

# Why Jesus is Hated

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Preacher: Edward Lobb

[ 0 : 00 ] Good. Well, with that, let's turn to our reading this morning, which is from John's Gospel, Chapter 18. And we're continuing in this series from John 18 and 19. So John's Gospel, Chapter 18, and you'll find that on page 904, page 904 in the hardback Bibles. And today I'll read from Chapter 18, verses 12 to 27. John's Gospel, Chapter 18, verses 12 to 27. It's the Thursday evening, late on the Thursday evening, Jesus has been arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane, and he is now being brought first to the Jewish high priests, and then later to Pontius Pilate. So John 18, verse 12. So the band of soldiers and their captain, and the officers of the Jews arrested Jesus and bound him. First they led him to Annas, for he was the father-in-law of Caiaphas, who was high priest that year. It was Caiaphas who had advised the Jews that it would be expedient that one man should die for the people.

Simon Peter followed Jesus, and so did another disciple, probably John himself. Since that disciple was known to the high priest, he entered with Jesus into the court of the high priest.

But Peter stood outside at the door. So the other disciple, who was known to the high priest, went out and spoke to the servant girl who kept watch at the door, and brought Peter in.

The servant girl at the door said to Peter, Peter, you also are not one of this man's disciples, are you? He said, I am not. Now the servants and officers had made a charcoal fire because it was cold, and they were standing and warming themselves. Peter also was with them, standing and warming himself.

The high priest then questioned Jesus about his disciples and his teaching. Jesus answered him, I have spoken openly to the world. I've always taught in synagogues and in the temple, where all Jews come together. I've said nothing in secret. Why do you ask me?

[ 2 : 22 ] Ask those who have heard me what I said to them. They know what I said. When he had said these things, one of the officers standing by struck Jesus with his hand, saying, Is that how you answer the high priest?

Jesus answered him, If what I said is wrong, bear witness about the wrong. But if what I said is right, why do you strike me? Annas then sent him bound to Caiaphas, the high priest.

Now Simon Peter was standing and warming himself. So they said to him, You also are not one of his disciples, are you? He denied it and said, I am not.

One of the servants of the high priest, a relative of the man whose ear Peter had cut off, asked, Did I not see you in the garden with him? Peter again denied it.

And at once, a rooster crowed. This is the word of the Lord. May it be a blessing to us today. Well, let's turn again to our John's Gospel, chapter 18, which you'll find on page 904 in the Big Bibles.

[ 3 : 40 ] Page 904, John chapter 18. And our subject for this morning is the question why Jesus should be hated.

Why Jesus is hated. It is a remarkable thing that the Son of God, the finest human being ever to have walked this earth, should be on the receiving end of very great hatred.

In fact, that hatred was so great that Jesus was only allowed to be publicly active for about three years before he was put to death by a mock judicial process.

It is remarkable, isn't it? Human beings generally honor goodness and integrity. Think, for example, of the goodness and integrity of someone like Mother Teresa of Calcutta, all the good work that she did and the way that she is now honored.

And yet Jesus, whose goodness and integrity were absolute and flawless, was hastened to the gallows in three years. Now, it's this murderous hatred that I want us to look at together from John's Gospel, chapter 18.

[ 4 : 58 ] It's the high priests of the Jews who hated Jesus the most. But before we look at their hatred in chapter 18, I'd like to turn back a few pages, and you might like to turn with me to chapter 11, John chapter 11, because this gives us some background as to what was going on.

So let's look at John 11 and verse 45. I'll read a few verses from there. John 11, verse 45. What has just happened is that Jesus has raised Lazarus from the dead in the previous verses.

So verse 45. Many of the Jews, therefore, who had come with Mary, that's the sister of Lazarus, and had seen what Jesus did, in other words, raising Lazarus from the dead, believed in him.

But some of them went to the Pharisees and told them what Jesus had done. So the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered the council and said, what are we to do?

For this man performs many signs. If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation.

[ 6 : 08 ] But one of them, Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, said to them, you know nothing at all, nor do you understand that it is better for you that one man should die for the people, not that the whole people, the whole nation should perish.

He did not say this of his own accord, but being high priest that year, he prophesied that Jesus would die for the nation. And not for the nation only, but also to gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad.

