

**March 1<sup>st</sup>, 2009**  
**“The Last Year of the Life of Christ, Part 36”**  
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**John 11:49-50**

**49 And one of them, Caiaphas, being high priest that year, said to them, “You know nothing at all,  
50 nor do you consider that it is expedient for us that one man should die for the people, and not that the whole nation should perish.”**

Thank you very much for coming to hear the message for today. Before we begin our next lesson, let us reiterate our reason for attending Church.

We attend Church to obtain the mind of Christ, meaning, to have the Bible illuminated in our minds so that we can clearly understand the principles that Jesus taught and base our daily personal decisions on those principles.

We come to Church because we want to be obedient to the Bible, which is the doctrine of Jesus Christ, in an informed, insightful and intelligent manner.

In our last lesson, I made the point that our mission as a church is to provide an effective argument for the historical reality of the life, death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ to our community, and that it is my job to preach and publish presentations that affirm the evidence that the Biblical accounts of the activities of Jesus Christ are historically accurate. In our last lesson, we also recounted the episode in which Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead. When Jesus arrived at Bethany after Lazarus’ death, He talked to Lazarus’ sisters who showed Him the way to the tomb. **John 11:38-44** records:

**38 Then Jesus, again groaning in Himself, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone lay against it.**

**39 Jesus said, “Take away the stone.” Martha, the sister of him who was dead, said to Him, “Lord, by this time there is a stench, for he has been dead four days.”**

**40 Jesus said to her, “Did I not say to you that if you would believe you would see the glory of God?”**

**41 Then they took away the stone from the place where the dead man was lying. And Jesus lifted up His eyes and said, “Father, I thank You that You have heard Me.**

**42 And I know that You always hear Me, but because of the people who are standing by I said this, that they may believe that You sent Me.”**

**43 Now when He had said these things, He cried with a loud voice, “Lazarus, come forth!”**

**44 And he who had died came out bound hand and foot with graveclothes, and his face was wrapped with a cloth. Jesus said to them, “Loose him, and let him go.”**

As was my point in our last lesson, this miracle had a great impact on the disciples. The discussion that the disciples had with Jesus about Lazarus’ illness before they left for Bethany, the statement from Jesus during that discussion that He was going to “wake Lazarus out of sleep”, the fact that, when Jesus and the disciples reached Bethany, Lazarus had been in the tomb

for four days, Jesus' declaration to Martha and the disciples that "I am the Resurrection and the Life", and the final fact, that Jesus prayed a prayer to God and spoke a word to a dead man, and Lazarus rose from the dead, all had a powerful impact on those who had allegiance to Jesus Christ before these events occurred.

Of all of the miracles that the disciples saw Jesus perform, the raising of Lazarus was the one that gave the disciples absolute confidence in the abilities and identity of Jesus. After Lazarus, the disciples certainly believed that which Peter confessed when Jesus asked them about their impressions of His identity, in **Matthew 16:13-16**:

**13 When Jesus came into the region of Caesarea Philippi, He asked His disciples, saying, "Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?"**

**14 So they said, "Some say John the Baptist, some Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets."**

**15 [Jesus] said to them, "But who do you say that I am?"**

**16 Simon Peter answered and said, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."**

Not only has the raising of Lazarus convinced the disciples that Jesus is the Son of God, it also convinced many of the other Jews who were blessed to see Lazarus come out of the tomb. **John 11:45** says:

**45 Then many of the Jews who had come to Mary, and had seen the things Jesus did, believed in Him.**

Their mourning changed to joy when Lazarus was raised from the dead. But as great as was the miracle that Jesus performed, equally astonishing was the reaction of those that opposed Jesus' ministry. **John 11:46-48** records:

**46 But some of them [that witnessed the miracle] went away to the Pharisees and told them the things Jesus did.**

**47 Then the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered a council and said, "What shall we do? For this Man [Jesus] works many signs.**

**48 If we let Him alone like this, everyone will believe in Him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and nation."**

