

November 29, 2015
Sunday Morning Service
Series: John
Community Baptist Church
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Greer, SC 29650
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SILENCE IS GOLDEN AND TRUTH IS PRECIOUS

John 18:12-27

In this season of political yammering, I long for the practice of the title of this sermon. After listening to too many presidential candidates, I firmly believe that silence is golden and truth is precious. The problem with that idealistic opinion is that no one gets elected in this current culture by silently going about his or her work or by telling the truth.

In spite of that reality, I am happy to report that Jesus showed us how this balance works in a time of conflict. That He remained silent when the hypocrites threw all manner of deception, disrespect, and illegality at Him is beyond human comprehension. That He responded with the perfect words at the perfect time is one of those “YES!” moments. That all of this perfect response got Him hung on a rugged cross is all to the glory of God.

He gave us the perfect example to follow. Let’s follow the story and learn how to follow Him.

Annas Questioned Jesus.

In our last study from John’s Gospel, we reviewed the circumstances surrounding Jesus’ arrest. Now, beginning with verse twelve of chapter eighteen, we see that the soldiers took Jesus to the former high priest (vv.12-14). From this statement it appears that the Roman soldiers had taken control. *So the band of soldiers and their captain and the officers of the Jews arrested Jesus and bound him (v.12).*

If we can recall the previous study, we remember that probably somewhere between 200-600 Roman soldiers, a cohort or part of the cohort, showed up at the Garden of Gethsemane to secure orderliness while the temple guard arrested Jesus. Now it appears they are the ones

in charge of taking Jesus into custody, though it is still obvious also that the officers of the Jews (representatives of the Sanhedrin) were involved. Possibly this was because Peter’s attempted defense of Jesus highlighted the possibility of a riot.

A pressing question might be, “Why did they take Jesus to Annas?” (vv.13-14). He was not the high priest at this time, but he was the real power behind the current high priest. *First they led him to Annas, for he was the father-in-law of Caiaphas, who was high priest that year (v.13).* Of the four writers of the Gospels, John is the only one who mentioned specifically that Jesus was questioned by Annas. Luke mentioned that Jesus was mocked and beaten before He went to Caiaphas, which was probably a reference to this situation without mentioning Annas.

Annas was a very powerful man in this respect because he had been the high priest from AD 6 – AD 15. After about nine years in office (an office in which God’s law required a lifetime), Pilate’s predecessor Valerius Gratus threw Annas out of the position. Then Gratus appointed Caiaphas to the office in AD 18. That was not a popular move with the public. The Jewish populace was adamantly opposed to Roman officials appointing and un-appointing who would serve in this most esteemed office. Therefore, even though Annas was out of the official position, he was still the power behind the seat. His power was also due to the fact that over time five of his sons also occupied the office of high priest (from AD 16-63). And Caiaphas, was Annas’ son-in-law. The text states that Caiaphas was high priest that year which means he was in office at that time, in that memorable year of Christ’s death.

At few months earlier, Caiaphas, serving as the high priest, had revealed God’s plan without knowing it. John pointed out that *It was Caiaphas who had advised the Jews that it would be expedient that one man should die for the people (v.14).* Caiaphas made this statement in the context of the Sanhedrin, the religious ruling body of the Jews, meeting to discuss Jesus’ fate. He arrogantly spouted to the 70 members of the council, “You know nothing at all” (11:49), which was equivalent to “You don’t know what you are talking about.” In that setting, this arrogant man explained to his peers, *“Nor do you understand that it is better for you that one man should die for the people, not that the whole nation should perish” (John 11:50).*

The meaning of the priest's statement is significant. It was better for the rulers of the Jews if one man died so that the whole nation would not be destroyed by the Romans. They perceived Jesus as a rabble-rouser who would bring down the wrath of Rome on them. They feared that Rome would at the very least remove their positions of authority (11:48). It appeared to human wisdom that Caiaphas and the council members were in charge of this matter. They decided that Jesus should die in behalf of the nation (i.e. so the nation would not perish).

