

# Jesus Died to Gather the Children of God

by John Piper

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*God's sovereignty and plan of salvation are revealed through the death of Jesus, which was a loving set of events planned by God to save the nation and gather the children of God.*

**Duration:** 51:27

**Scripture:** John 3:16, John 11:51, Romans 11:26, Galatians 2:20, Revelation 5:9

**Topics:** "Divine Sovereignty", "Substitutionary Atonement"

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## Description

This sermon delves into the profound truths revealed in the Bible passage about the plot to kill Jesus and the divine plan of substitution for salvation. It emphasizes the importance of trusting God's sovereign control in difficult times, finding comfort in the doctrine of substitution, recognizing the significance of the Jewish people's existence and future salvation, embracing diversity in the body of Christ, and experiencing a deep, personal love from God through the cross.

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## Transcript

Let's pray. We love your Word, O God. It is living and active, sharper than a two-edged sword piercing to the division of soul and spirit, bone and marrow, and revealing the secret things of the heart as nothing else can do.

So protect me from merely speaking my words, which would be so fruitless. And grant that I would be faithful to draw out of this text your holy intention, just like John drew it out of Caiaphas' word. Come, Holy Spirit, anoint my mouth.

And let there be a converting power and a strengthening power and an edifying power and a reconciling power and a mobilizing, confidence-giving power and a peace-giving power. And do exceedingly and abundantly beyond all that we could ask or think by Your powerful, holy Word, I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Lazarus has been raised from the dead by the omnipotent Word of Jesus, verse 44. Many people have seen it. Some of them believe on Jesus, and others run to the Pharisees and tell them what happened.

And what happens next in this text shows the fear among the Jewish leaders that finally brought Jesus to execution. Verses 47 and 48. Let's read them again.

So the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered the council and said, What are we to do? For this man performs many signs. If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him. And the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation.

Now the council here, as you know, is the Sanhedrin. This is the supreme court of the Jewish nation. It doesn't get any higher than the Sanhedrin.

The council. So this issue here is huge. Heaven call a little court.

This is huge. This is no longer the issue of mob violence like we saw in chapter 10, verse 31, ready to stone him because of blasphemy, as they heard it. This is high-level federal consultation.

And what's at stake, as you saw, is not the truth. This council does not care about finding truth. One thing is at stake.

Survival. If more people keep believing on him, they say, the Roman Empire, which owns this nation, will come and crash down on them and shut this down with horrific outcomes, as in fact happened about 40 years later. Why would that happen? How are they thinking? The way they're thinking is this.

This Jesus, remember this in chapter 6, verse 15, is viewed by thousands of these people as king. Remember? They were ready to come and make him king. And he had to run and hide because he doesn't want to be declared an earthly king.

But that's the mood of the moment. If this goes on, and he just raised somebody from the dead, if this goes on, they're all going to say this. They're all going to be saying, the king has come.

The long-expected Messiah is here. The king has come. And what will the Romans think of that? That's the issue.

They will think nothing of it and they will crush it with all their empire might. And this place, the temple, and this people will be history. That was the reasoning.

Jesus is now not a little blasphemer that needs to be stoned. He is a threat to the existence of the nation, Israel. That's how they see it.

The one who came to be the Savior is now viewed as the destroyer of the nation. So ironic. So, in response to this really critical situation as they see it, and it was, it was, Caiaphas has a solution.

And what we're going to see in a moment is that his word is not his word, but only, he did not speak this of himself, it is the word of God. It's kind of breathtaking when we listen. Let's read it.

Verses 49 and 50. One of them, Caiaphas, who was a high priest that year, said to them, you know nothing at all. Nor do you understand that it is better for you that one man should die for the people, not that the whole nation should perish.

So he rebukes them. You're all upset because you don't understand anything. I'll tell you the solution.

Kill him. For it's better that one man should die, so the nation won't. We kill him, so the Romans won't kill us.

