

# Empire Church of the Brethren

## Sunday Service Sermons

**23 March 2025**

When the Religious are Wrong

Text: "Then the high priest rent his clothes, saying, He has spoken blasphemy, what further need have we of witnesses? Behold, now you have heard his blasphemy. What do you think? They answered and said, He is guilty of death." *Matt. 26:65-66.*

People can be wrong in their judgments.

Harry Emerson Fosdick, in his book "What Is Vital in Religion", told of a newspaper editor in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, who heard Lincoln's Gettysburg Address at the dedication of the national cemetery.

But he was a hardheaded realist who would not fall for the words expressed by the president of the United States during those crucial Civil War years.

He wrote in his paper: "We pass over the silly remarks of the President, for the credit of the nation, we are willing that the veil of oblivion shall be dropped over them and that they shall no more be repeated or thought of".

But the newspaper editor was wrong in his judgment of Lincoln's Gettysburg Address.

The priests in Israel once made a wrong judgment too.

They decided that Jesus was not the Messiah.

The storm had been gathering for some time.

The plot thickened as Jesus continued his ministry and the people responded to his love and his teachings.

For the priests the issue was decided when Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead.

They determined then that he must die.

The priesthood was well established in Israel.

According to one source, there were one hundred thousand priests in Jesus' time.

The only qualification for the priesthood was unbroken physical descent from Aaron.

Moral qualifications and spiritual power did not enter into the matter.

The only disqualifications were certain physical blemishes.

In the illegal trial of Jesus, the priests came to a definite decision: Jesus must die.

They were the religious of their day.

But on that day the religious were wrong.

What happens when the religious are wrong?

When the religious are wrong, we see the results of pride.

The pervasion of pride.

It is easy to see that the priests were pervaded with pride.

Since they qualified for the priesthood by their ancestry, they had an unusual pride in their paternity.

They also had pride in their position and power.

And they were pridefully convinced that their position was right and that Jesus' position was wrong.

The place of pride.

Pride has a proper place in our lives.

We should have pride in certain things.

The pride in oneself that causes one to live and serve with confidence is one instance.

The pride in the gospel that causes one to share it with others is another.

But pride can also be harmful.

As with the priests, pride can easily cause one to make wrong decisions and to follow destructive courses of action.

The price of pride.  
The Bible warns, "Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall".  
The price of pride can be very high; pride can indeed lead to destruction.  
Our pride can keep us from reaching the things we desire most.  
Supposedly, the priests desired to reach God most of all.  
But their prideful rejection of Jesus kept them from entering into the presence of God.  
The priests' pride kept them from God.  
Our pride can keep us from attaining our goals.  
When the religious are wrong, we see the effects of prejudice.  
The fact of prejudice.  
Prejudice refuses to take into consideration the individual himself.  
The religious leaders were prejudiced against Jesus.  
To them he did not have the right credentials.  
They prejudged him, deciding that he could not properly represent God.  
The faults of prejudice.  
Prejudice blinds us to God.  
Those who are prejudiced cannot see what God wants them to see.  
God wanted the priests to see the revelation of himself through Jesus Christ, but their prejudice blinded them.  
Prejudice limit's the love of God.  
The priests did not like the people with whom Jesus associated, and they were willing to cut those people off from the love of God.  
Through their prejudice toward those individuals they in effect limited the love of God.  
Jesus showed God's love to people like Zacchaeus, whom they had labeled a sinner.  
Jesus showed that a good Samaritan had carried out the commandment of God to love another as he loved himself, while the priests would have no dealings with the Samaritans, good or otherwise.  
By their prejudice, the religious leaders were asserting that God loved them but not others.  
When the righteous are wrong, we see the completion of the plot.  
Causes of the plot.  
The priests' plot against Jesus thickened.  
Several causes of the plot can be traced through the account.  
Jesus brought people directly to God.  
This destroyed their pride in position.  
The priests were no longer necessary for persons to come into God's presence.  
Jesus cleansed the temple and called for it to be used only for its original purpose.

In doing this he put an end to some of the religious leaders' profits, for they had profited from the exchange of currency used in the temple.  
They had also profited from the sale of animals to be sacrificed at the temple.  
Jesus was inclusive in his love.  
This undercut the religious leaders' prejudice.  
They were exclusive in their love.  
Only religious Jews of their own kind came under the umbrella of their love.  
But Jesus showed the true heart of God in an inclusive love that reached out to all persons.  
Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead.  
This showed up the religious leaders' power.  
They did not have power over life and death.  
They did not have the power to act directly for God.  
All of these things fit together to cause the priests to plot against Jesus.  
In the trial the plot was completed.  
The course of the plot.  
The priests found a weak link in Jesus' organization.  
By the betrayal of Judas, they were able to arrest Jesus.

Then they tried him.

Follow the course of the plot.

First, the religious leaders brought out false witnesses.

In their search for false witnesses, they could not find witnesses who would agree with their accusations against Jesus.

The law said that two witnesses had to agree before a person could be found guilty.

Finally, they found two people who twisted and misapplied the statements of Jesus to assert that he said that he would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days.

Of course, the reference was to the temple of his body and his resurrection from the dead.

Next the religious leaders tried direct confrontation.

When the false witnesses made their charges against Jesus, they directly confronted him, asking him if he was the Christ, the Son of God.

Jesus refused to answer them.

Then Jesus simply stated that the high priest had said it himself and that one day they would witness the Son of Man in his power and glory.

This was too much for the high priest, who accused Jesus of blasphemy.

The priest found him guilty and announced the penalty of death.

In the course of the plot, they confronted Jesus directly.

In the end, each one of us must confront the Christ directly.

The religious can be wrong.

When the priests decided against Jesus, they were wrong.

But the religious can also be right.

They are right when they recognize in Jesus the one who can forgive sin and bring them to God.

We must decide for Jesus.