A few weeks ago, we had an interesting discussion about sinfulness. **Romans 3:23** tells us:

**23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,**

Sin does not always involve violating of one of the physical commandments, as in, "You shall not steal", "You shall not kill", "You shall not commit adultery". As a matter of fact, keeping the physical commandments is the elementary level of Christianity. The more advanced level of Christianity involves developing a Christian attitude, which is an attitude that works and hopes for the repentance of others. Jesus gave His disciples a lesson on the Christian attitude when He was on His way to Jerusalem for His last time, and was rejected by the Samaritans in whose town He intended to stay the night. **Luke 9:51-56** records:

**51 Now it came to pass, when the time had come for Him to be received up, that He steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem,**

**52 and sent messengers before His face. And as they went, they entered a village of the Samaritans, to prepare for Him.**

**53 But they did not receive Him, because His face was set for the journey to Jerusalem.**

**54 And when His disciples James and John saw this, they said, “Lord, do You want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them, just as Elijah did?”**

**55 But He turned and rebuked them, and said, “You do not know what manner of spirit you are of.**

**56 For the Son of Man did not come to destroy men’s lives but to save them.” And they went to another village.**

Jesus stated the Christian attitude succinctly, in **Luke 19:10**:

**10 for the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost.”**

The Christian attitude begins with the knowledge that regardless of how sinful a person may have been, as long as he or she is alive, they have the opportunity to decide to accept Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior and to repent of and be forgiven for their sins. The Christian attitude is the long view, the view of perpetually giving others another chance to repent, because the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost. We do not have forever to repent because life is finite, and we are all going to come to the end of life someday. However, until a person actually dies, even if they do not respond to our most passionate of attempts to persuade them to reconcile their lives with the Lord, we have to keep our hope for their repentance alive, because if they live, they will have another chance. Peter tells us, in **2Peter 3:8-9**:

**8 But, beloved, do not forget this one thing, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.**

**9 The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.**

Jesus is always looking for the way to reconcile men to God, but the Jewish religious leaders have the opposite perspective. **John 11:46-48** records:

**47 Then the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered a council and said, “What shall we do? For this Man [Jesus] works many signs.**

**48 If we let Him alone like this, everyone will believe in Him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and nation.”**

Let me translate. If Jesus keeps raising people from the dead, He will be more popular with the people than we are. Since raising people from the dead makes Jesus closer to God than we are, Jesus will become the de facto religious leader of Israel, and will be able to usurp our authority. Once Jesus is in authority and the Romans begin to deal with Jesus rather than us, we will lose our place in the power structure, and then Jesus will mess up the deal that we have with the Romans to keep things going.

The Jewish leadership concluded that Jesus, being a Galilean carpenter, was not sophisticated enough to deal with the requirements of playing politics with Pontius Pilate. Jesus, with His honesty, would not handle the system of kickbacks, under-the-table political deals and threats to appeal to Caesar in Rome that were required to deal with the Roman Procurator. If Jesus was in charge and did not deal with Pilate in the proper way politically, Pilate might become angry and begin mass crucifixions of the leadership in order to get things back under control. On the one hand, Jesus demonstrated great power with God, but on the other hand, the Jewish leadership was concerned about politics, not religion.

The Jewish leaders could not allow Jesus to gain a position of authority because He would probably mess up the political system that they had put together with Pilate. A conundrum if there ever was one. What could they do with Jesus?

This logical analysis of the problem before the council is only partly correct. Pilate had not contacted the Jewish leadership about Jesus, nor had Pilate informed them that unless they got Jesus under control, bad things were going to happen. No, the Romans were not really the reason for the council's deliberations. The Jews were primarily concerned with the politics of maintaining their authority and power among their own people. The Jewish leadership intended to stay in charge, and they did not intend to allow a hick from the sticks like Jesus to usurp their authority with just a few miracles.

