

THE HANDS OF THE PASSION¹

Hands of Hypocrisy

In the name of Jesus, our great High Priest and Friend of sinners, dearly redeemed:

Every good story needs a bad guy, and in the inspired true story that is the passion of Jesus, there are plenty of villains to choose from. We immediately think of Judas, the disciple of Jesus who was willing to betray his Lord for a few pieces of silver. We remember Peter, the proud disciple of Jesus who repeatedly denied that he even knew Jesus. We picture the Roman governor Pontius Pilate seated on the Stone Pavement, knowingly sentencing an innocent man to die. No question they did very bad things, but what about Judas seized with remorse and refusing to keep the blood money? The rooster crowed in the darkness, and Peter realized his sin and sobbed uncontrollably. Pilate at least tried to spare Jesus' life.

Sinful actions, serious consequences. They fell to Satan's temptations, but evidence of an inner struggle. The Holy Spirit inspired Paul to write: ***"None of the rulers of this world knew [the mystery]. (If they had known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.)"*** (1 Corinthians 2:8 EHV²)

But Caiaphas? The Gospel accounts record no redeeming qualities. Cold, calculating, completely ruthless. Not letting anyone or anything stand in his way, not even the Son of God. While holding the highest spiritual office in Israel representing God, he's stoking the appearance of virtue. There is a word for pretending to be something you're not. Today we examine Caiaphas' hypocrisy. Not so that we can shake our heads at him. Or congratulate ourselves for not being like him. A close examination here can only force us to take a closer look at ourselves, our own hearts, to see if we have **Hands of Hypocrisy**.

Mark details the legal examination of Jesus before Caiaphas, without mentioning the his name. Jesus was led into the Sanhedrin court in the middle of the night. Highly unusual, completely illegal. The goal of this gathering was not the truth, only enough evidence for a quick death sentence.

Problem? The Sanhedrin could not come up with any dirt on Jesus. He was clean, perfect, actually. How do you blame a capital crime on someone who has never done anything wrong? Use his own words against him? Some stood up and testified that they heard Jesus claim, ***"I will destroy this temple made with hands, and in three days I will build another made without hands."*** (v. 58). Jesus did say something like that at the beginning of his ministry (John 2:19), but he was talking about his body, not the physical temple. Didn't matter. False witnesses hate the truth, so Jesus couldn't set the record straight.

And in the middle of this mess, presiding over this mockery of justice was Caiaphas. Was he more upset with Jesus or with his peers for botching this golden opportunity to get rid of Jesus? Imagine him thinking, "If you want something done right, you have to do it yourself!" He stood up and addressed Jesus directly, ***"Have you no answer? What is this they are testifying against you?"*** (v. 60)

Jesus gives no answer, so the interrogation continues. Except Caiaphas raises the stakes, putting Jesus ***under oath*** (Matthew 26:63), demanding, ***"Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed One?"*** (v. 61) A simple *Yes* or *No* question, but with devilish intent. Say nothing – tacit denial. Say *No* – actual denial. Answer *Yes* – game changer with all the evidence Caiaphas needs.

Jesus understands completely all the implications. He can anticipate the consequences of an honest answer. Yet He declares without hesitation: ***"I am....And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the***

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² EHV ~ *Evangelical Heritage Version* (<http://wartburgproject.org>) © 2019. NPH: 800-662-6022, Amazon-Kindle, LOGOS.

right hand of power and coming with the clouds of heaven.” (v. 62) Now was not the time for silence. Jesus is **the truth** and will always testify to the truth. It was time to suffer at the hands of hateful injustice. The time had come to carry to completion God’s plan of salvation.

Was the high priest happy? Ecstatic? He doesn’t show it. Instead, this morally bankrupt man makes a huge display of moral outrage as he grabs his collar with his hands and tears his clothes, asking the Sanhedrin, **“Why do we need any more witnesses? . . . You have heard the blasphemy.”** (v. 63f) **Blasphemy?** Claiming to be the Messiah, the Son of God? That’s what shocked Caiaphas at the cost of his robes? That charge would stick. That was all the Sanhedrin needed to be rid of Jesus once and for all.

And then, for just a moment, the hypocrites took off their masks. The men who made up the Sanhedrin, usually so sanctimonious, almost always practiced and polished, turned into an out-of-control mob. **“They all condemned him as being worthy of death. Then some began to spit on him. They covered his face and struck him with their fists, saying, “Prophecy!”** (vv. 64f).

Spitting in the face of another human being. Attacking a man who couldn’t defend himself, blindfolded against fists to his face. So disturbing. But I do want to know 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?

Partly political as we’ve heard in previous Lenten sermons. Jewish leaders feared the masses would leave them to follow Jesus, costing their authority and any good will with the Roman invaders. Remember how Caiaphas told the Sanhedrin earlier that Jesus must die so that the nation might live.

But Caiaphas also hated Jesus. He would stop at nothing to destroy Jesus because his main motivation wasn’t political. It was spiritual. The high priest represented a way of life, a time-honored religious system in which God supposedly rewards people for being good. Some people, especially the religious leaders are convinced that they do enough good to get into heaven on their own.

Jesus turned their comfortable world upside down. Instead of patting them on the back, he called them to repent. He called them **whitewashed tombs, a brood of vipers, children of the devil.** He called them out for their hypocrisy, not to embarrass them, but because he cared about them, because he wanted them to see the error of their ways, because he wanted them to see that he was the only way to heaven. Jesus’ confession to Caiaphas prophesied that the high priest would see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven. Their roles would be reversed – the judge would be judged. Caiaphas repent!

But hypocrisy can’t see past it’s own shiny image hiding what’s inside. The hypocrite wants to believe he doesn’t need to repent of his sins because he has no sin. But God’s Word says different. Ponder this personally: ***If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.*** (1 John 1:8) Self-deception is so easy? Hypocrisy hides in our sinful nature. Have you ever thought to yourself, “I may not be perfect, but at least I’m not as bad as . . .”? Ever been critical of another Christian for committing a sin you struggle with yourself? Is the church is full of hypocrites? First impressions, positive image – can anyone hide deep, dark secrets from God?

Every person, every Christian, is guilty of hypocrisy. What prevents us from going down the same path as Caiaphas? Dear Jesus! Our Savior calls us to repent, not to embarrass us, but because he loves us. Stop pretending not to have sin. Remove the mask and look to him who alone removes the guilt of sin. Come clean. Confess day by day. He is faithful and just and will forgive us and purify us from all unrighteousness. Jesus makes us righteous, holy, and blameless in the eyes of God. How we look in the eyes of others ceases to be so important. In fact, the hope we have in Jesus makes it totally irrelevant.

A hypocritical high priest presided over that sham trial, but our Great High Priest was always in control. Jesus knew that he would be mistreated. He had predicted it. Jesus could see the questions of Caiaphas as an obvious attempt to trap him, but Jesus still answered because he wasn’t concerned about saving his life. Jesus was on a rescue mission to save our souls from eternal death. And so he spoke the truth because he is the Truth. And the Truth sets us free. Amen.