So from that day on, notice this, they made plans to put him to death. Now let's keep this passage, chapter 11, open before us for a moment because it's very illuminating.

And it tells us things about these high priests and the council and the Pharisees, which we don't learn from Matthew, Mark and Luke. Most of this 11th chapter of John tells the story of the raising of Lazarus, Lazarus who'd been dead for four days.

And you'll see in verse 45, many of the Jews who had seen this spectacular miracle believed in Jesus. But some of them, verse 46, marched straight off to the Pharisees and reported the incident.

[ 7 : 23 ] And did the Pharisees say, this is wonderful. God is at work amongst us. No, they did not. They immediately called a meeting of the Sanhedrin. That's the high council of Judaism.

And they said effectively, brothers, we are in the deep end here. This is just awful. We can't deny the signs that this man is performing. But if we don't stop him, everybody's going to believe in him. And if that happens, there'll be crowd hysteria. The whole city will boil over with excitement, thinking that the Messiah king has come to rescue Israel from the Romans. And the Romans will come down upon us like a ton of bricks.

Tyrannical overlords don't like it when a subjugated people threatens to rise up in revolt. They tend to smash them down with an iron fist. Recent history has demonstrated that over and over again. And look at what the chief priests actually say in verse 48. The Romans will come and take away both our place, which I think means our place in society, the position that we've managed to secure for ourselves.

[ 8 : 30 ] We'll take away our place and our nation. Now, you can understand the viewpoint of these high priests. Palestine, Israel, had been conquered by the Romans in 63 BC, some 90 years before these events.

But the Romans, over time, had come to an accommodation with the Jews. The real power in the land, of course, lay with the Romans and the Roman governor. But the Jews had been allowed by the Romans to retain their royal family, the Herods.

They'd been allowed to keep the temple with its rituals and its priesthood. And the synagogues were up and running in different parts of the nation. So although Israel had completely lost its independence, it was allowed to function as a Jewish nation under the lordship of Rome.

So the chief priests and the Sanhedrin had a great deal to lose. If Jerusalem were to break out in mob excitement, claiming that the Messiah had come, the Roman army would almost certainly come down upon them very heavily.

If your memory goes back far enough, you'll remember Tiananmen Square in Beijing in 1989. That's the kind of thing that can happen. But Caiaphas, the high priest, moves the meeting forward at verse 49.

[ 9 : 48 ] He turns to the council and he says to them rather brutally, you are a load of ignoramuses. It's not necessary for the whole Jewish nation to perish. Only one man needs to die.

He can stand in and die for everybody. John notices, of course, in verse 51, that Caiaphas quite unwittingly has spoken a true prophecy. Indeed, Jesus would die for the nation.

And not just for the Jews, but for all of God's Gentile children who are scattered abroad. Caiaphas spoke far more than he understood. But at the brutal level of his fear and jealousy, he clearly saw that the way to protect the Jewish institutions and privileges was to get rid of Jesus. And that is why, verse 53, from that day on, they made plans to put Jesus to death. So in their own mind, this decision was now taken.

They must find a way. They were committed to this plan of getting rid of Jesus. They were willing to sacrifice so much in order to keep their privileged position. They were willing to sacrifice their integrity and truthfulness.

[10:58] They were even willing to say, as they did in chapter 19, we have no king but Caesar. The Jews said, no king but Caesar. That was a denial of the God of Abraham.

All integrity, all nobility could be sacrificed if only they could get their way and have Jesus put to death. So they were fiercely determined from that day on, as verse 53 puts it.

So when we get to chapter 18, their resolve to kill Jesus has only been deepened and hardened. And it's that resolve to kill him which drives the agenda in the dealings that Jesus has with the high priests.

They have no serious interest in what Jesus has to say. They've already categorized him as a blasphemer, a deceiver, and a Sabbath breaker. And now they also see him as a threat to the whole structure of Judaism and all its privileges.

So let's turn back now to chapter 18, and we'll look at John's narrative and see what else we can find out from it. Well, first let's trace the actual events and see what happened.

[12:07] You'll see that John interweaves his account of Peter's denial with his account of Jesus before the high priest because the two things were happening simultaneously, only a few yards from each other.