The irony of all that is that the Romans did come and reduce the city to rubble just like Jesus said they would. He warned, *"For the days will come upon you, when your enemies will set up a barricade around you and surround you and hem you in on every side"* (Luke 19:43). The enemy would indeed come and destroy the nation in AD 70.

Add to that irony is the fact that Caiaphas had no earthly idea that when he insisted on the death of Christ, he was simply enabling God's plan for redemption. Christ would die not only for the Jewish people but died in behalf of all sinners who would plead His blood as the covering for their sins. This was God's plan, God's program. The Heavenly Father was in perfect control of all of these circumstances. While the seated powers and the wanna-be powers leveraged their authority, God was pulling all the strings.

This should cause us to stop and wonder if God is still in charge of situations and circumstances in the world? He sure is – in spite of the dire picture the nightly news draws. Is He still working all things to His designed ends for His own glory? Yes. Is God in charge of world events right now? Yes. Is God in control of the events that effect you every day? Yes. Then should we not be trusting God implicitly? Of course. And if we really trust God, how do we respond to difficult questions, accusations, interrogations, and even punishment?

The former high priest questioned Jesus about His disciples (vv. 19-24). The questions from Annas' and Jesus' response or non-response are interesting (vv. 19-21). Annas was curious about the disciples. *The high priest then questioned Jesus about his disciples and his teaching* (v. 19). Actually in this one question, Annas asked two questions. One question was political in nature and the other one was theological. First, when the former high priest questioned Jesus about the disciples, he was probably probing to discover the size and scope of Jesus' following. How many disciples (followers) did Jesus have? Was it a large enough fan base to

cause concern for Rome? Were His followers significant enough to put pressure on Rome, maybe even cause trouble for the Sanhedrin?

More important probably is the second question. Annas wondered about Jesus' teaching. This was the primary concern for the sixty-two members of the Sanhedrin. Jesus especially revealed the hypocrisy of the Pharisee party but also exposed the Sadducees as frauds in His teaching. The high priests were Sadducees but the majority of the Sanhedrin were Pharisees. The real reason the leaders wanted to get rid of Jesus was because He exposed their sins. The supposed reason they presented to Pilate was that Jesus was a political liability.

Jesus gave a general answer about His ministry. He reminded the powerful man that He had taught openly about who He is. *Jesus answered him, "I have spoken openly to the world. I have always taught in synagogues and in the temple, where all Jews come together. I have said nothing in secret"* (v. 20). The records of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John give us a good idea of what Jesus taught. He continually revealed that He, being co-equal with God the Father, came to teach the truth of heaven. He taught that God the Father sent Him to die for sinners – but almost no one picked up on that part.

The religious people who were connected with the temple and synagogue knew what Jesus had taught. Jesus pointed this fact out to Annas. *"Why do you ask me? Ask those who have heard me what I said to them; they know what I said"* (v. 21). In fact, all the masses acknowledged that He taught with authority (Matthew 7:29). Nicodemus, who was possibly one of the council members, acknowledged that Jesus was a teacher sent from God (John 3:2). Even the temple police who the council sent to arrest Jesus came back and reported: *"No one ever spoke like this man."* (John 7:46).

It really wasn't that the former high priest and his friends didn't know. Maybe the man and his friends were part of the "world" Jesus warned the disciples about. Jesus taught that those kinds of people cannot receive the Spirit of truth (John 14:17). Jesus did not make Himself known to them (John 14:22). Jesus warned that people like that hate the disciples just like they hate Jesus whom they cannot know intimately (John 15:18).

Not surprising in that kind of setting we discover a sudden outbreak of abuse and torture (vv. 22-24; Luke 22:63-65). Apparently one of the temple officers was the one who struck Jesus. *When he had said*

these things, one of the officers standing by struck Jesus with his hand, saying, "Is that how you answer the high priest?" (v.22). Obviously, in the understanding of that officer, the high priest was to be highly esteemed and Jesus was to be abused.

