

THE TWELVE VOICES OF
EASTER



CAIAPHAS: VOICE OF CONDEMNATION

Matthew 26: 59-68

Some call me a puppet. But I am not. Those who see me as a puppet obviously know nothing about the strength of family ties. They have no understanding of my loyalty to my father, or actually my father-in-law, as you would call him. He has a strength of influence over me as though he were my father. Annas is a powerful man, perhaps the most powerful Jew in Palestine. He was appointed high priest by the governor Quirinius 25 years ago. During his term, the Sanhedrin was little more than his personal judicial body. And even though he was deposed more than 15 years ago, he still dominates the council and the priesthood. Always a manipulator, enforcing his will. He had his successor removed from office so that his son, Eleazer, could serve as high priest. And then, he worked things so that I received the title. And his purposes do not end with me. There are still four other sons and a grandson to follow.

My father is a powerful man. I do not doubt that each one in turn will serve as high priest. Our father gets his way. And now, although Annas is the power, I have the office. I do pretty much what he wants me to do, and he makes sure I know what he wants done. So you see, the events of that night were not entirely my doing. A mob burst into the courtyard of our home, dragging a bound prisoner. They took Him first to my father-in-law. I am used to being second. Whenever there is a quarrel for the high priest to decide, the matter is brought to me for a hearing, but only after Annas has heard it.

It was late, midnight or after. I had already gone to bed. Apparently Annas was still up. He interviewed their prisoner while I dressed. I came down to the hall and the chief priests. By that time some of the elders of the city and many members of the Sanhedrin had arrived. The man with the mob was Jesus of Nazareth. They presented their accusation. He was a blasphemer and His case must be decided immediately. Blasphemy. A capital offense. I have to tell you, I wasn't much interested in this business, but I caught a look from my father. He was.

I hastily convened a meeting of the Sanhedrin, since many were at hand. We heard the evidence. Frankly, there was not much of a case. The preliminary interview with Annas had turned up nothing we could use. It was clear that we would need more evidence if we hoped to make any charges stick. I did not like hearing a capital case without the full council. So I adjourned the council so we might renew the inquisition later when more could be there. I commanded the officers to take Jesus down to the dungeon in the lowest level of my house, there to be held behind bars in chains until the evidence was gathered and the full council convened. I didn't know what else to do with Him.

In the morning just before dawn, we reconvened. Most of the council members were present, along with the elders of the people, both the chief priests and the scribes. And there were some witnesses, those who claimed to have heard Jesus make blasphemous statements. But the witnesses could not agree. There weren't two stories that matched in the whole lot. If we could not get some real evidence, we would have to dismiss the case.

Finally, one member of the Sanhedrin asked Him directly, "If you are the Christ, tell us." That was something. Maybe the prisoner would supply His own evidence. But His response was not as direct. He said, "If I tell you, you will not believe Me. "Then He said something about the Son of Man being seated at the right hand of the power of God. That enraged the council. One of them asked, "So you are the Son of God." To this, His reply was direct: "I am." The room erupted. Voices shouted, "Blasphemer! Traitor! Pagan!" The Sanhedrin was in a frenzy. But He stood silent.

Of course it was all wrong. How did we expect to get away with this? This was no trial. In the first place, our law does not permit a trial to be held at night, and yet we had been up all night long. And then we had the man before us only because of a blood-money bribe paid to one of His followers. Plus, we had asked the defendant to incriminate Himself. That was excluded from our law as well. And there I was, about to pronounce a capital sentence, even though our law does not permit a sentence to be pronounced until the day after a conviction. What were we thinking? It was the kind of thing you hope nobody ever hears about. I could feel my father's eyes upon me. It crossed my mind that I had an opportunity to step out of his shadow, to rise to a higher level of justice and throw out this case. But there was Annas. His will beat on me like a hot summer sun. I really had no choice but to follow his wishes and please the chief priest. I knew what I ought to do, but I also knew what I had to do.

I am one of the twelve voices of Easter. Mine is the voice of condemnation. It was my voice that proclaimed the innocent Nazarene guilty of blasphemy. What else could I do? Don't you understand the power of our family? Or don't you understand the significance of the office of high priest? I am not a puppet. I am a dutiful son. In that room that morning, a simple man submitted himself to the will of his father. That's all.