

Hypocritical Hands

Mark 14:55-66 ⁵⁵ Now the chief priests and all the council sought testimony against Jesus to put Him to death, but found none. ⁵⁶ For many bore false witness against Him, but their testimonies did not agree. ⁵⁷ Then some rose up and bore false witness against Him, saying, ⁵⁸ "We heard Him say, 'I will destroy this temple made with hands, and within three days I will build another made without hands.'" ⁵⁹ But not even then did their testimony agree. ⁶⁰ And the high priest stood up in the midst and asked Jesus, saying, "Do You answer nothing? What *is it* these men testify against You?" ⁶¹ But He kept silent and answered nothing. Again the high priest asked Him, saying to Him, "Are You the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?" ⁶² Jesus said, "I am. And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven." ⁶³ Then the high priest tore his clothes and said, "What further need do we have of witnesses? ⁶⁴ "You have heard the blasphemy! What do you think?" And they all condemned Him to be deserving of death. ⁶⁵ Then some began to spit on Him, and to blindfold Him, and to beat Him, and to say to Him, "Prophecy!" And the officers struck Him with the palms of their hands. ⁶⁶ Now as Peter was below in the courtyard, one of the servant girls of the high priest came.

Black hat, white hat, Good Guy, Bad Guy, evil, righteous.

In lots of movies, it is pretty easy to tell who the bad guy and the good guy are. The good guy looks good, the bad guy looks evil. But there are movies in which the bad guy looks good, metaphorically, and sometimes literally, wears the white hat.

In the story of Jesus crucifixion, there are almost too many bad guys to choose from. Judas who betrayed Jesus. Peter who drew his sword and denied Jesus. Pilate who was too much of a wimp to do what was right. Barabbas the murderer, the soldiers who hit and mocked Jesus, the crowds who turned on him, the disciples who fled, and we could go on.

However, the one who stands out above them all, the worst of the lot is the guy who literally as well as metaphorically was wearing the white hat. Caiaphas the high priest, Caiaphas the hypocrite.

Most of the people involved in Jesus' crucifixion gave in to temptation. They had character flaws, some of them big flaws but still flaws and failures as humans. We can understand that. We like to think we are better, but we know how easy it would be for us to join Peter in his denial.

But Caiaphas, this is not a lapse of judgment. It's not a mistake or a giving into temptation. It is not a simple character flaw. Caiaphas is determined to put Jesus to death and nothing is going to stand in his way, not the law, not the truth, not even the fact that Jesus is able to raise the dead and cast out demons.

Caiaphas calls the Sanhedrin together without the legal amount of time required. He calls them at night which was also against the law. He pays people to lie in court. He renders judgment at the same meeting also illegal.

Jesus himself seems to point to Caiaphas as the ultimate villain the one worthy of the most blame when he says to Pilate, "Therefore the one who delivered Me to you has the greater sin." **John 19:11 NKJ**. "The one who delivered me" is singular in the Greek as well as in the English. Jesus is pointing to a single individual. I am not sure who else he could be referring to other than Caiaphas.

Caiaphas' sin is all the greater because he was the high priest. He wore the white hat physically as well as metaphorically. He was supposed to be serving the people. He was supposed to be teaching them about the Messiah. He was supposed to be watching for the Messiah and preparing the people for his coming.

He should have been first in line to be baptized by John. He should have been sitting at Jesus feet and leading the people to Jesus. He was supposedly God's messenger to the people.

Caiaphas tears his clothes as though he is so upset at what Jesus just said, but in truth in could not have been happier. He had gotten exactly what he wanted. The tearing of the clothes was all an act.

In every way Caiaphas was outwardly the guy in the white hat but inwardly a seething putrid pile of sin and self deception. Caiaphas is not only the villain but also the biggest hypocrite.

The truth of who and what Caiaphas and the rest of the Sanhedrin had become is seen so clearly at the end of Jesus' trials.

Mark 14:65 NKJ ⁶⁵ Then some began to spit on Him, and to blindfold Him, and to beat Him, and to say to Him, "Prophecy!" And the officers struck Him with the palms of their hands.

Their masks come off. The sinfulness of their hearts is clearly seen.

So how did it happen? How did the high priest, who knew God's word, who daily sacrificed for the sins of the people? How did he turn into this? It is easy and comforting to us to see Caiaphas as a two-dimensional character. To look at him and see him as evil, and he did it because he was evil and that is all there is too it.

It's comforting because it lets us think that's him that isn't me. But it is not true.

I have no doubt that at one time Caiaphas just like any one of us. I have no doubt that at one time he tried his best to be the man in the white hat inwardly as well as outwardly. No doubt he tried to be a good high priest and to teach God's word faithfully.

So what lead him to this?

We could point to a couple different factors, but the truth is anger and pride. Either one of those will if not dealt destroy a person, but the two together feed of each other and eat away a person from the inside.

Caiaphas is not a demon who pretends to wear white. He was a man like us who did not begin as a hypocrite, but who allowed anger and pride to grow inside like a black mass of sin. He allowed it to eat away at him from the inside until the white clothing was only a veneer and then finally as we see in our text, even the veneer is torn away and the truth of the blackness of the inner sin is clearly seen.

Caiaphas tearing his robe is not unlike one of those movies where the aliens burst out from inside a person. Except in this case it is that same anger and pride which has grown and eaten Caiaphas alive.

When we think of Caiaphas as the evil guy, it is easy to distance ourselves from him. When we recognize where this sin started then it is not so easy to distance ourselves. All of a sudden we see the seeds of what Caiaphas became inside us as well.

Pride and anger seething and growing is what lead Cain to murder his brother. It is what lead king Saul to seek David's life. It is what lead Joseph's brothers to sell him into slavery. It is what lead Hitler to become a monster.

Yet however much of a monster Caiaphas or Cain or Saul were, they were still men for whom Jesus came to die. Men who could if they wanted receive forgiveness in his blood, be washed through him and become white again. Not just white on the outside but on the inside as well.

That same blood of Christ can wash and cleanse our anger as well. Hopefully before we get to the point of Caiaphas or Hitler but even if we are at that point Jesus' blood can still cleanse us.

The only way to deal with anger is through Christ. We need to confess our own sin. We need to recognize that whatever anyone else did, the anger is our sin, and ask Jesus to forgive our sins and wash away that anger.

Cleanse us from our anger O Lord and make us white within.

Anger makes us the worst kind of hypocrite, the blood of Christ washes away our filth and makes us white within.

Amen