

The Price of Our Redemption II

Youth Instructor

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Conviction, mingled with passion, led Caiaphas to rend his robe. He was furious with himself for believing Christ's words; but instead of rending his heart under a deep sense of sin, he rent his priestly robe in determined resistance.

By this act, done to influence the judges to condemn Christ, Caiaphas condemned himself. By the law he was disqualified for the priest's work. A high priest was not to rend his garment. By the Levitical law this was prohibited under sentence of death. Among the Jews it was the general custom for the garments to be rent at the death of friends, but this custom the priests were not to observe. When Aaron lost two of his sons because they did not glorify God, he was forbidden to show sorrow by rending his garments. Moses said to him and to his sons, "Uncover not your heads, neither rend your clothes; lest ye die, and lest wrath come upon all the people."

Everything worn by the high priest was to be whole and without blemish. The pattern of the priestly robes was made known to Moses in the mount. Every article the high priest was to wear, and the way it should be made, were specified. These garments were consecrated to a most solemn purpose. By them was represented the character of the great antitype, Jesus Christ. They covered the priest with glory and beauty, and made the dignity of his office to appear. When clothed with them, the priest presented himself as a representative of Israel, showing by his garments the glory that Israel should reveal to the world as the chosen people of God. Nothing but perfection, in dress and attitude, in spirit and word, would be acceptable to God. He is holy; and his glory and perfection must be represented in the earthly service. Nothing but perfection could properly represent the sacredness of the heavenly service. Finite man might rend his own heart by showing a contrite and humble spirit; but no rent must be made in the priestly robes.

The high priest who dared to appear in holy office, and engage in the service of the sanctuary, with a rent robe, was looked upon as having severed himself from God. By rending his garment, he cut himself off from being a representative character. He was no longer accepted by God as the officiating high priest. This course of action, as exhibited by Caiaphas, showed human passion, human imperfection. Caiaphas might truthfully have said of himself, "By our law I ought to die." He might have been arraigned before the Sanhedrin; for he had done the very thing the Lord had commanded should not be done.

By rending his garment, Caiaphas made of none effect the law of God, in order to follow the tradition of men. A man-made law provided that in case of blasphemy a priest might rend his garment in horror at the sin, and be blameless. Thus was the law of God made void by the laws of men.

Each action of the high priest was watched with interest by the people; and Caiaphas thought for effect to show his piety. And by displaying a horror that seemingly caused him to rend his beautiful garments, he gained a fanatical admiration from the people. But he was committing blasphemy. He was reviling the Son of God. Standing under the condemnation of God, he pronounced sentence against Christ as a blasphemer.

This pretended horror for sin has been acted out over and over again in the history of our world. And by exaggerated religious zeal and pretended piety, men will again deceive their fellow men.

The religion of those who crucified Christ was a pretense. The holy vestments of the priests covered hearts that were full of corruption, malignity, and crime. They interpreted gain to be godliness. Caiaphas was not a priest after the order of Melchisedec. He never knew what it was to be obedient to God. He had the form of godliness, and this gave him the power to oppress. He acted toward Christ as a priestly judge, an officiating high priest, but he was not this by God's appointment. The priestly robes he rent in order to impress the people with his horror, covered a heart full of wickedness. Though clothed with a gorgeous dress, he was acting under the inspiration of Satan.

The rent garment ended Caiaphas's priesthood. By his own act he disqualified himself for the priestly office. After the condemnation of Christ he was unable to act without showing the most unreasonable passion. His tortured conscience scourged him, but he did not feel that sorrow which leads to repentance.

The act of Caiaphas in rending his garment was significant of the place that the Jewish nation would thereafter occupy toward God. The once favored people of God were separating themselves from him. Christ came to them with a message, but he was despised and rejected. As he stood on the crest of Olivet, he wept over Jerusalem, and lamented her fall. He foresaw the retribution which the deluded, disloyal nation could not, would not, see. The generation among whom he had worked the works of God he addressed as the most guilty, because of the great light they had had. "You have refused to listen to your Redeemer," he declared. "If thou art destroyed, O Jerusalem! thou alone wilt be responsible. Ye would not come unto me, that ye might have life. Ye would none of my counsel, ye despised all my reproof."

When upon the cross Christ cried out, "It is finished!" and the veil of the temple was rent in twain, the Holy Watcher declared that the Jewish people had rejected him who was the antitype of all their types, the substance of all their shadows. Well might Caiaphas rend his official robes, which signified that he claimed to be a representative of the great High Priest; for no longer had they any meaning for him or for the people.

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