

XIII. To Herod

Caiaphas quickly rubbed the sleep out of his eyes as he entered the main entryway to his home. He had been awakened by his servant and told that an injured priest was at the door, insisting upon seeing him personally. It could only be Malchus, Caiaphas knew as he hurried, and that could only mean that something unfortunate had happened when they tried to arrest the Nazarene. He opened the door nervously, expecting the worst.

The high priest was stunned by Malchus' appearance. Disheveled and bruised, his left ear torn and coated in dried blood, he looked as if he had been beaten on the road by robbers. He also noticed his eyes burning with anger as well, further enhancing the man's almost maniacal look.

"Malchus, what happened to you? You look as though you've been set upon by thieves!"

"I was, teacher. One of the Nazarene's drunken disciples tried to take my head off. I was lucky to have escaped with my life!"

"I'm sorry, my friend. But did you capture the Galilean?"

"Yes, Rabbi. He's in custody now. That's why I'm here...to tell you!"

Caiaphas breathed a sigh of relief. "Very good, Malchus. I'm

pleased. Please, come in. Permit my servant to clean your wound.”

“There’s no time,” the priest answered. “We must go to the Hasmodian palace immediately.”

“Herod’s palace? Why?”

“The captain of the guard had orders to take the man to Herod upon his arrest. I told him you wished him brought here, but he insisted. I ran ahead to tell you before they arrived.”

“That imbecile,” Caiaphas fumed. “Knowing Herod, he’ll throw the man into his prison and keep him like a pet monkey just as he did the Baptist. I’ve orders that he be taken to Pilate in the morning, and we have much to do before then. Malchus, go to the temple and have Zimri send for the priests I listed on the scroll and have them meet at my home as soon as possible. He’ll know what I’m talking about. I’ll go to Herod’s palace myself to ensure the Nazarene is brought here. Go now, hurry!”

“But the man who struck me, Rabbi. He must pay for my injury, but the guard captain let him go! You must insist he be brought before you as well!”

“Yes, later, Malchus. I’ll see to it personally. Now, please, do as I ask. We haven’t much time.”

Caiaphas watched the young priest move quickly through the gate and disappear into the pre-dawn darkness, still cradling his torn ear and cursing quietly to himself. The man’s injury was fortuitous, Caiaphas decided, for it would further serve to underline the danger the Nazarene posed to his fellow priests, making his condemnation even more likely. Malchus would suffer a permanent disfigurement, perhaps, but his scars would help bring about the Nazarene’s imminent downfall.

He dressed hurriedly as he considered his next move. He was not genuinely upset that the Nazarene was being taken to Herod’s palace

first. In fact, he had promised the king he would see to it that the Nazarene would be brought before him once they had the man in custody, though at the time he hadn't expected it to come to pass. He had actually expected the Galilean would flee, or perhaps be killed in the effort to arrest him, but now that they had taken him alive, it made sense Herod would want to be involved. He wanted credit for the capture, perhaps in a bid to strengthen his hand with the governor. Having the Nazarene appear before the hated king would actually work to his advantage. Herod was already considered a traitor by the people; his involvement would permit Caiaphas to work quietly behind the scenes while Herod would gain the wrath of whatever followers the Nazarene might have had. A win-win situation, as far as he was concerned.

Or it would be if he could prevent the always unpredictable monarch from taking matters into his own hands. It would take all the powers of persuasion at his command to get the Nazarene released into his custody, but he had a few ideas how it might be accomplished. The Herodian king was no match for the high priest's intelligence, as he would demonstrate shortly.

It promised to be a most extraordinary day, Caiaphas decided as he hurriedly finished dressing, suddenly finding himself anxious for day to dawn.

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Judas followed the soldiers through the darkened streets of the city in silence, his stomach knotted in anticipation. The arrest had gone better than he could have hoped, despite Peter's little trick, and the Master appeared to be playing his role of captured fugitive well. He wasn't certain how Herod figured into the mix—their procession

to his palace was unanticipated—but then no plan is without the occasional hitch. Besides, it hardly mattered where the rebellion began, only that it did. Herod's palace would be as good a place to set things in motion as anywhere else.

The comparative ease with which it had come off was a good omen, Judas decided. Everything was proceeding exactly as planned. Still, a part of him wondered if he had done the right thing in betraying the Master. Logically, it made sense, and the fact that the Master had been waiting for them when they arrived demonstrated he understood the necessity of the whole business as well. The arrest, all for show as far as Judas was concerned, was a part of the charade—the opening act in a drama that would herald in a new age. The Master understood that as well as he, and was merely playing along.

