

Mark 14:55-65

⁵⁵The chief priests and the whole Sanhedrin were looking for testimony against Jesus in order to put him to death, but they did not find any. ⁵⁶Many testified falsely against him, but their testimonies did not agree. ⁵⁷Some stood up and gave this false testimony against him: ⁵⁸“We heard him say, ‘I will destroy this temple made with hands, and in three days I will build another made without hands.’” ⁵⁹Yet even on this point, their testimony did not agree.

⁶⁰The high priest stepped forward and questioned Jesus, “Have you no answer? What is this they are testifying against you?”

⁶¹But Jesus was silent and did not answer anything.

Again the high priest asked him, “Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed One?”

⁶²“I am,” Jesus said. “And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of power and coming with the clouds of heaven.”

⁶³The high priest tore his robes and said, “Why do we need any more witnesses? ⁶⁴You have heard the blasphemy! What do you think?”

They all condemned him as being worthy of death. ⁶⁵Then some began to spit on him. They covered his face and struck him with their fists, saying, “Prophecy!” The guards also took him and beat him.

Hands of Hypocrisy

I.

Every good story needs a bad guy. The Passion of Jesus is a true story, written down under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. There are plenty of villains to choose from in the story. There was Judas, the disciple who willingly betrayed his Lord for a few pieces of silver. Even Peter had his bad guy moments; he repeatedly denied that he even knew Jesus. The Roman governor Pontius Pilate knowingly sentencing an innocent man to die.

There is no question that these men did some very bad things, but were they themselves entirely bad? When Jesus was arrested, Judas was seized with remorse and refused to keep the blood money he had been bribed with. After the rooster crowed in the darkness, Peter realized his sin and sobbed uncontrollably. As for Pilate—at least he tried, didn't he? He did what he could to spare Jesus' life until the Jewish leaders backed him into a corner.

To be sure, what these men did should not be minimized. Their actions had serious consequences, but the Bible doesn't describe them as evil incarnate either. Yes, they sinned. Yes, they succumbed to Satan's temptations, but in all three cases we see the evidence of an inner struggle.

Caiaphas is another matter. Reading about him in the gospels you don't find any redeeming qualities. He is cold, calculating, and completely ruthless. He will not let anyone or anything stand in his way, not even the Son of God. Interesting. Caiaphas held the highest spiritual office in Israel and was *supposed* to represent God.

Hypocrite. That's the word that comes to mind when we think of Caiaphas. That's the word for pretending to be something you are not.

Today we will examine the hypocrisy of Caiaphas.

II.

Mark records the information about the interaction between Jesus and Caiaphas, even though he never mentions the high priest by name. Jesus was brought before the Sanhedrin

in the middle of the night. Not only was that highly unusual, it was illegal. But the Sanhedrin wasn't meeting to get to the truth, but to manufacture evidence that would lead to a quick conviction.

The problem was...Jesus was too clean. Perfect, actually. How do you come up with dirt on someone who has a spotless record? How do you pin a capital crime on someone who has never done anything wrong?

They tried to take Jesus' own words out of context, twist them, and use them against him. "We heard him say, 'I will destroy this temple made with hands, and in three days I will build another made without hands'" (Mark 14:58, EHV). While Jesus *did* say something like this, he was talking about his body, not the actual temple. Jesus really couldn't set the record straight, since the witnesses weren't telling the truth.

Presiding over this mockery of justice was Caiaphas. Was he more upset with Jesus, or with the rest of the religious establishment for botching a golden opportunity to get rid of Jesus? It wouldn't be surprising if he were thinking to himself: "If you want to get something done right, you have to do it yourself." So...he stood up and addressed Jesus directly: "Have you no answer? What is this they are testifying against you?" (Mark 14:60, EHV).

Since the whole matter was a lie, there was no point in answering. The interrogation continued. The next question raised the stakes. "Then the high priest said to him, 'I place you under oath by the living God: Tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God!'" (Matthew 26:63, EHV). It was a devilishly clever question, designed to be a trap. Saying nothing would be a silent denial. Saying no would be an *actual* denial. Saying yes would be a game-changer, because it would give Caiaphas the evidence he needed.

