

Fellow redeemed, this is a hard lesson for us to learn. How we need to guard against rejecting Jesus in our own day and in our own way. Jesus went the way of the cross—experiencing defeat by the rejection of his own people—to teach us the lesson of faithfulness, yes, but so much more importantly, to reconcile us to God—to redeem us and rescue us and restore us and forgive us of all our sins of rejecting him. In him we are **undefeated**. Follow him, then, up to Calvary, up to the cross. Be faithful to him who was faithful to you, who loved you, lived for you, was rejected for you, who died for you. May God grant this to each of you, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

Matthew 26:57-68 – Undefeated – 116, 121 (1-4)
03/18/20 – Pastor David M. Kuehl – St. Paul's, Muskego, WI

Our Lenten journey to Jesus's cross continues. Today we find ourselves one step closer to the day when all the promises God made regarding the Messiah will be fulfilled. Matthew records for us what has to be one of the most appalling, most piercing, most painful moments in Jesus' passion. God had predicted that the Messiah would suffer, but who would have guessed that this suffering would come at the hands of his own people? That his sorrow would be inflicted by those whom he came to seek and to save, especially those who were their spiritual leaders? What a powerful lesson we learn from their sad and shocking behavior. For as we see theirs, we also see ours. But we also rejoice that in Jesus' treatment at the hands of the Pharisees, who were acting in spiritual blindness, we find our victory. My friends, because Jesus was rejected by his very own, we are accepted by God. As we continue our **Undefeated** Lenten series:

See Your Acceptance in Jesus' Rejection

- 1. Jesus was rejected by those who knew better.**
- 2. How we need to guard against rejecting him, too.**

Matthew writes: *"Those who had arrested Jesus took him to Caiaphas, the high priest, where the teachers of the law and the elders had assembled. ...The chief priests and the whole Sanhedrin were looking for false evidence against Jesus so they could put him to death. But they didn't find any, though many false witnesses came forward. Finally, two came forward and declared, 'This fellow said, 'I am able to destroy the temple of God and rebuild it in three days.' Then the high priest stood up and said to Jesus, 'Aren't you going to answer? What is this testimony that these men are bringing against you?' But Jesus remained silent. The high priest said to him, 'I charge you under oath by the living God: Tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God.' 'You have said so,' Jesus replied. 'But I say to all of you: From now on you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven.' Then the high priest tore his clothes and said, 'He has spoken blasphemy! Why do we need any more witnesses? Look, now you have heard the blasphemy. What do you think?' 'He is worthy of death,' they answered. Then they spit in his face and struck him with their fists. Others slapped him and said, 'Prophecy to us, Messiah. Who hit you?'"*

1. It really shouldn't surprise us that, when the message of the cross is proclaimed, it's often met with hatred and hostility. Jesus predicted as much. But what is surprising—both in the events of our text and in the long history of the church—is that so often the ones who are the most hostile, the most vicious, the most filled with hate toward Jesus are those who should be the first to welcome him and believe in him and love and trust and worship him.

That's what we see in our text today. We see it, first of all, in the attitude and actions of the high priest, Caiaphas. He's the man who represents God before the people, the one who offers sacrifices for them and intercedes for them before God. He's the overseer of all the temple ceremonies and sacrifices, most of which, in one way or another, point ahead to the Messiah, whose great sacrifice will pay for the sins of the world. If anyone should know that Jesus is the fulfillment of all those ceremonies and sacrifices, that Jesus is the long-promised and long-awaited Messiah, it is the high priest. Oh, yes, Jesus experiences defeat when he's rejected by someone who should know better.

Then there are the rest of the Jewish officials who serve on the Sanhedrin, the Jewish high court. They are the experts in the Law. So expert are they that they've memorized verbatim large portions of the Old Testament. Shouldn't we expect an outcry from them? But they speak not a word for Jesus. Not one of them stands up to denounce this mockery of justice, this kangaroo court. They've hardened their hearts against the very messianic prophecies that they've memorized verbatim. Instead, they've filled their hearts with hatred and hostility that will not go away unless Jesus is put to death. Oh, yes, Jesus experiences defeat when he's rejected by those who should know better.

And what has changed today? For sure, the gospel is proclaimed in all its truth and purity. We enjoy freedom of religion in our land. But does that mean that we who call ourselves Christian always put Paul's resolve *"to know nothing except Jesus Christ and him crucified"* (1 Cor 2:2) front and center in our lives? Not at all! Sometimes we look at Jesus and see nothing more than a great teacher of morality, a good guy, a fine fellow, someone who shows us how to live an upright and godly life. Sometimes we question *"Jesus, Jesus, Only Jesus"* (CW 348) and convince ourselves that, while he's the one who made salvation possible, it's only if we follow him, do enough good things, behave ourselves, and pray and pay enough, then maybe, maybe God will consider us worthy and welcome us into heaven.

Oh, yes, Jesus is still defeated today by those who should know better. By you and by me. How sad! How tragic!

2. What a word of warning there is for us in this lesson! As we heard Jesus tell his disciples in the Garden of Gethsemane last week, *"Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation"* (Mt 26:41). *"Watch and pray"* (Mt 26:41), Jesus says. *"Keep your eyes focused on me and my Word."* *"If you continue in my Word, you are truly my disciples"* (Jn 8:31), he says. *"I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me"* (Jn 14:6), he says. Inspired by the Holy Spirit, Peter says, *"Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved"* (Ac 4:12). All of which is why Jesus so pointedly says, *"Watch out for false prophets"* (Mt 7:15).

Yes, my friends, how we need to guard against getting sucked into the notion so trendy today that right doctrine, purity of teaching, doesn't really matter. How easy it is to question Jesus' virgin birth, his incredible miracles, his full and forever payment for our sins, and his glorious resurrection from the dead on Easter morning. Aren't there times when we're tempted to consider unimportant teachings of Scripture, like the verbal inspiration of Scripture, infant baptism, the Real Presence of Jesus' body and blood in the Lord's Supper, the roles of men and women, and church fellowship—all teachings that are to strengthen us in our relationship with God and guide us in our relationships with one another? It's so easy for us to think that what we believe and teach is up to us, and that the Bible is some kind of smorgasbord or buffet line, from which we can pick and choose whatever fits our fancy at any given moment. Oh, yes, how we need to guard against rejecting Jesus! And when we do, how we need to recognize that for sin, repent of it, and return to our God for the assurance of the forgiveness of our sin in Christ!

Yes, in Christ. As we watch Jesus being rejected by Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin, let's see in his rejection our acceptance by God. Let's rejoice that *"God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting our sins against us"* (2 Cor 5:19). Let's resolve that by the power of the Holy Spirit we'll always believe and proclaim the whole counsel of God's Word. Let's pray that we'll be filled with so much love for Jesus that we willingly take up our cross and follow him, even if we are rejected and threatened with death. For we have his promise that he will never forsake us when we hold to him and to his Word: *"Be faithful, even to the point of death,"* he says, *"and I will give you life as the victor's crown"* (Re 2:10).