

NOT DURING THE FESTIVAL

Pastor Colin Rieke ~ February 24, 2016

¹ When Jesus had finished saying all these things, he said to his disciples, ² “As you know, the Passover is two days away—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 and they schemed to arrest Jesus secretly and kill him. ⁵ “But not during the festival,” they said, “or there may be a riot among the people.” (Matthew 26:1-5)

Behold the Lamb of God for sinners slain,

Timing is everything. Timing is everything when it comes to a quarterback tossing a pass to a receiver. Timing is everything when preparing a surprise birthday party. Timing is everything when it comes to following a carefully laid plan. Timing is everything when it comes to a marriage proposal. Timing is everything when it comes to calling a Pastor for Sahuarita.

Timing is everything in the Bible as well. Today, the irony we focus our attention on has to do with timing. It may come as no surprise to us that the Jewish leaders wanted to kill Jesus. But they were just as concerned about the timing of when that would happen. The irony of their timing is summed up by one phrase: NOT DURING THE FESTIVAL.

1. It was the one time they didn't want to kill Jesus
2. It was the one time that what they feared most could happen

(1)

The festival that is being spoken about is the festival of the Passover, the most important festival of the year. During the Passover, Jewish pilgrims from all over the world flooded Jerusalem to celebrate what God did for their ancestors in bringing them out of Egypt. We are now just two days before the Passover – Tuesday of Holy Week. The pilgrims were already streaming in. One could feel the holiday excitement in the air. Jesus' most committed enemies agreed, “NOT DURING THE FESTIVAL!” It was the one time they didn't want to kill Jesus.

Matthew sets up the irony so well in just five short verses. On that Tuesday night, two groups of people were meeting. On the Mount of Olives, Jesus sat down with his disciples. In the palace of Caiaphas, the high priest, the chief priests and the elders of the people were meeting. What were they meeting about? Matthew says, “**they schemed to arrest Jesus secretly and kill him.**” The leaders of the Jewish nation, the men charged with both justice and religious purity, hated Jesus so much that they were plotting to kill him. But they wanted to do it in a secret way to avoid being blamed, how's that for irony?

So they reached a consensus on one important issue, NOT DURING THE FESTIVAL. We don't know who said these words, but that's not important. They all recognized the wisdom of this statement. It would be much easier to deal with Jesus after the Passover was over and all the pilgrims had left. The Passover was the one time they didn't want to kill Jesus.

What a contrast that was to what Jesus and his disciples were doing when they met on that Tuesday night. Jesus and his disciples had already had a full day. He had already been to the temple, confronted his enemies and won every argument they threw at him. Then he and his disciples walked out of the city over to the Mount of Olives. Then he spoke these crucial words, **“As you know, the Passover is two days away—the Son of Man will be handed over to be crucified.”** Jesus told his disciples what was coming, how it was coming and when it was coming. No matter what his enemies plotted, on the very day of the festival, on the Passover, Jesus 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.

There would be nothing secret or sly about it. He wasn't just going to be stabbed in the back by an assassin, he wasn't just going to disappear. He was going to be crucified! By definition, this was a public act. First of all, it had to be done by the Romans, the Jews did not have the authority to execute someone. There would be a legal proceeding. Crucifixion meant tying or nailing a victim to a post and letting him hang, sometimes for days, until he died. It involved an open and public space. Guards watched the prisoner until he died. In Jerusalem, it meant that one had to march the prisoner through the city and outside to Calvary, where executions took place.

How different this would be than what Jesus' enemies expected? Nothing about Jesus' death was what his enemies expected. That's the real irony here. **NOT DURING THE FESTIVAL.** It was the one time they didn't want to kill Jesus, but it was the one time God had in mind. This irony teaches us who was really in charge. The leaders of the Jews were convinced that they had matters under control. They controlled the temple, and through it, the people. They were convinced they could make this happen the way they wanted it to. God however, had other ideas. God chose the Passover as the exact day his Son would be arrested, because the Passover was a prophecy of Christ. Every detail about the Passover – from the one-year old lamb without blemish, to the blood sprinkled on the doorframes of the houses in Egypt – was pointing to Christ. God wanted Jerusalem to be overflowing with people on the day his Son died, because God wanted his people to see the fulfillment of all that he had been promising for 1,500 years

Jesus' entire ministry was all about this timing. His entire ministry was aimed at this final trip to Jerusalem. Without this trip to Jerusalem, the rest of Jesus' ministry would have been pointless. And so, the very men who said, **“NOT DURING THE FESTIVAL”** participated in every phase of Jesus' death. They paid Judas to betray Jesus. They sent guards to Gethsemane on the night of the Passover to arrest him. They gathered false witnesses in the middle of the night, held a kangaroo court, and convicted Jesus of blasphemy. They brought him to Pilate and demanded that he die. They asked for the release of Barabbas instead of Jesus. They even walked back and forth in front of the cross taunting him.

