

# "THE PLOTTING HEART"

## Wednesday Meditation

### **\*Scriptures for Wednesday of Holy Week:**

- Jesus continues his daily teaching in the temple complex (Luke 21:37–38)
- The Sanhedrin plots to kill Jesus (Matt. 26:3–5; Mark 14:1–2; Luke 22:1–2)

As we continue our walk through Holy Week, we see that Jesus has left Bethany and is now lodging on the Mount of Olives, which is just outside of Jerusalem. He gets up early each day to go to the temple to teach. He knows his mission is nearing its end and he wants to make the most of every minute, he is eager to reach every last person that the Father has given to him (Lk 21:37-38). That's where the focus is in the gospels – Jesus and the temple. We assume that his teaching was a continuation of what we've been reading up until now. The message has not changed. It is interesting that we are not told of any miracles that week – only the good news of the kingdom.

But Matthew and Luke give us a glimpse into something else that happened on Wednesday, away from the crowds, the teaching, and the temple. Frustrated by their inability to discredit Jesus, the Jewish leaders assemble to deal with "The Jesus Problem."

*"Then the chief priests and the elders of the people gathered in the palace of the high priest, whose name was Caiaphas, and plotted together in order to arrest Jesus by stealth and kill him. But they said, "Not during the feast, lest there be an uproar among the people." **Matt 26:3-4***

As I read that, I can't imagine a scenario where the pastors and elders are getting together to deal with a heretic (though they were wrong – he was the Messiah, not a heretic!), and someone suggests *murder!* Even at the highest levels of power – Congress or the Presidency, who would be gutsy enough to introduce the words "kill him" into the conversation?! Whoever spoke up would have cloaked their words in self-righteousness. "He claims to be God!" "Our law says that blasphemy is punishable by death!" It is a solution looking for a justification. And there is a lesson for us in that: there is no limit to what the human heart will justify in order to protect itself from repentance. Apart from the Holy Spirit, we would sooner murder God than repent of sin.

This meeting takes place in secret, away from the temple and the crowds of people. The rulers of the people are gathered together to hatch a plot. The chief priests are there. Surely they are still smarting from Monday's humiliation when Jesus chased out their tenants and accused them of making the temple into a den of robbers. They are accompanied by the elders, a group of Pharisees and Sadducees who represent two political parties opposed in their interpretation of the Law, but united in their opposition to Jesus. They were the office holders and here comes Jesus talking about his Kingdom. Finally, we see Caiaphas. He is the high priest that year and he had already made his intentions known that "it is better for one man to die than for the whole nation to perish." He had intended it to get rid of Jesus, he did not know the deeper truth that he had spoken of salvation through the One whom he would kill. This is the same Caiaphas whom they would bring Jesus before in a couple days to be tried for blasphemy. This Caiaphas, who had already prejudged that he should die.

But this was not a meeting to discuss whether he should die, rather how. The decision had already been made. It must not be during the Feast, they say, because there are too many people, too many of his followers. We must wait until they leave, lest they riot. It had happened before and consequences from the Roman crackdown were still etched in their collective memories. No, they would need to arrest him and try him by stealth, or by as the HCSB reads, by "treachery".

But it didn't happen according to their plans did it? The very next day, Judas would present himself and offer Jesus up. Because what they were planning for evil, God was intending for good – the salvation of many! And it would happen on God's timeline, not theirs. Jesus would die a Passover Lamb's death. They were the leaders of Israel, the decision makers, but God is the Lord of history and he was accomplishing his purposes through them. Oh, how little we know from our vantage point! This reminds me of Psalm 2:1-3

*"Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD and against his Anointed, saying, "Let us burst their bonds apart and cast away their chords from us."*

The rulers of the people had taken counsel together, but they were plotting in vain.

*Vs 4-8: He who sits in the heavens laughs; the LORD holds them in derision. Then he will speak to them in his wrath, and terrify them in his fury, saying "As for me, I have set my King on Zion, my holy hill." I will tell of the decree: The LORD said to me, "You are my Son; today I have begotten you. Ask for me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession.*

God is in control of this whole scene. The rulers are plotting how to kill Jesus, but the Lord sits on his throne and laughs. He holds them in derision because they mean it for evil. God uses the same deed for the salvation of many. Isaiah 53:10 says,

*"It was the will of the LORD to crush him; he has put him to grief." This is not some kind of divine child abuse, as some scoff, but to accomplish his purpose. Isaiah continues... "Out of the anguish of his soul he shall see and be satisfied; by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make many to be accounted righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities.*

God's cosmic purposes for the salvation of many people through the death of his Son is mindboggling, yet simple. But there is a more personal lesson for me in this as well: Even as I point the finger at the Jewish rulers gathering in Caiaphas' palace to plot against God, I see the self-righteousness in the palace of my own heart vaunting itself against God. How many times do the managers of my heart's idol-factory gather to justify my own sin?

When I was young, we sang a song with the lyrics: "Joy is the flag flown high from the castle of my heart, when the King is in residence there." What is the flag that is flying from the castle of your heart? Is the King in residence there? What is ruling your heart today? Who are the voices that are speaking to your conscience?

Today Jesus is teaching in the temple, calling his people to repentance. Soon, he will go to the cross to bear their sin. May we find ourselves receptive to his teaching and submissive to his voice.

1. Read Isaiah 53 – Where do you see God's plans accomplished in Jesus? How is this unexpected?
2. What are the idols of your heart? What do you find yourself justifying to yourself and others?

In Christ,

Pastor Grant

