



JOHN 11:45-57

Then one of them, named Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, spoke up. "You know nothing at all! You do not realize that it is better for you that one man die for the people than that the whole nation perish."

He did not say this on his own, but as high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus would die for the Jewish nation, and not only for that nation but also for the scattered children of God, to bring them together and make them one. So from that day on they plotted to take his life.

(verses 49-53)

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Caiaphas nails it. He's completely hostile to Jesus, and so makes his statement without compassion and with no sense of justice whatsoever. But he nails it. John

tells us that he actually speaks prophetically, far beyond his own understanding, giving expression to God's own purpose.

Of course, Caiaphas' understanding of what he had said was somewhat different than the Lord's intent. Caiaphas recommended Jesus' elimination as a solution to a problem already identified by the other chief priests and Pharisees. They had expressed concern that if Jesus was left unchecked, *"everyone will believe in him, and then the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation"* (verse 48). Hence, Caiaphas's solution. Put Jesus to death, he says, so that the Romans leave the rest of us alone.

But Jesus' death will be much more consequential, dealing with bigger issues than merely Roman occupation. Already in John's Gospel this theme of "substitution" – Jesus giving his life for others – has been raised several times. When Jesus first appears on the scene, John the Baptist shouts out, *"Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"* (John 1:29). Those familiar with Temple sacrifice would recognize the image immediately, understanding that the life of a lamb was given to sacrificially deal with the sins of the people. John casts Jesus in that role. And while Caiaphas thought Jesus' death could adequately handle problems for the nation of Israel, John tells us Jesus' role is immeasurably bigger – he will handle the sins of the whole world, decisively taking them out of the way.

Later, Jesus would again put himself in the role of "substitute" as he talked about what it means for him to be the Good Shepherd. Yes, he will guard the sheep from the thief, the one who comes only to steal and kill and destroy. Yes, he will protect the sheep from the wolf, unlike that hired hand who runs away at the least sign of danger. But more than these, Jesus says the Good Shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. This is the language of substitution. The sheep are protected, but it costs the Shepherd his life. Not unlike Caiaphas' equation.

But it's back in Mark's Gospel that Jesus makes another statement sounding more like Caiaphas' plan yet. *"For even the Son of Man,"* Jesus said, *"did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many"* (Mark 10:45). One sacrifices for the many. One perishes for the sake of the nation. One gives his life as a ransom, winning freedom and well-being for everyone else.

John sees the prophetic significance of Caiaphas' statement, unpacking it so all his readers (whether from Israel or not) can rejoice. This substitutionary sacrifice, he tells us, is not confined to one nation, but stretches far beyond. It's for all *"the*

scattered children of God.” The scope is wide. The plan is all-encompassing. It embraces all people. It includes me.

As Peter will later say, *“Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God”* (1 Peter 3:18).

The substitution is now complete.

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Dear Lord Jesus, thank you that though Caiaphas and his fellow leaders schemed, your plan was already in place to bear the cost of substitution for me. You are the Lamb who takes away sin. You are the Shepherd who lays down your life. You are the ransom, that I might live. Once for all. For the whole world. Praise your name.

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Reflect:

Jesus has borne our sin, fully and completely. The whole work is done. His substitution is complete. Theologically this is true. But experientially, are you still bearing any of it yourself? If so, don't hold back. Off-load it on Jesus – he's already got it covered.