This seems to be a flaw of human nature. How often do we hear people who bow before a human religious figure, who would even kiss his ring if given the opportunity, and at the same time curse Jesus regularly in their everyday conversation. Even people who claim to love and respect Jesus know more about what their favorite religion or religious organization believes than they know about Jesus' teaching. Therefore, it is not surprising that some of the most serious persecutions that have overtaken the followers of Christ come from people who talk favorably about Jesus but who worship human religion.

How should people who are determined to speak truth respond to such treatment? Should we answer the fool according to his folly? Should we not answer the fool according to his folly? Should we demand our rights? Did Jesus not have any rights as a citizen who lived under Roman jurisdiction or member of the Jewish community?

We know that Rome had some pretty serious rules that applied to Roman citizens. But we have the Constitution of the United States. This simple document affords citizens of this nation rights that you cannot even imagine. Like the woman who I saw on a video the other day. I would guess that she was in her early thirties, has given birth to fifteen kids and has no husband. She declared quite forcefully to the reporter who was doing the story that she had a right to expect someone to take care of all her children. Really? Does the Constitution allow citizens to exercise that kind of irresponsibility?

At least we know that we have the right to a fair and speedy trial. It appears that Jesus did not have that right. So how did He respond? Jesus replied with truth. *Jesus answered him, "If what I said is wrong, bear witness about the wrong; but if what I said is right, why do you strike me?"* (v.23). The truth could not be denied. Therefore, the officer had no right to strike Jesus. But what do we do when people are not persuaded by truth?

It seems from this story that when the officer struck Jesus, it opened a floodgate of abuse. Luke wrote, *Now the men who were holding Jesus in custody were mocking him as they beat him. They also blindfolded him and kept asking him, "Prophecy! Who is it that struck*

you?" And they said many other things against him, blaspheming him (Luke 22:63-65). Finally after some time of torture, Annas then sent him bound to Caiaphas the high priest (v.24).

Caiaphas Convicted Jesus.

At this point, it will be useful for us to draw together all of the statements about Jesus' trial that the other writers, Matthew, Mark, and Luke, included in their accounts. They described the setting for us. When Jesus arrived at the house of Caiaphas, the council of religious leaders was already there waiting to condemn Him. Matthew wrote, *Then those who had seized Jesus led him to Caiaphas the high priest, where the scribes and the elders had gathered (Matthew 26:57).*

Now Jesus was before the official ruler of Judaism, the one the governor appointed. With him was the whole council – the leadership of the Jews. Not only did this council represent the authority over the people, but they supposedly represented God and His law. To be apprehended by this august body for interrogation was a serious matter. Yes, but God was in charge of all this. God the Son understood that this was the Father's will. How will He respond? Will He speak or remain silent? How would I respond having already been beaten for no reason and not expecting much better in this court?

They had to wait until daylight in order not to break one of their laws. *When day came, the assembly of the elders of the people gathered together, both chief priests and scribes. And they led him away to their council (Luke 22:66).*

The phrase "when day came" highlights the fact that the Jewish leaders broke many of their own laws in the way they tried and condemned Jesus. The Jewish culture prided themselves on maintaining one of the most fair and equitable judicial systems. Some of the main points of their law would have forbid a trial before a former high priest. Their law forbid a trial at night, a trial in a private house, or a trial where there was no indictment. Their law forbid beating and torturing the suspect with no sentence or even an indictment. It forbid the judges from soliciting testimony against the defendant. It forbid not providing legal council for the defendant, forbid not allowing the defendant to defend himself, and forbid allowing the defendant to incriminate himself. All of these things obviously happened according to the Gospel accounts.