We substitute Jesus for us. Now, verses 51 and 52 are the central and most important verses in this text. It's John, the writer of the Gospel, interpreting Caiaphas' word as God meant them.

So skip them for a moment and let's finish the chapter for just a second and come back and spend the rest of our time on 51 and 52. Jesus knows things are volatile. His time has not yet come, and so he goes into hiding in a little obscure town near the wilderness.

Verse 54, Jesus therefore no longer walked openly among the Jews, but went from there to the region near the wilderness to a town called Ephraim, and there he stayed with his disciples while things cooled down. Now, the great feast of Passover is coming. This is the one where he's going to be finally executed.

Verse 55, the Passover is on the way. The crowds are swelling in Jerusalem. Things are becoming increasingly unstable.

On top of that, Jesus' name is in the air. People are asking, verse 56, where is he? Is he going to come? This is like dry kindling ready for a Messianic Zionist match to be thrown on it. And the whole thing explodes, and Rome crushes it.

Verse 57, the final outcome is in place. The decision has been rendered by the council. It is this, if anyone knew where he is, he should let them know so they might arrest him.

That's going to take us to Gethsemane before we're done. Okay, now back to verses 51 and 52. Caiaphas, high priest, verse 50 said, it is better for you that one should die for the people, not that the whole nation should perish.

And John, writing the Gospel here, says there's more meaning here than what was intended by Caiaphas. And here's his understanding. Verse 51, Caiaphas did not say this of his own accord.

There's another will going on here. There's another actor, another speaker. He didn't say this of his own accord.

But being high priest that year, he prophesied that Jesus would die for the nation. And not for the nation only, but also to gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad. God, this is a massive text.

I'd like five weeks on this text, but I will give you a summary of those five sermons instead. So there are five truths in this text, and then I will walk through them. I'll name them, walk through them, come back and apply them to your lives, and that's the plan.

Here's the name. There are five massive truths here that will affect your life for the strength in hard times, comfort in the face of your own sin, confidence that God keeps His promises, large-heartedness when you're tempted to be narrow and self-centered, and joy in the very personal, particular love of God for you, not in general, but for you in particular. Those five things I'm going to point out.

So let's see the truths. I'll give you the truths in the text, and then the application. Number one, God did not just turn the national crisis for Israel's good and our good.

He was in it from the start, planning it. See the difference? Does God see a difficult situation and fix it, turn it, or is He in it from the start, managing it, planning it? And I'm arguing that's the case because of what this text says. So notice carefully what John says about Caiaphas' words.

Verse 50. It's better for you that one man should die for the people, not that the whole nation should perish. And John says something amazing in verse 51.

He did not say this of his own accord. But being high priest that year, he prophesied. He prophesied of God's accord, not his own.

He prophesied of God's accord, not his own. Now think that through. God brought these words out of Caiaphas' mouth.

God put them there. God has a meaning. At one level, these are Caiaphas' words, and his meaning is one thing.

At another level, these are God's words, and his meaning is another thing. And the point I'm making here is, these words sealed Jesus' death. These words were the death warrant of Jesus.

God spoke these words. Caiaphas wanted Jesus dead and out of the way. So he spoke these words.

And Jesus wanted Jesus. God wanted Jesus dead and risen and reigning and triumphant over the world. And he spoke these words.

He didn't arrive on the scene here late and say, oh my, what will I make of these words? He spoke these words. That's amazing. I mean, my whole life is based on things like that.

You think you're troubles? God says, oh no, what will I make of that? That horrible mess. I'll figure it out. That's not my God.

Caiaphas prophesied. That is, he spoke God's words. And God said, it is better for you that one should die for the people and that the whole nation should not perish.

Better indeed, better than any plan in the universe. Infinitely better that he die. I love God.

I love God. He did this with you in mind. That's coming later.

That's point five. We're on one. It's just too good to wait.

Therefore, the death of Jesus was not mainly a tragic set of events which God turned for good. It was a loving set of events that God planned for good. God himself served the death warrant on his son.

