



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Matthew 26:57–69; John 11:47–54

Gospel of Matthew

“Christ Before Caiaphas, the Cynical Timeserver”

TRANSCRIPT

Before we read the passage from Matthew which will be the object of the exposition, I would like to read a passage from the 11th chapter of the Gospel of John, verses 47 through 54, a passage in which John records some of the things that happened at a previous meeting of the council which have reference to things that we'll be talking about later on. So will you turn to John chapter 11 and verse 47:

“Then gathered the chief priests and the Pharisees a council, and said, 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. And one of them, named Caiaphas, being the high priest the that same year, said unto them, 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. And this spoke he not of himself: but being high priest that year, he prophesied that Jesus should die for that nation; And not for that nation only, but that also he should gather together in one

the children of God that were scattered abroad.”

You’ll notice, incidentally, these words that the high priest uttered, were words that have an entirely different meaning in his mind from the intended mind of the Holy Spirit in the recording of them. For Pilate—rather for Caiaphas, the words were a piece of cynical utilitarianism, for he says in verse 50, “It is expedient for us that one man should die for the people.” He does not mean of course that one man should bear the sins of the people and therefore we go spiritually free with the forgiveness of sins. He rather means that we are going to have to put away Jesus of Nazareth, because if he continues, we are going to get into trouble with the Romans, and they will take away our favored privileges and our place as a nation with a measure of self-rule that we do have now.

So he says it’s expedient for us that one man should die in order that the people continue to have the blessings that they have from the Roman government, whereas as God intended these words they were a piece of exposition of the significance of the gospel of Jesus Christ. So it’s an illustration of the fact that God controls the mouths of men and makes them say what he would have them say, for he speaks before God in words that form a beautiful expression of the gospel: one man should die for the people. Well, in verse 51 he says, he prophesied, that Jesus should die for that nation. It’s an illustration of the fact that men may prophesy and not even understand the words that they are saying. Now in verse 53 we read,

“Then from that day forth, they took counsel together for to put him to death. Jesus therefore walked no more openly among the Jews; but went from there unto a country near to the wilderness, into a city called Ephraim, and there continued with his disciples.”

Let’s turn over now to the account of the trial of our Lord which is in Matthew chapter 26 and read the passage that we are going to look at in the exposition in a few moments. It’s Matthew

chapter 26 and verse 57 through verse 68. You can see from that previous passage that Caiaphas and the council have made up their minds already regarding the disposition of Jesus of Nazareth. In verse 57, Matthew the evangelist writes,

“And they that had laid hold on Jesus led him away to Caiaphas the high priest, where the scribes and the elders had been assembled. But Peter followed him afar off unto the high priest’s court, and went in, and sat with the guards, to see the end. Now the chief priests, and elders, and all the council, sought false witness against Jesus, to put him to death; But found none: yea, though many false witnesses came, yet found they none. At the last came two false witnesses, And said, This fellow said, I am able to destroy the temple of God, and to build it in three days. And the high priest arose, and said unto him, Answerest thou nothing? What is it which these witness against thee? But Jesus held his peace,”

That’s a remarkable statement. You would have expected him perhaps to answer these questions, but he refused to reply.

“And the high priest answered and said unto him, I adjure thee by the living God, that thou tell us whether thou be the Christ, the Son of God. Jesus saith unto him, Thou hast said: (incidentally, that was a common way of making an affirmative answer; in the Markan account, the words are simply, “I am”). Nevertheless I say unto you, Hereafter shall ye see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven. Then the high

priest rent his clothes (or tore his clothes) saying, He hath spoken blasphemy; what further need have we of witnesses? Behold, now ye have heard his blasphemy. What think ye? They answered and said, He is guilty of death. Then did they spat in his face, and buffeted him; and others smote him with the palms of their hands, (this incidentally in the Greek text is an expression not simply of Slapping, but of punching with the fist; and the Markan account adds the fact that the servants participated in this, which makes it extremely ironic, because he is the servant of Jehovah and these servants of the wicked men have the freedom of punching him with their fists) and all the time saying, (Matthew says) Prophesy unto us, thou Messiah, Who smote thee?”

