

From The Pulpit

by Rev. Donald M. Clark

CAIAPHAS WAS A selfish opportunist. To him, nothing was sacred except as it became an expedient means to serve his desired end. Even his marriage had been arranged with that in view. When evil old Annas had been deposed from the office of High Priest by Valerius Gratus, Caiaphas secretly contracted to marry Annas' daughter, and thus serve the double purpose of keeping the line of family succession unbroken and elevating himself to a position of prosperity and prestige. Some whispered, with wicked smiles, that he was a fool--a tool of Annas, but Caiaphas was neither a fool nor a fool. Annas was in disfavor with Rome, and his newly-acquired son-in-law was his only door to power, and Caiaphas never let him forget it!

And yet, his power was being undermined. Not by Annas--not by Rome--it was being threatened by a Galilean named Jesus. Both Annas and Caiaphas were saducees, and thus did not believe in a future life, but Jesus did! And not only did he teach such, but in Bethany recently, He had raised a man from the dead! Caiaphas opposed dangerous doctrines with all the prejudice of a bigot, but this was more than doctrine! This actually happened, and soon the furore of the people acclaiming Him as the anticipated Messiah would reach the ever-alert ear of Rome, and all that he had labored for would be lost.



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What had happened to Annas, would happen to him--and that must never be! This was the ugly spectre of fear that haunted his heart, and immediately he set out to remedy the situation.

The means he took to save his position and to rid the nation of a disturbing influence makes a series of dramatic scenes portraying the swift succession of events leading to the condemnation and crucifixion of Jesus Christ. Let us look briefly at each of these scenes this morning.

FIRST, IS THE scene of the hurried convening of the Council of Chief Priests immediately after the miracle of the raising of Lazarus.

As soon as they had gathered, one of the younger chief priests shouted wildly, "What do we: for this man doeth many miracles. If we let him thus alone, all men will believe on him; and the Romans shall come and take away both our place and nation." (John 11:47,48) Many nodded in agreement and others began to murmur among themselves, until a crescendo of conversation started to mount to the point of frenzied fury. However, it was here that Caiaphas adjusted his colorful robes carefully, and stood to command attention. Quickly the babble of voices subsided, and he spoke with exaggerated calm, flavoring his words with the sarcasm of superiority.

"Ye know nothing at all, nor consider that it is expedient for us, that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not." (John 11:50) There was that word--"expedient". "Expedient for whom?" "For us." He was now draping his selfish plans in the robe of patriotism, but the other priests didn't care. This was all they needed. A word from the High Priest had, in a moment blueprinted their plans of getting rid of this Disturber. For "from that day forth they took counsel together to put Jesus to death" (John 11:53). And they left the council with the smiles of smug satisfaction on their faces.

THE SECOND PICTURE is that of a scene occurring about a week later. It is in the Temple, and is one of excitement, joy, confusion and tension. The excitement is generated by the running children, their shrill shouts of happy hosannas filling the air. This was a day of welcome, as they had strewn palms in the path of the Nazarene, riding through the city in triumph. The joy is experienced by those whose eyes were beholding for the first time the wonders of the world, and by those who sold sacrificial animals in the temple. The cursing clamor of the men as they hurriedly left the area, the scrambling

of the children for the coins rolling on the pavement, the erratic flight of newly liberated doves made for confusion. . . confusion that resulted in tension. For, over in the corner, were the chief priests; the same ones who had heard of Lazarus; who had witnessed the tumultuous welcome accorded Jesus; who had beheld with their own eyes the miracles of healing, and who had seen this disturber drive out the money-changers.

"They were sore displeased", for Annas had carefully developed a profitable business in money-changing and sales of sacrificial animals in the Temple, and now this, this Carpenter, this fanatic this imposter dared to upset the religious tradition of the priests! So, more than ever, the fires of hatred burned brighter against this One. . . the fires which would soon burn with a white heat of fury and consume the Prophet from Nazareth.

THE THIRD SCENE is just two days before the Passover. We see the familiar forms of the chief priests, plus the scribes and elders gathered together. The flickering light from the lamps played upon their faces, accentuating the evil of their plans, and traced weird patterns on the walls behind them, the grotesque shadows moving slowly as though they were black embodiments of the demon world.

Caiaphas speaks, "This Disturber must die, and quickly. But not on the feast day lest there be an uproar among the people." (Matt. 26:3,4) But all were agreed that he must die. But how to take Him unawares and secretly was the question that consumed many minutes, and still there was no satisfactory answer. They could not just arrest Him, for there was no charge, except their own hatred, and no Roman governor would accept this as grounds.