He didn't just predict it. He unleashed it. This word of prophecy tracked Jesus down to Gethsemane and put him under arrest.

There was no escape because God had spoken for us. It is better. That's point one.

Number two, substitution is at the heart of the Christian faith. Get this if you get anything. Substitution is at the heart of the Christian faith.

You go on any kind of interview show, and they say, what's the heart of your faith? Say the word substitution. And then when they say, what do you mean? Go for it. Verse 50, it is better for you that one man should die for, in the place of the people, not that the whole nation should perish.

Verse 51, second half of the verse, he prophesied that Jesus would die for the nation. In the mind of Caiaphas, the substitution was this. We kill Jesus so Romans won't kill us.

We substitute Jesus for ourselves. In the mind of God, the substitution was, I will kill my son so that I won't have to kill you. You.

God substitutes Jesus for his enemies. Now, I wonder how you feel about the word kill. I'm sitting there at my computer and think, should I say this? Should I say God killed Jesus? The word kill just connotes sin.

It connotes callous, murderous. It's got so many connotations, I shouldn't say that. God killed Jesus.

And I don't want to cause anybody to stumble. I don't want you to see God in a wrong way. Here's the reason I said it, and I'll probably say it again before I'm done.

I say it because of the way God talked in Isaiah 53. I'll read you just a few verses. You know these.

This is maybe the greatest chapter in the Old Testament for knowing what Jesus was up to 700 years from then. Verse 4, We esteemed him stricken, smitten by God. By God.

Smitten by God. Or, verse 6, The Lord laid on him the iniquity of us all. He crushed him.

In fact, that's what it says in verse 10. It was the will of the Lord to crush him. He has put him to grief.

I wouldn't venture to talk like this if I didn't see it in the Bible. I wouldn't risk it. So, substitution.

God taking his Son and putting him square where I belong and bringing his hand down on him where he should have brought it down on me. This is the center of our faith. If you ever want to bear witness to the center of Christian faith, go here.

We are the people who believe God substituted his Son for sinners so that sinners could live forever, sins forgiven, in his presence as his family. This is our faith. You can say it pretty quick.

Infinitely glorious. That's number two. Substitution is at the heart of the Christian faith.

Number three. There is a future for the people of Israel as a redeemed ethnic nation and as part of the single blood-bought body of Christ. Say it again.

There is a future. I mean, from this day, 2011, there is a future now for ethnic Israel, not just spiritual Israel, but ethnic Israel, and they will be part of the blood-bought body of Christ as his redeemed ethnic nation. Now, this is real controversial, and I don't have time to defend it.

I have tried that in Romans 11 when we preached through Romans. Go read it there. I mention it because it is so prominent here, and I want you to know how I take this text and what a massive implication I think it has.

There are wonderful Christians that I love with all my heart and hang out with who don't agree with me, so you need to know that too. Verse 51, middle of the verse, Caiaphas prophesied, that is, God spoke and said, Jesus would die for the nation, the ethnos, called Israel. Not just individual Jews, I interpret, but for the nation.

Eventually, the nation of Israel as a whole will be saved. Not every past individual Israelite who rejected the Son, we know they're doomed because the Pharisees are perishing, Jesus said. People are fleeing into the kingdom from north and south and east and west, and the sons of the kingdom are being cast into outer darkness.

Not all individual Jews are saved. More than all individual, any religion is saved. So I'm saying to die for the nation is to seal the covenant for the nation, and that the nation someday will coalesce around Messiah Jesus and be saved.

Last week I gave some provocative words. I'll give you another provocative sentence. Last week's provocative sentence was, no one can be saved unless he becomes a Jew.

Meaning, everyone must believe on Jesus the Messiah and so be united to Him, the offspring of Abraham, so that they may become heirs of the promises made to the world through Abraham. It's the only way you can be an heir of the promises made to the world through Abraham is to become a seed of Abraham in Jesus, by faith. Now here's the provocative sentence today.