So verse 13 tells us that the soldiers led Jesus, now bound, to Annas, who was the father-in-law of Caiaphas, who was officially the high priest that year.

Now fathers-in-law are usually 20 or 30 years older than their sons-in-law. So Annas was almost certainly a fair bit older than Caiaphas. Annas had been the high priest.

Now it seems that the Romans rather enjoyed interfering with some of the Jewish arrangements because officially, if a man became high priest, he would hold that office for life, just as the Pope in Rome does, or at least used to.

But the Romans wanted to show the Jews who was really top dog. And quite often they would stand a high priest down and appoint somebody else for a year or two. And this seems to have been what had happened here.

[13:11] Annas was still very much alive and well, but he'd been demoted and his son-in-law Caiaphas had been put in instead of him. But the ordinary people, the Jewish folk, were still thinking of Annas, the senior person, as the man who had the real authority.

And verse 15 suggests that Annas was still living in the high priest's official residence. And Simon Peter ends up in the courtyard of the high priest's house. It's only later in verse 24 that Annas sends Jesus down the road to Caiaphas's house.

Now, that detail is not highly important, but it's interesting to work out the ins and outs of the story and try to see what's going on. But what is important is the interview between Annas and Jesus, which is recorded in verses 19 to 23.

Jesus is brought into Annas's house, led in, as verse 12 tells us, by the Roman soldiers and their captain and the officers of the Jews, the temple police.

And verse 12 tells us also that Jesus was bound. He was roped around to prevent him from moving easily and to prevent him, of course, from running away. So as we look at verse 19, let's remember two things.

[14:27] First, that Jesus stands there before Annas tied up. So it's hardly a discussion between two men on equal terms. And secondly, we know that Annas is not some unbiased interrogator.

He is one of this group of people who have already determined, predetermined, to put Jesus to death. So by the standard of men's justice, there is nothing just about what's going on here.

This is an interrogation whose outcome has already been decided. And verse 19 shows us that Annas questioned Jesus about two things.

First, his disciples. Presumably, how many were there? Because if they numbered thousands, they might mass together in a huge number and make a great uprising.

And a large mob gathering together in the city center was something to be feared. So the question about his disciples might well have been born of fear. But the second question is probably the more important from Annas' point of view.

[ 15 : 32 ] And that is the question about Jesus' teaching. It was his teaching that really worried and upset the Jewish leaders. If you look across to chapter 19, verse 7, you'll see the heart of their fear.

They say to Pontius Pilate, We have a law, and according to that law, he ought to die because he has made himself the son of God. That was the heart of their complaint.

In fact, no need to turn this up. But back in chapter 10, verse 33, the Jews picked up stones to stone him. And they said, We're going to stone you for blasphemy because you, being a man, have made yourself God.

So they regard him as a terrible imposter, a deceiver, claiming to be something that no mortal man could ever be in their view, namely the son of God. So in John's gospel, you get this irreconcilable clash of views.

The Jews say, You cannot be God. That is blasphemy. And Jesus says to them again and again, I am, I am, I am. That's quickly, and that's why he so quickly became intolerable to them.

[ 16 : 46 ] Now we'll just look quickly at verses 20 to 23. Annas asks him these pointed questions, but you'll see that Jesus refuses to answer him. And the reason for this may be that in Jewish law at that time, this is a strange thing, but it was not permitted for questions to be asked in a law court of the defendant while he was being tried.

A trial could only proceed on the basis of the testimony of witnesses. So first of all, witnesses would be called who spoke in favor of the accused, and then witnesses would be called forward who would speak against the accused.

And judgment would then be passed on the basis of this testimony for and against. But the defendant himself was not allowed to be questioned. So it may be that in refusing to answer Annas' questions, Jesus was really saying, I deserve a fair trial.

It's not legal for me to be questioned like this. Anyway, Annas quickly realizes he's going to get nowhere. So he sends Jesus to Caiaphas in verse 24. Why?

Because Caiaphas was the official high priest, and only the official reigning high priest had the authority to send Jesus to the Roman governor to be tried by him.