Yet, a tiny voice deep inside would not stop chattering its warnings. It filled him with doubts and at times fairly shouted that disaster was on the horizon. He tried to ignore it and lure the doubts to some far corner of his brain where they could be safely distracted, but they refused to obey. It reminded him of that day many years earlier when, as a boy, he had innocently muscled a small boulder over the edge of an escarpment, purely to see what would happen. He could recall the excitement still as he watched the massive stone loosen others on its way to the valley floor until a deluge of rock, making a sound like the roar of a hundred lions, began rolling down the valley wall. The thrill quickly turned to horror, however, when he noticed a simple hovel—largely hidden from view in the dense foliage below—in the crosshairs of the slide and watched in terror as the massive stones crushed the tiny structure like an eggshell. Judas ran when he saw what his simple lark had done and only found out later that the old woman who called the simple dwelling her home

had been crushed to death. Her death was considered a righteous vengeance from God at the time—the woman had a reputation for being one who sought signs and wonders from the stars—but only Judas knew what had really killed her. He told no one to this day, and had lived with the dark secret all his life.

It was that same voice—the same one that had told him to leave the rock alone, to abandon his determined insistence that it be sent hurtling down the side of the hill—that spoke to him now. It had been right that time, and its unexpected re-emergence filled him with dread.

Of course, things were different now. That was merely a youthful indiscretion—an innocent if deadly accident. That had nothing to do with this. He would just have to live with the little voice and learn to ignore it—just as he had then.

If only he had the faith of the Master, he could still such fears and enjoy the imminent victory.

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Caiaphas made the short trek to Herod's palace in remarkable time. Fearing he might be too late, he was relieved when he found the guards and their prisoners still waiting outside of Herod's residence, signifying the Jewish king was not yet ready to meet the assembly. As he had assumed, the Herodian king could not be rustled from a drunken stupor so quickly, permitting Caiaphas the time he needed to take control of the situation. Jehovah was with him, he decided as he quickly worked his way to the front of the assembly.

"Captain of the guard," Caiaphas called out to the assembly of soldiers, gaining the attention of one of the slightly older men.

"High Priest," the man replied, recognizing him.

“I understand you have the Galilean preacher in custody?”

“Yes sir. This is the man, Jesus of Nazareth,” he said as he motioned toward their bound prisoner standing quietly in their midst.

This was Caiaphas’ first opportunity to personally examine the man who had become such a source of trouble in the few short days he had been in the city, and he made his usual quick appraisal. The Galilean preacher was smaller, shorter, thinner than he had imagined: obviously of peasant stock, at least judging by his sun-darkened features, unkempt hair and simple manner of dress. Caiaphas was surprised at how ordinary he appeared, especially considering his reputation. He had expected to be impressed, but then what did he really expect from another crazed, self-proclaimed prophet?

Caiaphas shot Jesus a look of disgust before turning his attention back to the captain. “I heard there was some trouble. One of my priests was injured.”

“One of his followers pulled a weapon but it was nothing. We had him down in a moment.”

“I saw my man. His injury appeared most grievous. Why didn’t you arrest his attacker as well?”

The officer nodded toward Jesus. “He threatened to turn his other followers loose on us if we did. I didn’t have the manpower to wage a pitched battle in the dark so I agreed. We’ll take care of the man later.”

“But the Nazarene came willingly?”

The man nodded. “Gentle as a lamb. Other than the little altercation with your priest, the entire affair went flawlessly.”

“Excellent,” Caiaphas enthused. “And where is the disciple that betrayed him? I should like—”

“His majesty will see the prisoner now,” Herod’s senior attendant announced, opening the courtyard gate. “Proceed.”

Caiaphas instantly assumed position at the head of the assembly and strolled triumphantly through the outer gate. It was important he be seen as being in charge, especially in front of the always unpredictable king known for his often frivolous and poorly considered judgments.

Caiaphas knew how to manipulate a king as well as a pauper with equal dexterity. Unfortunately, being in the presence of the hated king had always proven a difficult task for the high priest, but it had occasionally been a necessary one. He had met with the man face-to-face only a few times and had always come away from those encounters feeling defiled. At least he could take comfort in the fact that Herod was less brutal than his famous father, though that made him no less despicable. As far as the high priest was concerned, he was no better than Pilate—worst, if you judged the man from the perspective of a Jew.

The Roman governor, at least, held no illusions about who he was. There was none of Herod's allusions to being one of the people with Pilate; he was a gentile throughout and made no claims to be otherwise. Herod Antipas, on the other hand, fancied himself the ruler of the Jews, beloved by all, but it was a sham. Rome held the real power; Herod was nothing more than a lap dog on a very short leash.