The person who was in charge and had the most to lose, was Caiaphas, who was the High Priest and the leader of the Sanhedrin. He gave the council a murderous solution to the conflict between the Sanhedrin and Jesus that just happened to dovetail with the plan of God. The text for today, **John 11:49-50**, records:

**49 And one of them, Caiaphas, being high priest that year, said to them, "You know nothing at all,**

**50 nor do you consider that it is expedient for us that one man should die for the people, and not that the whole nation should perish."**

There is an old saying; If you can't beat 'em, join 'em. Caiaphas' version of the old saying was: If you can't beat 'em, kill 'em.

Caiaphas was not primarily concerned about the nation, because he said, "it is expedient for us that one man should die." There was no immanent threat to the Nation of Israel, but there was an immanent threat to the leadership of the Jewish council. There was a more immanent threat to the emotional well being of the Jewish leaders, because there was someone in town that was clearly holier than they were. So the Jewish leaders decided to act on Caiaphas' recommendation, as **John 11:53** records:

**53 Then, from that day on, they plotted to put [Jesus] to death.**

Religious leadership is an interesting thing. There is a great temptation in religious leadership to take on the authority of God. People expect religious leaders to speak for God, even as Moses spoke for God when he brought the Ten Commandments down the mountain on tablets of stone. The problem is that religious leaders sometimes have a difficult time speaking for God because they don't always know what God would say in a given situation. In some cases, rather than pleading their ignorance of God's perspective, a religious leader might make something up that sounds good to them. So, advice from the pulpit may not actually be the word of God, but may be the word of the religious leader. And that is fine, as long as both the religious leaders and their followers are clear on the difference between that which God has commanded and that which the religious leader thinks is a good idea.

God's has designed His communications with us in such a way that His commandments are true, but they are not comprehensive. **Genesis 1:26-28** tells us:

**26 Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth."**

**27 So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and**

female He created them.

**28 Then God blessed them, and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth.”**

When God said, “have dominion”, in **Genesis 1:28**, God was telling the man, and us by extension, “You have a certain amount of decision making authority over these things that I have given you.” Our authority is limited because God reserves some decisions for himself, which is the reason for Bible teaching. God commands us to not make decisions that fall outside of the authority that He has given us. For instance, God tells the man in **Genesis 2:15-17**:

**15 Then the LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to tend and keep it.**

**16 And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, “Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat;**

**17 but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.”**

God gave the man authority over the fruit of the many trees in the garden but God maintained the authority over the fruit of one of the trees for Himself. The man had decision making authority, but the man’s authority was not total. God clearly drew the line of demarcation between His authority and that of the man by naming the tree from which the man was prohibited and giving the tree a distinctive place in the midst of the Garden so that man would not eat the fruit of the tree accidentally.

That is the pattern of our life in the world. God gives us authority, but clearly marks out where our authority ends and His begins. Our God-given job is to do the best that we can to make decisions that mirror those that God would make as we exercise our authority, which is why the Bible tells us that we are made in God’s image and likeness, as we have already read in **Genesis 1:26**. Being made in God’s image and likeness does not mean that we physically look like God, but that we have the capacity for intellectual decision making, for logic and for reason, in the same way that God does.

So, Caiaphas, as the High Priest and as the leader of the Jewish religious council, was in charge of making decisions about the direction of the Nation of Israel. It was his job to preside over and influence the development of the response of the Jewish religious leadership to the resurrection of Lazarus and the political popularity that it was sure to bring Jesus. Publically commanding a man who had been buried for four days to rise from the dead and having the dead man obey His command was certainly an action that would bring a man to the forefront of religious life, and would demand a response from the leaders of the dominant religion of the day. So Caiaphas, the leader of the Jews, made a decision, which was to order the death of the Man who raised a man from the dead.