The Jewish nation cannot be saved unless it becomes part of the Christian church. Meaning, in Jesus Christ, their salvation comes to them, and only in Jesus Christ, their Messiah, and in coming to Jesus, they join with us, Gentiles in one body called the church. Hasten the day.

So you need to know, as I read the Old Testament and the book of Romans, I can't escape the truth that God's covenant with ethnic Israel is irrevocable and will not be satisfied in its fullness until some future generation of ethnic Israel as a whole turns to Christ. And is saved by becoming part of the body of Christ with Gentiles. Paul asked this.

This is Romans 11, 11. Have they, meaning ethnic Israel, have they stumbled in order that they might fall? God forbid. Their stumbling brings salvation to the Gentiles, and the salvation of the Gentiles will eventually bring Israel to her Messiah, and so all Israel will be saved.

That has an application to your life, believe it or not, and it isn't political. Read things I've written on the blog if you wonder what I think the political implications of this are. I'll probably have to write another one after this sermon.

We'll get to the application in a moment. That's truth number three. Here's number four.

The blood of Jesus purchases a racially and ethnically diverse church. The blood of Jesus purchases a racially and ethnically diverse church. Verse 51.

He prophesied that Jesus would die for the nation, and not for the nation only, but also to gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad. The meaning here is that Christ died to gather Gentiles. I'll tell you in a minute why I think that.

To gather Gentiles scattered around the world in all the people groups of the world, of every ethnicity and every race. That's what the scattering means. They're scattered.

The children of God are out there. I'm dying to bring them. I will gather them by my blood.

That's what he's saying. Now, one of the reasons I think that is the parallel with chapter 10, verse 16, where Jesus said, I have other sheep that are not of this fold, not of this Jewish fold. I have other sheep

that are not of this fold.

Them I must bring also. They will hear my voice, and so there will be one flock. You see the parallels with this? So my argument is, he's saying the same thing in verse 51 as he said, or John is saying the same thing in verse 51 of chapter 11 as Jesus said in 10, 16.

There he says Christ lays down his life for the sheep, and not only the sheep but to gather other sheep that are not of this fold, this Jewish fold, into one fold. And here he says he dies to gather the children of God, sheep, scattered into one. So that's my first reason for believing Gentiles are in view here.

My second reason is because John himself in the book of Revelation, chapter 5, verse 9, unpacks this explicitly in terms of the nations. It goes like this. By your blood, that's the same as saying he will die to gather, by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation, and you have made them a kingdom.

Exactly the same thought pattern as in John 11, 51. These are the children of God. They're out there, chosen to be in the family, blood bought by Jesus, and they will be brought, they will be gathered.

So the point here is that the death of Christ has effects beyond the ransom of Israel, but including Israel, along with all the other nations, and that effect that the blood has is to gather a redeemed people, the children of God scattered into one, though they be from every race and ethnicity. I preached a sermon on racial harmony in a moody pastor's conference a decade ago, and my main thesis was racial harmony and racial diversity is not a social issue. It's a blood issue.

That's what I'm saying. Finally, truth number five before we do the application. Inside, listen carefully, inside the universal offer of salvation, which we know from John 3, 16, right? For God so loved the world, whoever.

Inside the universal offer of salvation, God has a particular design in the death of his son to convert the elect, the scattered children of God, and bring them to himself. So within the glorious open door sent to the world, whosoever will may come, for God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son, whoever believes, whoever believes, may not perish, but have eternal life. Within that glorious proclamation, which we should announce everywhere we go, there is a design as well.

Don't limit Christ's purposes in the cross to providing an opportunity for all to be saved. Don't limit the work of the cross to that. That's true, and gloriously so.

It unleashes us in the neighborhood. It unleashes us among the nations to look into every eyeball and say, he loved you and gave his son so that if you will but believe, you will be saved. But he did more than that.

And that's here. The more is here. And the more is, by your blood, you ransomed a people.

You are gathering a people called the children of God, who are out there, chosen before the foundation of the world, Ephesians 1, 4, for adoption. And you have died to bring them. And you will do what you died to do in regard to your elect.