A moment later they came into Herod's main hall to be met by the tired-looking king still in his nightclothes. It was apparent he had been abruptly roused from his bedchamber, impressing Caiaphas with his determination to be part of the proceedings. Obviously, the king was intent on playing an important role in all this, even at the cost of a full night's sleep.

His disheveled appearance, however, did nothing to enhance his stature, at least in Caiaphas' opinion. Herod was an obese little

man who reminded Caiaphas of nothing less than a wealthy, overfed street merchant. For all his disdain for Pilate, at least the Roman governor looked, talked, thought, even walked, like the aristocrat he was; Herod, on the other hand, had the demeanor of a commoner. He was also a master of debauchery—at least if even a fraction of the reports Caiaphas had heard about the man were true. He had even heard reports the man kept a stable of young boys for his personal pleasure—the prospect of which filled the high priest with revulsion.

The only positive thing to be said about Herod was that he was enough of a Jew that Caiaphas could enter his palace without defiling himself—at least technically. Still, being in the Hasmodian's palace made him feel dirty.

“So this is the man that has created so much trouble in the city,” Herod said after studying Jesus for a moment. “Can't say he looks like much of a threat to me.”

“But he is, your majesty,” Caiaphas interceded. “One of my priests was nearly killed trying to arrest the man!”

Herod seemed surprised at the high priest's presence. “Caiaphas, you old snake! I didn't know you would be out and about at this late hour. You participated in his arrest?”

“I wish it were so, your Highness, but I had other duties to attend to that needed my full attention.”

“Counting the temple proceeds well into the night, no doubt,” Herod smiled. “Pity, I would've liked to have seen you parrying with one the man's disciples.”

Caiaphas felt the heat of anger flash across his face at the slight.

“So tell me, Nazarene,” Herod said, his attention once again directed toward Jesus. “I've heard it said you're something of a sorcerer. I don't suppose you'd be willing to perform some small miracle for me? Nothing extravagant. Perhaps turn the high priest here into a rat

or some other form of vermin of your choosing.”

Caiaphas felt his jaw tighten, especially at the smattering of laughter the king’s request produced. Didn’t the man realize the power he held over the people and how easily he could sway public sentiment against the already unpopular king? He was a fool for making light of the high priest, and would one day pay for his insolence.

“My miracles are of the heart, your majesty,” Jesus said quietly, abruptly bringing an end to the laughter. “They happen in the deep places within where few are willing to tread.”

It was obvious from his blank expression that Herod didn’t understand the Nazarene’s answer. Fortunately, since he wasn’t really interested in his response, it didn’t matter.

“Pity,” he said at last. “Not that I really expected you to do anything. The Baptist refused my repeated requests to perform a miracle as well. Eventually I tired of asking and had him beheaded,” he added with a malicious grin. “I understand you were a follower of the Baptist yourself.”

“I was,” Jesus said simply.

“Then perhaps you should share his fate. How would that be, Nazarene? Follow in the footsteps of your Master! A few months languishing in my dungeon followed by a quick beheading!”

“The traitor needs to go before Pilate for trial, your Majesty,” Caiaphas said, feeling the situation starting to spiral out of control. “As much as he deserves judgment at your hands, your Highness,” he added quickly, “I have my orders. I’m certain the governor’s judgment will be in accordance with your own.”

Herod only glanced at Caiaphas as he rose from his throne and stepped closer, evidently not done with his questioning. He studied Jesus for a full thirty seconds without uttering a word, his curiosity about the man evident.

“I’m told you claim to be a king, Nazarene,” Herod said. “King of the Jews, in fact. Is that true?”

“My kingdom is not of this world, my Lord, but is an unseen one,” Jesus answered without hesitation. Caiaphas marveled at how serene the Nazarene appeared; as though he were having a simple conversation with the king over a tankard of wine rather than being on trial for his very life. He wasn’t sure many men could remain so calm under similar circumstances.

“I don’t know where this kingdom of yours is, Nazarene,” Herod replied, “but there is only one king of the Jews, and that’s me. Do you understand?”

The Nazarene appeared incapable of being intimidated—or was it only for show, Caiaphas wondered? “Yours is a kingdom that was given to you by others,” Jesus answered. “Mine is a kingdom that belongs to all men as a matter of their birthright. They are two different things.”

