

John 18:12-14, 19-24 [NIV]

¹² Then the detachment of soldiers with its commander and the Jewish officials arrested Jesus. They bound him ¹³ and brought him first to Annas, who was the father-in-law of Caiaphas, the high priest that year. ¹⁴ Caiaphas was the one who had advised the Jewish leaders that it would be good if one man died for the people.

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¹⁹ Meanwhile, the high priest questioned Jesus about his disciples and his teaching.

²⁰ "I have spoken openly to the world," Jesus replied. "I always taught in synagogues or at the temple, where all the Jews come together. I said nothing in secret. ²¹ Why question me? Ask those who heard me. Surely they know what I said."

²² When Jesus said this, one of the officials nearby slapped him in the face. "Is this the way you answer the high priest?" he demanded.

²³ "If I said something wrong," Jesus replied, "testify as to what is wrong. But if I spoke the truth, why did you strike me?"

²⁴ Then Annas sent him bound to Caiaphas the high priest.

We're in John 18 again today, if you'd like to turn there with me. This is the same "passion place" we looked at last week – the very same event. But instead of focusing on what Peter did, we're focusing on Jesus and what happened to Him there at the home of the high priest.

There are people in our world – more than we may realize – who have been genuinely hurt by, let's call it, "organized religion." All around the world, Islam has hurt people, certainly. Judaism. Mormonism. Hinduism. The religion of secularism.

Followers of Jesus would like to think that Christianity is exempt, and we all know that it ought to be, but we also all know that it's not.

All organized religion has hurt people, and that's because organized religion is made up of fallen, imperfect, infirmed people.

And people hurt people. Sometimes intentionally, sometimes by accident, but either way, people hurt people.

Some in our world have tried to blame religion for all the world's problems, as though if you could take away religion, you could do away with pain. But religion is certainly not the only purveyor of hurt. Philosophies have hurt people too, and politics, and education, and business, and industry, and even families.

And that's because wherever there are people, there is the potential for hurt. In fact, other than Jesus, every person who experiences hurt has, himself or herself, hurt other people as well.

In this life, to avoid being hurt by people, you would have to literally give up all relationships and all *potential* for relationship, isolate yourself in a pod somehow, and never engage with another person, ever.

That would keep you from being hurt by people, but of course, that cure would hurt you even worse.

So, contrary to what some believe, organized religion has in no way cornered the market on wounding people. But, organized religion *has* hurt people.

In fact, it was organized religion that hurt Jesus.

In this case, the faith was Judaism and the people were its leaders in Jerusalem, who had become unable, or unwilling, to see the bigger picture of what God was doing.

They were unable, or unwilling, to imagine they may be mistaken in their assessments.

They were fearful of change, and were unwilling to give up the control and the power that they possessed.

To put it bluntly, they had become poor stewards of the responsibility and authority that God had entrusted to them.

The word *stewardship* is a very Christian sounding word, isn't it? Like the words, *fellowship, vestibule, anoint, chancel, ministry, communion, and, narthex, stewardship* is a Christian-y sounding term, primarily because Jesus had a lot to say about being a steward.

And it's no wonder He did; stewardship is very important. In fact, our comprehension of it, or lack thereof, may well set the tone and tenor of just about everything else in our lives.

You see, followers of Jesus see all things around and about them as belonging to God, and so followers of Jesus see all things around and about them as *gifts* that God has temporarily entrusted to their care. This means that followers of Jesus holds to those things around and about them rather loosely.

It's not that we don't care about them. Of course, we do.

But in the end, Christians know that all things around and about us don't really belong to us. That includes our spouses, our children, our friends, our possessions (homes, cars, investments), our titles, our jobs and careers and responsibilities, our talents and gifts. They all belong to God. He has loaned them to us for a time, and we are but caretakers – stewards – of these things.

What happened to Jesus, from an earthly perspective, happened to Him because those in charge of the "church of Judaism," if I can put it that way, did not understand or accept stewardship.

They were poor caretakers – poor stewards of what God had entrusted to them. Specifically, they misused the power God had granted them.

Which is typically how people hurt other people.

And that's what happened to Jesus.

Jesus' trial, if you can call it that, had two parts: one ecclesiastical and one civil. And each of those had three phases. You see that when you put the pieces together from all four of the gospels. You need to do that in order to get the whole picture, because some of the gospel writers leave out details – and even whole parts.

For example, only John tells us this part here – where Jesus is brought before this fellow called Annas.

Who was Annas?

Annas was the guy who discovered the seeds that makes black licorice taste like it does. Anise.

No, I'm kidding.