After two hearings (one before Annas and one before Caiaphas), the council still had no cause for indictment. So the rulers pressed for more. What they got from Jesus was silence. Through the testimony of many false witnesses, Jesus' silence was deafening. Matthew recorded, *Now the chief priests and the whole Council were seeking false testimony against Jesus that they might put him to death, but they found none, though many false witnesses came forward. At last two came forward and said, "This man said, 'I am able to destroy the temple of God, and to rebuild it in three days.'" And the high priest stood up and said, "Have you no answer to make? What is it that these men testify against you?" But Jesus remained silent (Matthew 26:57-62).*

Sometimes silence is the best response. It proves complete dependance on God. If we really believe that God is in control, it may not be necessary to speak. In some cases, it is as we have often heard, "It is better to remain silent and be thought a fool than to open our mouths and remove all doubt." Often it is best to follow the example of Martin Luther. When his friend told him that an enemy was criticizing him and that he needed to silence the critic, Luther replied, "No, I'll just live in such a way that no one will believe him."

At other times it is right to speak BECAUSE it is God's will. That is what Jesus eventually did. He had taught the disciples, *"And when they bring you before the synagogues and the rulers and the authorities, do not be anxious about how you should defend yourself or what you should say, for the Holy Spirit will teach you in that very hour what you ought to say" (Luke 12:11-12).*

Now it was time for Jesus to speak. When He spoke, He revealed the Son's Authority. Caiaphas virtually put God the Son under oath. He, the ruler of the Jews, required, *"I adjure you by the living God, tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God" (Matthew 26:63b).* This statement required Jesus to answer in light of the fact that He was standing in the presence of the all-knowing God. It is a bit like our placing a hand on God's Word and saying "I swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help me God."

As a last resort and desiring to find Jesus guilty before too many people woke up and discovered what was happening, Caiaphas tried to push Jesus into stating before the council that He is equal to God. Jesus acknowledged the truth. *Jesus said to him, "You have said so. But I tell you, from now on you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand*

of Power and coming on the clouds of heaven" (Matthew 26:64). Jesus had taught this very thing for three years. People didn't believe Him. The rulers surely didn't believe Him. Most religious people still don't believe Him.

The hypocrites pressed hard. They said, *"If you are the Christ, tell us." But he said to them, "If I tell you, you will not believe, and if I ask you, you will not answer. But from now on the Son of Man shall be seated at the right hand of the power of God" (Luke 22:67-69).* The fact is, the rulers were not interested in believing. They were trying to get evidence by which to convict Jesus. In the will of the Father and for God's glory, Jesus gave them everything they needed. *So they all said, "Are you the Son of God, then?" And he said to them, "You say that I am" (Luke 22:70).*

That was enough evidence for the high priest to sentence God the Son. The hypocrites had pushed Jesus into self-incrimination. *Then they said, "What further testimony do we need? We have heard it ourselves from his own lips" (Luke 22:71).* Human wisdom cries out, "Oh, that's too bad!" Why did Jesus say too much? Would it have been better for Him to remain silent? This was obviously God's will. God the Son never made a mistake. He taught us the importance of knowing and doing the will of the Father.

The hypocrites determined to kill Jesus. *Then the high priest tore his robes and said, "He has uttered blasphemy. What further witnesses do we need? You have now heard his blasphemy. What is your judgment?" They answered, "He deserves death." Then they spit in his face and struck him. And some slapped him, saying, "Prophecy to us, you Christ! Who is it that struck you?" (Matthew 26:65-68).* That is what they had decided to do years earlier. That is what Jesus had repeatedly told the disciples was going to happen. Because that is what God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit had determined in eternity would happen.

Jesus set before us the perfect example of how to respond in conflict. First, we must know the will of the Father. Second, we must trust the Father's wisdom. Third, we must keep silent rather than lash out in fleshly retaliation. And finally, we must speak the truth when it is appropriate and in a way that is appropriate. That is a balanced approach to conflict that will bring honor to God.