May the Lord bless this reading of his Word. Let's bow together in prayer.

[Prayer} We're grateful to Thee, Lord, for these accounts of the sufferings of our Lord Jesus Christ. We marvel that wicked men have so misunderstood the intentions of our great triune God. And Lord, in the light of the things that we see, men who had great privilege and great opportunity but nevertheless were blind, we marvel that today, Thou hast in wonderful grace, illumined our minds to understand the fact that the Lord Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of the living God, and that he has offered an atonement for sinners. How blessed we are to have the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

And we know Lord that it is not by reason of any merit whatsoever in ourselves. It is the result of the manifestation of grace to us. And we give Thee praise and we give Thee thanks. We shall never understand all that is involved in the distinguishing love of our great God, but we do praise Thee for it.

“Christ Before Caiaphas, the Cynical Timeserver” by S. Lewis Johnson
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And Lord we pray that it may make a difference in our lives so that we too are concerned for those who do not know the Lord Jesus. Enable us, O God, by the grace of our great God and the guidance of the Holy Spirit, to make him known who has loved us so much.

We thank Thee for the other blessings of life, for the Bible, the open Scriptures which are— which we are able to read and ponder and meditate upon, which build us up, which strengthen us and give us consolation in times of trial.

We pray for the sick and ask Thy blessing upon them and for those in the hospital. Lord we commit them to Thee. We pray that Thou wilt strengthen. For those who face operations, we pray Lord that Thy blessing may be upon them in consolation in strengthening and healing. Give wisdom and guidance to those who minister to them.

And we thank Thee for the opportunity to discuss again with friends the things that concern the Lord Jesus. And we pray O God that if it should please Thee, Thou wilt use us as instruments of Thy grace.

Now Lord we pray Thy blessing upon this meeting. We ask that we may have the sense of Thy presence as we consider again some of the things that surround the greatest event of human history: the sufferings and death of our Lord Jesus Christ. We pray in his name. Amen.

[Message] The dictionaries define a timeserver as a person who for his own advantage deliberately surrenders his principles. That definition fits Caiaphas the timeserver to a tee. He was the high priest of the nation Israel, the supreme pontiff of the nation Israel, the ruler of the nation spiritually whose duty according to the Scriptures was to keep knowledge, spiritual knowledge. He was the messenger of the Lord of hosts, the angel of the Lord of hosts, and men, if they wished to seek the law of God according to Malachi were to seek the law of God from the mouth of the high priest.

And yet Caiaphas in spite of all of his great privileges and in spite of his place of authority in the nation was a man who was as resolute and defiant and as merciless a man as existed in the nation that day. What kind of man was Caiaphas? Someone has said he was astute and unscrupulous

diplomat, a wily manager of men, a master of assemblies with a fitting gift of speech; a conceiver of bold and daring policies in the hour when others waiver; a man of unflinching will in carrying them out.

If we were to try to put the character of Caiaphas into a sentence or perhaps even a word or two we would say that he was an ecclesiastic. He was the type of all of that long succession of men who have laid heavy burdens upon people interested in spiritual things and often thwarted the purpose of God by expediency.

Not all ecclesiastics are like Caiaphas, of course. There are some who by virtue of conviction have suffered greatly. There are some whose convictions are so deep that it can truly be said they are admirable men. In recent years, we have had illustrations of men who have been members of large religious organizations, who have given up their important positions by virtue of certain convictions that have come to them. We have men both in Protestant and in Catholic circles who have done just that. They were ecclesiastics but they were men who were able to stand for their convictions and even take steps which meant a great deal of sacrifice on their parts. They were ecclesiastics but nevertheless they were men of deep conviction.

