

The Best Laid Plans – John 11:45-54

In his 1937 book, “**Of Mice And Men**,” John Steinbeck quoted a line from an obscure poem written in 1785 and forever made it famous. The poem was “To A Mouse,” the author was Robert Burns, and **the line** was, “The best laid plans of mice and men oft go awry.” Ever heard that?

Steinbeck, of course, applied it to the plight of his characters, who despite their best efforts to own a ranch in the midst of the Great Depression, failed. Their plans went awry. And the original use, by Robert Burns, came after he upended a mouse nest while plowing a field. Causing him to reflect that even their best laid plans ended poorly. Hence the inclusion of mice. “The best laid plans of *mice* and men oft go awry.”

I don’t know about mice, but it’s self-evident with men. We could spend the whole morning recounting all the times we planned something to a “T”, only to see it end poorly. Like the surprise birthday party I once planned for Becky that ended in a lot of weeping and little surprise.

And the Bible *itself* is full of examples. The best laid plans of Joseph ended in Egypt. The best laid plans of Pharaoh, ended with the Moses. The best laid plans of Goliath, ended with David. The best laid plans of Jonah ended in Nineveh. And the list goes on.

Because that’s how God works. (**Proverbs 16:9**) *The heart of man plans his way, but the LORD establishes his steps.* (ESV) God determines the outcome. God paves the way. God controls the narrative. So that even the *best* laid plans of our heart “oft go awry.”

But the greatest example is the plan to kill Jesus. Right here in John 11.

Jesus just raised Lazarus from the dead, and as with most of his miracles, there’s some fallout. Leading to a plan that came to fruition, but accomplished the exact opposite of what was intended. And along the way, we find some fitting truths that still apply.

[45] *Many of the Jews therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what he did, believed in him, [46] but some of them went to the Pharisees and told them what Jesus had done.* Pointing out the fact that . . .

Some people will never be convinced (v45-46)

Many believed, praise God. Many. It’s one of the reasons Jesus waited to respond. He wanted *many* of the Jews to be there (19), so that many would believe. And they did.

But some didn’t. *Some of them* [v46] *went to the Pharisees* and tattled. Implying that they *didn’t* believe. Implying that they opposed him. Rejected him. Showing that some people will *never* be convinced.

They saw a *miracle* after all! And not just any miracle, as if there is such a thing, but a miracle of life from death. If that doesn’t convince somebody, nothing will. Just like those in our day who don’t believe in light of *Jesus’* resurrection. Another miracle. People you know. People you love.

Does that mean we should give up on them? Not at all. God changed your heart. God changed your mind. And he’s still in the business of changing lives. But some people have

hearts that are so hard, and so sinful, and so self-absorbed, they’ll never believe. They’ll never take a step of faith.

Just make sure that’s not you. Make sure you *are* convinced. Make sure you *do* believe. Make sure you see the miracles God does in your life and accept them as such.

Instead of explaining them away, as mere products of chance, receive them as the hand of God. From the provision he gives to the protection he provides. The divine appointments to the amazing opportunities. The little things to the big things. Make sure you’re among the many, not the some.

The second truth that still fits comes from v47-48.

Many believed but some tattled – [47] *So the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered the council* [the Sanhedrin; the seat of both political and religious power for the Jews; but still under the thumb of the Romans] *and said, “What are we to do? For this man performs many signs.* [Many miracles. Not the least of which was raising Lazarus.] [48] *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.”*

They were scared. Fearing that popular support for Jesus would bring unrest, and the Romans would roll in to crush it and clean house. Despite their best laid plans. Their best laid plans to keep the peace and preserve the status quo. “*If we let him go on like this*, v48, it’s not going to end well.” And they were right.

Showing that . . .

Jesus is a threat to the status quo (v47-48)

Was then and is now.

Then, he was a threat to their *place* and their *nation*. V48. Their *place*, probably referring to the temple and their position. The temple being their sacred place of worship, the center of life and religion at that time; and their position, referring to their role as political leaders on the Sanhedrin. Jesus was a threat to all that. Their place.

