

Jesus is the Christ (from John's gospel) # 39 (Matters of Life & Death # 5)

John 11⁴⁵⁻⁵⁷

When wicked words are transcendent truth

Divine irony in the plot to kill Jesus



Lazarus's corpse has come back to life at call / command of Jesus;

- Jesus, **the resurrection & the life** has had dealings with death – rescued its prey;
- Lazarus has come shuffling out of tomb.

Next section in narrative account reveals the **reaction of people**:

(45) Many of Jews therefore, who had come w Mary & had seen what He did, believed in Him,

(46) but some of them went to the Pharisees and told them what Jesus had done.

- Jews polarised into 2 opinions ...

Believers & tale-bearers

Implication seems to be : the tale-bearers were **not believers**;

- tale-bearing to Pharisees was not for purpose of persuading them to believe;
- but to provide them w intelligence of what going on.

Focus immediately shifts to **what** now **happens with this intelligence**:

(47) So the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered the Council.

Now we need to know a bit about this **Council**;

- Council = Sanhedrin – highest Jewish judicial body in land;
 - collection of 70 or so high-profile priests / scribes / leaders;
 - made up of 2 parties – Pharisees & Sadducees;
 - could liken it to Liberal & Labor in our political system;
 - each strongly opposed to each other;
 - ordinarily oppose anything other presents as matter of principle;
 - fight like cat & dog;
 - Sadducees in ascendency – almost all priests / high priests were Sadducees;
 - Pharisees bringing this problem are coming from position of minority;
 - ordinarily expect it to be squashed by dominant Sadducee party.

But no - here ∃ immediate **bipartisan** agreement:

What is it that is with this Council?

- we about to explore just that;
- what we find (as foreshadowed in CT) is **dripping w irony** all way thru.

Irony with respect to the Council

Irony in what they said

(47) *"What are we to do? For this man performs many signs.*

(48) *If we let Him go on like this, everyone will believe in Him.*

- they **don't dispute the signs**;

- Lazarus was dead – Lazarus is now alive;

- they cannot refute that – reality;

- this is just the latest in long list of signs that "**this man**" is doing.

Worried that if they don't somehow intervene: say something / do something,

Everyone will believe in Him.

1st thing that is **ironic** is:

- even tho they acknowledged that evidence is going to **engender belief in everyone**;

- they exclude themselves from "everyone":

- everyone who observes evidence of signs is going to believe;

- but we won't believe - no matter what the evidence;

- no matter how many signs;

- not matter how miraculous those signs become;

⇒ we won't believe.

That's not all they say:

(48) *If we let Him go on like this, everyone will believe in Him,*

*and the **Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation.**"*

- Jews were living under **Roman rule**;

- Romans allowed them limited lee-way for self-government;

- but if self-government gets out of hand – Romans will step in take control.

This ends up **ironic** too:

- because Council did not let Jesus go on like this – sought to stop Him;

- end result was Jews were weakened;

- in AD70 Romans did come in:

- lay siege to Jerusalem – ransack place / demolish temple;

- took total control;

- ironic: what Council desperately tried to avoid – happened as result of what they did.

Irony in why they said it

(48) *If we let Him go on like this, everyone will believe in Him,*

*and the **Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation.**"*

- they reveal real reason why they worried about these 2 things:

(1) jealous of Jesus' increasing popularity;

(2) threat of Roman interference;

- primarily concerned about their **own place**;

- their position / their prominence / their power / their prestige;

- becoming precarious ⇒ something serious must be done!

- feeling threatened ⇒ somehow threat must be neutralised / eliminated.

- Ironic** that these people who are the **spiritual elite** / leaders of the nation;
- supposed examples / exemplars of godliness;
 - are so absorbed in their own self-interest / self-serving concerns;
 - so up to ears in it - all of them - \exists no opposition party calling them out on it;
 - \exists bipartisan agreement – because they know: they all in together;
 - ironic: so open / upfront / unashamed about their self-centred attitude.

Irony in how they said it

- (48) *... the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation."*
- they do add on a secondary concern for the nation;
 - can take that 2 ways – **sincere or cynical**:
 - (1) may be **sincere** in what they say:
 - may genuinely believe: what is good for them is good for nation;
 - if so – somewhat ironic:
 - inflated sense of own importance;
 - *we ourselves are key keepers / custodians of nation*;
 - *in nation's interest for us to be preserved in power/ prominence.*
 - other way to take it – more **cynical**
 - (2) maybe they simply wanting to appear better than they really are;
 - not look good to be so self-absorbed / self-centred;
 - so add : this is good for nation;
 - even tho it hardly appeared on radar of real concerns.

Perhaps **more hypocrisy than irony**;

- perhaps no surprise any more;
- sadly developed reputation:
 - for being more concerned about their own apparent godliness than God Himself;
 - for being more concerned about how they look on outside
 - than w what is really going on on inside
 - so perhaps brazen self-interest is not so surprising.

