Why did the authorities want to arrest & kill Jesus?

This question came from one of the confirmation students after watching one of our episodes on the Video Bible: Gospel of John.

It's a great question, because, when you think about it, it makes no sense! Who would want to kill Jesus?! I mean, He's God. He loves everyone. He never sinned. He came - as we read in John 3:17 - "not to condemn the world but to save the world!" And when you realize it was the religious leaders of His own people who plotted to kill him, it makes even less sense. To top it all off, it was His greatest miracle - bringing Lazarus back to life after he'd been dead for four days - that prompted those leaders to move from "We should kill him," to "We will kill him!"

There are actually a couple of reasons that these authorities wanted Jesus dead. Here's the reason they gave:

Then the chief priests and the Pharisees called a meeting of the Sanhedrin (the Jewish ruling council).

"What are we accomplishing?" they asked. "Here is this man performing many signs. If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and then the Romans will come and take away both our temple and our nation." John 11:47-49

In other words, they were afraid that Jesus would lead a revolt and that lots of people would join in that revolt. They knew from past experience that the Romans were ruthless and powerful when it came to putting down revolutions. The religious leaders could not see how this would end well - from a human perspective.

But, you know how the reason you give to others for doing something (or not doing something) isn't always the real reason?! The rationale for the reason you give to other people is that you think that's the explanation that will make you look good, (because you know that the real reason is one that won't make you look so good.) That's what's going on here.

However, Matthew tells us the real reason these religious leaders wanted Jesus gone:

"For he (Pontius Pilate) knew that it was out of ENVY that they had delivered him (Jesus) up." Matthew 27:18

Envy can cause people to do really rotten things - like kill Jesus!

But we can't just leave it with "envy" as the bottom line. We must remember this extremely important verse from Romans 8:28:

And we know that in ALL things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.

That verse reminds us that God can take anything bad - including the execution of His Son by envious people - and turn it into something good!

In fact, it was God's plan since the creation of the world, that His Son would die as a way of taking the punishment for the sins of all people, so that everyone who puts their trust in Jesus will receive forgiveness for their sins, and thus be able to spend eternity with our sinless God!

So, I guess we can say this to sum it up: Jesus' death was caused by sin. From a human perspective it was due to the sin of envy, but from God's perspective it was due to the sin of all mankind!

Thanks for asking,
Pastor David

Send your questions to pastor@livingwordlutheran.net