Even bigger, he was a threat to their *nation*. Their existence as a people group in their own land, with their own ways and their own laws.

Jesus threatened the status quo of all that by leading people in a *different* direction. A direction of *true* freedom. Freedom from the tyranny of the Romans, freedom from the Law of Judaism, and freedom from the bondage of sin. And still does. He’s *still* a threat to the status quo of things like that.

• The status quo of power, influence, and identity

The power of sin and its ill-effect on our culture. The influence of unbiblical ideologies and those who spread them. Like socialism – the redistribution of hard-earned money and private property; naturalism – the seedbed of evolution; secularism – the elimination of God from our society. Jesus is a threat to all that. Not to mention the identity of those who cling to such things. *Cling* to a lifestyle of sin and influence.

All of which leads to fear and disdain toward those who cling to Jesus. Those who

comprise the church. Accusing us of things like “Christian Nationalism” when we involve ourselves in politics. And advocate for Christian principles.

“He’s a Christian Nationalist. That’s Christian Nationalism.” A pejorative label that’s taken on a life of its own. Most of the time to make false accusations based on false definitions.

And most of those come unbelievers, like liberal pundits and podcasters, who fear the implications of a nation *infused* with Christian principles, and populated with Christian people. As if that’s never *been* the case. As if our country wasn’t founded on such principles and people.

So they go to great lengths to stigmatize us, and pervert our beliefs, as if Christian Nationalism means a lack of religious freedom, forced adherence to biblical morals, and a state-mandated church. Garbage. Other than the lunatic fringe, that’s just the rhetoric of people who fear the influence of Jesus and see him as a threat to the status quo.

Which he is. He is! But not in the nefarious way of unbelieving journalists. Or politicians.

Jesus is a threat to the status quo because his kingdom is like a mustard seed that grows into a tree. Small and quiet, but strong and unstoppable.

Jesus is a threat to the status quo because he changes hearts and minds to live for *him* instead of themselves; him, instead of the world; him, instead of the party. Jesus is a threat to the status quo because he lights up the darkness through the lives of his followers, and makes those who are part of it uncomfortable.

Christian Nationalism is not the belief and practice of *forcing* Christianity on our culture, it’s the desire to see biblical principles and biblical people *influence* our culture. Not just in church, but in public. Not just here, but everywhere. Not just a little, but a lot. In *every* area of life and culture. Politics, education, media, business, you name it. Because God’s way is *best* for our country. Period. And if that’s threatening, so be it. Because *some* of the best laid plans *need* to go awry.

But thank God we haven’t gone the way of countries like Nigeria, or Pakistan, or North Korea, or China. Where Christianity is so feared they go to *violent* lengths to control and suppress it. Which becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy, such fear and oppression . . .

- **Because those who believe in Jesus tend to undermine oppression**

Jesus, and those who follow him, are a threat to the status quo of evil governments, because they tend to *undermine* their oppression, by their very beliefs and lives. Their convictions about right and wrong. Their love for all that’s good.

Take the **American Revolution** (Turnbull’s painting) for instance. Led for the most part by men who believed. And pastors who preached. And authors with a biblical worldview. All of which was a threat to the status quo of an oppressive British government at the time, whose best laid plans went awry.

Christians aren’t conducive to the status quo of poor governance. Christians aren’t agreeable to the influence of sin. Christians tend to undermine the coercion of unjust

leaders. Why? Because they don’t fear them. Christians don’t fear those who wield the power. And don’t follow those who abuse it.

Instead, they resist such oppression. Demanding righteousness. Calling for justice; where wrongdoers are rightly punished, and victims are rightly protected. Even *fighting* for what’s right and best sometimes. Like some of our brothers and sisters around the world.

All of which is a threat to the status quo, and those who maintain it. A threat to the best laid plans of *evil* men. It’s a fitting truth.

Which brings us to v49-52 and a third. The council was fearful – [49] *But one of them, Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, said to them, “You know nothing at all. [50] 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.*” He wasn’t wrong. Politically it was *obviously* better for Jesus to die.

