

April 17, 2022

“The Verdict Reversed”
Acts 5:12-32

FCF: Conflicting opinions of Jesus

PROPOSITION: (magnet) With the resurrection, God has reversed the verdict.
(anchor) And so we must entrust ourselves to Jesus.

SCRIPTURE INTRODUCTION:

No reputable historian denies the existence of Jesus of Nazareth. It is an established fact. The debate surrounds questions as to His identity, His mission, and the implications. Why does this matter? Well, consider the claims of His followers, things He said of Himself - even during His trial before the authorities of the day. He is the Christ, the Son of Man, the King of the Jews.

Not everyone agrees with that, of course. Different positions have been staked here and, obviously, not everyone can be right. Where do you land on this? What’s your opinion of Jesus?

SCRIPTURE READING: Acts 5:12-32 (vv.30-32)

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

SERMON INTRODUCTION:

Jesus is Lord. What does that mean? C. S. Lewis explores this in *The Weight of Glory*:

...it is not so much of our time and so much of our attention that God demands; it is not even all our time and all our attention; it is ourselves. For each of us the Baptist’s words are true: “He must increase and I decrease.” He will be infinitely merciful to our repeated failures; I know no promise that He will accept a deliberate compromise. For He has, in the last resort, nothing to give us but Himself; and He can give that only insofar as our self-affirming will retires and makes room for Him in our souls. Let us make up our minds to it; there will be nothing “of our own” left over to live on, no “ordinary” life. I do not mean that each of us will necessarily be called to be a martyr or even an ascetic. That’s as may be. For some (nobody knows which) the Christian life will include much leisure, many occupations we naturally like. But these will be received from God’s hands. In a perfect Christian they would be as much part of his “religion,” his “service,” as his hardest duties, and his feasts would be as Christian as his fasts. What cannot be admitted—what must exist only as an undefeated but daily resisted enemy—is the idea of something that is “our own,” some area in which we are to be “out of school,” on which God has no claim.

For He claims all, because He is love and must bless. He cannot bless us unless He has us. When we try to keep within us an area that is our own, we try to keep an area of death. Therefore, in love, He claims all. There’s no bargaining with Him.

The orthodox historic Christian position is that what Lewis is saying here is directly applicable to the Lordship of Christ. That is to say, Jesus claims all and there is no bargaining with Him.

What would make Jesus worthy of such loyalty and trust? How would we know? What proof is there? Good questions. The answer is the resurrection, the events of Easter. For with the resurrection, God has reversed the verdict showing us our need to entrust ourselves to Jesus.

What does it mean to say God has “reversed the verdict”? That’s the theme of our text, this account of events in the weeks following Jesus’ resurrection that can be explained only by His resurrection. Here we have two verdicts - one of a lower court and one of a higher court.

I. THE RECORD BEFORE US

But before we can explore these two opposing verdicts, we need to examine the historical record. The stakes are high. Can we trust what we read here? There are very good grounds.

A) An Early Date

For starters, we have an early date. It’s possible to date Luke-Acts to 60-62 A.D. How? By considering two events that are not recorded - the fall of Jerusalem and the death of Paul.

1. The fall of Jerusalem

Jerusalem fell in 70 A.D. For the Jewish people of the time, this was the loss of their capital and temple - the center of their spiritual and political life for a thousand years. Tens of thousands of people died. And yet, there is no mention of this in Acts. Think with me. Why would that be?

Illustration:

Here's an illustration from *The God Conversation*. Imagine a book about the World Trade Center - seven buildings, two towers of 110 stories. It has its own zip code. Some 50,000 people work there. And then it stops. What does that tell you? It was written before 09/11/01.

2. The death of Paul

Then there is the death of Paul, likely beheaded during the reign of Nero between 62-65 A.D. Paul was the central figure in the early church. And yet, no mention here in Acts. Again, why?

Illustration:

Here's another illustration. Let's say you find a book on Abraham Lincoln. Among other things, you read of his inauguration, the Gettysburg Address, and his last public speech. Then it stops. Again, what does that tell you? It was written before 04/14/65 when he was assassinated.

B) A Reliable Source

The idea here being that you can date a writing not just based on what is included but by what is excluded. And the dating of Luke-Acts is within just a few decades of Jesus' ministry.

1. Not mythical

Which makes it a reliable source. It is not mythical. It is far too early for the story to have grown. Any errors or lies could have been refuted by the fact checking of the living witnesses.

2. Call for consistency

Which calls for consistency - to treat these documents with the fair hearing given to others.

Application:

What do we learn here? The stakes are indeed very high. But we can trust the record.

II. THE VERDICT OF THE LOWER COURT

Which then brings us to the verdicts, the first being of a lower court, the Jewish Council. Who do they say Jesus is? What is their assessment? (**READ Acts 5:30**) They crucified Him. This is the pattern of the early apostolic message. "You killed Him..." What does that mean?

A) Elimination

1. A threat

They saw Jesus as a threat to be eliminated. A threat to the people - a blaspheming false teacher. A threat to their power - Pilate knew it was out of envy. They feared losing power and influence.

2. The tree

They saw Jesus as a threat. And so they had Him hung on a tree - a reference not just to the cross but even further back (**READ Deuteronomy 21:22-23**). The cross was more than a painful and shameful death. It was deemed to be the mark of being under the wrath and curse of God.

