

Matthew 21:46

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

But when they sought to lay hands on him, they feared the multitude, because they took him for a prophet.

Analysis

But when they sought to lay hands on him (καὶ ζητοῦντες αὐτὸν κρατῆσαι)—The verb ζητέω (zēteō, 'to seek, to endeavor') with κρατέω (krateō, 'to seize, to arrest') shows deliberate intent to arrest Jesus. Their response to truth was violence—not refutation but removal of the truth-teller. When people can't answer Christ's arguments, they silence His voice. This murderous intent fulfills the parable they just heard—like the tenants killing the son (21:38-39), they now plot Jesus's murder.

They feared the multitude, because they took him for a prophet (ἐφοβήθησαν τοὺς ὄχλους, ἐπεὶ εἰς προφήτην αὐτὸν εἶχον)—The verb φοβέομαι (phobeomai, 'to fear, to be afraid') shows pragmatic calculation, not moral restraint. They didn't fear God but public opinion. The crowds held (ἔχω) Jesus εἰς προφήτην ('as a prophet'), making arrest politically dangerous. This exposes leadership motivated by crowd-pleasing rather than truth-seeking. Within days, they would manipulate these same crowds to demand crucifixion (27:20-23). Popular opinion is fickle; truth is eternal.

Historical Context

This occurred Tuesday of Passion Week, days before Jesus's arrest. The leaders delayed action until they could arrest Jesus privately (26:3-5), away from crowds who might riot. During festivals (Passover was imminent), Roman authorities watched for disturbances—insurrection brought swift, brutal response. The

leaders' restraint was tactical, not righteous. By Thursday night, they arrested Jesus in Gethsemane's isolation (26:47-56), then manipulated Friday's crowd. Political calculation, not truth, guided their actions.

Related Passages

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Study Questions

1. When have you compromised truth for fear of others' opinions rather than fearing God?
2. How does the leaders' murderous response to Jesus's teaching warn against defensiveness when confronted by God's Word?

Interlinear Text

καὶ	ζητοῦντες	αὐτὸν	κρατῆσαι	ἐφοβήθησαν	τοὺς
But	when they sought	him	to lay hands	they feared	G3588
G2532	G2212	G846	G2902	G5399	
ὄχλους	ἐπειδὴ	ὥς	προφήτην	αὐτὸν	εἶχον
the multitude	because	for	a prophet	him	they took
G3793	G1894	G5613	G4396	G846	G2192

Additional Cross-References

Matthew 21:11 (Prophecy): And the multitude said, This is Jesus the prophet of Nazareth of Galilee.

Matthew 21:26 (Prophecy): But if we shall say, Of men; we fear the people; for all hold John as a prophet.