But little did he know! Little did he know what he was *saying*, and little did he know how *right* he was! And just in case we don’t get it, John spells it out.

[51] *He did not say this of his own accord, but being high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus would die for the nation, [52] and not for the nation only, but also to gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad.*

If he wasn’t speaking of his own accord, v51; if he wasn’t speaking for himself, for whom was he speaking? God. That’s the implication of the phrase, *being high priest that year*. He was in a respected position of leadership, established and ordained by God, to speak on his behalf. Because that’s what priests did. They spoke to God on behalf of the people, and spoke to the people on behalf of God.

So *being high priest that year* [in a position to speak for God] *he prophesied that Jesus would die for the nation*. Not in the sense *he* thought, not in the way he articulated in v50, just to avoid upsetting the apple cart; but in the salvific sense. Jesus would die for the *sins* of the nation. That’s the idea.

And not for the nation only, the Jews only, but for the sins of the *world*. Gentiles. *Those scattered abroad*. Because that’s the only way to *gather* his children into one. *One* nation. *One* kingdom. One people, comprised of all peoples. *Every* tribe, tongue, and nation.

He didn’t know it, but Caiaphas was speaking prophetically and spiritually. An unwitting messenger of truths he couldn’t imagine.

And the whole thing is a perfect example of the Joseph Principle. That . . .

What man intends for evil, God uses for good (v49-52)

Despite the best laid plans. Remember that? From Genesis 50? Jacob had died, and Joseph’s brothers feared that in the *absence* of their dad, he would hate them. And take vengeance. Pay them *back* for all the evil they had done in selling him into slavery.

But Joseph said, no worries. **Genesis 50:20** – *As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today.*

I call it the Joseph Principle. What man intends for evil, God uses for good. The application of which is repeated over and over in the Bible.

But the ultimate example, is the *good* God brought about in Jesus, despite the intent of the Jewish council. Despite the best laid plans of Caiaphas. What he intended for evil, in the murder of one, God used for good in the salvation of many. And in the process, *unites* the many. Jew *and* Gentile. It's a fitting truth that still applies.

But only in God's time. Because last . . .

God's plan will not be rushed (v53-54)

We've seen it before in the book of John, and we'll see it again. God has a plan that won't be hurried.

V53-54. The council obviously agreed with Caiaphas – [53] *So from that day on they made plans to put him to death.* [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 the disciples.*

Ephraim was about 18 miles north of Jerusalem, in the southern part of Samaria. A safe place for two reasons: (A) Jews from Jerusalem didn't like to go *into* Samaria; and (B) It was close to the wilderness; a barren landscape where *few* people went. Plus, he was with the disciples.

The point being, the Jews wanted him dead. And made *plans* to kill him. *From that day on.* (53) But as we've seen several other times, his hour had not yet come. (John 2:4; 7:30; 8:20) That wasn't God's plan.

And there was no rushing it. Jesus would stay in Ephraim for another couple of *months*. Using it as a base as he went from town to town, teaching and preaching about the kingdom of God, while slowly making his way *back* to Jerusalem. (Luke 13:22) On *God's* time. In God's plan. Despite the best laid plans of others.

Because God's plan will not be rushed. Not then, not now. And thank God for it, because his way is way better than ours. His timing, perfect. He knows, and we don't.

So may the Lord give you patience upon patience to wait on him, and faith upon faith to trust him.

Summary

Four enduring principles that illustrate the adage and showcase the proverb. *The heart of man plans his way, but the LORD establishes his steps.* (Proverbs 16:9) So that even the *best* laid plans oft "go awry." And that's okay. Because God's plans are best. Just look at Jesus.

Prayer – Lord, you took what the enemy meant for evil and turned it into good. And you still do. Which means the victory is ours and the battle is won. Thank you. And help us, we pray, to stand strong as you threaten the status quo, and shine bright as we undermine oppression. We love you and worship you.

You Are Loved