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PLOT & PROPHECY

"What are we to do?" Perhaps you've asked this question recently. About something in your personal life or community or place of employment. We live in difficult days, locally and globally. Maybe Christmas isn't on your mind this Christmas Eve so much as "what are we to do?" We can learn some things from John 11 as we ponder the options. Does it make any difference that Christ has come? That HE lived? Yes! All the difference. Jesus has everything to do with everything.

Just BECAUSE Jesus lived put people in a quandary. "**What are we to do?**" steamed the religious power brokers in John 11:47. This upstart rabbi from a backwater province was becoming too popular. "**If we let Him go on like this, everyone will believe in Him,**" they stewed. Never mind that's what should happen when Messiah comes! So far in John's gospel, Jesus turned water into wine, cleansed the temple, fed a multitude healed an official's son, an invalid, and a blind man. Then He raised a dead man to life.

PROPHECY - So the leaders convened a council. The Council, actually. The Sanhedrin, the supreme religious authority in the land. It was composed mostly of Sadducees, a party which favored cooperation with Rome. Theological liberals, they didn't believe in angels or the afterlife. The Pharisees were the other major party. They were conservative keepers of righteousness, mostly scribes who guided people in their daily lives. But Jesus seemed to aim His sharpest barbs at them, for majoring on the minors.

These parties were mostly at odds with each other. But Jesus had to be stopped. His popularity could lead to insurrection, as the people expected a Messiah who would throw off the yoke of Roman rule. The religious leaders feared they would be the losers - losing their powerful positions which gave them wealth and authority. It could even lead to losing the temple in Jerusalem, their hallowed national symbol.

Verse 49 is the turning point. Caiaphas said, "**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.**" Even he didn't know the real meaning of his words. But it was a prophecy, since he was High Priest.

PLOT - From that day on, the religious authorities made plans to put Jesus to death. No longer talk or speculation, they were plotting. Jesus had to be stopped. In response, He withdrew into the hinterlands. He made Himself scarce around the authorities, because His time had not yet come.

This episode reminds us that God can speak even through unbelievers. In the Old Testament, God often used unbelieving nations to discipline His people, and turn them to repentance and faith. So the turmoil of tyrants and terrors does not disrupt God's plans. He can be using them to accomplish His purposes.

PROVIDENCE - What intertwines in John 11 as plot and prophecy was actually providence. That's a \$50 theological term to describe how God works in the world. So the prophecy of Caiaphas, which led the council to plot plans to put Jesus to death, actually helped work out God's plan to put Jesus to death.

And that's what Christmas has to do with it. Without Christmas, there would be no Christ to go to the cross. Verse 52 explains Jesus was supposed to die, "**not for the Jewish nation only, but to gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad.**" Remember, Jesus in chapter 10 said He was the Good Shepherd who came to gather into one flock all the people who believed in Him. Jesus fulfilled more than 300 prophecies about Him made hundreds of years before His birth.

That's what Christmas is all about. It started way back in the Old Testament, with God's promises to send the Messiah to make everything right. Christ would pay for the sins of the people rebelling against the Creator. So God came in the flesh as an infant in a cradle. Because He would grow up to go to the cross. He would die and be buried. And His raising Lazarus just foreshadowed His raising up of Himself.

MERRY CHRISTMAS - In God's providence, plot and prophecy produce a perfect plan to save God's people. And Christmas puts everything into right perspective. "**What are we to do?**" We are to kneel before Christ our Savior, in repentance. By faith, we are to receive His resurrection life. Then we are to live out God's purpose in our own lives, by His holy power within us.

That's the Good News of Christ at Christmas! *Merry Christmas!*