Jesus completely understood what was going on. "Jesus said to him, 'It is as you have said. But I tell you, soon you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of power and coming on the clouds of heaven'" (Matthew 26:64, EHV). Now was not the time for silence. Now was the time to testify to the truth. Now was the time to suffer at the hands of these hateful men. Now was the time to complete God's plan of salvation.

Caiaphas must have been ecstatic when Jesus spoke those words. He put on his poker face and didn't show it. This morally bankrupt man put on a huge display of moral outrage. He grabbed his shirt collar and tore his clothes and asked the Sanhedrin: "Why do we need any more witnesses? ⁶⁴You have heard the blasphemy!" (Mark 14:63-64, EHV).

Blasphemy. Claiming to be the Messiah—the Son of God. *That* was what supposedly shocked Caiaphas so much that he tore his robe. *That* was the charge that was going to stick. *That* was all the Sanhedrin needed to get rid of Jesus once and for all.

Just for a moment the hypocrites took off their masks. The men of the Sanhedrin were always polished and practiced, but now they turned into an out-of-control mob. "They all condemned him as being worthy of death. ⁶⁵Then some began to spit on him. They covered his face and struck him with their fists, saying, 'Prophecy!'" (Mark 14:64-65, EHV).

Mark paints a gruesomely vivid picture of the scene. They spit on him; something almost every culture sees as degrading and disrespectful. Already tied up, now they put a blindfold on Jesus before they began to rain down punches on him. He couldn't see when the next punch was coming, or from which angle.

Why? Why were they so filled with rage? Why did they want Jesus dead? Why was Caiaphas willing to sell his soul to achieve this goal?

In part, at least, it was political. The Jewish leaders were afraid the masses would follow Jesus and leave them behind. They would lose their authority and their power.

But there was another reason Caiaphas hated Jesus and would stop at nothing to destroy him. It was spiritual. The high priest represented a time-honored religious system—a way of life in which God rewarded people for being good. Some people, especially the religious leaders, were convinced that they were doing enough good to get into heaven on their own.

Jesus had turned their comfortable religious world upside down. Instead of patting them on the back for their goodness and high moral standing, he called them to repent. He called them whitewashed tombs, a bunch of snakes, children of the devil. He called them out for their hypocrisy. It wasn't to embarrass them, it was to try to get them to see the error of their ways and to see that he—Jesus—was the only way to heaven.

III.

We haven't been looking at Caiaphas tonight so we can shake our heads at him and congratulate ourselves for not being like him. Take a look at yourself. Take a look at your own heart. Are you guilty of having hands of hypocrisy?

Caiaphas rejecting the invitation of Jesus to repent demonstrates for us the danger of hypocrisy. The hypocrite cares only about what can be seen on the surface. The hypocrite wants to project a shiny image on the outside to keep people from seeing what's on the inside. The hypocrite wants to believe he doesn't need to repent of his sins because he *has no sins*.

God wants you and me to ponder the implications of this verse from the Apostle John's First Letter: "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us" (1 John 1:8, EHV).

Are you vulnerable to self-deception? Are you guilty of hypocrisy? Have you ever thought to yourself: "I may not be perfect, but at least *I'm* not as bad as...?" Have you ever been critical of another Christian committing a sin you struggle with yourself?

IV.

Sometimes people say they don't go to church because churches are full of hypocrites. The best answer to that is: "You are absolutely right." We work hard to present a positive image. We want people to see us a certain way, but there are sins we don't want anyone to see. God sees them, though. No matter how well we are able to hide things from other *people*, we cannot hide from him.

Every Christian is guilty of hypocrisy. So what separates us from Caiaphas? What keeps us from going down the same destructive path?

Jesus calls us to repent. Not to embarrass us, but because he loves us. When we come clean and confess, he is faithful and reminds us of the forgiveness he has already won for us. He makes us pure and righteous in the eyes of God. God sees us as perfect because of the righteousness of Jesus. What other people might think of us is totally irrelevant.

A hypocritical high priest presided over that sham of a trial, but our Great High Priest was always in control. Jesus knew he would be mistreated. He had predicted it. He could see the questions Caiaphas asked for what they were—an obvious attempt to trap him. Still, he answered them. Jesus wasn't concerned about saving his own life, he was on a rescue mission to save souls from eternal death.

Jesus spoke the truth. Jesus testified to the truth. He *is* the Truth—and the Truth has set us free. Amen.