Caiaphas was not that kind of man. He was the son-in-law of Annas, a very unscrupulous high priest who ruled as high priest from A.D. 6 to A.D. 15. He was deposed because of the wickedness of his rule. When the Romans came many years later, they discovered that Annas had been responsible for the storing up of millions of dollars in the treasury. He was that kind of man. Caiaphas was the son-in-law of Annas, but Annas so far as we can tell was still the power behind the throne. And while Caiaphas ruled as high priest from 18 A.D. to about 37 A.D., a lot of that time was under the influence of Annas.

Caiaphas was a cold-blooded cynic—a hypocrite—a man who knew exactly what he wanted and did not mind using spiritual power to accomplish it. What a contrast between Caiaphas and our Lord Jesus Christ. It is hard to find a greater contrast between two men who outwardly might appear to be somewhat similar. One of these men was a lover of religion the other, the Lord Jesus, was a

lover of a personal God, his Father. The one was strong in power the other was strong in submission to God. Caiaphas was histrionic, dramatic, he was the kind of man who could carry out his duties such as rending his garments in a very dramatic way, and the Lord Jesus, on the other hand, is the authentic man—the undisguised man, the real man. Caiaphas is characterized by craftiness and subtlety and deceit; the Lord Jesus is the guileless man. He is the Nathaniel, the great Nathaniel in whom there was no guile, in the ultimate sense.

The one man was the strongman of the entrenched religious system. The other was meek and gentle with no haven but the wide sky of God’s verity, as someone has put it. You could hardly find a greater contrast in men than the contrast between Caiaphas the high priest of Israel and the Lord Jesus Christ, the high priest of God.

There is also, I think, a biting irony in this situation. The Lord Jesus is the deliverer. He is the deliverer *par excellence*. But the deliverer stands before those who are in bondage to sin in bonds himself. He is the holy one, but he stands condemned by those who are supposed to have authority in holy things. He is the God-man. He is the one who is very God of very God; a divine person who possesses also a human nature but at the same time he is accused, this God-man, of blasphemy. He is the high priest forever, but he is sentenced by the high priest who serves for only a few years. And finally, he is the resurrection and the life, but he is sentenced by the religious authorities to die. What irony. What biting irony in the confrontation of Caiaphas, the high priest of Israel, and the Lord Jesus, the high priest after the order of Melchizedek.

The trial of the Lord Jesus falls into two parts. It is an ecclesiastical trial, and it is a civil trial. And there are three parts of each of these two trials: the ecclesiastical trial and the civil trial. In the ecclesiastical trial he appears informally before Annas. That incident is only recorded in the Gospel of John. Then there is this illegal midnight meeting before Caiaphas which is recorded here in the passage that we have read for our Scripture reading this morning, and then again the council met early in the morning after the sun came up in order to confirm the judgment that was made in the illegal midnight meeting.

Having condemned him for blasphemy but realizing that the Romans would not accept a charge of blasphemy—that would have meant nothing to them; they would not have put him to death for theological reasons—the Jewish Sanhedrin realized that they must charge him with something else. And so the charge that was brought before the Romans was the charge of sedition, and again our Lord Jesus appears before three men. He appears before Pilate, and then Pilate learning that Herod was in town and wishing to get himself out from under the burden of the situation had him sent off to Herod. But Herod would not accept that and sent him back to Pilate and Pilate was forced to sentence him to death.

Now we are looking at the informal meeting, this illegal meeting that occurred during the night. We know from later rules concerning the meetings of the Sanhedrin that a formal meeting of the council was valid only between sunrise and sunset. So if this meeting as the Gospels record occurred at nighttime, and if at that time sentence was pronounced upon the Lord Jesus it was the sentence of a meeting illegally held. Alfred Edersheim was the Grenfeld lecturer on the Septuagint at the University of Oxford, a man who was a very fine and widely recognized scholar and also a Jewish Christian, and a man who was also a Jewish man and a friend who was not a Christian who said that this was a private murder committed by burning enemies not the sentence of a regularly constituted Sanhedrin.

Now that fact has been dated—debated down through the years and of course, I do not expect you to accept necessarily the testimony of one man in the solution of the problem, but all of the evidence of the Gospels is to the effect that this was an illegal meeting, and it was a private murder committed by burning enemies, not the sentence of a regularly constituted Sanhedrin.