In short, Annas was the guy who wielded all the power. You might say Annas was the church boss.

Some of you know, all too well, exactly what that means. You've been in churches where – there is really only one person in charge.

It doesn't matter who the pastor is.

It doesn't matter who the superintendent or bishop is.

It doesn't matter who's on the board.

It doesn't matter who is elected or appointed to any office.

If something happens in that church, it happened because one person said it could, and that is the de-facto leader of the church: the church boss.

Now, usually those are small churches, and usually they stay small, because, church bosses don't like to not be in control, and in order for something to grow in a healthy way, control always has to be relinquished.

That's true of churches.

It's true of businesses.

It's true of families – children.

For growth to happen, more and more people have to be invited into both responsibility and authority, and where the person in charge can't or won't relinquish those things, growth and development are stunted.

That's one thing that keeps some kids from ever growing up. For a variety of reasons, there are parents who won't relinquish control – they won't let their kids become adults.

The power person won't give up their power, and this fellow, Annas, was that person here.

People say that, in this world, power tends to run in families, and Annas led the power family of Jesus' day – at least with regard to religion.

Annas was previously the high priest – for about 10 years, and then he had five sons and one son-in-law who served in that way after him. Caiaphas, the son-in-law, was the ruling high priest at this time.

It was all connected by family, you see?

We're hearing a lot these days about the monarchy of England and all that surrounds it being called, "the firm."

Well, this was the ecclesiastical "firm" of Jesus' day.

And this "firm" was on the ropes, you see. They were feeling threatened in a couple ways in those days, first and foremost by their governmental overlords – the Romans.

Rome was generally tolerant, and in some cases, even benevolent, toward religion.

As long as you didn't cause a stir, as long as you didn't threaten their authority and rule, as long as you weren't upsetting their apple cart, they'd let you play your game.

But you see, when a guy like Jesus comes along and starts talking as He did about new kings and new kingdoms and all that, well, that can raise a Roman eyebrow or two. And the people who felt that Roman scrutiny the most intensely were the Jewish leaders, because in that day, no one (in the Roman world, anyway) had any sense that Jesus was representing anything but Judaism.

The Romans saw Jesus as a Jew – and a radical one, and that upset the Jewish leaders, because they saw Jesus as the one who was putting their necks on the line with the Roman government, you see? Those Jewish leaders were terribly afraid of losing their place, losing their positions, losing their control.

You see it plainly at the end of John 11, where the Jewish leaders called a meeting and said, "*Hey, if we let this Jesus go on like this, the Romans are going to take away our temple and our nation.*"

They'll take away our position, our authority, our power.

These guys were the power guys, and they wanted to stay the power guys.

With regard to the senate elections this year, I heard Mitch McConnell say, in a funny way, "Well, I've been the *majority* leader and I've been the *minority* leader, so I can be either, but if you ask me, being *majority* leader is a lot better."

Of course it is – nobody wants to *not* be in power.

That's what caused Caiaphas to admit, there again in John 11, "*It's better – that one man die for the people than for the whole nation to perish.*"

What he's admitting is, "Hey, I think it's OK to do this evil thing for the sake of the status quo." You notice how he couches his comment in the language of "the good of the people," but it's funny how politicians always see "the good of the people" as extensions of "the good of themselves."

A public servant knows the difference, but a politician – a person already feeling the pressures of his political masters – does not.

And that's what happens in people when their power is threatened.

But Rome wasn't the only thing threatening to the Jewish leaders here.

They also felt threatened by Jesus Himself, because people were listening to Him and actually believing Him – and following Him.

Those guys hated Jesus because He was winsome and wise and effective. He answered their questions, and then asked them questions they couldn't answer.

There was just something about Jesus – and everyone knew it. Matthew 7 tells us the crowds were amazed at Jesus, because they felt He taught with real authority, and not like the run-of-the-mill rabbis and scribes and priests.¹

But you see instead of listening to Jesus and learning from Him and maybe even considering who He might really be, the Jewish leaders just got more and more closed to Him and more and more angry with Him.

¹ Matthew 7:29

They wouldn't allow even God Himself to take away their positions, their authority, their power.

And it was all based in fear – the fear of losing control.

They feared Jesus for that reason. They feared His followers. They feared the crowds. They feared the Romans. They feared what would happen to them if things continued the way they were going.

They feared the loss of control.

And you see where that fear led them?

They held this totally out-of-line secret meeting – call it a fishing expedition, call it an inquisition – in the middle of the night, under cover of darkness. Trying to find something – anything, any little bit of evidence – that would allow them to take Jesus to Pilate, the Roman governor, because only he had the authority to execute someone.

