

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN YOU FIGHT AGAINST GOD?

11 ⁴⁵Many of the Jews who had come to console Mary and had seen what [Jesus] did, believed in him. ⁴⁶But some of them went to the Pharisees and told them what Jesus had done. ⁴⁷Therefore the chief priests and the Pharisees called a meeting of the Sanhedrin and asked, What shall we do, this man is performing many signs? ⁴⁸If we leave him alone, everyone will believe in him; then the Romans will come and take away our place and our nation. ⁴⁹One of them, [named] Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, said to them, You know nothing at all. ⁵⁰You do not realize that it is better for you that one man should die for the people, [rather] than have the whole nation perish. ⁵¹Now he did not say this on his own; on the contrary, being high priest that year, he prophesied that Jesus should die for the nation—⁵²and not only for the nation [of Israel], but also that he might gather together the children of God who were scattered. ⁵³So from that day on they plotted how they might put him to death. ⁵⁴Therefore Jesus no longer went around publicly among the Jews; rather, he withdrew to a region near the wilderness, to a village called Ephraim; and there he stayed with the disciples. ⁵⁵When it was almost time for the Jewish Passover, many went up to Jerusalem from the countryside to purify themselves before the Passover. ⁵⁶They kept looking for Jesus, and as they stood in the temple area, they asked one another, What do you think? Will he not come to the Feast? ⁵⁷Now the chief priests and the Pharisees had given the order that if anyone knew where [Jesus] was, he should report it so that they might arrest him. (Jn. 11:45-57)

Introduction

Old Doc Runyan's tone was weary, "Don, I am sorry, but there is no doubt. You have polio."

The words hung in the hot, medicinal fumes of the Los Angeles County Hospital examining room. Don could recall the recent words of a newscaster: This summer of 1954 has brought with it a veritable epidemic of polio. A lump swelled in his throat. He had worked for General Petroleum for only a few months; he had no sick leave, no benefits, and now no future. His thoughts splintered into a thousand fragments.

Don tried to pray. But the only words that would come forth were, "LORD, why, why, why?" Later he railed at God. "What about Clella and Randy and Davey? Who is supposed to take care of them?"

"God, You say in Your Word, 'Seek first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added to you.' this one of the 'things'?"

Resentment flared and Don's thoughts turned ugly. "Why, LORD? What about all my neighbors? They drink, gamble, and play around, and all they get is a regular paycheck—a lot bigger than mine. We are Christians, LORD. We try to be honest and good citizens, and what do we get? This!" (POWER, 11/25/84, pp. 2-ff.)

Due to the circumstances he faced, due to the trials he encountered, Don found himself fighting against God. But Don came to discover that fighting against God is both futile and self-defeating. By the grace of God, Don came to that realization and gave up the fight:

The realization of my helplessness overwhelmed me. “Lord Jesus, I know I am wrong.” The words came back again, and guilt descended on me like a flood. I had built a wall between God and me. A Bible verse from a dimly remembered Sunday School lesson crept into my mind: *“Whom have I in heaven except you? And there is none upon earth that I desire beside you”* (Psl. 73:25.)

“Father, I can fight no more,” I prayed. “I give it all back. Forgive me. If You want me crippled or dead, it is all right. I just know I need and want You. I am too tired to go on alone.”

Little by little Don relaxed. A sense of relief and peace enveloped him. Feeling the LORD’s presence, tender and vibrant, he gave up the struggle and surrendered to God’s love. (*POWER*, 11/25/84, pp. 6-7.) Once he did, he discovered God’s peace, and a new life of fruitful service for Christ.

In the passage of Scripture presently before us, we encounter a group of men who likewise chose to fight against God. Tragically, unlike Don, they did not give up the struggle, and eventually that futile struggle destroyed them.

If you are fighting against God, you are doing something that is both foolish and tragic. It is wise to give up the struggle, surrendering to His will and discovering His forgiveness, grace, and blessing.

I. Don’t Fight Against the LORD, Because It is Very Foolish

The raising of Lazarus from the dead was Jesus’ last and greatest sign, testifying to the fact that He really is the Savior sent by God.

We are now informed as to the reaction to this last great sign performed by the Lord Jesus: *“Many of the Jews who had come to console Mary and had seen what [Jesus] did, believed in him. ⁴⁶But some of them went to the Pharisees and told them what Jesus had done”* (Jn. 11:45-46.)

Upon receiving the report of how Jesus had raised Lazarus from the dead, the chief priests and the Pharisees called an emergency meeting of the Sanhedrin to discuss the question, What should we do?