You will get that done. And there will be one people infallibly. Christ died not only to offer the world salvation.

He died in order to bring his people to himself, to overcome their rebellion and gather them omnipotently to himself. Those are the five truths. Now the five applications of those truths to your life.

Number one, Bethlehem, be strong in the face of hard times and seeming defeat in your life. Because God is not simply watching and waiting to turn it all for good. He's in it from the beginning, planning it for your good.

From outside, the words of Caiaphas looked like hostile human plan that would bring the Messiah to ruin. That's what it looked like. If all you could see was human seeing, you would say, this is terrible.

This Supreme Court has just issued Jesus' death warrant and he's the best man who ever lived. This is infinite injustice. It's all it is.

And it's not all it is. And that's the way most of us look at our problems, isn't it? You're right now in the midst of something like that. You are.

Some more urgently than others. Others you don't even know. But right now you're in the middle of something that if you just look at it that way, there's just no solution.

There's no solution. This is just mess. That's all it is.

This marriage is just mess. My kids are just mess. My jobs are just mess.

My health is just mess. That's all it is. And I'm telling you, that's not all it is, Christian.

That's not all it is. I've preached this to myself so many times. How do you survive without me? I don't know.

I couldn't. So, Christian, don't judge by appearances. Trust the sovereign God who's planning everything for your good and for more good in the world than you can imagine.

I don't care how impossible it looks right now. See, this needs a sermon, right? Five sermons, but... Number two. Applying truth to.

In the face of your ongoing sinfulness, my ongoing sinfulness, I'm loving this sermon for John Piper. In the face of my own ongoing sinfulness, take comfort that the very heart of Christianity is substitution. Caiaphas meant we kill Jesus so the Romans won't kill us.

God meant I kill my son so I don't have to kill you. He Himself bore our sins in His body on the tree. Christ suffered, the righteous for the unrighteous, that He might bring us to God.

When Satan and your conscience... He's probably doing it right now. He'll do it as you lay your head down on the pillow tonight, or maybe when you wake up in the morning, depending on whether you're a nighttime sad person or a morning sad person. Satan and your conscience will conspire to indict you.

And sometimes it will be so hard, you wonder if you're a Christian. And I'm saying, there is nothing at the moment of your death or early in the morning or late at night, whenever Satan and your conscience beat up on you, there is nothing more comforting than to throw back in Satan's face substitution. Rivet that work in your mind.

He put His Son in my place! Satan! He took it all! He paid it all! He provided it all! What you doing here? Be gone! How do you fight? How do you stay alive in this world, spiritually, without the doctrine of substitution? Number two, I'm sorry, three. The amazing existence of the Jewish people today just their existence today and, if I'm right, the certainty of their future salvation as a people is a sign in the 21st century that God exists and that He keeps His promises. And if He keeps His promises for Israel, He'll keep them for you who trust in the Messiah and are part of that family.

Anne Rice, vampire novelist, atheist for 30 years until about six years ago, now a writer of Christian novels. How did she get saved? Do you know? I'll read it to you. She wrote this in her novel, *Christ the Lord*, 2005.

I stumbled upon a mystery without a solution, a mystery so immense that I gave up trying to find an explanation because the whole mystery defied belief. The mystery was the survival of the Jews. It was this mystery that drew me back to God.

Don't take this lightly that the Jews exist 2,000 years after Holocaust and pogrom after pogrom after hatred. Number four, if we love the doctrine of substitution, we will love what He bought by it, namely, diversity in the body of Christ. This is just saying what I said last week.

Christians are not parochial, right? We don't have a parochial mindset that says, ooh, why are they moving to my neighborhood? Why are all these refugees and why are all these people coming to my town, my town? What? Your town? Your town is Jerusalem in heaven. We're just aliens here. They belong here.

We don't belong here. We're the refugees. And our mindset is we like it this way.

So bring it on, diversity. Right? I wish the church thought that way. Christians don't have a parochial mindset.

