

March 15, 2015

*John 18:12-14: **“Those Who Wanted Jesus to Die:
The High Priest”***

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Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Every now and then archeologists find something that spectacularly supports the Biblical record. In 1990, archaeologist Zvi Greenhut entered a burial cave in Jerusalem's Peace Forest that was discovered during construction work. Inside were 12 ossuaries, or limestone boxes, which were used to hold the bones of deceased people. A family member would go to the tomb about a year after death, when the body had decomposed, gather the dry bones and put them in the ossuary.

One bone box was inscribed "Yehosef bar Kayafa," which translated to "Joseph, son of Caiaphas." The ancient Jewish historian Josephus described him as "Joseph, who was also called Caiaphas." These bones of a 60 year old man were from Caiaphas, the same high priest mentioned in our Gospel lesson for this morning. His and other bones found in the tomb were re-buried on the Mount of Olives. The Caiaphas ossuary is now displayed in the Israel Museum in Jerusalem.

It says in our Gospel lesson: "So the band of soldiers and their captain and the officers of the Jews arrested Jesus and bound him. First they led him to Annas, for he was the father-in-law of Caiaphas, who was high priest that year. It was Caiaphas who had advised the Jews that it would be *expedient* that one man should die for the people."

I want you to grab hold of that one word, "expedient." Expedient is a great word to use in connection with Caiaphas. The dictionary says that if an action is "expedient" it is an action that is convenient and practical, although possibly improper or immoral. That is a perfect description of Caiaphas. He had no scruples. No moral convictions were going to get in the way of his plans.

Annas and Caiaphas were lessons in hypocrisy. They pretended to be something they were not. They appeared to uphold the law, but they were astonishingly corrupt. We know from history that Annas had a long career orchestrating his plans from behind one puppet high priest after another. Did you know that Annas was the reigning High Priest when the twelve-year-old Jesus first visited the Temple? Annas only held the office for nine years, but after that five of his sons and one son-in-law held the position. Annas and Caiaphas were still in power when the apostles left Jerusalem to share the Good News of Christ with the world.

The Bible doesn't describe the wealth of Annas and Caiaphas, but other sources make it clear that they were immensely wealthy. And with great wealth comes power. The Talmud (an ancient record of what Jewish teachers thought and taught) accuses Annas and company of being "whisperers." Whisperers in the sense of whispering into the ears of high ranking officials - making back room deals - getting judges verdicts to fall where they wanted them - perverting justice and corrupting the powers that be (The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah, vol. 1, p.263).

Do you remember what it says in John 11? After Jesus had raised Lazarus from the dead, the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered the council together because they were upset that people were believing in Jesus. They were convinced that one thing was going to lead to another and that the Romans were going

to come and take away their place and their nation. John writes: "But one of them, Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, said to them, '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' . . . So from that day on they made plans to put him to death (John 11:45-53)." Caiaphas didn't give it a second thought when thinking about murdering Jesus. He only cared about the Jewish nation in so far as it served him with money and power. And the religion of money and power doesn't have a moral code. Everything goes. Sounds a lot like our society today. Sounds a lot like even the church.

The procedures of the Jewish leaders during Jesus' trial were illegal. Jewish law required that trial for a capital crime begin during the daytime and adjourn by nightfall if incomplete. Sanhedrin members were supposed to be impartial judges. Jewish rules prohibited convicting the accused on His own testimony. Again, all of this sounds familiar as the law is broken to reach personal objectives.

Now, the Bible tells us that Caiaphas was high priest that year! That is really the shocker. The high priest was supposed to serve as the Jewish people's representative before God. On the day of Atonement, Caiaphas was to enter the Holy of Holies in the temple to offer sacrifice to the Lord. He was to serve as picture of the Savior who was to come. As it says in Hebrews 5,

For every high priest chosen from among men is appointed to act on behalf of men in relation to God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins. He can deal gently with the ignorant and wayward, since he himself is beset with weakness. Because of this he is obligated to offer sacrifice for his own sins just as he does for those of the people. And no one takes this honor for himself, but only when called by God, just as Aaron was. So also Christ did not exalt himself to be made a high priest, but was appointed by him who said to him, "You are my Son, today I have begotten you."

In Caiaphas, we have the son of the devil. Satan wanted Jesus to die uselessly and pointlessly so God's purpose would be thwarted. If that were to happen, then our sins would not be paid for and we would face the tortures of hell. The high priest's motive was *expedience*. There's that word again. His motive was self interest and the removal of the object of his jealousy. The leaders concluded that the end justified the means. They did not understand the purpose of Christ and why he had to die. They only saw him as a pawn to exploit for their own advantage.

Today there are many who rage against Christ and do the best they can to exploit him in every possible way. Some may even appear to embrace him as long as it happens to be on their own terms and to their own advantage. While they want people to believe that they are good, they pervert the Word of Christ and seek a salvation that is far from the eternal kingdom of our Lord. Such human selfishness plays into the hands of Satan. Jesus becomes expedient.

Jesus is the true and forever high priest. Unlike Caiaphas, in Jesus we have a High Priest who is "holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners, exalted above the heavens." No other priest could ever say that. He was tempted but never yielded to sin. Secondly, because he was sinless, he didn't have to offer

sacrifices for himself, but instead could offer himself as a sacrifice. It says in Hebrew 7: 27: "He does not need daily, like those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins, and then for the sins of the people, because this He did once for all when He offered up Himself." With that, we are brought to the third superiority - his sacrifice of himself was "once for all." The fourth superiority of Christ over all other priests is that they were appointed by the Law in their weakness, but he was appointed by a divine oath as a perfect Son. And finally, the priesthood of Jesus Christ is forever. You won't find his bones in an ossuary box or buried on The Mount of Olives.

Jesus rose from the dead. He never has to be replaced. The great and overarching point is that we have a great High Priest, Jesus Christ, who came into the world as the Son of God, lived a sinless life, offered himself as a perfect sacrifice for the sins of his people, rose to everlasting life, sits at the right hand of the majesty of God, and there loves us and prays for us and bids us draw near to God through him. He fulfilled the whole idea of the high priest. He reigns forever! St. Mark writes (14:60-62):

And the high priest stood up in the midst and asked Jesus, "Have you no answer to make? What is it that these men testify against you?" But he remained silent and made no answer. Again the high priest asked him, "Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?" And Jesus said, "I am, and you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven."

Amen.

Pastor Brock Abbott