These men did all that because God's plan could not be stopped. God's love demanded that he give himself to pay for all sins – even for the sins of these men. So, the one time they didn't want to kill Jesus, God made them fulfill the plan he had conceived of before the world began. And God did it for us. And God used these men to bring that plan to fulfillment.

(2)

The Jewish leaders, played right into God's hands. Now, you and I both know, that when God says something is going to happen, it is going to happen, whether we like it or not, whether we participate in it or not. But how we become his tools matters. Do we serve him out of faith or in spite of our unbelief? What

was it that led the Jewish leaders to play into God's hands? It was their own sinful pride. This is why they said, "NOT DURING THE FESTIVAL." It was the one time that what they feared most could happen.

So, what did the Jewish leaders fear? In short, they feared losing their position. They had the prestige of being the guys whom people looked to for guidance in the religious realm. They were the ones who could tell people what God wanted and didn't want. And besides this, it also had some nice perks with the Roman government as well. Jesus was throwing a wrench in their cushy little life. Jesus was teaching the people what God wanted and didn't want. This is what made them hate Jesus, because he was taking away their position. And if they killed him during the feast, they thought, they feared that a riot would break out, and this riot would undercut their credibility with the Romans. And so their sinful pride drove them to plot a way to kill Jesus.

It might be easy to think that this sinful pride is only unique in the religious leaders of Jesus' day. But I think we know better. Our sinful pride may not have led us to kill anybody, but can we honestly claim to be any better? Their problem is our problem too. Sinful pride is the heart of all sin. It takes on many different forms, but at the end of the day, sinful pride says I'm the most important person on earth. What I want matters more than what others want, my opinions are better than anyone else's opinions – even better than God's. Now, we probably don't come out and say it that way, but isn't that the way we act? When we throw temper tantrums, isn't that the same thing? When we hold grudges, when we replay in our minds over and over again what people have said and done to us, isn't that sinful pride? When we wallow in despair and are convinced that our sins are so bad that God could never love us, that's sinful pride too. It's saying that what Jesus did on the cross isn't good enough to cover *my* sin.

Our God calls for us to be humble, the exact opposite of sinful pride. He calls for us to put him first, and to serve him and our neighbor. God calls for us to sacrifice for our spouses, children and strangers who still need to hear the gospel. But our sinful pride always finds a reason to rebel against God. Even if we actually succeed in hiding our pride from others, God still sees it. That sinful pride in our hearts and displayed in our lives has earned us death and hell. That's what every single one of us deserves.

That's why God made sure Jesus died on his day, on the very day when his enemies didn't want him to. It wasn't just to show them who was in charge. It was to pay for our sinful pride. It was no accident that Jesus died on a cross, the most horrible way that Romans knew how to kill someone. They reserved crucifixion for traitors and rebels. Certainly pain was involved. But, perhaps surprisingly, the Bible never dwells on the pain. Rather, it dwells more on the shame of the cross. To the Romans, the cross claimed that this was the lowest kind of criminal. To the Jews, the cross was even worse. God said, "**Anyone who is hung on a pole is under God's curse.**" To the Jews, being hung on the cross symbolized being abandoned to hell.

So when Jesus said that he would not only die, but that he would be crucified, he was telling his followers that he would be abandoned to the sufferings of hell itself on the cross. He would suffer all our shame and scorn from a holy God. God should pour that shame and scorn out on us in hell. But he won't. Because Jesus didn't suffer just one man's scorn and shame in hell, on the cross he suffered all the scorn, all the shame, all the hell of every sinner who will ever live. And when Jesus said, "**It is finished,**" it was indeed finished, the payment for sins was complete. Then he died for us all. And then rose. And when he rose, he said that all the shame and scorn, all the death and hell were over. We are free and we are loved. This was God's perfect timing.

Timing is everything. These men wanted to kill Jesus, just not that week. And when it didn't go as planned, they still celebrated doing it. They may have seen the irony in the fact that there wasn't a riot like they feared, but that's not the real irony here. The real irony is that God used their hatred and opposition to bring our Savior to the cross at the exact moment he planned, all so that Jesus could fulfill his mission and win eternal life for us. Give thanks for that irony. Amen.