We must not, however, think that the Jewish people are solely responsible for the death of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is very clear that the Gentiles are responsible just as definitely as the Jewish people. We cannot say that our Lord was crucified by the Jews. We cannot say he was crucified by the Gentiles. He was crucified by representatives of the human race, and we should remember that

and be very careful to remember it. It is a testimony to the sin, not of the Jews alone, but it is a testimony to the sin of us who are Gentiles as well.

But it is clear that the claims of the Lord Jesus were never investigated really. I have a friend in this city who also has a friend and at a wedding that I performed we were very concerned about the salvation of this individual about which we were talking, and he said with reference to this person that that person had said to him, “I have been brought up in my religion I will not leave it. If I am wrong I will just go to hell.” That is an illustration of a closed mind. [Laughter] I think it is fair to say [Johnson laughs] I think it is fair to say that Caiaphas had a closed mind. It is very easy to have a closed mind, and of course those of us who have been by the grace of God brought to the knowledge of the Lord Jesus as Savior, we too know what it is to have a closed mind. But it’s clear that our Lord’s claims were never truly investigated.

Now the trial I think of the Lord Jesus is the perfect fulfillment of John chapter 3 and verse 19. And this is the condemnation that light has come into the world but men have loved darkness rather than light because their deeds are evil.

Now Matthew, in the first two verses in the passage that we have read, has described the circumstances. The Lord Jesus has been taken captive, and he is brought away to Caiaphas the high priest. The elders and the scribes have already been in assembly, and Peter follows afar off. When the council meets and when the Lord Jesus is brought before the high priest, there are three questions that come before that council. And these three questions are the matter of the false witnesses, the matter of Messiahship, and the questions of blasphemy. We’ll look for a few moments at these three questions.

I want you to notice first of all the question of the false witnesses and let me read again the verses 59 through 63, the first part of the verse, because this is the section of the Matthean account in which this matter of the false witnesses is discussed. We read in verse 59: “Now the chief priests, and elders, and all the council, sought false witness against Jesus, to put him to death; But found none: yea, though many false witnesses came, yet found they none.” That is, they found none who

could agree. “At the last came two false witnesses, And said, This fellow said, I am able to destroy the temple of God, and to build it in three days. And the high priest arose, and said unto him, Answerest thou nothing? What is it which these witness against thee? But Jesus held his peace.”

Now you can see from this account and if you will read the other two accounts, you will see the same thing that Mr. Religion, or Caiaphas the high priest, has clearly already prejudged this case. They had already met. It was already the opinion of the counsel that Jesus’ life must be sacrificed in order to preserve the place of the nation before the Romans. He had mouthed expediency unto the guise of patriotism when he said it is expedient for one man that one man should die for the people. So here again he is following out his preplanned intention of doing away with him.

When two false witnesses come forward—Mark tells us that they disagreed among themselves, and furthermore we know from other accounts in the Gospels that they misquoted him—these two witnesses are taken up as possibly being ground for accusation. Remember in Jewish law, it was at the mouth of two or three witnesses that a thing should be established. They say that he said, I am able to destroy the temple of God and to build it in three days.

Now essentially there is nothing wrong with that statement, because he does not say that he is going to destroy the temple. He says simply that I am able to do it according to their words. But yet it was a misquotation because so far as we know what our Lord Jesus had said a long time before this was, destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it again, and John makes the telling comment that what he meant by that was that if they should destroy his body—the temple of his body—he would be raised again from the dead. So, destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up, is not the same at all as saying, this fellow said I am able to destroy the temple of God and to build it in three days. They had misunderstood him. They had misquoted him, and now they used their own misunderstood quotation from him as the means of accusation of him.