[ 18 : 08 ] So let's consider this question. Why were these high priests like this? Why did they hate Jesus so much? Well, John the evangelist, right through his gospel, helps us to understand their hard-heartedness and their unwillingness to receive Jesus.

He came to his own people, but his own people did not receive him, says John in chapter 1. But let me just spend now a few minutes delving back into the earlier chapters of John. There's no need to turn up the pages unless you're quick-fingered, but I'll give you chapters and verses as we go along.

The first thing that the Jewish leaders did not like about Jesus was that he pointed out their sin. He says in chapter 7, verse 7, the world cannot hate you, but it hates me because I testify about it that its works are evil.

Now this, of course, was fundamental in the preaching of Jesus. Remember what he said when he first arrived? Mark's gospel, chapter 1, he came to Galilee and he cried out, repent, for the time is fulfilled.

The kingdom of God is at hand. Therefore, repent and believe the gospel. But for him to point out the need for repentance, to call people to repentance, it is such a gracious and loving thing to do.

[ 19 : 25 ] if we are under judgment because of our sin against God and if our repentance is the necessary precondition of being forgiven, we need to be called on to repent because if we're not willing to recognize our sin and turn decisively from it, we cannot be forgiven and heaven will be forever barred to us.

But these Jewish leaders, they hated to be told that they were sinners in need of repentance. Do you know the words of this old song? Two lovely black eyes.

Oh, what a surprise. Only for telling a man he was wrong. Two lovely black eyes. If somebody tells you that you're wrong, of course you want to push back at him, don't you?

You want to catch him a sharp one between the eyes. But if the perfect, flawless son of God comes to you and tells you to repent, you may well hate him for it.

For you or me to admit that we're sinners is such a radically humbling process that we might well turn on our heel and walk away. The world hates me, says Jesus, because I testify about it that its works are evil.

[ 20 : 43 ] Now the second reason, or a second reason, why the Jewish leaders hated Jesus is that he told them that they didn't understand their scriptures, their Bible, the Old Testament.

And of course, they prided themselves on their Bible knowledge very much. To tell a scribe or a Pharisee that he didn't understand the Hebrew Bible would be rather like telling the chancellor of the Exchequer that he knows nothing about economics.

It was galling to them. But this is what Jesus said to the Jewish leaders in John chapter 5, verse 39. You search the scriptures, the Old Testament, because you think that in them you have eternal life and it is they that bear witness about me, yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life.

Now the people described in the Gospels as the scribes or the doctors, the teachers of the law, were meticulous students of the Bible. They knew their Bibles backwards. They were a bit like a police force doing a fingertip search of a piece of land.

No stone is left unturned. They examine every square inch of the terrain. That's the way they treated their Bibles. So to be told by Jesus that they have missed the main point of the Old Testament cannot have endeared him to them.

[ 22 : 03 ] But that is what he said to them. The scriptures are all about me. They were thinking scripture leads to eternal life.

But Jesus was saying no, it is scripture that points to me as its fulfillment and goal and by repentantly believing in me you will have eternal life.

But they wouldn't have it. Years ago I remember visiting a very friendly rabbi, Jewish rabbi in Manchester. This was 30 odd years ago.

He was young and so was I. I got to know this man because his wife and my wife were both junior doctors working on the same hospital ward and they were very kind to us and had us around more than once for a meal.

But on one occasion when Michael, the rabbi, was with me he said, come upstairs to my study and I'll show you my Bible. So we walked up to his study and there he had the most beautiful, it must have been very expensive, but a beautiful bound copy of the Hebrew scriptures laid out on a big reading desk in the middle and it was open at the page of, I think it was Isaiah.

[ 23 : 12 ] And as I looked at that Bible there, I was struck with the painful thought that I understood the prophet Isaiah in a way that he didn't. He knew his Hebrew backwards.

I didn't know a word of Hebrew, but I understood it because I was a Christian simply for that reason. This is why Jesus, speaking to those two disciples on the road to Emmaus, said to them, beginning with Moses and all the prophets, I'm going to explain to you everything in the Old Testament that describes me, how it's all fulfilled in me.

So the Jews did not like being told that their Bible was all about the man that they thought of as an imposter. Then thirdly, the Jews hated Jesus because they thought of him as a breaker of the law of Moses, in particular, that he was a Sabbath breaker.

