

## ***The Vindication of Jesus*** *Acts 2:22-36*

We've all heard about people being wrongly convicted of a crime and then later being exonerated - either through an eye-witness that surfaced or through DNA testing or some other irrefutable evidence. We love it when an innocent person is vindicated.

As we read the Gospel accounts of Jesus' life we anticipate that all of the false accusations will be addressed and that He will be vindicated. When Jesus is finally crucified, there was no vindication. It appeared as though Jesus' life was a tragic failure, that His teachings were false, that God had rejected and abandoned Him. Having been hung on a tree it appeared as if He had been "cursed by God." After the crucifixion, none of the charges made against Jesus had been answered; none of the taunts had been refuted.

- The Romans mocked Jesus as "King of the Jews" (which irritated the Jews). He didn't look like a king as He hung on the cross. (see Matthew 27:27-37)
- One person who passed by said, "If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross" (Matthew 27:40)
- The Jewish authorities mocked Him saying, "He saved others; He cannot save Himself. . . let Him come down from the cross and we will believe Him" (Matthew 27:41-42).
- They also said, "If God really delights in Him, let God rescue Him now. . . for He said, 'I am the Son of God.'" (see Matthew 27:43)

None of these charges were answered at the crucifixion. It appeared as though Jesus ***wasn't*** a king, that He ***couldn't*** really save others, and that God really ***didn't*** delight in Him.

Even His disciples were disillusioned and bewildered after His crucifixion (see Luke 24:19-24). The two disciples on the road to Emmaus made the comment, ". . . we were hoping that it was He who was going to redeem Israel," with the implication, ". . .but He obviously isn't the messiah."

How did God answer the charges made against Jesus? How did He vindicate Jesus? Here on Easter morning you're probably not surprised to hear me say that ***God vindicated Jesus by raising Him from the dead***. Through the resurrection God reversed the verdict of humanity. The resurrection of Jesus vindicated everything Jesus said and everything Jesus did.

Today we are going to see how Peter made this point in Acts 2. Then we'll consider a couple of the implications for us. If the resurrection vindicated Jesus, I think you'll agree with me that we should pay very close attention to what He said and what He did.

***Jesus' resurrection reversed the verdict of humanity and vindicated His life and death.*** (Acts 2: 22-36; Romans 1:4) Acts 2 records what happened in Jerusalem approximately 50 days after the first Easter weekend. On that day the Spirit of God

descended upon the followers of Jesus in Jerusalem with the result that they began speaking with “other tongues.” They spoke in languages that they hadn’t learned; people who had gathered from many different countries heard them speaking about God in their own languages. As you might imagine, this caused quite a stir in Jerusalem.

Peter stood up and gave an explanation. He first assured them that they weren’t drunk (which some people supposed), but that the Holy Spirit had been poured out on them as the prophet Joel had foretold. Beginning in verse 22, Peter appealed to the crowd’s firsthand knowledge about Jesus, saying this:

22 “Men of Israel, listen to these words: Jesus the Nazarene, a man attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through Him in your midst, just as you yourselves know—

The people of Jerusalem didn’t dispute that Jesus had performed miracles, wonders, and signs. Peter was pointing out that when they saw Jesus heal a man blind from birth or feed the 5,000 that God was affirming His identity; God was performing these miracles through Him. Verse 23 is fascinating:

23 this Man, delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death.

On the one hand, Jesus’ death on the cross happened according to the “predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God.” Jesus’ rejection by the nation didn’t take God by surprise; Jesus had resolutely set His face to go to Jerusalem to be arrested and scourged and crucified. Hebrews 2 speaks of the “divine imperative”: Jesus **had to** become one of us (being compelled by love) so that He might die on the cross as our substitute. Jesus wasn’t an unwilling victim; He laid down His life for us according to the predetermined plan of God.

On the other hand, those who demanded His crucifixion and those who carried it out were culpable. Peter says, “this Man. . . you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death.” The verdict of humanity was that Jesus was a blasphemer and a dangerous man. The verdict was that Jesus deserved the worst punishment available, crucifixion.

But that verdict was not the last word. We read in verse 24:

24 “But God raised Him up again, putting an end to the agony of death, since it was impossible for Him to be held in its power.

Peter said, “You put Jesus to death, but God raised Him up again.” Peter explains that “it was impossible for [Jesus] to be held in [death’s] power.” It was impossible for Jesus to be held in death’s power for many reasons. The reason given in the following verses was because Jesus was the descendant of David that God had promised would sit on his throne forever. In order for Jesus to be enthroned at God’s right hand, He had to be raised from the dead. Because of who He was, Jesus’ death on the cross was

satisfactory payment for sin; He didn't have to remain dead for that payment to be effective. And so God raised Him bodily from the dead.

Being raised on the third day was also part of the predetermined plan of God. Jesus had told His disciples this in Luke 9:22:

22 saying, "The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed and be raised up on the third day."