None of what these guys did here was standard operating procedure.

In a Jewish trial, the judge does not question the accused. In a Jewish trial, the judge questions witnesses, to see if two or more people could substantiate charges.

That's why Jesus answers as He does there in verse 21, *"Why are you questioning me? There are no big secrets here. I've taught in the temple and synagogues – wide open places. Ask those who heard me."*

You see, unlike them, Jesus did not operate in private, under the cover of darkness. He didn't keep two sets of books. He'd been teaching publicly all week.

"Ask those who heard me," Jesus said, because He knew that plenty of people did.

Ah, but they'd already done that, and hadn't found anything they could use. But their fear drove them on – on to more and more unreasonable, unethical, ungodly ways and methods.

I mean, look how differently Jesus operated compared to these priests.

They had to catch Him by surprise – off his guard – in the middle of the night.

They had to intimidate Him.

They had to somehow trip Him up and make Him say just that one thing that would be grounds for condemnation.

And, of course, what better witness could you have against a guy than Annas himself.

They had it all figured out, or at least they thought they did.

You see what this kind of fear does to people?

The most powerful Jews of their day feared loss of control so much that they were driven to theological blindness, irrationality, and not only embracing, but the seeking out of utter lies. They wanted to keep control so badly that they accepted totally unorthodox methods, and they condoned the most vicious behavior against someone they knew was innocent of their charges.

They would certainly have condemned other people for behaving the very way they themselves did.

But their fear blinded them to reality.

Their fear caused them to forget that they were but stewards of their responsibilities and authority and positions and titles, and that wound up causing, not only Jesus' destruction, but also, ultimately, their own.

Now Jesus, on the other hand, stood and faced His accusers – He even faced death – without fear, because He knew that He was but a steward of His life and God's purposes for Him.

All through His ministry, Jesus He said things like:

"My food is to do the will of Him who sent me."²

"Some things only the father knows."³

"I have brought You (God) glory on earth by completing the work You have me to do."⁴

"I have come from Heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of Him who sent me."⁵

"Not what I will, Father, but Your will be done."⁶

All those words of Jesus speak to what Paul wrote to the Philippian church, that *"Jesus, being in very nature God, didn't consider equality with God something to be used to His advantage. Instead, Jesus made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death – even death on a cross!"⁷*

You see, to be like Jesus is to be very different than those Chief Priests.

To be like Jesus means:

We don't have to know.

We don't have to control.

And we don't have to fear.

To be like Jesus means to operate in truth and love, in the light of day – to keep only one set of books for all to see.

To be like Jesus means that we realize that all we have – all about and around us is given us by God, and we are just stewards – caretakers – of what belongs to Him.

Let me ask you, are you suffering from the fear of losing control?

There's plenty to cause it these days, from Covid to politics, from career to kids, and everything in between.

Are you suffering from the fear of losing control?

Is it making you do crazy things – unreasonable things? Is it causing you to act, not just in irrational ways, but in absolutely wrong ways – toward other people?

Because of the pressures of life in our day, are you turning into a Chief Priest?

The cure for this is remembering – keeping in front of us always – that, in all things of earth, we are nothing more than stewards, just as Jesus was.

It is God who gives and takes away.

It is God who lifts up people and nations, and who takes them down again.

² John 4:34

³ Matthew 24:36

⁴ John 17:4

⁵ John 6:38

⁶ Mark 14:36

⁷ Philippians 2:5-8

It is God who owns us—and all that's around and about us.

Of course, you and I, we can't undo what happened to Jesus, but we can try to keep that sort of hurt from happening to others—at least not on our account—simply by remembering—by realizing—that we are stewards—caretakers—of what really belongs to God.

If there's some part of life where you've slipped out of *stewardship* and into *ownership*,

- if you've fallen in love a little too much with being in charge,

- if you find, when you're really honest with yourself, that you fear a future you can't control—and maybe you've even reacted to that in some ungodly ways,

don't go the way of the Chief Priests.

Embrace being a steward, and let God re-assume His ownership of that place in your life. That's the way of Jesus.

Closing Song: *All the Way My Savior Leads Me*

Benediction:

You notice that in verse 12 there we're told that they bound Jesus, to take Him to Annas.

And then after the episode with Annas, they had Him bound again, verse 24 there, and sent Jesus on.

If it weren't so tragic, it would make you laugh.

They tried all this binding of Jesus to give them the illusion of control.

The reality is, though, the only thing that bound Jesus here was His desire to do God's will—and it was all for the sake of love for us and all His world.

May we all be so bound, as we let God lead us.