But Jesus held his peace. You know in all forms of law so far as I know or, at least in our law, the accused is not required to clarify the prosecution’s testimony, and so when they in falsity made this accusation against him, he held his peace. I think it’s striking, and we’ve said this several

times in the Gospels, I think it's striking that on several occasions the Lord Jesus did not reply when it might have seemed very wise for him to reply according to our human wisdom. Would not this have been the perfect time to express himself concerning messianic prophecy? Would it not have been desirable for him to begin as he did with the disciples on the Emmaus Road with the prophecies of the Old Testament and seek to explain to them from the Word of God why it is true that he is the Messiah? But Jesus held his peace.

I think it is again another application of the principle which he had given in the Sermon on the Mount, and that principle is simply this: that we do not cast our pearls before swine. There are times when it is proper for a Christian to be quiet in the presence of the unbelievers. There are times when it would be a sin to express the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. That is the plain teaching of the Word of God. Now I know we are not taught this in classes on evangelism. We are taught just the opposite: that we should always under every circumstance try to explain the gospel to people. But it's evident our Lord has never listened to our classes on evangelism [laughter], because not only did he hold his peace before Caiaphas at this point, but also before Pilate and before Herod. There came a time before both of those two men in his testimony when he was absolutely silent. He surely did not pull out the “Four Spiritual Laws” and hand them to them. You see there is a time even when all of our testimony is not only not right—it's wrong. So he held his peace. He's not required to clarify their testimony. But in a moment he will speak.

Now then we have the matter of Messiahship coming up, and the high priest when our Lord Jesus did not reply to these accusations says, “I adjure thee by the living God that thou tell us whether thou be the Christ the Son of God.” So here we see him passing from silent obedience to a speaking kind of obedience. He had no obligation to answer these conflicting charges, but when the Jewish head of spiritual state, so to speak, speaks to him and asks him officially for a confession of his Messiahship, he will answer the denial that lies within Caiaphas's heart. I adjure thee, he says.

Now there could hardly be a more excruciating form of denial of our Lord's claims than for the high priest to say, I adjure thee. Here is the high priest in Israel who is supposed to be a man

whose position is supposed to be neutral in matters such as this. He has a responsibility to test spiritual claims. He certainly is not supposed to prejudge cases, but he speaks to the Lord Jesus who has made the claim that he is the sinless Messiah, and he calls upon him in these words, I adjure thee by the living God that you tell us whether you are the Christ or not. In other words, he asks him to speak under oath.

Now when he speaks under oath or when he asks him to speak under oath, I should say, it is as if he were doubting our Lord's truthfulness at all times. Why do men speak under oath? Well they speak under oath because we know that men don't always tell the truth. That's why we call upon a man in the witness box to swear that he will tell the truth. Why? Because we know they so often don't tell the truth, and we hope that under certain conditions they would be more inclined to be truthful than others.

So when a person calls upon another to speak under oath, it's as if he were saying you're not an honest man; you're only honest under certain conditions. So you see the high priest in calling upon our Lord Jesus to speak under oath has already prejudged the case. He knows or confesses by this that the Lord Jesus is not the sinless Son of God who always speaks in truth. It is, I say, an excruciating form of denial of the Son of God, because it is a personal affront and an insult to his honesty and integrity. I adjure by the living God that you tell us whether you are the Christ the Son of God.

They say, that is the Englishmen do, an Englishman's word is his bond. Well that's not altogether true, of course, but our Lord Jesus of all people needed no adjuring. He did not need for anybody to say to him, now I want you to speak under oath. Everything that our Lord Jesus ever said was always under the bond of absolute truth and integrity. Well since the high priest asks him to confess his Messiahship, he replies, thou hast said—or as Mark puts it, I am.

Now it seems to me that this is the final official confession of Messiahship which he intends to make in his first coming. I want you for a moment just to think about the background of this answer: I am. Now remember last week we were talking about this expression, I am, and I made the

statement that it comes from Exodus chapter 3 where Moses sees the burning bush, and after seeing the bush that was afire but was not consumed, God spoke to him and told him that he intended to deliver the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt through the hand of Moses. Moses then desiring to have some name for God that he might report to the children of Israel, asked him who he was, what was his name, and the answer came: I AM who I Am.

