

MIDWEEK LENTEN VESPERS 3  
Jesus' Trial before the High Priest

The leading theologians and pastors of Israel passed judgment upon the One who will judge the living and the dead. And they seem to have had no fear or shame in doing so. Doesn't that blow your mind? It was a sham of a trial. There is no doubt about that. Even before the trial began, the verdict was in. We read, ***“Then they took him to Caiaphas, the high priest, where the chief priests, elders, and teachers of the law had assembled. Caiaphas was the one who had advised the Jews that it would be good if one man died for the people.”***

Caiaphas reasoned not that it would be right, but that ***it would be good for them.*** And there is quite a difference between the two, isn't there? How often haven't our sins been what seemed good for us at the moment? Sin has a way of seeming practical, doesn't it? And that's the best sort of sin in our old Adam's estimation, because it's easier to justify. Unfortunately, God justifies sinners and not sins. Sometimes the Christian life isn't practical, but it is always rooted in what is right.

It wasn't that the chief priests and teachers of the law didn't know what was right. They knew the Scriptures forwards and backwards, but their knowledge had become clouded by their own selfish desires and their natural instincts. They didn't see how it was good for them to risk losing their cushy and prominent positions as the religious leaders to this upstart Rabbi from Nazareth, or how it was good for them to risk upsetting the Romans with all this talk of a Messiah and the chance that He might get the people all worked up and riotous. What they did wasn't right, that's for sure. But it did seem good for them. It might not have been Scriptural, but it was reasonable in their view. That was their line of thought.

Little good it did them in the end, though. They eventually their precious positions anyways. Jerusalem was destroyed by the Romans, temple and all, in 70AD, and not because of Jesus, but because the Jews had started a political uprising. Jesus was no rebel. He never would have begun an insurrection. And yet, even though they put Him to death to avoid such a scenario, something even worse ended up taking place. Even more, how many thousands didn't convert to Christianity, not before Jesus' death, but after His resurrection and ascension! This upstart Rabbi would have His followers no matter what obstacles they threw in His way. Pentecost would start things off with thousands of converts, the first of many more thousands to come throughout the Roman Empire. The more the church and her Lord were persecuted, the stronger they grew.

So what about us? Do we ever fall into such clouded judgment, asking what is better for us now instead of what is right? Do we let ourselves sometimes presume that we actually could be wiser and more reasonable than the Logos Himself, than God Himself, who created all things and upon whom all that exists is founded? And how has that worked out for us in the end?

- Did putting our trust in what was not God bring us true and lasting peace or did it only eventually increase our disenchantment and dissatisfaction?
- Did drowning our sorrows lead to good decisions and a lasting escape from our problems, or did it only increase them?

- Did going farther than God would have us go in a relationship without a commensurate commitment solidify that relationship or only increase our heartbreak and regret when it fell apart?
- Did scheming for what we did not earn or could only obtain in the short-term through deception make us a more fulfilled and contented human being in the long-term or did it cost us friends, a job, or self-respect?
- Did cheating on a test increase our knowledge or did it get us a good grade now while at the same time harming our ability to learn throughout life by building upon the knowledge we should have gained through practice?

We cannot expect God to bless things done contrary to His expressed will. We cannot expect God to look with favor upon things we've done disregarding His commands. One of the most dangerous things we can do, therefore, when faced with a situation where there is a clear biblical wrong or right, is to allow that pesky question of what is best for us to muck up equation. Letting it do so only guarantees we get the answer wrong.

Scripture is the ultimate arbiter of right and wrong. For that reason, when the Christian must make a decision, especially a difficult one, the process should go something like this:

- Our first and primary concern must always be what Scripture says.
- If the Scriptures do not address the matter, then we must examine and consider our conscience.
- If our conscience is clear, then with prayer and sanctified reason we must try decide what is most likely to bring about a godly and beneficial outcome for all involved, and not just ourselves. Something gained at the expense of another is seldom if ever in accord with God's will.

In his judgment that ***“it would be good if one man died for the people,”*** Caiaphas was spot on in a way he likely never imagined. It was good for the people, and even for him, that Jesus died. That was the only way his sin could be forgiven, and Jesus knew that and had every intention of winning forgiveness for Caiaphas and all people as He stood wrongly accused before him. Let that sink in: Jesus died for the very men who unjustly condemned Him. They sinned in doing so, but if they repented later, their sins were no less forgiven than ours, so abounding is the Savior's love. If they would later come to their senses and believe on Him to whom the Scriptures pointed them, there was mercy even for these derelict religious leaders, who sought what seemed best for them at Jesus' expense, who criminally handed Him over as an alleged criminal to the cruel tortures of the Romans who would show Him no mercy at all.

The Scriptures point you to the same Jesus who stood before Caiaphas, his Savior and our Savior. And Christ has offered His all-sufficient sacrifice for sin to give you much more than a few minutes, weeks, months, or years of happiness. He has died and risen to grant you an eternal contentment that, if you would only get out of its way in those moments when you are tempted by transitory tinsel, will saturate even the most trying times in this life. Believe that, and found all you say and do upon it. And that is not only what is right; that is what is best for you. Amen.