These religious leaders were concerned that if they did not put a stop to this man, Jesus, all men would come to believe in him—i.e.; all Israel would hail Him as the promised Messiah. If that were to happen, the Romans would come with force and take away *“our place and our nation”* (vs. 48.)

Notice the motivation for their opposition to Jesus: It is the fear of losing **their** place and **their** nation. They dare to refer to the temple of God and the accompanying service of the temple as *“our place”*—the place from which they derived their prestige, power, and wealth. They dare to refer to the people of God as *“our nation”*—viewing the people, the revenue, the land, and all that composed the nation of Israel as belonging to them, as being their own personal domain. They fail to appreciate that all the privileges and blessings they enjoyed were the gracious gifts of God to be received with gratitude and to be used in service to God. How often when we find ourselves fighting against God is there not present the underlying attitude of resentment; resentment at being deprived of something or someone we mistakenly view as belonging to us by rights: these are **my** children, how dare God take them from me? But note the testimony of Jacob, *“Then Esau looked up and saw the women and children. ‘Who are these with you?’ he asked. Jacob answered, ‘They are the children God has graciously given your servant’”* (Gen. 33:5.) Or we resentfully think, if not actually utter the thought, “I have a right to health and worldly happiness, and it is God’s job to provide these things for me!” But note again the testimony of Jacob, *“I am unworthy of all the kindness and faithfulness you have shown your servant”* (Gen. 32:10a.)

Caiaphas, the high priest, offers what he believes to be the solution to their dilemma:

One of them, [named] Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, said to them, You know nothing at all. ⁵⁰You do not realize that it is better for you that one man should die for the people, [rather] than have the whole nation perish. (Jn. 11:49-50)

Motivated by fear, by resentment, by self-interest, there is conceived a plot to murder the Son of God—but how incredibly foolish it is to fight against God! What are these men doing? They are plotting to murder Jesus. Why are they undertaking such an evil deed? The thing that finally caused them to take this concerted action was the fact that Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead—a demonstration that Jesus Himself is the Resurrection and the Life! Thus, here are a group of men plotting the death of the very One who is the Lord of life! Note Jesus’ testimony recorded in John 10:17-18,

The Father loves me because I lay down my life—[I lay it down] in order that I may take it again. ¹⁸No one takes it away from me, I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it again. I received this commandment from my Father. (Jn. 10:17-18)

Notice, too, how quickly they will lose control of the whole situation: At this point they are plotting a single murder. Soon they will be forced to plot a second murder: *“the chief priests made plans how they might also put Lazarus to death; ¹¹because it was on account of him that many of the Jews were leaving and believing in Jesus”* (Jn. 12:10-11.) Then twelve more murders will be needed to silence the

apostles after the day of Pentecost when they begin to boldly give their witness to Jesus' resurrection and call upon their countrymen to believe in Him as the promised Messiah. Before long it will have to escalate into an all-out persecution of those who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ; following the martyrdom of Stephen, *"there arose ... a great persecution against the church that was in Jerusalem"* (Acts 8:1.)

When we set ourselves against God and stubbornly fight against Him, the situation quickly gets out of control. We find that the devil seizes the opportunity to extend his evil control—what results is the reverse of what is commanded in James 4:7, *"Submit yourselves ... to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you."*

If you fight against God, you will find yourself doing something very foolish. If, in your struggles against God, you assume the role of a "civil rights protester" demanding your rights from God, to your confusion, you will discover that all rights belong to Him: *"The earth is Jehovah's, and everything in it; the world, and all who live in it, ²for he has founded it upon the seas, and established it upon the waters"* (Psl. 24:1-2.) The LORD declares to Israel: *"Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, you will be my treasured possession out of all the nations, **for all the earth is mine**"* (Ex. 19:5.) If, in your struggles against God, you assume the role of a "trial lawyer" and seek to put God on trial and demand justice from Him, to your dismay, you will discover that He is the Source of Justice and the righteous Judge of all the earth. When Job demanded an audience with God, the outcome was far different than he had anticipated: *"Jehovah answered Job out of the tempest. He said, ⁷Brace yourself like a man; I will question you, and you shall answer me. ⁸Would you discredit my justice? Would you condemn me so that you might be justified?"* (Job 40:6-8.) Job was forced to recant and humble himself before the LORD: *"Then Job replied to Jehovah ...³ 'Surely I spoke of things I did not understand, matters that are too wonderful for me to know ... ⁵My ears had heard of you, but now my eyes have seen you. ⁶Consequently, I abhor [my words] and recant in dust and ashes"* (Job 42:1,3b, 5-6.)