Now all of the statements in the Bible related to, I am, and all the significance that lies around those two words as the confession of the absolute distinctness of the true God come from that chapter in Exodus chapter 3. I AM who I AM. And I think I said last Sunday that it is impossible for God to be defined absolutely. It is impossible for God to give an absolute definition of himself to men. He says, simply I AM who I AM. What more could God say? I AM who I AM. If we define God by human limitations we limit him. And so he cannot truly be the God who is absolutely infinite and eternal and possessed of all of the other attributes that belong to an infinite, eternal God. He can only say I AM who I AM.

Now he can give a relational definition. He can say I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob, as he does just shortly after that in the 3rd chapter of the book of Exodus. He says simply that I am the covenant-keeping God, and I will redeem my people according to my purposes. But as far as he is concerned he is I AM who I AM.

Now we know that when in Exodus chapter 3 God confessed who he was, I AM who I AM, shortly thereafter there occurred the plagues. And the plagues finally issued in the deliverance of the children of Israel by means of the blood atonement of the Passover night. As a result of the plagues, the judgments and then the deliverance by blood, the children of Israel went out of the land in their exodus from Egypt, and the bondage of Egypt, into the ultimate freedom of the land that God had promised them.

Now all of that is typical. All of that is illustrative of the true confession of the Lord Jesus and the Exodus—the true Exodus that is grounded in the blood that was shed on Calvary’s cross. For you see, when that bush burned in the Old Testament and was not consumed, that was an

illustration of the self-existent God. And then the plagues that follow and judgment that comes and the deliverance by means of blood is all illustrative of the work of the cross, where the Lord Jesus bears all of the plagues of divine judgment crying out, O my God my God why hast Thou forsaken me, and then through the shedding of his blood accomplishes the Exodus of the people of God from the bondage of sin.

Now if we have in Exodus chapter 3, the burning of the bush, when our Lord Jesus makes this confession in the council in the Sanhedrin, as one of the commentators has said, “All the thermometers of God were bursting, because it was here that the Lord Jesus was making the ultimate confession of who he the covenant-keeping God was.” Yes, it’s true, Caiaphas, I am the Messiah the Son of the living God. This incident is more important than the incident of the burning bush, because it is really the fulfillment of it. God has finally spoken in his Son: Caiaphas, I am the Messiah the Son of the living God.

Incidentally, when he makes this confession and says he is the Messiah the Son of the living God, he means of course that all of those who are related to this great covenant God, are themselves delivered by virtue of their relationship to him. It is an amazing confession. It is a magnificent confession. And it is a confession that touches the destiny of every single individual Christian. And if you’re a Christian, it touches you’re destiny, because when he cried out, I am, yes I am the Messiah the Son of the living God, it was a confession of all that God was and had been doing from the ages past, and of course it has come to it’s ultimate perfection in the sufferings of the cross.

But he does not stop there. He adds, “Nevertheless I say unto you hereafter ye shall see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power and coming in the clouds of heaven.” We know that our Lord Jesus holds three offices. He holds the office of prophet. He is the prophet who is absolutely truthful. He is the greater prophet than Moses. He is the priest who offers the atoning sacrifice; the once for all sacrifice. And he is the king who is coming to settle all of the affairs of earth and introduce his kingdom.

Now he has here reached the climax of his prophetic office by saying, yes it's true I am the Messiah, the Son of the living God. That is the prophecy of God. In a moment when he cries out on the cross as I said, My God My God why hast Thou—why hast Thou forsaken me, he is acting as the priest who offers the one sacrifice that delivers from sin. But the time is coming when he shall come again as the king, the third of his offices, and he shall set things straight down here upon the earth.

Now it is I think plain that he is referring to these three offices here. He has made his office, he has made his confession as prophet. He has referred to the fact that in the light of the circumstances to his death, but as a result of this and as a consequence of it, he will come again and finish in the physical sense, and the spiritual sense, all the work that is bound up in the shedding of the precious blood.