For example, in the first part of John chapter 5, Jesus heals a man who had been ill for 38 years, but he heals him on a Sabbath day. He did it on purpose.

But when the Jewish leaders find out about this, they are very cross. And John writes in chapter 5, verse 16, this was why the Jews were persecuting Jesus, because he was doing these things on the Sabbath.

[ 24 : 29 ] But he answered them, my father is working right up until now, always working, and I too am working. In other words, your understanding of the Sabbath has a narrow and unloving legalism about it, which is quite foreign to my purpose.

Then fourth, Jesus was hated because he called the Jews slaves of sin and the offspring of Satan. Now that is inflammatory language.

But Jesus, because he loved these Jews, we must never lose sight of that. He loved them. He was trying to show them the truth about themselves so as to jolt them into understanding their real position.

He says to them in John 8, verse 31, the truth will set you free. Now they didn't like that at all. They bristled up. They said, we're Abraham's children.

We've never been slaves to anybody. How can you say you'll become free? And he replied, everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin. He goes on to say a few verses later, your nature is the same as your father's and your father is not Abraham as you think.

[ 25 : 41 ] Your father is the devil and your will is to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning. He has nothing to do with the truth. But because I tell you the truth, you do not believe me.

And their response to that is to tell him that he has a demon, that he's insane. John's gospel, there are many other instances, but it's full of this fierce confrontation between the Jews and the Lord Jesus.

But Jesus never engages with these people in controversy because he is naturally aggressive or because he wants to see them condemned by God. Not at all.

It's the opposite. He says in chapter 5, during one of these controversial exchanges, he says, I'm saying these things so that you may be saved. That was his goal, to save them.

I'm trying to penetrate your hardness of heart because I've come for the lost sheep of the house of Israel. As John puts it in chapter 3, verse 17, God did not send his son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.

[ 26 : 51 ] That's why Jesus kept on wrestling with these stubborn men. But they were determined against him. They were determined to kill him. And of course, they succeeded in the end.

Perhaps we could turn back again to chapter 11 and verse 48. 11, 48. Lazarus has just been wonderfully raised from the dead.

and chapter 11 is one of the high points of John's gospel. But the raising of Lazarus is a shaft of light and power from heaven. It's a foretaste of the world to come where death is no more.

But this mighty miracle forces the chief priests and the Pharisees to say, if we let him go on like this, everybody's going to believe in him and the Romans will come in and take away our place and our nation.

In other words, the arrival of Jesus and his teaching is a threat to everything we stand for, our whole establishment. This is why in chapter 18, Annas interrogated Jesus, Jesus bound with ropes.

[ 27 : 59 ] And this is why Annas sent Jesus still bound to Caiaphas, the reigning high priest who in turn sent Jesus still bound to Pontius Pilate. Why Pontius Pilate?

Well, one of the restrictions placed on the Jews by the Romans, one of the reasons why the Romans allowed them to carry on was that the Jews were not allowed to carry out capital punishment.

The Romans reserved that right for themselves. It was part of their way of dominating the Jews.

These high priests would gladly have used their own Jewish method of stoning.

They would gladly have stoned Jesus to death, but they were strictly forbidden to do so. So they had to send him to Pilate and then they pressed Pilate and called loudly to Pilate to give the order to crucify Jesus.

But this is why they hated Jesus. It's because he threatened their whole establishment and he presented them in effect with a choice.

[ 28 : 58 ] They had to choose between him and religion and they chose religion. Now you might say, but isn't Christianity a religion?

The answer is no. Christ brings religion to an end. Religion worldwide comes in many different forms, but at heart every type of religion consists of a system of rules.

Rules about such things as prayer, fasting, pilgrimage, food and drink, daily routines, family life, education, money, almsgiving, charity, and so on.

But the principle common to all religions is this, keep the rules and you'll get to heaven. In other words, you can save yourself if you try hard enough.

All religions are a system of self-salvation by means of personal effort and merit. Now the Old Testament does not teach salvation by effort and merit.