II. Don't Fight Against the LORD, Because You Cannot Win

In verses 49-50 there is recorded the counsel of Caiaphas, the high priest: *"One of them, [named] Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, said to them, 'You know nothing at all. ⁵⁰You do not realize that it is better for you that one man should die for the people, [rather] than have the whole nation perish.'"*

John immediately points out that there was a far greater meaning to Caiaphas' words than he could ever have imagined:

Now he did not say this on his own; on the contrary, being high priest that year, he prophesied that Jesus should die for the nation—⁵²and not only for the nation [of Israel], but also that he might gather together the children of God who were scattered. (Jn. 11:51-52)

This counsel was not merely the murderous scheming of an evil man. It was, at the very same time, the supreme prophecy of God placed upon the lips of this man in his capacity as high priest. Here is the whole meaning of the Old Testament summed up in one brilliant word from God, and in one brilliant way by God! It is God's way of saying, "I am in control! I have seen fit to use the mouth of this villain to utter My truth. And I will employ their very scheme to accomplish My divine purpose!" Note the testimony of the early church recorded in Acts 4:27-28,

Indeed Herod and Pontius Pilate met together with the Gentiles and the people of Israel in this city to conspire against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed. ²⁸They did what your power and will had decided beforehand should happen. (Acts 4:27-28)

Who but God can get His enemies to carry out His will, and to do so with the same degree of zeal as His most faithful and willing servant?

If you fight against God, you cannot possibly win. On the contrary, you will unwittingly accomplish God's good purpose in spite of yourself. By way of example, the former Soviet school system carried on an extensive propaganda campaign promoting communism and opposing God. But even this, under the sovereign control of God, served the purpose of truth:

In a 1984 Russian novel, *The Riddle*, a teacher complains, "People have no faith in teachers." This lack of faith in teachers results primarily from the fact that the children understand that the teacher is not telling them the truth ... The way their teacher deceives them is obvious to school children, from the very earliest grades, since the assessment of a pupil's progress is based not on his knowledge, but on the need to fulfill the progress plan ... At the beginning of each school year, according to a Moscow teacher, "the percentage of successful students is often set at over 99 percent." Consequently, the teacher is obliged to give "satisfactory" or even "good marks" even to pupils who know nothing, so as not to upset the fulfillment of the plan by the class, the school, the district, or the republic. (Mikhail Heller, *Cogs in the Wheel*, Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., New York, 1988, pp. 160-161.) Because students have learned by experience not to believe what the teacher says, the final result is that a teacher with a total lack of credibility teaching lies oddly enough ends up serving the cause of truth—the students know from experience, that the truth is the opposite of what the teacher declares it to be.

As the Book of Proverbs proclaims: *"There is no wisdom nor insight nor plan that can succeed against Jehovah"* (Prov. 21:30.)

III. Don't Fight Against the LORD, Because You will Eventually Destroy Yourself

Why did these men seek to murder Jesus? They were seeking to do so in order that the temple, the nation, and their privileged position might be preserved.

But they failed to appreciate the fact that the entire Old Testament system—the temple, the priesthood, even the nation—were only provisional institutions: Their main purpose was to illustrate the work of the Messiah and to prepare the way for His coming. The Old Testament theocracy with all of its institutions was intended to function up until the time that the Messiah came and undertook His divinely-appointed work: dying in the place of His people to redeem them from their sins and the judgment incurred by their sins. Note that at the time of Christ's death on the cross God already began the work of dismantling the temple:

And when Jesus had cried out again in a loud voice, he gave up his spirit. ⁵¹At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. The earth shook and the rocks split. (Matt. 27:50-51)

With the death of Christ the priesthood and the whole Old Testament system suddenly became obsolete; it had accomplished the purpose for which God had instituted it. Then, within a relatively brief time (by 70 A.D.), God would use the Roman army to completely demolish the temple and destroy the city and scatter the Jewish nation.

If you fight against God, you will eventually destroy yourself. If, in your struggles against God you assume the role of a "military general," pitting the strength of your stubborn will against God, to your regret, you will find that there is no possibility of success against the omnipotent God: *"Woe to him who strives against his Maker! [He is nothing more than] a potsherd among the potsherd on the ground!"* (Isa. 45:9a.) Job asks the rhetorical question, *"[Jehovah] is wise in heart and mighty in strength; who has hardened himself against him and succeeded?"* (Job 9:4.) But if you assume the role of the penitent tax collector and humbly plead for the LORD's mercy, pleading like him, *"God, be merciful to me, the sinner"* (Lk. 18:13,) you will find mercy, strength, and abundant blessing. The Apostle James exhorts us, *"Humble yourselves in the sight of the LORD, and he shall exalt you"* (Jas. 4:10.)