Well now there is one final matter, and that's the matter of blasphemy. The false witnesses have been shown to be false witnesses. He has made his confession of Messiahship, and now the high priest rends his clothes saying, he's spoken blasphemy! “What further need have we of witnesses? Behold now ye have heard his blasphemy.” Isn't it striking that Caiaphas, this ecclesiastic, this man who utters all of these kinds of cynical utilitarian statements, is now here changing horses in the middle of the stream. You can tell exactly where he stands. Previous, his position has been, if we don't do away with him, the Romans will take away our privileges. But now he says, if we don't do something about this man, we are not being true to the Bible, because the Bible tells us that he is an enemy of God's truth. He has spoken blasphemy. So now his stand is on the interpretation of the Old Testament. Formerly it is of course a political stand.

Now the rending of the garments must not be thought of as being an expression of genuine horror on the part of Caiaphas. It was like putting on the black cap. You see, when a man was convicted of blasphemy, the high priest rent his garments as a matter of custom. And the rent had to be of a specified length. And furthermore, it had to be in certain garments—those that could be most easily mended. So it was not the kind of thing that is an expression of true horror and true concern. It was just a formal thing through which he went.

It reminds me of the story of a chorus girl, I think I've written it up in the *Believers Bible Bulletin*, who introduced her sweetheart to another chorus girl but nevertheless did not forget the proprieties. He transferred his affections to the new charmer, and naturally the other girl who had been hurt by this was very much upset, but she directed her anger at the girl rather than the man. She exploded in an angry letter and in this letter, not forgetting the proprieties, she said look here you little cat, you know blame well, we had been going together for months. Wait till I lay my hands on you, you good-for-nothing bleached blonde. I'll scratch your eyes out, pull your hair, your teeth and throw acid on you. Yours truly, and she signed her name. But then she put a little PS: PS—Please excuse pencil. She didn't forget the proprieties even then. [Laughter]

Now when a high priest rends his garments and when he does it in this situation, it's like the proprieties. He wants to be sure to do that which is proper. What he really meant by that if he had been true to the facts of the case, what he should have meant by it is alas, alas to think that Abraham should have given birth to such a son as this—a son who confesses falsely that he is the Messiah.

Well the consequences of the trial are given in the last two verses—verses 67 and 68—and the mistreatment of our Lord Jesus even by servants. Think of it. Think of the irony of the servants of the high priest mistreating the servant of Jehovah. They spit upon him. They buffet him. They smite him with their fists, for that's really the meaning of that Greek word. It is an illustration of contempt. It is an illustration of sadism. It's an illustration of a kind of demonism. If they had been serious, they would have closed the meeting of the council in all solemnity, but instead we have delight of servility in insulting someone who is superior and trampling on fallen greatness, much as the Italians did when poor Mussolini got his many years ago.

And then to make it even more ironic, in the midst of all of this, they blindfold our Lord and as they are beating him and punching him with their fists, they cry out to him: “Prophecy unto us, thou Messiah, who smote thee!? Prophecy unto us who smote thee.” And as they hesitated to wait for an answer there was a cock that crowed and they all heard it and paid no attention to it whatsoever.

You see, the prophet is asked to become a fortuneteller. He's asked to become a magician. He's asked to become a Houdini. But ironically, there was being fulfilled in their own hearing one of the most remarkable prophecies of the whole of the Bible. It was, Peter before the cock shall crow twice, you will deny me thrice, and so as they are beating our Lord, and crying out, prophesy unto us who smote thee!, there is being fulfilled that tremendous prophecy of the crowing of cocks, which only illustrates the fact that men who are spiritually blind cannot understand anything. He that is of God heareth God's words, the Lord Jesus said. You hear them not, because you are not of God.

That's why in a meeting such as this, I can preach these great doctrines of the sufferings of Christ, and someone may sit in the auditorium and though they hear the words, they do not make any more sense to them they do not any more hear the spiritual significance of them than those servants did when they heard the cock crow that morning which was the signal of the fulfillment of one of the most magnificent prophecies the Lord Jesus ever made. O the blindness of men.