They have a kingdom mindset. We rejoice at blood-bought diversity not because we're left-wing activists, but because we love Jesus and why He died. It is better that one die than he might bring all the children of God scattered among all the races and all the ethnicities and all the languages and we say, yes, yes, yes! And then do what we can at the ground level to make it look a little bit like that where all the trouble happens.

Easy to talk big generalities, you know. But once you start working on this at any level, you get in trouble and that's okay. Number five, finally.

The design of God in the death of Christ to convert and gather His scattered children should have two big effects on you, believer. So, within the universal offer of the Gospel, John 3.16, the particular design, John 11.51 and 2, to effectively gather His children scattered among all the peoples, that design should have two big effects on you. Number one, it should give you a rock-solid confidence in the success of the cross.

The cross of Christ is not merely the creation of a possibility depending on human response. No guarantee of success in that. Creation of a possibility depending on mere human response.

Well, the whole thing might abort if it's just the creation of a possibility depending on you. If that's all the cross is, where's your confidence in the invincible strength and power? The cross is going to succeed. And the answer is, because inside that, there's this design.

I will gather my children infallibly by my blood. I bought them. So, that's the first effect.

My confidence that God in His cross work can't fail because of this. Here's the second one more personally. I think it might be felt more personally.

And so many believers do not experience this, so I hope God will, by His Holy Spirit right now, do some heart-sensitizing awakening. God means for you, Christian, to feel, experience, sense an intense personal being loved particularly, personally, especially in the cross. So many Christians who miss this particular point think when Christ died, He created a possibility.

If I actualize the possibility, then it turns into love for me. Okay? There's so much more that God means for you to enjoy than that God threw out the possibility that you might be in the family. The Bible teaches He chose you before the foundation of the world to be in the family.

And then when Christ died, He died with the particular intention that you would be gathered from all the peoples of the world. You, you would be gathered. You, not in general, you would be gathered.

And then He sends out the gospel and the Holy Spirit triumphs in love over your rebellion, awakens faith and brings you to Himself. And from then on, how you should feel particularly loved. Let me ask you it this way.

Galatians 2.20 has been a kind of a life verse since I was a sophomore in college. I'm crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me.

And the life, this is the important part, the life that I now live, I live by faith. So daily, the life that I live. Daily, the life that I live.

I'm living by faith, hour by hour. I'm living by faith in the Son of God who loved me. What do you think? What do you feel when you say that? Who loved me.

It doesn't mean merely He offered you love and you took it. That's not all it means. It means He pursued you with love.

He conquered you with love. He awakened you with love. He bought you with love.

He satisfied you with love. And now, trembling and happy, you live on this particular love. Oh, that you might experience this.

Oh, that you might experience this. So many Christians live a level down from this. He threw out a love line, everybody loved the same, and I grabbed it, and that's what makes me His.

And there's nothing peculiar about that love. The same love He had for the lost who go to hell. No.

No. That's not the picture. The picture is, He threw it out, and by His blood, He bought your reaching for it.

He bought your reaching for it. He took your hand and put it on there. He chose to do that a billion years ago.

Don't mainly think of problems theologically when you hear this. Mainly think speechless gratitude. There's a wideness in God's mercy like the wideness of the sea.

The door is open. If you come to Christ for life, you'll be able to talk like that, and you may come. If you would come, you may come.

If you don't come, it will be because you don't want to come, and you'll be guilty, and God will not be faulted in your damnation. He will not. And if you come, you will know He loved me.

Before the foundation of the world, He wrote my name in a book. He died for me. He pursued me with love.

He awakened me with love. He conquered me with love. He satisfied me with love.

And now I live in that love. Let's pray. Father, I ask that You would draw all these people to Yourself.

If Christ be lifted up, I will draw all to myself. This is how You gather Your children, all of them. Apply these five truths to us for the glory of Your great name and for the good of our soul.

For the good of the nation Israel, I pray for their conversion, Lord, soon. For the diversity of Your church and for the joy of Your beloved. In Jesus' name, Amen.

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