B) Suppression

From the start, Jesus was to be eliminated. And this movement was to be suppressed.

1. Frustrated determination

You can hear the frustrated determination in what we read. This is the second time the Council has tried to intervene, to try and put an end to this delusion. They are clearly beside themselves.

2. Stubborn opposition

But it's more than frustrated determination. It's stubborn opposition. There is no pausing to ask about these miracles or the escape from jail. There is no interest in whether the message is true.

This is the verdict of the lower court. Jesus to be eliminated, the movement suppressed.

Application:

How do we see such opposition today? How do we see a desire to have nothing to do with Jesus today? Let me speak of two very broad camps - the irreligious and the religious. The irreligious live as their own lord in disobedience to God's commands, keeping their need of Jesus at arm's length. The religious live as their own lord in obedience to God's commands, keeping their need of Jesus at arm's length. They look different. But they are essentially the same in the posture towards Jesus. Neither the irreligious or the religious see any need of Jesus and would just as soon be rid of Him. That's the verdict of the lower court. It's still very much alive today.

But with the resurrection, God has reversed this verdict. This decision no longer stands.

III. THE VERDICT OF THE HIGHER COURT

Which brings us to the verdict of the higher court, as spoken by the apostles (**READ Acts 5:30-32**). Here's the pattern. "You killed Him. But God raised Him. And we are witnesses."

A) Resurrection

God raised Him! This is referring to Jesus' miraculous resurrection from the tomb.

1. Deep history

Note the appeal to a deep history. "The God of our fathers" was at work in this, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. "You killed Him but our God raised Him." A stark contrast made.

2. Recent events

A deep history flowing into recent events. Jerusalem was filled with this teaching partly because these events were still on the minds of the people. The wood of the cross had not yet rotted. The garden of the tomb was still in bloom. His blood was on them. Yet God had raised this Man.

B) Exaltation

God had raised Him - both in resurrection and in exaltation, lifting Him up.

1. High position

Raised to a high position, to the right hand, a place of supremacy, honor, and power. As Leader - as captain and prince, author and founder. As Savior - deliverer and preserver. This was a title in the Old Testament given only to Yahweh and now to Jesus. Consider the shocking implications.

2. Great prerogatives

Raised to high position and great prerogatives. The authority to grant repentance and forgiveness of sins. Again, only the Lord could do this. And it could only come through a new covenant.

So the verdict of the higher court is in. The decision of the lower court has been reversed and overturned. Jesus has been raised. Jesus has been exalted. That was the apostolic message.

Application:

What would it mean for us to hear this verdict and heed this testimony? The response of the apostles tells us something of the answer. They could not be silent, not in their words or in their lives. They could not unsee what they had seen or unhear what they had heard. They took it to heart and let it shift their whole paradigm, how they approached all of life - their beliefs, assumptions, priorities, purposes, goals, and aspirations. They took it in and it set them apart.

If we are to truly hear this verdict and heed this testimony, we have to do the same. Every area of our lives has to be examined and entrusted to Jesus. Nothing can be claimed as our own and sectioned off away from Him. Again, He claims all and there is to be no bargaining.

With the resurrection, God has reversed the verdict. We must entrust ourselves to Jesus.

CONCLUSION:

But what would it mean to follow Jesus? What sort of king is He? In C. S. Lewis' *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, he tells the story of four children in the land of Narnia. The children meet Mr. and Mrs. Beaver, who describe the mighty lion, Aslan, to them ([READ](#)):

"Is he a man?" asked Lucy.

"Aslan a man!" said Mr Beaver sternly. "Certainly not. I tell you he is King of the wood and the son of the great emperor-beyond-the-sea. Don't you know who is the King of the Beasts? Aslan is a lion - *the* Lion, the great lion."

"Ooh!" said Susan, "I'd thought he was a man. Is he - quite safe? I shall feel rather nervous about meeting a lion."

"That you will, dearie, and no mistake" said Mrs Beaver; "if there's anyone who can appear before Aslan without their knees knocking, they're either braver than most or else just silly."

"Then he isn't safe?" said Lucy.

"Safe?" said Mr Beaver; "don't you hear what Mrs Beaver tells you? Who said anything about safe? 'Course he isn't safe. But he's good. He's the King, I tell you."

Jesus is not safe. But He is good. What then would it mean to live under His rule, to yield our lives to Him? We get an idea of this just by looking at the lives of His earliest followers and the writings of the New Testament. It may well mean suffering and hardship. For to follow Jesus is to enter a clash of worldviews, a collision of kingdoms, a spiritual war as real as any other.

That's a reality and it has to be said. But we can also speak of the assurance of deep change and renewal over time, as this same Jesus sets out to make us more like Himself. Out of His grace, He gives the privilege of participating in His work as we give ourselves to His service. And in the course of that, we experience a life of flourishing, of fruitfulness, tasting life as it was meant to be and one day will be. We see this sort of thing all through the book of Acts and the history of the Church. It's all real. It's all true. This Lion may not be not tame but He is good.

With the resurrection, God has reversed the verdict. Let us entrust ourselves to Jesus.

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