Reminds me of a man who was bald except for two hairs on his head, and he nursed those hairs along. He thought they were great. [Laughter] And he did everything that he possibly could. He wouldn't allow any of that greasy kid stuff to touch them at all, until one morning he awakened he looked down on his pillow and there were the two hairs. He said, "My God, I'm bald!" [Laughter] We can be so blind about obvious things. Caiaphas and the Jewish people and the Gentiles with all of these magnificent things happening right in their spiritual presence were utterly blind.

May I close with a startling observation and also an application? Caiaphas in one sense was right when he said that the Lord Jesus was guilty of death. Speaking from God's standpoint, he was right. He was guilty of death, for he was being made sin. He was being made sin, and therefore was coming under condemnation. And as he was hanging upon the cross that is exactly what he was, bearing our sin and our condemnation.

As a matter of fact, the words of Caiaphas and the words of God are identical, for Caiaphas said, one must die for all. Now the Lord God also says, one must die for all, so that the statements that the two make: one must die for all are identical. But oh the difference in meaning. For Caiaphas,

one must die for all means Jesus must die in order that we may have our privileges under the Roman government. But for God to say, one must die for all means that the atoning sacrifice must be offered in order that the people of God might be gathered from abroad together into the family of God. Men may say, aha, that good-for-nothing man. In one sense they are wrong. God says, ah that earthly that worthless man. In the spiritual sense he’s right. O the glorious paradox of the sufferings of Christ.

Now I am sure that as we think about these things, it is obvious to us that one of the most important things is that we truly respond to the decision that faces us between Caiaphas and Christ. Was he a blasphemer or was he the Messiah? Caiaphas said he was a blasphemer because he claimed to be the Son of God. He said he was the Messiah. There is no halfway house between these two positions. You cannot say he was a good man. As I heard someone say again this week, He was not God, but he really was a very good man and a good teacher. But you see he cannot be a good man and a good teacher if he said he was God when he was not. That is blasphemy.

But this man, so calm and majestic in silence and in speech, the judge among the judges, the priest among the priests, and the prophet among the prophets—this man, why who is he? Why Peter gives the only correct answer: thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.

You know, if Caiaphas had really been truly a priest of God when they brought the Lord Jesus into his presence, he would have looked upon him. He would have looked upon his face. He would have been smitten of his own sin. He would have been brought to a sense of his own unworthiness. He would have gotten down off of his little seat, walked over toward the true priest, taken off his ephod, taken off his turban, taken off the miter, taken off the plate that had “holiness unto the Lord above it,” taken it off himself, put it on the Lord Jesus Christ. He would have fallen down in his presence, and he would have cried out as the true priest prophesying truly, Behold the Lamb of God which taken away the sin of the world, and he would have turned to him and he would have said, Thou art the Messiah Thou art the priest forever after the order of Melchizedek; I do worship Thee as the fulfillment of all of the program of God.

“Christ Before Caiaphas, the Cynical Timeserver” by S. Lewis Johnson
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But of course it was not to be. He rent his garments in token expression of horror at the confession. May God help us to rend our own hearts in repentant praise and thanksgiving for the Son of God who loved us and gave himself for us.

If you're here this morning and you have never believed in him, we call upon you to recognize who he is, what he has done, and cast yourself upon him for time and for eternity. May we stand for the benediction?

[Prayer] Father, we are amazed again as we think again of these great events that transpired during the life and ministry of our Lord Jesus Christ. How marvelous is the plan of God. How wonderful is the expression of divine truth in the life and ministry of Jesus of Nazareth. We do, Lord, bow before him. We worship Thee for him. We worship him, the second person of our triune God in the Spirit. Truly, Lord, Thou art the Messiah, the Son of the living God.

We praise Thee for the forgiveness of sins, and O Father we do pray that if there are some here who have not yet this experience, open their blinded eyes give them understandings of themselves and then of Him.

May grace mercy and peace go with us.

For Jesus' sake. Amen.