What **happened next** is:

- (49) *But one of them, Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, takes the floor*;
- this is where the irony really steps up;
 - what seen so far is rather mild compared to what we about to have set before us.

Irony with respect to Caiaphas

In who he was

- (49) *One of them, Caiaphas, who was high priest that year ...*
- (51) *He did not [speak] of his own accord, but being high priest that year he prophesied ...*
- Caiaphas occupied v privileged position of presiding over Council;
 - leader of leaders;
 - one who would speak the oracles of God;
 - his words taken as prophecy - word from God Himself.

Irony in what he said

(49) He said to them [the Council], "*You know nothing at all.*

- scathing / insulting attack on his fellow councillors;
- treats them w disdain / contempt – all pathetically useless;
- shuts down discussion / debate;
- he has v high opinion of himself – he alone has wisdom to decide / determine the case.

Actually v **similar** to way in which discussion / debate is shut down in **public square today**;

- treat people w different view w contempt – not worth time of day to listen – v sad.

Here ironic : what Caiaphas said was **actually true** – they did **know nothing at all**;

- Council's concerns about own self-interest did indeed show they knew nothing at all;
 - knew nothing in way they ought to have known it;
- Caiaphas's words are actually true.

But what is even more ironic about him saying this:

- if it was true of them – it was **even more true of himself**;
 - when he said they knew nothing:
 - he meant they far too weak-kneed / wishy-washy / pussy-footing about;
 - he has no time for this talk / discussion / debate about "**what are we to do?**"
 - shall we caution him?
 - shall we speak out against Him?
 - shall we seek to silence Him?
 - shall we arrest Him?
 - shall we lock Him up?
 - as far as Caiaphas is concerned it is patently obvious what they need to do:
 - they need to kill him – get rid of Him right now – once & for all;
 - so if it was true : the Council knew nothing at all – as they were supposed to know it;
- ⇒ even more true of him: he knew nothing at all – as he should know it.

Now look at what he goes on to say – how he expresses His determination that Jesus must die:

"You know nothing at all.

(50) *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."*

This is perhaps the **most incredibly ironic statement** in all the Bible – or anywhere;

*It is better for you that **one man should die for the people,**
not that the whole nation should perish."*

- to die **for** the people means to die in the place of the people;
 - to die as a **substitute** for the people;
 - to die instead of the people dying.
- Caiaphas's language is **sacrificial** language;
 - he means : Jesus dies as a sacrifice;
 - his logic to persuade others of his plan
 - is that makes sense to sacrifice 1 man to save a multitude / nation.

John explains for us a bit more of meaning of Caiaphas's words:

- (51) He did not say this of his own accord,
but being high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus would die for the nation,
- (52) and **not for the nation only**,
but also to gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad.
- Jesus must die not only for the nation as it stands now;
 - but for whole nation – including all of God's children scattered abroad;
 - getting rid of Jesus will consolidate all Jews under wise counsel of Council.

Caiaphas's statement is a statement of profound / **transcendent truth**;

*It is better : Jesus dies as a substitutionary sacrifice for whole nation of God's people
So that the whole nation of God's people shall not perish, but be united as one.*

Had anyone else on that side of cross / resurrection **ever articulated** this truth **so clearly**?

- here is doctrine of vicarious substitutionary atonement – effective for all God's people
- even closest of Jesus' disciples could not have stated this doctrine this clearly;
- but here it is on the lips of **wicked / conniving / murderous** high priest
who hates / detests / loathes Jesus – determined to have Him dead;

Who would choose Caiaphas to be the spokesmen for profound truth?

- he not understand import of what He saying;
- he had his own malicious / murderous motives for saying what he says;
- but in God's inscrutable sovereign providence
⇒ Caiaphas says precisely the words:
convey God's greatest revelation of gospel to date!
- his **wicked words** are God's **transcendent truth**!

Is there anything more ironic than that?

Irony in why he said it

- (50) *It is better for you that one man should die for the people,
not that the whole nation should perish."*

Caiaphas wants to be seen as taking the noble **moral high ground**;

- noble leader not kowtowing to whims of public opinion;
- noble statesman making the tough call
to sacrifice 1 for survival of whole nation;
- noble high priest who puts ultimate good of all of his people as his #1 priority.

But it is ironic that what he actually says is quite different to this:

- (50) *It is better for you that one man should die for the people,
not that the whole nation should perish."*

- not about what is best for all the people;
- it is all about what is best for them (council)
& best for him (of course, tho he careful not to say that).
- reality is : the whole nation is not under threat from Jesus;
- what is under threat is their precious priestly power over people;
- Council is body being threatened;
- Caiaphas determined to hang on to control – at any cost!

Irony in when he said it

Let's remind ourselves of context here:

- Jesus has just declared: **I AM the resurrection & the Life**
- Jesus has just given good evidence for His claim:
 - just commanded a corpse to come forth from the tomb;
 - Lazarus been dead 4 days – decomposing – yet came back to life;
 - He manifests that He is the Life-giver – He is life;
 - He is the resurrection;
- yet immediate response of Caiaphas is to say *Let's kill him*;
 - how absurd!
 - how futile!
 - how insane!
 - how ironic!