Caiaphas’ order for the death of Jesus, however, was over God’s line of demarcation. God reserved the decision as to when a man should die for Himself and the legal authorities that He has appointed. The legal authorities, of which Caiaphas was one, could order death, but only under certain specific circumstances. **Deuteronomy 17:8-9, 12** records:

**8 “If a matter arises which is too hard for you to judge, between degrees of guilt for bloodshed, between one judgment or another, or between one punishment or another,**

matters of controversy within your gates, then you shall arise and go up to the place which the LORD your God chooses.

**9** And you shall come to the priests, the Levites, and to the judge there in those days, and inquire of them; they shall pronounce upon you the sentence of judgment.

**12** Now the man who acts presumptuously and will not heed the priest who stands to minister there before the LORD your God, or the judge, that man shall die. So you shall put away the evil from Israel.

The priest was to order a sentence of death when judging a physical infraction of the law of God. But Caiaphas said, "it is expedient for us that one man should die". There is no infraction of the law of God in Jesus' actions; Caiaphas is planning to use his power to kill Jesus for expediency's sake. Killing someone just to keep or better your own position is murder. Jesus says, in **Matthew 5:21-22**:

**21** "You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder, and whoever murders will be in danger of the judgment.'

**22** But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment. And whoever says to his brother, 'Raca!' shall be in danger of the council. But whoever says, 'You fool!' shall be in danger of hell fire.

But although Caiaphas' order was murderous and sinful, God has the capacity to use sinfulness to accomplish His purpose. God's foresight about that which we will do and His cleverness to use our sin for a higher purpose does not make our sinfulness any less sinful, but it does allow God to navigate the circumstances of our lives in such a way that we can see the pattern of His movements in history and emulate His example in our decision making. Caiaphas sinned when he said to his fellow leaders, "it is expedient for us that one man should die for the nation." God decreed that that which Caiaphas said sinfully would become true, but not in the way that Caiaphas intended. God tells us, in **John 11:51-52**:

**51** Now this [Caiaphas] did not say on his own authority; but being high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus would die for the nation,

**52** and not for that nation only, but also that He would gather together in one the children of God who were scattered abroad.

Caiaphas intended that Jesus die so that the Jewish leaders would be able to keep their political positions. God intended that Jesus die so that all that chose to believe in Jesus Christ, including the Jews, could be saved from the eternal consequences of their sins. Both God and Caiaphas planned that Jesus would die, but God's plan for Jesus' death was benevolent while Caiaphas' plan was self-centered.

The great sin of mankind is not necessarily a physical sin such as killing, stealing or the commission of adultery, but the great sin of mankind is self-centeredness. In **Matthew 16:24-26**:

**24** Then Jesus said to His disciples, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.

**25** For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it.

**26** For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?

Self-centeredness started in the garden. The content of the first temptation, in **Genesis 3:5** is:

**5 For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."**

The devil trapped the woman with the words, "you will be like God". God was in charge of the garden, and the role of the man and woman were to have dominion over the garden under God's authority. The devil told the woman, "Don't let God tell you what to do. Eat this fruit and you will be like God, and then you can do whatever you want to do."

Compare the devil's message to the woman, "do whatever you want to do", to Jesus' message to His disciples, "deny yourselves, take up your cross and follow Me." The devil advised the woman to be self-centered, while Jesus advised the disciples to deny themselves and be other directed.

Another word for sin is self-centeredness. **Romans 3:23** could accurately be rewritten: **23 for all [are self centered] and fall short of the glory of God,**

The reason that we are still sinners is that we are still self-centered. We, like Caiaphas, are concerned about that which will be expedient for us, and we have not yet totally developed the maturity of other-directedness.

In the New International Version of the Bible, **1Corinthians 13:4-7** says:

**4 Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud.**

**5 It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs.**

**6 Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth.**

**7 It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.**

Where is our sinfulness? Well, let us ask ourselves: Are we always patient? Are we always kind? Is boasting or pride a part of our personality? Have we been rude to or angry with anyone recently? Are we holding grudges against anyone for things that they have done in the past? Have we been glad when someone gets their comeuppance rather than praying for their repentance and reconciliation? Have we always trusted those whom we should have trust, and always hoped for the best rather than feared the worst in tough situations? When tasked with protecting someone, have we persevered in our protection or let them down?

