

Every good story needs a bad guy. In the story about Jesus' suffering and death, we have several bad guys to choose from.

- There's Judas, Jesus' disciple who betrayed him for silver pieces.
- There's Peter, Jesus' disciple who repeatedly denied knowing him.
- There's Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor, who was well-aware he was sentencing an innocent man to death.

All these men did bad things. Were all of them bad people?

- After Jesus' arrest, Judas returned the bribe money.
- After the rooster crowed, Peter sobbed uncontrollably.
- Pilate tried to spare Jesus' life, but the Jewish leaders backed him into a corner.

Yes, each sinned. Each gave in to Satan's temptations. Each struggled with their actions. But the Bible doesn't describe any of them as flat-out evil, or evil personified.

That can't be said of the owner of this week's hands – *Caiaphas*. When Caiaphas puts on the black hat, it was a perfect fit. No matter where you read about Caiaphas in the gospels, you won't find any redeeming qualities. He's cold, calculated, completely ruthless. He refused to let anyone stand in his way, not even the Son of God.

Which is interesting. As the man who held the highest spiritual office in Israel, Caiaphas was supposed to represent God. There's a word for pretending to be someone you're not ... that's right ... *hypocrite*.

Hands of Hypocrisy! That's what we'll call the hands that belong to Caiaphas. We're not here to pick on him and wag our fingers or shake our heads at him. We're not here to congratulate ourselves for not being like him. We're here to look at our own hands and ask ourselves, "*Do I have **Hands of Hypocrisy**?*"

In our lesson, Mark reports how, in the middle of the night, Jesus was brought before the Sanhedrin. They're the Jewish Supreme Court on religious matters. And yes ... you guessed it ... that was illegal. Their goal wasn't to get at the truth. Their goal was to get a quick conviction before the people woke up and found out what happened.

The Sanhedrin had a giant problem on their hands. They didn't have any dirt on Jesus. He was squeaky clean! Perfectly clean! How do you pin a crime on someone who's never committed one? By twisting his words and using them against him. Some testified that Jesus' claimed: **I will destroy this temple made with human hands and in three days will build another, not made with hands.**

Jesus said that. But he wasn't talking about a demo and rebuild project on the Temple. He was referring to his body. It didn't matter though. Presiding over this mess of a trial was Caiaphas, who asked Jesus: **Are you not going to answer? What is this testimony that they are bringing against you?** Since Jesus refused to respond, Caiaphas puts him under oath: **Are you the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One?**

This simple yes or no question wasn't so simple. It was a trap no matter how Jesus answered it. If Jesus said ...

- nothing, that would be a silent denial.
- "No" that would be an actual denial.
- "Yes" that would give Caiaphas the evidence he needed.

Jesus knew exactly what would happen if he gave an honest answer. He did it anyway: **I am. And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven.** Now was the time for him to testify to the truth. Now was the time for him to suffer at the hands of hate-filled humans. Now was the time for him to carry to completion God's plan of salvation.

Poor Caiaphas! It must have been hard to hide his excitement, and still put on this big display of rage

by tearing his clothes and asking: **Why do we need any more witnesses? You've heard the blasphemy.**

Blasphemy is a terrible sin. It carries the death penalty. Blasphemy is claiming to be the Messiah, the Son of God. Ripping his robes is how the High Priest expressed how upset he was. Blasphemy was the crime they used to finally get rid of Jesus.

Those pious and polished members of the Sanhedrin turn violent: **They all condemned him as worthy of death. Some began to spit at him; they blindfolded him, struck him with their fists.**

Spitting in the face of another human being. Attacking a man who was blindfolded and couldn't defend himself. Those are disturbing actions. What made them react in this way? Why was Caiaphas willing to sell his soul to see Jesus dead?

It was partly political. You probably heard somewhere along the line during Lent: *The Jewish leaders were afraid the people would leave them to follow Jesus. Then they'd lose all their power.*

There's some truth to that. But there's another reason Caiaphas refused to stop until he destroyed Jesus. It was spiritual. The high priest represented a way of life, a religious system in which he thought God rewarded people for being good. Some people, these religious leaders for example, were convinced they were doing enough good to get into heaven on their own.

But Jesus turned their world upside down. Instead of patting them on the back, he called them a brood of vipers and children of the devil. His strong words weren't meant to embarrass them, but to show how much he cared about their souls. He wanted them to repent of their hypocrisy and see him as the only way to heaven.

But, by rejecting Jesus' invitation, Caiaphas demonstrates the spiritual danger of hypocrisy. The hypocrite tries to project this shiny clean image on the outside, so people can't see what's on the inside. The hypocrite doesn't see the need to repent of his sin, since he hasn't.

But God's Word wants us to believe something different. God wants you and me to ponder the implications of this truth: **If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.**

Ask yourself, "*Am I guilty of hypocrisy*"?

- Have I ever thought: "*I may not be perfect, but at least I'm not as bad as (fill in the name)*"?
- Have I ever been critical of another Christian for committing the same sin I struggle with myself?
- Have I ever heard the criticism that the church is "*full of hypocrites*"? Have I ever considered the best response might be to say: "*You're right*"?

We work hard so people see us in a certain way. We work hard to hide our deepest and darkest secrets. And even if we could hide them from everyone else, we can't hide anything from God. He's the only one that matters.

Every person, every Christian, is guilty of hypocrisy. So, what or who prevents you and me from going down the same path as Caiaphas? Jesus! Jesus calls us to repent, not to embarrass us, but because he cares about us. Jesus calls us to stop pretending that we have no sin and come clean and confess: **He is faithful and will forgive us and purify us from all sin.**

A hypocritical high priest presided over that mess of a trial, but Jesus, our High Priest, was always in control. He knew the questions were a trap, but he still answered them because he didn't care about saving his own life. He was on a mission to save your life for all eternity. Jesus had to speak the truth, because he is the Truth ... and the Truth always sets us free.