Irony with respect to God & the gospel

Irony = when what is said is the **exact opposite** of what would be **expected**.

∃ irony in what God says in the gospel

- He who seeks to keep his life will lose it
 - but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it - Matt 10(39)
- Having been set free from sin, we have become slaves of righteousness - Rom 6(18)
- Humble yourselves before the Lord, and He will exalt you - James 4(10)
- When I am weak, then I am strong - 2 Cor 12(10)
- The first will be last the last will be first - Matt 20(16)

The **Gospel** itself is **paradox** of sinners being saved – having eternal life,

- thru Jesus the righteous submitting to death / hell / devil,
 - suffering death / hell / devil,
 - conquering power of death / hell / devil.
- whole thing is utterly / profoundly / beautifully / gloriously ironic.

∃ irony in what we say

- We may be the eternally-elect / blood-bought / Spirit-indwelt / born-again / destined for glory / adopted children of God
 - guaranteed to be conformed to image of Jesus;
 - but we still say / do things which are **utterly inconsistent** w that.

We can even be like Council:

- **invested so much of our life** in particular point of view
 - might be on politics / religion / philosophy / science / sport / arts;
 - might be on refugees / asylum seekers;
 - might be on climate change / church;
 - invested so much in maintaining particular point of view
 - not open to debate / discussion;
 - closed to being challenged – feel threatened;
- ⇒ shut down – chill out from engaging – fearful of **losing our place**.

We can even be like Caiaphas:

- **claiming moral high ground**
- wanting to appear noble / altruistic / utterly honourable;
- when reality is \exists mixed motives in our own hearts;
 - we are concerned about our place / position / prominence;
 - our popularity / our power;
- we can do it w our children when we correcting them;
- we can do it when we accused – we immediately on defensive;
- we can do it when we feel insecure / threatened
 - by someone who seems better than us / more popular than us.

This is **ironic in one sense** – not behaviour that belongs to born-again believer;

- but in another sense it is not – all still works in progress – need grace w one another.

\exists irony in what unbelievers say

If God can choose to use Caiaphas's **wicked words** to proclaim His **transcendent truth**;

Is it not likely He will have other unbelievers around us also saying **profound things**?

- like Caiaphas they may have no clue about what the depth of what they say;
- but we might be able to learn a profound thing or two from them;
- worth looking out for.

Here's a quotes from **Charles Darwin**: could be worth your while pondering:

"It is not the strongest of the species that survive, nor the most intelligent,
but the one **most responsive to change**."

- think of catastrophic change of the fall – only hope thru repentance – profound!

One of the popular slogans last week in NSW **abortion** debate was:

"If it's **not your body**, it's **not your decision**"

- ironic : the science would say this slogan supports pro-life argument!

\exists the popular slogan "**Love is love**"

- the intent is often to use it to end all discussion – shut-down Christians;
- but if really ponder it – can be almost as profound as **I AM who I AM**;
- go deep enough into concept of love – will come face-face w God– **God is love**

Perhaps we can see : \exists **gospel opportunity** coming from most unlikely places;

- people say things that have more profound meaning than they realise;
- can be good idea to ask a few Qs to help them go deeper / deeper.

Here's a different type of example I've borrowed / adapted from **John Chapman**:

- you're walking down street – accidently bump into someone / they into you;
- they taken totally by surprise – out of the mouth comes blasphemy:
"Jesus Christ!"
- you say "*No – Geoff Findlay, but I am Jesus' ambassador – Can I help you?*"

Unbelievers will sometimes say things that can be **interpreted in profound way**;

- they not mean it like that;
- but can open door for discussion - maybe you like to try it sometime.

(Conclusion)

So be encouraged by Council & Caiaphas:

- **God's truth is out there** in public square;
- may be maligned by malicious men who would main / murder Almighty
- God's truth is out there:
- it has been lived out in life & love of Jesus;
- death is dead – love has won – Christ has conquered!
- you're out there – on winning side!

Pray

Sing In Christ alone

Benediction – Phil 4(1,23)

Therefore, my brothers, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown,
stand firm thus in the Lord, my beloved.
The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.

(Believers & purifiers)

Back in text - take you to end:

(55) Now the **Passover of the Jews was at hand,**

**and many went up from the country to Jerusalem before the Passover
to purify themselves.**

Like crowd of people we met at beginning of text – here they are again at end:

- probably same 2 groups
- some are believers;
- but some seem to be only purifiers;
- living the irony of rejecting Jesus;
- may be quite ready to identify Him to Pharisees;
- complicit in pointing him out so He can be arrested;
- yet at same time preforming purification rituals
- feel right w God

If we ever come across someone engaged in some sort of **religious ritual**;

- ∃ opportunity there to mention the reality behind the ritual
- maybe empty observation – but God has transcendent truth ;
- you have the words & knowledge of eternal life;
- it is for sharing.

