

ROAD TO EASTER
HEARTS OF STONE

Friday, February 23

Reading: John 11:45-57

John 11:50 *"You do not realize that it is better for you that one man die for the people than that the whole nation perish."*

51 *He did not say this on his own, but as high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus would die for the Jewish nation,*

52 *and not only for that nation but also for the scattered children of God, to bring them together and make them one.*

While the resurrection of Lazarus brought many to belief, some who witnessed the event went and reported to the Pharisees. The Sanhedrin (the Jewish "supreme court") is called together to deal with the situation. They realize the danger they are in. If this unprecedented miracle draws the Passover crowds to Jesus, a rebellion may ensue and the Romans would come and crush the nation and take away their position of power.

We now meet Caiaphas for the first time. He was high priest from A.D. 18-36. He was the son-in-law of the former high priest Annas who was the real power behind the Temple. He was a Sadducee (liberals) and heavily involved in the politics of the time. That the Pharisees (conservatives) would team with such a man shows the degree of their hatred for Jesus.¹ His solution is that it is better for Jesus to die than for the whole nation to be destroyed. To Caiaphas this was a practical, political decision. But John sees it as a prophecy. Though the high priest did not know it, he was speaking the truth of the gospel. Jesus would die for Israel and the world.

From this point on, the religious establishment sought for a way to kill Jesus. They commanded anyone who knew of Jesus' whereabouts to inform them. For this reason, many of the pilgrims who were arriving in Jerusalem for Passover wondered if Jesus would skip the feast this year.

LESSON ONE: "Hard Hearts." While many of the people standing at the tomb that day believed in Jesus, there were some who did not. They went and reported this event to the religious leaders. Hearing of this great miracle brought more hatred from the religious leaders and increases their desire to kill Jesus. How sad that people could see the power of Christ and yet harden their hearts against Him. But people do the same thing today. They can see how Jesus changes lives but still refuse to turn to Him. Do you have a hard heart? Have you put your faith in Jesus Christ?

LESSON TWO: "The Good News." Without realizing it, the high priest Caiaphas was the first to proclaim the message of the gospel – Jesus' death would bring together people from all nations ("scattered children of God") and make them one in Christ. Jesus' death is the heart of the gospel message. And it is available to all! How are you sharing the good news with those around you? With family? In your neighborhood? At your work? To the ends of the earth?

¹ The SADDUCEES did not believe in the supernatural (angels, miracles, etc) and would only take the 5 books of Moses as Scripture. They were in charge of the Temple and collaborated with the Romans to keep their power. The PHARISEES were the conservatives who controlled the local synagogues of worship. They held to the entire 'Old Testament' as God's Word and thus believed in the supernatural. They were very strict and made hundreds of rules to add to God's law they expected the people to obey.