

Theme: Ironies of the Passion: “Not During the Festival”

Matthew 26:1-5 (EHV)

When Jesus had finished saying all these things, he said to his disciples, ²**“You know that after two days it will be the Passover, and the Son of Man will be handed over to be crucified.”** ³**Then the chief priests and the elders of the people assembled in the palace of the high priest, whose name was Caiaphas.** ⁴**They plotted together how to arrest Jesus by stealth and kill him.** ⁵**But they said, “Not during the Festival, or else there might be a riot among the people.”**

Timing is everything. This is true in so many areas of our lives. Driving through the Bay Area at 11am as opposed to 4:30pm: Good timing! Asking for a raise or a vacation the day after you are hired for a job: Bad timing! Pausing for dramatic effect when you’re giving a speech...Good timing! Asking someone to marry you after your first date: Bad timing!

In our work, in our relationships, in music, in sports, when travelling, or taking a vacation, when public speaking, or telling jokes, so often it is true: Timing is everything. Maybe you can think of an event or a situation in your life where the timing was very important. Today’s example of irony from the passion is all about timing. It can be summed up in one simple statement that the religious leaders of Israel agreed on, a statement of when they wanted to kill Jesus: **Not during the festival.**

The “festival” that is mentioned in our text was the Passover. It was the most important festival of the year for the Jewish people, and it was followed by a week-long celebration known as the Festival of Unleavened Bread. During the Passover, Jewish pilgrims flooded Jerusalem. At the time of this text it was just two days before the Passover—so, this would be Tuesday of Holy Week. The pilgrims would have already been streaming in to Jerusalem. No doubt there was already excitement in the air because of the approaching festival. Jesus enemies agreed: The one time they did not want to kill Jesus was during the festival.

Oh the irony! Do you know when Jesus was arrested to be crucified? On the very day of the Passover! At the one time his enemies did not want to do it, they would kill Him. Despite the fact that our text tells us, **the chief priests and the elders of the people assembled in the palace of the high priest, whose name was Caiaphas.** ⁴**They plotted together how to arrest Jesus by stealth and kill him.** ⁵**But they said, “Not during the Festival, or else there might be a riot among the people” (v. 3-5).**

They wanted to kill Jesus in some sly, secret, treacherous way. They wanted to make sure that they wouldn’t be blamed for it. They didn’t want to do it during the Passover because that might cause a **“a riot among the people”** and might get them in trouble with the Romans and threaten their positions of power.

So why did Jesus’ death happen when and how it did? Because Jesus said it would! Remember from our text it wasn’t just the Jewish religious leaders who were meeting on that Tuesday of Holy Week. Jesus met with His disciples on the Mount of Olives where He was teaching them and speaking about His return on Judgment Day. Our text tells us, **When Jesus had finished saying all these things, he said to his disciples,** ²**“You know that after two days it will be the Passover, and the Son of Man will be handed over to be crucified” (v. 1-2).** It didn’t matter what the chief priests and the elders were plotting. Jesus’ time had come. In two days, on the very day of the Passover, He would be arrested so that He could be crucified. At the one time his enemies did not want to do it, they would kill him. How’s that for irony?

Nothing about Jesus' death was what the Jewish leaders expected or wanted. What lesson are we to learn from this irony of Jesus' passion? Who was really in charge? The leaders of the Jews were convinced that they had matters under control. They thought that they were the ones who were behind the scenes "pulling the strings" to make things go how and when they wanted them to. God, however, had other ideas. God had chosen the Passover as the day when His Son would be arrested and die, because God had given them the Passover as a prophecy of Christ. He wanted Jerusalem to be filled to overflowing on the day His Son died, because God wanted his people to see the fulfillment of all that he had been promising since the very first Passover 1500 years earlier.

Jesus' entire ministry was, in fact, aimed at this final trip to Jerusalem. God's love demanded that He give Himself to pay for all sins—even for the sins of these men who plotted against Him. So when these men least wanted to kill Jesus, God made them fulfill the plan He had conceived of before the world began. And God did all that for us. He saw you and me before He even said, **"Let there be light!" (Genesis 1:3)**. He controlled everything so that it all happened exactly the way it was supposed to. He even used these men to bring Jesus' mission to completion so that we would live.

Now, obviously, when God decides that he's going to make something happen, it's going to happen. But how we become His instruments—His tools—matters. Do we serve him out of faith or in spite of our unbelief? What made these men serve God's plan? It was their own sinful pride and hatred of Jesus. They wanted to be in charge. They wanted control over when and how things were done, and anything and anyone that was a threat to this was going to be eliminated.

Despite the fact that we don't have the same murderous hatred that these men did, we struggle with the same sinful pride that they did. Their problem is our problem too. Sinful pride is the heart of all sin. It takes many different forms, but in the end, sinful pride says that I am the most important person on earth. What I want should matter more than what other people want—even more than what God wants. "I want it my way and I want it when I say so!" Now, maybe we never say those words out loud, but even as adults don't we often pout, through temper tantrums, or get upset when things don't go the way we want them to? When people don't treat us the way we want them to? That too is a type of sinful pride. Or even when we wallow in despair and are convinced that our sins are so bad that God could never love us, that is sinful pride too. It's essentially saying that what Jesus did on the cross isn't good enough to cover *my* sin.

These sins and more were the reason why God made sure that his Son died on the very day these men didn't want him to. Jesus was dying for us. And it was no accident that he died on a cross. That too was prophesied by God. And while the cross was a horrifically painful way to die, the Bible doesn't dwell on the pain of the cross. It dwells on the shame. To the Romans, the cross proclaimed that a person was the lowest kind of criminal, unworthy of any kind of honor in death. To the Jews, the cross was even worse. God had said in the Old Testament, **"a person left hanging on a tree is cursed by God" (Deuteronomy 21:23 EHV)**. And when God says "curse" He means condemned to hell. To the Jews, being hung on the cross symbolized being abandoned to hell.

God's Word prophesied it and Jesus Himself declared it in our text, **"the Son of Man will be handed over to be crucified" (v. 2)**. He would be abandoned to the sufferings of hell itself on the cross. His Father would heap on Him all the shame and scorn that we sinners should get from a holy God for daring to follow our sinful pride and our own desires instead of Him. God should pour that shame and scorn out on us. But He didn't. Jesus took that shame and death for us. Then He rose for us to show that all that scorn and shame and death and hell were over. Because of this we are forgiven, set free, and will live forever with Him in heaven!

Yes, timing is everything. These men wanted to kill Jesus, just not that week. The real irony is that God used their hatred and opposition to bring our Savior to the cross at exactly the moment He planned so that Jesus could fulfill his mission and win eternal life for us. Thank God for His perfect timing in our lives, and for His perfect timing in *saving* our lives! Amen.