While deeply engrossed in this discussion, a servant came in quickly and silently, and whispered in Caiaphas' ear. At first, he scowled, as though in disapproval, but then, a slow smile spread across his face, and he motioned the servant to do his bidding. The others wondered at his change of expression, and followed his gaze toward the open door. There stood the servant with. . . could it be? Yes, it was the "man of Keriyoth", the money-keeper of the Galilean group, Judas Iscariot.

SOME HALF ROSE to thrust him out, but Caiaphas stayed them with a languid hand and a chuckling laugh, and beckoned Judas to come before the company. Nervously, Judas scanned the crowd, perhaps surprised that so many were there, and then, with husky, shaking voice--did he quaver from fear or because of guilt? He asked: "What will you give me, and I will deliver Him unto you?" (Matt. 26:15) Without delay, they agreed that thirty pieces of silver would be sufficient, and they sent him on his way to accomplish his foul mission. And again, the smile of smug satisfaction came to the face of Caiaphas.

Finally, we turn to the fourth picture, the setting of which is in the same palace of the high priest, Caiaphas. The elders, scribes and chief priests are there again, including many who were hired as false witnesses, plus the betrayed Christ. Even though their nefarious plans were carefully executed, there was still difficulty in destroying the Disturber. They had already passed sentence on Him, but were without a charge worthy of death. And, since they could not put one to death, there must be a charge brought somewhere along the line wherein the Roman government would condemn Him. Furthermore, Caiaphas was in a predicament. If, in bringing the charge, he dwelt on any supposed opposition to civil authority, that would enlist the sympathies of the Pharisees in His favor; if he emphasized supposed Sabbath violation or neglect of traditional observances, even his Saducees would agree with him, and yet he must do something, and do it now!

THE WITNESSES, brought in with conflicting preparation, disagreed with one another, until it seemed that bedlam would replace the cold, calculating plans for murder that were theirs. And, to make matters worse, through it all, Jesus the prisoner, maintained majestic silence. "Every poisoned arrow of their carefully provided perjuries fell harmless at His feet, as though blunted by the diamond shield of His white innocence. Was this imposter to prevail against them, merely for the lack of a few consistent lies? Was His life charmed even against the calumny confirmed by oaths?" (Farrar's Life of Christ)

Then, Caiaphas, losing all semblance of calm, filled with fear and anger, jumped from his judgment seat and striding into the midst of the

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confused council, shouted in Jesus' face--"Answerest thou nothing?" (Mark 14:60) But even then, His awful silence remained unbroken. Fear and anger were replaced with uncontrollable fury, as the High Priest thrust his face before that of Jesus and screamed: "I adjure you, by the living God, Art thou the Christ, the Son of God?" (Matt. 26:63)

Plain as day, that question--plain as death, the reasoning behind it. For Caiaphas and the religious rulers, there was but one issue here; this One must be destroyed. Jesus paused. The lamps pitched little daggers of light and shadow across the room; the silence in the place was an aching fire. This was the zero hour. The priests leaned forward in their seats, waiting. . . The world, without realizing it, waited, for on His answer rested the hopes of its millions. . . the angels in Heaven, to whom He was the "chiefest among 10,000", waited, their voices stilled, but ready to lift the strain of redemption's holy anthem. . .

THEN LOOKING STEADILY into the eyes of Caiaphas, He spoke. "I am; and ye shall see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven." (Mark 14:62) Tumult split the silence, like a lightning thrust out of control; the council was a council no longer, but a bedlam. Caiaphas, ripped his outer and inner garments in wrath, his face livid with rage. Turning to his associates, he cried; "Ye have heard this blasphemy; What think ye?" No one could distinguish the voices, but at the same time no one could fail to know the sentence--DEATH!

Death? Yes, He suffered it on Calvary, but the sentence was rather on those who spoke it, for death consumed all that they so frantically sought to preserve--position, prestige, tradition, the people, the nation, even the Temple, while the One over whom they sat in judgment conquered death, and lives as eternal Son of the Highest.

CAIAPHAS WAS A selfish opportunist, but he missed his greatest opportunity. The world is filled with men of Caiaphas' character, who for expediency's sake, would condemn and crucify the Christ of God. The path of selfish expediency is the path to the dark abyss of death and worse than that, it is the path that leads to judgment, for "The Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of His power." (II Thess. 1:7-9)