You may have eschewed fornication, adultery, murder and robbery, but still not reached the standard of true Christianity. The Apostle Paul told the Philippians church, in **Philippians 2:3-4**:

**3 Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself.**

**4 Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.**

I repeat my point of several weeks ago; one of the reasons that our marriages and familial relationships are so important is that they are the laboratory in which we have the opportunity to develop our other-directedness. **1Corinthians 13:4-7** teaches us that love does not lead us to marry someone for that which they can give us, but rather for that which we can give them. When we focus on that which we can obtain from our marriages rather than on that which we can give, the love in our marriages becomes sibling rivalry, as we see our spouses as the ones that should sacrifice for us rather than the ones for whom we should sacrifice.

We grow when we give, and we shrink when we demand that others give to us. Almost every time that I have chosen to give in to my wife and do that which she wanted to do, we have drawn closer in our relationship and I have seen the benefit of her plan. Had it been up to me, we would never have obtained a dog, nor would we have taken up dancing, and now the dog is my daily companion and dancing is our passion. It takes an adjustment period to do something with which you are uncomfortable, and the early stages of adjustment are difficult, but the benefits gained by seeing life from someone else's perspective are wonderful.

God has given us the laboratory of life to learn this lesson, and the other people in the world, especially our spouses, are the components of the experiment that we are performing to find out how to keep God's commandment, not the commandment to conform to physical rules, but the commandment to love. **Matthew 22:35-40** records:

**35 Then one of them, a lawyer, asked [Jesus] a question, testing Him, and saying,**

**36 "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?"**

**37 Jesus said to him, 'You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.'**

**38 This is the first and great commandment.**

**39 And the second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'**

**40 On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets."**

Jesus put the bar for love pretty high. He told His disciples, in **Matthew 5:44**:

**44 But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you,**

Jesus showed His love for Caiaphas and for all of the Jewish leadership during His Jewish trial. Jesus' accusers were not able to convict Jesus of any sin, as He had done none. The trial was going badly, when Caiaphas himself decided to take a hand in the proceedings.

**Matthew 26:62-63** records:

**62 And the high priest arose and said to [Jesus], "Do You answer nothing? What is it these men testify against You?"**

**63 But Jesus kept silent. And the high priest answered and said to Him, "I put You under oath by the living God: Tell us if You are the Christ, the Son of God!"**

Jesus would have been within His rights to say nothing, and His refusal to speak would have effectively ended the trial. But God's only begotten son understood that if He refused to speak, those that hated Him would not be able to kill Him on the Cross, and He then would not be able to extend His love and His salvation to them. The purest form of love is disinterested love, the ability to extend love even to those that hate you. So Jesus chose to answer the question and go to the Cross. **Matthew 26:64-66** records:

**64 Jesus said to him, "It is as you said. Nevertheless, I say to you, hereafter you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven."**

**65 Then the high priest tore his clothes, saying, "He has spoken blasphemy! What further need do we have of witnesses? Look, now you have heard His blasphemy!**

**66 What do you think?" They answered and said, "He is deserving of death."**

Once again, Caiaphas came to an ungodly conclusion because it was expedient for him. But God used Caiaphas' ungodliness to send Jesus to the Old Rugged Cross, so that Jesus' love for us could compensate for our lack of love for others. Let us resolve to not choose, as Caiaphas



did, to do that which we consider expedient for us at the expense of someone else, regardless of how justified we may feel to do so, as that would be to maintain our sinful nature. But let us give up our sinful nature and love one another, bearing the fruit of the Spirit of God, as **Galatians 5:22-26** instructs us:

**22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,**

**23 gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law.**

**24 And those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.**

**25 If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.**

**26 Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another.**

Let us love one another, even as Jesus has loved us, because all men will know that we are His disciples if we show love, approaching His level of selfless love, for one another.

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