Herod’s eyes narrowed. Indeed, his throne had been inherited from his father, who had been placed over the people by the Roman authorities, rendering his kingship a creation of the hated occupiers and, as such, illegitimate. It was something Herod had been known to take especially personally, and the harsh action he had taken against those unwise enough to point it out in the past were well known. Caiaphas had to suppress a smirk when he heard the Nazarene utter it, and caught himself feeling mildly surprised at the little Galilean’s courage—or stupidity, depending upon one’s perspective. The Baptist had been equally as direct, he was told, and had his head put on a platter for it.

“Insolent bastard!” Herod shouted, instantly inciting the captain of the guard to strike Jesus on the cheek, sending him staggering.

“Apologize to the king, you pig!” the captain ordered as he pre-

pared to deliver a second blow.

Herod raised one finger to silence the suddenly tumultuous crowd. “No, that won’t be necessary,” he said as he waited for stillness to return to the room before proceeding, demonstrating that he knew how to work a crowd as well as Caiaphas. “He says he’s a king, and who am I to doubt it? But a king dressed in such humble rags will never do, not if he is to go before the mighty governor. Shemah, bring me one of my robes!”

The servant quickly collected one of the bright purple robes on hand and presented it to the king.

“Put it on him. Let’s ensure he’s dressed appropriately if he’s going before the most noble Pilate! He must look like the king he claims to be.”

The servant threw the robe around Jesus and nervously tied the front clasp to keep it from slipping past his shoulders.

“There, that’s so much better! Now you possess the regal bearing of a true king. I’m most pleased and, Nazarene, don’t bother to thank me. It’s a small thing I do for you.”

Suddenly Herod drew closer to Jesus, their eyes locking. He casually flicked the tassel on the front of the robe with his forefinger and leaned closer until he was mere inches from the man. “From one king to another, I wish you luck with the gentle Roman prefect,” he said, a note of menace underlying each syllable. “You’ll need it, I understand. I only hope he finds you as amusing as I have.”

With that Herod strode from the room, leaving the assembly murmuring in his wake. Once it became apparent he was not going to take further action, a moment later the captain of the guards, finally realizing the drama was over, had his men roughly pull Jesus out of the room and back into the outer courtyard. The “trial” before Herod had been as perfunctory as Caiaphas had hoped, much to the

high priest's relief.

Caiaphas' victory was only momentary, however, when he noticed the captain begin marching the procession north, obviously intending to take their prisoner to the Praetorium at the Fortress Antonia for disposition. Caiaphas instantly felt a curl of panic well up within him as he realized what was happening and quickly moved to the front of the procession as it began its quick march through the outer gate.

"We must take the Nazarene to my residence, Captain," Caiaphas said, running now to keep up. "He is to stand trial before the Sanhedrin. It's our law."

"The king told me to take him to Pilate," the young officer answered firmly.

"The king said no such thing," Caiaphas corrected. "He merely prepared him to be received by Pilate. He must first be tried by the people for his crimes. My home is nearby and I've already sent for the chief priests. We must go there first."

The captain didn't reply but continued to march his men forward as if Caiaphas were invisible.

"It will be a serious breach in protocol if the man is merely delivered to the governor without the charges being read against him by his own people first. It could cause an uproar that might easily be avoided. Surely you, as a fellow Jew, understand that?"

The captain looked at Caiaphas uncertainly but didn't slow his pace.

"Besides, it's not even dawn yet," Caiaphas added. "Surely the governor will not appreciate being awoken in the middle of the night to attend to such a trivial matter. It might even elicit his ire, and I'm told he is a man who possesses little patience...especially for young officers who are foolish enough to rouse him out of a full night's sleep."

The captain stopped the procession and studied the high priest for a moment, his indecision self-evident. He had obviously never overseen an arrest of a major figure before and was understandably uncertain how to proceed. It was a weakness Caiaphas knew how to take advantage of.

“You and your men will have to stand in his courtyard for hours waiting for the governor to finish his morning rituals before he even considers receiving your prisoner. Surely, you don’t want that!” Caiaphas added, softening his tone considerably. “An hour is all I ask. Surely that couldn’t hurt anything, and it will bring you back to the fortress after dawn, when the governor will be awake and ready to receive your prisoner.”

The captain sighed. “It will have to be done quickly, High Priest,” he said firmly, eliciting a vigorous nodding from Caiaphas.

“Of course. We will be most expedient. And it *is* the proper thing to do.”

Like a massive parade, the procession of soldiers, their prisoner, and a small but growing crowd of curious onlookers swung around as a group and began heading south, bringing an invisible sigh of relief to the high priest. For the first time that evening Caiaphas felt that he had finally regained control of the situation, permitting him to direct the upcoming events to his liking.

Precisely the way things were supposed to run in *his* city.