

Caiaphas, The Politician
Journey Through Lent, week 4
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March 11, 2018

John 11:45-53

CHILDREN'S TIME

Isn't this a wonderful apple? The skin is so shiny. Look how smooth it is and it has a beautiful shape. I don't see any spots that look like bugs or worms have gotten at it. Yes, this is a really great apple!

But wait. We can't know if this apple is good just by looking at the outside. We have to look on the inside, and maybe taste it to know if it really is a great apple.

One day, I found what I thought was a great apple like this. I bought it at the grocery store and looked forward to eating it. I took it home and set it in a bowl in the kitchen. Then a few days later I was hungry and thought of that apple, so I went into the kitchen, got the apple, washed it, and took a bite expecting to taste a wonderfully juicy apple. Instead, I discovered that the whole apple was rotten. It didn't taste good at all and I was so disappointed.

Unfortunately, it can be the same with people — sometimes there are men or women who look like people of faith on the outside. They might come to worship on Sunday, smile a lot, bring an offering, and sing every song, and even listen to the sermon, but in their heart they are far from God.

They look good on the outside, but we might say their faith is only "skin deep." Maybe they just want to look good for other people, but in their heart they really don't believe. If they keep coming, God might work on their heart, and then they'll become people of faith on the inside too.

This isn't anything new. Jesus found the same thing in his time. One day, some religious leaders complained that Jesus' friends were eating without first washing their hands. In those days, there were very strict religious laws and traditions about washing your hands before eating, and they asked Jesus why his friends didn't do the proper hand-washing ceremony before eating.

Jesus knew that these people were not focused on the important things that mattered, like what is in the hearts of people, but only on the outward things they did, their

traditions. Jesus said that their worship had no meaning because they didn't focus on the more important things, like their relationship with God and their hearts being clean on the inside.

SERMON

Ah ha! Good morning. It is good to see a group of people who are faithful to worship in the house of God. There are too many who have given up hope that God will continue to meet the people in the Temple. But you are here. That is good!

There have been threats. Oh yes, there have been many threats on the Temple in Jerusalem and it is very concerning, very concerning indeed! Some in Rome feel that we have become a threat to Rome. They would love an opportunity to tear down this Temple to diffuse our power. In large part, this tension is due to the number of younger Jews who have rebelled. Every few years there is another group of Jews who, wanting freedom from Rome, devise some plan to take on the Romans. They never get very far of course, because the Romans have such a powerful military. There was the major revolt 20 some years ago when a very large

group of young Jewish revolutionaries marched in with swords and spears to take on the Romans. There was so much bloodshed in that revolt. But of course Rome crushed the rebels and crucified thousands of them to make an example of what happens to those who challenge the Romans. What a sad day that was. We cannot be so stupid as to allow that kind of bloodshed again. We must be more shrewd.

You see, we Jews hold a delicate balance here with the Romans. They have the political power and do rule the land, but we also have political leverage because of our numbers and the relationship I have forged with the Romans, and this works in our favor to maintain our practice of rituals and ceremony in the Temple as it was prescribed by God through Moses. And if I can profit a bit in the process it is a just payment for the essential services that I perform for the people. They should be grateful!

This balance is personal to me, because I am Caiaphas, the High Priest — it is my responsibility to maintain this balance with the Romans. It is also my duty to represent the people before God and represent God to the people. I

lead the priests in the faithful practice of sacrifice in the Temple and this is central to our faith. It is I, and I alone, who hold authority and the responsibility to enter the Holy of Holies in the Temple once each year on the Day of Atonement to offer the sacrifice for the forgiveness of sins for all of the people. I take this responsibility very seriously.

These threats to the Temple are concerning, you see, if we do not have the Temple then we cannot perform the sacrifice, and if we cannot perform the sacrifice, then the people cannot be forgiven and as a people we lose our identity. So, the Temple is central to our religious lives and identity as a people. It is essential to maintain and preserve this institution!

We all know the stories of exile when our people were removed from Jerusalem and from the Temple to live in Babylon against our will. Our people suffered! We were lost. We were depraved. We were not able to live as God has called us to live. Those were the saddest of days for our people. We cannot allow our people to be separated from the Temple again — at all costs we must preserve our Temple!

This is why the matter of Jesus is so crucial. He is gaining a huge followings and I have heard that some people are even calling him the Messiah, the one Isaiah spoke about who would come from the line of David to be the King of the Jews, and overthrow the Romans.

I know the scriptures better than all of these common folk and what they are saying is clearly wrong. They don't understand the scriptures as I do. Most of them are uneducated and ignorant anyway. They want to hold onto any sort of hope this man Jesus is offering. I'm sure they could be persuaded without too much trouble to take up arms at any moment.

But I can tell that Jesus is no warrior. I don't understand why all of the people who follow him cannot see that. If they would only use their head and think, they would see clearly as I do. But the movement is growing stronger than ever, especially since he supposedly raised to life this guy named Lazarus after he had died. So, we must be proactive and take care of this threat now!

That is why I got together with my chief priests and the Pharisee leaders to talk about a plan. We

agreed to arrest Jesus and find some political charge against him, so that we can hand him over to the Romans who can then make such a spectacle of him that others will be too afraid to challenge them again, and we can enjoy peace and maintain our position of power.

If we do not make this happen soon, Jesus' followers will very likely take up arms and start another rebellion and there is always the chance that this time the Romans will wipe us out including our Temple.

Now would I like to see the Romans overthrown? Certainly! That would free us from their political control. However, that is a risky proposal. They have such great military power. If we banded together to challenge them it would surely end again in great bloodshed and loss, and that would set us so far backward. What would we have then? No! We are better working out a political solution to preserve the peace and the delicate balance that we have been nurturing with the Romans now for years.

This Jesus is clearly a misguided and deceived revolutionary who must be silenced and his followers dispersed.

As High Priest, I recently prophesied that Jesus would die for the Jewish nation, and I can now see it coming together. When he dies, his rebellion will die with him, and that removes all of the political tension and the balance will be restored. Not only that, but then we will win greater trust with Rome and be able to unify Jews from far and wide as one body right here in Jerusalem. Yes, it is much better for only this one man to die, than to allow the massive bloodshed that is sure to come if his movement continues to grow.

We have just won a victory here that is moving forward our plan. One of Jesus' disciples, Judas is his name, came to his senses and wanted to help us to capture him without anyone else getting hurt. So, we captured Jesus and handed him over to Pontus Pilate, the local Roman Governor of Judea. This is so important.

It is Passover, when we celebrate with appropriate sacrifice the freedom of our people from slavery. Even though there are large crowds and it could get dicey, what better time to sacrifice Jesus for our freedom from this revolt. Truly, the masses of Jews will be much safer without him stirring everything up. It will be literally like Jesus is dying

for his people. He has even said it: like a shepherd giving his life for his sheep.

Yes, this is the best plan and we are almost there. We are now working to coordinate chief priests, Pharisees and others to mingle with the crowd to stir them up in the public hearing so that we can get rid of this Jesus once and for all. If Pilate lets him off though, which he could, we will have to appeal to Rome and that could be much more tricky. I will eagerly watch for what Pilate does.

Will you join me in working up the crowd against this Jesus when the time comes? I certainly hope so.