

March 17, 2019 Crosswords Pt. 2 Matthew 26:57-68

For real reasons, the Reformation resulted in a Protestant movement that was suspicious of the power of tradition in the Church, especially where tradition set aside, and at times even ignored the teaching of Scripture. Our first trip to Israel in late January 2017 taught me a lesson that did not come easy: that beyond the Church there were traditions supporting Biblical teaching that one could not get behind in time; that is, as long as pilgrims have been journeying to the Holy Land to walk in the footsteps of Jesus there are specific sites and places where things occurred, identified by the Jewish people.

One such place in Jerusalem is the house of Caiaphas. As it says in Matthew 26, “those who had arrested Jesus took him to Caiaphas, the high priest, where the teachers of the Law and the elders had assembled.” For very close to 20 centuries, Jewish guides have been taking Christian pilgrims to the house of Caiaphas where these very lines of the Gospel unfolded. We know it was night. We know Jesus was a prisoner under guard. I had never even thought to ask the question, ‘where was Jesus held until daylight?’ The answer is, at the house of Caiaphas. When the interrogation was over, the charge officially laid, Jesus was bound and lowered into the cistern. Barbara and I have been there. I get emotional just remembering the experience.

We are tempted to forget our Presbyterian, Christian system of church government is modelled on the Jewish system. Caiaphas was elected for a term of one year. He was the chairman of the rabbinical council of Jerusalem, the Sanhedrin. Like our Presbyteries, the Sanhedrin was not called a committee, or a board, it was referred to as a court. The assembled teachers of the Law and elders made up that court. With Caiaphas in the chair it was an official meeting. The meeting had been called to deal with Jesus, who has been arrested, using Temple guards. What we read in verses 56 and 57 is Matthew's telling us that this is not an ad hoc gathering of conspirators. It is an official meeting of the Sanhedrin. In another chapter of this story we will be reminded that there were members of the court, who were very sympathetic to Jesus and who followed his ministry with great interest and even a measure of faith. They were trying to be careful. They were afraid. A demonstration of too much support could bring those members of the Sanhedrin under discipline.

In verse 59 Matthew tells us what the agenda was for this meeting, and he leaves no doubt it was official. "The chief priests, (we would call it the Executive Committee) and the whole Sanhedrin were looking for false evidence against Jesus so that they could put HIM to death." The agenda has been accepted. There is a general agreement that Jesus is trouble. HE stirs the passions of the people. The Sanhedrin fears enthusiasm...they fear it because they know that if there are disturbances, for and against Jesus, and if the Romans catch

wind of that they will in their ignorance, treat disturbances with the military hammer as insurrection and rebellion. The Romans fear the power of religious passion. Their general approach is to outlaw the native religions of conquered provinces. They have made an exception in the province of Judea....but that exception is continually under review.

Matthew tells us that Peter is nearby. He is outside near the courtyard of the house. He sits down among the guards who like everyone else involved, are waiting for the outcome of the meeting. Peter has a seat in the gallery as it were. He can hear what is going on. He can see the meeting to some degree. He is a witness. And speaking of witnesses, there are a number of people who have come to give evidence. They may have been paid to do so. It was one of the things that Matthew tells us about the proceedings. In most cases the Sanhedrin heard the stories and dismissed them as being of sufficient merit to be the basis of a capital charge before the Roman procurator. As much as this is an official meeting the Rabbinical Council of Jerusalem, only the Romans can order and carry out a death sentence. Caiaphas has no doubts about that. The charge has to be believable, and it has to play well in the ears and the mind of the Roman Procurator, Pontius Pilate.

Two came forward and testified that Jesus said that HE was able to destroy the Temple in Jerusalem, and rebuild it in two days. Caiaphas is getting testy. He knows that stories and unsubstantiated claims will not impress the Gentile

Roman Procurator. He will never render a sentence of death based on Jewish religious claims alone. Caiaphas is frustrated. The clock is ticking and they need something that will get Pilate's attention. He rises and he badgers Jesus. "Are you not going to answer?" Jesus remains silent. Caiaphas takes charge and goes to the central issue here. "Tell us, and tell us under oath by the living God. Tell us, if you are the Christ, the Messiah, the Son of God."

Jesus answers that question. It is about HIS very identity, who HE is. "Yes, it is as you say," Jesus replied. You and I ought to underline those words. A literal translation of the words of Jesus is "You said it." But continuing in the whole of the verse 64, Jesus gave them exactly what Caiaphas asked for. Jesus said, "I say to you, Hereafter you will see the Son of Man (that is an Old Testament phrase that refers to the Messiah), you will see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven." Listen to verses 13, and 14, of Daniel chapter 7 in the Old Testament. "I saw in the night visions and behold, one like the son of man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of Days, (that is God Himself) and they brought him near before him, and there was given him dominion and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations and languages, should serve him: his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed."

Jesus knew what HE was saying. And Caiaphas got it. Do not let anyone tell you Jesus never said HE was the Messiah, the Christ of God. HE said it as clearly as it can be said. HE said it before the Council which understood what the words meant, the reference to the Prophet Daniel. And the response was immediate: "Then the High Priest tore his clothes and said, 'He has spoken blasphemy! Why do we need any more witnesses? Look now you have heard the blasphemy. What do you think?'" "He is worthy of death", they answered. And they spat in his face, and struck him with their fists. (Matt 26:65-67) This is the second time Jesus was assaulted. Shortly HE is bound and lowered into the cistern where HE spent the remainder of the night.

These are words that lead to HIS bearing the cross, and being crucified. Jesus knew what HE was saying, and HE knew the words would not be received well by the balance of this audience. He knew that any who were sympathetic would not dare speak out. Jesus knew what all of this was about. In that room at Caiaphas' house HE faced a choice. He embraced the will of His Heavenly Father. He loved and loves you. He loved and loves me. He embraced HIS identity and HIS destiny. He would save us from our sins and sinfulness. In the power of the love of God, Jesus chose to save us.

Let us pray;

Of eternal love begotten, uncreated, One-in Three,
Christ the Alpha and Omega, Christ, the Source and End will be.

God Redeemer, God Creator, God the Spirit, now to thee
Hymn and chant and high thanksgiving and unwearied praises
be, honour glory and dominion and
eternal victory...evermore and evermore. Amen

(Hymn 163 vs. 1 & 5 BOP)