A HARMONY OF THE GOSPELS
JJJJ. God's Great Grace Over Man's Great Sin
(John 11:45-54)

I. Introduction

A. When Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, He set in motion events that would bring out the worst in Israel's leaders while it also brought out the best in God's work due to God's great grace over man's great sin.

B. Reviewing these events in John 11:45-54 offers encouragement for us believers when we are tempted to feel discouraged over the great sinfulness in mankind today. We view this passage for our insight and edification:

II. God's Great Grace Over Man's Great Sin, John 11:45-54.

A. When Jesus dramatically raised Lazarus from the dead after his body had been entombed for four days, many Hebrews who had come to visit Mary to comfort her believed in Him as Messiah and Son of God, John 11:45.

B. However, when the Pharisees heard of it, they told the Sadducees, so the Sanhedrin met to plan how to handle Jesus, John 11:46-47a. This was an unlikely union: the "'Pharisees were anti-Roman, loved to foster in Israel dislike of the alien and devotion to the hopes and ideals proper to the people of God'" where the "'Sadducees were tolerant to Rome . . . feared, obeyed her, and dreaded . . . the revolt that might rouse her . . . wrath. So the ancient rivals, united by common hate . . . met to plot'" (A. M. Fairbairn, Studies in the Life of Christ, 1891, pp. 219-220 as cited in J. Dwight Pentecost, The Words and Works of Jesus Christ, 1991, p. 346).

C. Realizing that Christ's raising of Lazarus could lead all Israel to believe in Jesus, members of the Sanhedrin asked what they were accomplishing: if they let Jesus keep performing such miracles, everyone in Israel would believe in Him, and He could then lead a revolt against Rome to try to establish a Jewish kingdom, provoking Rome so that the Romans would come and take away their temple and nation, John 11:47b-48.

D. Caiaphas, whom the Romans set up as high priest that year, spoke up in the Sanhedrin, claiming its members did not understand anything! (John 11:49) He claimed that it was better for them that one man, Jesus, die on behalf Israel's people than that the whole nation perish by the hand of Rome, John 11:50.

E. However, "(w)hile Caiaphas did not realize the prophetic significance of these words, they did constitute a prophecy ''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'' (v. 51-52)" (Op cit., Pentecost). "While Caiaphas proposed the death of Christ as a solution to the immediate political problem, God purposed His Son's death as a solution to the problem of sin of the whole world," Ibid.

F. In view of God's eternal plan, the vast sinfulness of man as expressed in this meeting of the Sanhedrin could not have been more contrasted with the infinite righteousness, love, grace and sovereignty of God (as follows):

1. The Gospel of John opened with the claim that Jesus Christ, the "Word that became flesh" (John 1:17, 14) was also the eternal Creator God of Genesis 1-2 through Whom all things were made (John 1:1-3).
2. This God became God Incarnate (the Word was made flesh, John 1:14) with the express purpose of becoming the figurative sacrificial Lamb of God Who would take away the sin of the world by His substitutionary death on the cross (John 1:29 with 2 Corinthians 5:21).
3. Hence, the Sanhedrin's plan to put their Creator God Incarnate to death to save their nation from Rome's retaliation was as narrow-sighted, ungodly and wicked as could be, especially in view of the resurrection of Lazarus that proved that Jesus was from God and hence Messiah as He had so often claimed! That miracle alone should have led Israel's religious leaders to believe in Christ, not to try to put Him to death!
4. On the other hand, God by His "deliberate plan and foreknowledge" was permitting the Sanhedrin to condemn Jesus to death to provide redemption not only for Israel, but for the whole world that whosoever believed in Him might have eternal life and become a child of God (Acts 2: 23; John 3:16; 1:12-13)!

G. Since the Sanhedrin plotted to take Jesus' life, He no longer moved about publicly in Judea, but He withdrew to the village of Ephraim near a wilderness area about 10 miles northeast of Jerusalem where He could quickly move into hiding if necessary (John 11:53-54; Ibid.; The MacMillan Bible Atlas, 1968, p. 148 (Map 234).

H. Jesus stayed there until it was time for Him to go to Jerusalem for His crucifixion (Op. cit., Pentecost).

Lesson: Though Israel's religious ruling body reacted to their Creator God Incarnate's raising of Lazarus by plotting to kill Him in great evil, God planned that their plot be used to perform Christ's great work on the cross.

Application: May we never be discouraged at the seeming overwhelming evil in man that we witness in today's world, for where sin abounds, God's grace more exceedingly abounds (Romans 5:20b-21)!