today leaves no doubt about what the opposition is willing to do. To protect themselves, the opposition is willing to go for the kill. So they make their plans to catch Jesus and have him killed.

With this we get to the Jesus end game. I am using the term "end game" from chess because in this battle between Jesus and the opposition forces, that battle has moved to the last phase. And one of the things about the "end game" is that it is at this point in the game that clarity emerges about what the real differences between the two sides, their strengths, what they can do and how the two sides intend to achieve the end goal. We are at that point in the Gospel narrative now. We know what the opposition wants to do, but we also have some idea about what Jesus wants to do.

Now the question is, what relevance has understanding of the twists and turns of Jesus' war with his opposition have for you and me. There are three things I would like to point out here.

First, we may not realize it, but our spiritual lives are a journey with many parallels to Christ's. When we first come to Christ, it is a new world. Sometimes we have dramatic experiences, sometimes that moment of decision may be quite unremarkable

externally. However your journey begins, the first phase of your walk involves figuring out what it means to get your sense of right and wrong from Jesus. You are becoming aware of your own sins and finding that you have new ways to deal with it. You also get a new sense of history. You feel a new sense of connection to the people, places and events of the Bible. You are also beginning to sense a new and deeper relationship to others who have a relationship with Christ. So like a babe born into a new world, a new believer is someone who looks upon this new community and new world view with curiosity and fascination. This is a miraculous new world, but wait there is more to come.

Once you get a little established in your faith, Christ moves you a little outward from the kingdom bubble into the big bad world out there. Suddenly, you find that as fascinating and wonderful as the world that Christ rules is, the world that you started to inhabit, and the world out there are in serious opposition. As you grow in your faith, you become more aware that these two worlds are on a collision course. Also you start to get tested and bumped by the outside world. This is the phase in which you will have many tests and trials. These trials will keep increasing in intensity till you are tested to the limit that God has set for you and only you.

But every time you clear a test, you will grow in your faith and be prepared for your next test. But these tests are not there simply so that God can entertain Himself by seeing you jump through hoops or falling down. These challenges are meant to build you up so that you can be used by God to be part of God's plan to expand the kingdom of God. When you have come to a place of maturity, then God can and will use you mightily for his kingdom expansion.

So here is the deal. If you know where in this timeline you are, it helps you become better aware of what you should be doing in that phase. If you are starting out on the journey, focus on understanding this new world that you have entered. Learn as much

as you can about the one who rules this world, the values of this world and others who live in this new world.

Once you have already familiarized yourself with this new spiritual realm, then know that in the next phase you will be tested in battle between the kingdom of God and kingdom of this world. So if you live in phase two, you will focus on equipping yourself for this battle. In phase 3, once you have a handle on the spiritual battle, you will focus how God wants to use you to make an impact on the lives of those around you.

Every believer is somewhere in these three phases. When you are aware of where you are in this journey, then you will be able to well prepared to deal with what it entails. My prayer is that we will not be casual followers of Christ but conscious followers of Christ. Followers who are well aware of where we are in our spiritual journeys so that we can be well prepared today and be well placed to finish well, when that time comes. Let us pray.