**Matthew 26:57-68** April 3, 2019

Pastor P. Martin **Faith Lutheran Church, Radcliff, KY** Mid-week Lenten Service #4

*Matthew 26:57Those who had arrested Jesus took him to Caiaphas, the high priest, where the teachers of the law and the elders had assembled... 59The chief priests and the whole Sanhedrin were looking for false evidence against Jesus so that they could put him to death. 60But they did not find any, though many false witnesses came forward. Finally two came forward 61and declared, “This fellow said, ‘I am able to destroy the temple of God and rebuild it in three days.’ ”*

*62Then the high priest stood up and said to Jesus, “Are you not going to answer? What is this testimony that these men are bringing against you?” 63But Jesus remained silent. The high priest said to him, “I charge you under oath by the living God: Tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God.” 64“Yes, it is as you say, “Jesus replied. “But I say to all of you: In the future you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven.” 65Then the high priest tore his clothes and said, “He has spoken blasphemy! Why do we need any more witnesses? Look, now you have heard the blasphemy. 66What do you think?” “He is worthy of death,” they answered.*

**It Can’t Be True!**

You have heard of the little boy whose parents asked him, “Do you know who Jesus is?” He answered, “Sure I do. That man who stands in front of church on Sunday.” Of course, no pastor wants to be mistaken for Jesus. It is just plain wrong in so many ways. Yet, every pastors also realizes that there is a tiny grain of truth to it. A pastor is, in a way, a picture of Jesus; an under-shepherd for the Good Shepherd—and that had better make him tremble just a little bit.

If you want to know what the point of the Jewish high priest was, he was just that: a picture of Jesus, a picture of the Messiah who would come. The Jewish high priest made symbolic sacrifices for sinful people; the future Messiah would make a one-time perfect sacrifice for all people. The mortal and sinful Jewish high priest was the mediator between God’s people and God; similarly the Messiah would be the eternal sinless intercessor between God’s people and God.

When Jewish believers looked at their high priest, they were to see a portrait in miniature of their long-expected Savior.

Oh, how far things had fallen by Jesus’ day! We don’t have time to trace the long, sometimes joyous, more often sad succession of the priesthood, but we should have a basic outline. Fourteen centuries before Christ, at Mount Sinai, God had declared that the first high priest would be Aaron. Only direct descendants of Aaron were to be high priests after him. A high priest had that office for life, like our Supreme Court justices. The high priest was the supreme religious authority. Interestingly, he was to have no political authority. God did not want politics infecting and perverting the priesthood. And it sort of followed God’s plan for a thousand years or so.

Then a couple centuries before Christ, politics entered the sacred space. By the time of Jesus the high priest was chosen not by God, but by the pagan Romans. It was a political appointment determined by under-the-table-cash and family influence. How far it had fallen from God’s intention! The high priest was supposed to be a forerunner of the Messiah, a physical, living prophecy of what the Savior would be like. Yet in the time of Jesus the high priest’s family was so worldly and corrupt that the common people frequently cursed the high priest’s name, even if in hushed tones.[[1]](#footnote-1)

The high priest in office for the entire ministry of Jesus, named Caiaphas, had come to the high priesthood in just this way. His father-in-law, Annas, had been the high priest. Annas had aggravated the Romans, interestingly enough, by executing someone without Roman approval. So the Romans deposed him and looked around for a favorable successor. Annas’ family, having had their fingers slapped and desperate to maintain the power and prerogatives of the high priesthood, appeased the Romans. They managed to get Annas’ son-in-law, Caiaphas, appointed to the office. So successful was the high priestly family at playing politics and greasing Roman palms that Caiaphas stayed in power nearly two decades.

Jesus repeatedly confronted this high priest and his power structure, both in word and deed.

Jesus had also made a dent in their revenues. Perhaps the chief source of income for the high priestly family was the temple market. This was the very market which Jesus had rampaged through with a whip made of cords, chasing out the livestock and upsetting the money-changers’ tables. Jesus delighted the crowds, but he was making powerful enemies.

Jesus had proven his divine authorization in miracle after miracle. On his final journey to Jerusalem, he performed his greatest miracle of all: He raised Lazarus from the dead. In response to the Lazarus crisis, the ruling council met. After much hand-wringing they couldn’t come up with a way to deal with Jesus. Finally, this same Caiaphas berated the entire Jewish ruling council, *“You know nothing at all! You do not realize that it is better for you that one man die for the people than that the whole nation perish!”* (John 11:50). He knew what to do with Jesus. So it is hardly surprising that once Jesus was arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane, he was promptly escorted to, of all places, the high priest’s house.

Here is the greatest mockery of justice of all time! Here the court sits, the Great Council of the Jewish people, with its High Priest as the presiding judge. They meet not in their judgment chamber on the temple grounds, but in the private house of the chief judge. They listen to false witness after false witness, but hold none of them in contempt of court or for perjury. [On this point God’s law had been most clear: “*If a malicious witness… proves to be a liar, giving false testimony against his brother, then do to him as he intended to do to his brother. Show no pity: life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot.”* (Dt 19:16-21, abbrev.)] Yet Caiaphas listens to false witness after false witness, frustrated only that they are not better liars. Even when he finds two false witnesses who sort of agree that Jesus made some sort of vague terroristic threat about destroying the temple, he tosses their misrepresentations aside. He walks up to Jesus, accuses him of something totally different, and demands, ***“I charge you under oath by the living God: Tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God.”***

Oh, if only they had asked him this question right at the start, Jesus could have saved them so much time. ***“Yes, it is as you say. But I say to all of you: In the future you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven.”*** “I am the Son of God, and I will one day come to judge you!” There they have it. With his own mouth!

The kangaroo court quickly reaches its pre-determined verdict and condemns Jesus to death. Oh how rich the irony! That Jesus is put to death because he claims to be exactly who he is! How rich the irony that the high priest of the God of Israel condemned the Messiah, of whom he was to be a living picture. How ironic! How wrong!

Yet there, but for the grace of God, are we. We cannot by our own thinking or choosing believe in Jesus Christ our Lord or even come to him. It is not our wisdom or good judgment that makes us believers in this one standing before Caiaphas. Jesus would remind us just as he reminded us, *“You did not choose me, but I chose you.”* God’s word tells us, *“No one can say, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ except by the Holy Spirit.”*

The humbling truth of the matter is that but for the Holy Spirit’s work in our hearts, we would stand with the majority of that ruling council, backing up Caiaphas, and condemning Jesus to death. “No. He can’t possibly be the Son of God! No, he can’t possibly have a right to tell me how to live my life. No, he can’t possibly one day call me to account for all the things I have done in my life. No!”

While we have been graciously granted to *not* reject Jesus as did Caiaphas, how many of these people we know! People who always find an excuse to not visit church with you. People who get impatient and agitated when you start talking about spiritual matters. People who have their questions to ask God, rather than listen to his revelation. People who chase after their marketplace earnings rather than devoting time and talents to their God and Savior.

To each of these—and this is a humbling call to each and every one of us—to each of these Jesus says, ***“You will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven.”*** To them he will say as he promised just a day earlier, *“Depart from me, you who are curse, into the eternal fire.”* (Mt 25:41)

Praise God that Jesus willingly went to the cross for your sins. Praise God that you believe Jesus’ testimony. Praise God that you can let others know! Amen.

1. Edersheim, *Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, p.850. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)