

Religious Leaders in Christ's Day

Scripture: Luke 3:1 – 2 (p. 60), John 11:45 – 57 (p. 105),
& John 18:19 – 24 (p. 42)

3/22/20

Our next step to set the stage for Jesus' ministry after the last two weeks messages on the Roman Rulers in Christ's Day and Christ's Family is to look at the religious leaders in Christ's Day. In our scripture reading we heard their names. The two religious leaders we are going to look at are Annas & Caiaphas.

Annas was an extremely powerful man in Christ's day. He was high priest in Jerusalem from 7 AD to 15 AD. Annas controlled most of the Sadducean aristocracy and he managed the Temple. Annas had unparalleled success at nepotism. Nepotism is the ability to keep your family and friends in high places. Annas had five of his sons become high priest and Caiaphas was his son-in-law. He was good at taking care of the family. Annas followed the Law exactly as it was written with no exceptions. Or maybe let us say – Annas followed the Law exactly how he interpreted it!

By our scripture reading from the Gospel of John we have these words – *Annas then questioned Jesus about his disciples and his teachings. Jesus answered him – ‘I have spoken openly to the world. I have taught in the synagogues and the temple where all the Jews come together, and I have spoken nothing in secret. Why do you question me? Ask those who have heard what I spoke to them, they know what I said.’* When Jesus said this one of the officers standing nearby struck Jesus saying – *‘Is that the way you answer the high priest?’* Jesus answered him, *‘If I have spoken wrongly, testify of the wrong; but if I have spoken rightly, why do you strike me?’* Then Annas sent Jesus bounded to his son-in-law Caiaphas.

Caiaphas was married to the boss's daughter which was a common way of getting ahead in that day. And of course, it is sometimes a good way of getting ahead today!

One of founding fathers of our denomination Alexander Campbell knew this way well. He was the son of our first religious leader in Thomas Campbell and when he married in western PA, he married the richest daughter in the area. So, Alexander Campbell went from a poor preacher to one of the wealthiest men in Western PA. His wealth allowed Alexander to do many things in ministry – He published a monthly journal entitled ‘The Millennium Harbinger’ to share his message, and his wealth allowed him to travel a lot planting churches as he went, and he started a great school and college called Bethany College in Bethany West Virginia. Oh, Alexander Campbell married well, so did Caiaphas.

Caiaphas was a high priest from 18 AD to 36 AD and his main duty was to run the Temple as a family enterprise with Annas. Caiaphas received kickbacks on everything sold at the Temple in Jerusalem for sacrifice. He was often seen taking money for the bazaars just outside the inner Temple. Pilgrims would come to the Temple and exchange their native currency for the sacred half shekel Temple dues and Caiaphas would make a big profit from the money changers and give it to Annas’ family.

They were trying to calculate the risks. If they did nothing, Jesus would start a revolution and further incite the Romans against the Jewish people. If they got rid of Jesus, there was a chance the movement led by Jesus would be stopped and things would return to normal.

In what Caiaphas perceived was conventional wisdom. He urged them to spare the nation by taking the life of one man. Caiaphas said – *You know nothing at all! You do not understand that it is better for you to have one man die for the people than to have the whole nation destroyed!*

An ironically, this was exactly what God had in mind!

As Christians we do not have favorable opinions of Annas & Caiaphas. They were the lead prosecutors against Jesus and they forced Pilate’s hand to crucify Jesus and put him on the cross. But the two, Annas & Caiaphas, fared no better in Jewish tradition. They were not looked at in history as good high priests.

So, what can learn from Annas & Caiaphas, the religious leaders in Christ’s day? They both knew of Jesus. They saw Jesus teaching in the Temple. They heard Jesus’ words. Jesus was right in their temple teaching and preaching. They had witnessed the strength of Jesus’ words in the House of the Lord and those words did not inspire Annas or Caiaphas to serve God better – Jesus’ words stirred up anger and fear within them!

They saw Jesus turn the money changers tables over in the outer court of the Temple. Caiaphas saw Jesus disturb his kickback program with the money changers in the Temple's outer courtyard. Caiaphas saw Jesus upset his 'get rich quick' scheme. And this action brought anger and hatred to them. Their fear grew that Jesus was going to change the order of things. Their fear grew that Jesus was going to upset the status quo!

They heard of Jesus' miracles. They knew about all of Jesus' miracles – they knew about Jesus making the blind see, the lame walk, the sick healed, and the biggest one done most recently – raising of Lazarus from the dead. They knew of all that Jesus had done!

And they were afraid of Jesus' power and they were threatened by Jesus! So, they became Jesus' accusers, interrogators, and judges! They both were so interested in retaining their power that they sought harm to Christ. They needed to eliminate the threat Jesus possessed. They needed to eliminate this threat to their power!

Is this true of each of us? Do we have interest in our lives that distract us from Christ? Does the quest for the power of money distract us from Christ? Does our family keep us from Christ? Does the longing for social status distract us from Christ? Does the lure of this world distract us from Christ? Does the fear of terrorism distract us from Christ? Does the hatred for people different than us distract us from Christ?

Are we Annas in the modern day? Are we power hungry so Jesus becomes a problem? Are we Caiaphas in the modern day? Have we come into a situation of wealth and power so Jesus becomes a problem?

Twelve questions to end this message, but each questions has the same answer and that answer is found in Jesus Christ!

May we during this season of Lent get to know Christ and hear his word. May we never become the accuser, the interrogator, and the judge of others.

Let us pray:

In your hearing before Annas & Caiaphas, O Lord, you answered their accusations without a word because you knew that the trial was only a crude attempt to bring justice. In your beatings and pain before your crucifixion upon a cross, O Lord, you took our sins upon your broad shoulders. In your death upon the cross, O Lord, you showed us the way to salvation.

We thank you for your patience for us and your compassion upon us. We are grateful that you sacrificed so much for us. May we always remember your sacrifice. Grant us your mercy - AMEN