[ 30 : 08 ] It does not teach self-salvation for a moment. It teaches the Jews and the Gentiles to expect a coming king, a Messiah who will come to save them. But the Jewish leaders of the first century AD were reading the Old Testament in such a way as to fillet it of its central teaching about the coming Messiah.

They reduced it to a set of rules. This is why the Pharisees often said of Jesus, he is doing things that are not lawful. They would say to his disciples, why does your master do what it's not lawful to

do on the Sabbath?

They had boiled away the glorious teaching of the coming Savior and all they had left in the bottom of the pan was an inflexible mess of legalism.

And churches can quickly become like this. We must be very careful that the liberating gospel doesn't degenerate into the straitjacket of legalism.

Let me just give a couple of examples. Well, pastor, at this church we have always had a communion service on the third Sunday of the month. And if we're going to change that, we might have a lot of unhappy people in the congregation.

[ 31 : 21 ] Do you realize that? We might have a riot on our hands. This church is characterized by having the third Sunday of the month for communion. Here's another. I once heard a bishop say to a group of young ministers, I know this because I was one of them.

The bishop said, when you take your Sunday service, always wear a cassock, a surplice, a clerical collar, and black shoes polished clean. I'll never forget the black shoes polished clean.

The danger is that traditions and rules become more important in the end than the glorious truth about Christ the Savior. C.S. Lewis apparently walked one day into the senior common room of his Oxford college and he found there a group of academics who were discussing the different religions and they were making heavy weather of it.

So when they saw him come in, one of them said, ah, here's Lewis. Let's see if he can help us here. Lewis, tell us, what is the difference between Christianity and other religions? I can answer that in one word, he said.

Grace. All the religions teach works. Grace means a free gift from God. Everything else teaches works. Self-salvation by effort.

[ 32 : 37 ] Do this, do that, don't do this, don't do that, and you'll be saved. Jesus radically humbles us by telling us that we are completely unable to save ourselves because we're sinners.

That's our nature. We're sinners under the righteous judgment of God. But in our impotent and bankrupt state, God has graciously reached down.

He's reached a very long way into our mess of pain and sin and wretchedness. And he's taken hold of us and washed us. He's paid the penalty for our sins for us in the person of Jesus dying on the cross in our place.

Religion will always say work and sweat and climb up a great steep ladder to heaven by your own merit. Paul tells us in Romans 5 that it was when we were weak and utterly helpless that Christ died for the ungodly.

That is such a relief. It is such good news. The hard thing is the humbling that we have to go through before we admit that we're powerless to rescue ourselves.

[ 33 : 45 ] But once we've been through that, once we've got down on our knees and admitted our moral bankruptcy, we then look up into the face of our Savior and we're filled with joy and thankfulness and we realize that we're loved.

But let's take warning from these high priests who hated Jesus. They could not abide his exposure of human sin. They hated the way that he confronted their legalistic misreading of the Old Testament.

It is possible for our hearts to follow the priests. It's possible for those who start out on the road of following Jesus to leave him after a while and become legalists, reckoning the rule book of men as more important than the gospel of salvation to sinners.

Because the rule book of men bolsters human pride, pride in our achievements, even our religious achievements, pride in our rules and accomplishments. Yuck, yuck.

What did John Newton write? Amazing grace, how sweet the sound that saved a fine, upstanding specimen of humanity like me. No, a wretch.

[ 35 : 00 ] That is me, a wretch. That's you. And when you see that and you admit it and you come deeply to terms with it, really come to understand that, you will then rejoice that God has sent you a savior.

So friends, let's not follow these priests who hated everything that Jesus stood for. Let's stick with John the evangelist who tells us that God so loved the world that he gave his only son that whoever believes in him will not perish but have eternal life.

Let's pray. Let's thank him. Our dear Lord Jesus, how we praise you that you were prepared to leave the beauty and bliss of the courts of heaven and to immerse yourself in human life, indeed to

become truly a human being, a human being perfect and flawless but you did it for our sake so as to take the full weight of our sin, our rebellion against God upon yourself. You received the wages of our sin which is death and we thank you so much because it spells freedom for us who believe in you. So please, dear Lord Jesus, write this glorious freedom ever more deeply in our hearts, we pray, and fill us with thankfulness and we ask it for your dear name's sake.  
Amen. Amen.