It was a divine imperative that the Son of Man be raised from the dead on the third day. If you read through the book of Acts you'll see that the apostles **repeatedly** told people God raised Jesus from the dead. They made the point that God reversed the verdict of humanity and vindicated Jesus. For example, in Acts 3:14–15 Peter told a crowd of people in Jerusalem:

14 "But you disowned the Holy and Righteous One and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, 15 but put to death the Prince of life, the one whom God raised from the dead, a fact to which we are witnesses."

In Acts 4 Peter told the Jewish authorities:

10 let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead— by this name this man stands here before you in good health.

In Acts 5:30-31 Peter said these words:

30 "The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom you had put to death by hanging Him on a cross. 31 "He is the one whom God exalted to His right hand as a Prince and a Savior, to grant repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins."

In Acts 10 Peter was in Caesarea talking with Cornelius and others when he said:

39 "We are witnesses of all the things He did both in the land of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They also put Him to death by hanging Him on a cross. 40 "God raised Him up on the third day and granted that He become visible. . ."

Acts 13:28–31 records Paul's message in Pisidian Antioch in which he said of Jesus:

28 "And though they found no ground for putting Him to death, they asked Pilate that He be executed. 29 "When they had carried out all that was written concerning Him, they took Him down from the cross and laid Him in a tomb. 30 "But God raised Him from the dead."

The early church repeatedly pointed out that God raised Jesus from the dead, reversing the verdict of those who put Him to death. Even though Jesus submitted to crucifixion, God wasn't agreeing with the verdict that had been passed. The plan to have Christ die

as our substitute and then raise Him from the dead as vindication of everything He taught and everything He did - including His death. We see this taught in numerous places.

Back in Acts 2, at the end of Peter's message on the day of Pentecost, he concluded by giving a challenge. This challenge is based on his conclusion that God had raised Jesus from the dead and had seated Him at His right hand (the place of power and authority). In verse 36 we read:

36 "Therefore let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ—this Jesus whom you crucified."

By raising Jesus from the dead and then seating Him at His right hand, God was declaring that Jesus is both Lord and Christ. The word Lord simply means "master." Paul would write in Philippians 2 that one day every person would acknowledge Jesus' Lordship: one day every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. Whether it's glad submission or forced submission, one day every single person will acknowledge that Jesus is Lord.

At the resurrection and ascension, God also declared that Jesus is Christ/Messiah. Jesus - by His life, death, and resurrection - had actually accomplished everything that He as Messiah set out to do. He had defeated God's enemies; He had been pierced through for our transgressions; He had established a new covenant through His blood.

The resurrection reversed the verdict of humanity and vindicated Jesus' life and death. Everything Jesus had taught was true. His death accomplished what He said it would. In Romans 1 Paul confirms all of this when he writes:

3 concerning His Son, who was born of a descendant of David according to the flesh, 4 who was declared the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead, according to the Spirit of holiness, Jesus Christ our Lord,

The Jewish authorities had taunted Jesus by saying, "If you are the Son of God (as you say), come down from the cross." Jesus' response was, "No, I am laying down my life as a ransom for many." And God added, "And I will raise Him up again on the third day. That is how I will declare that He is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased."

I hope you agree with me that if God really did vindicate Jesus by raising Him from the dead, He's not the type of person we should ignore. If God has "declared Him the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead," we should respond to Him carefully and fully. I want to talk about two simple responses to the vindication of Jesus.

The first involves ***Believing that Jesus' death accomplished our salvation.***

Every single person ends up trusting in someone or something for their salvation. You might be trusting in yourself. You might look around and think, "I'm not perfect, but I'm better than most people. I do lots of good things and I help lots of people." Maybe you're

betting your eternal destiny on the idea that everybody who's above average gets into heaven.

Or perhaps you have concluded that you're below average when it comes to morality. You might be trusting that if you clean yourself up and try harder that God will be impressed with your effort and accept you. Maybe you are performance-based in every area of your life and you're banking on the idea that you can perform well enough for God.

Or perhaps you're trusting in some other religion or philosophy. There are plenty of options out there. But here's another possibility: By raising Jesus from the dead, God is letting you know that He has already accomplished your salvation. The Bible tells us what we instinctively know, namely, that our problem is sin: instead of running toward God, we have each run away from God and tried to find fulfillment in all sorts of things that just don't satisfy. Jesus said that He was going to die on the cross as payment for our sins. When God raised Him from the dead on the third day, He was declaring that Jesus had indeed paid for sin - that His death accomplished what He said it would.

Salvation (forgiveness, freedom from sin, eternal life, the indwelling Holy Spirit) is purely a gift. The NT uses the term "grace" - meaning that it is a gift you can never earn or deserve. You simply have to accept it. This is the most extravagant gift that you will ever be given. Nothing even comes close. But you have to receive it by faith. No matter what you've done or where you've been. . . no matter how little you know or understand. . . salvation is a gift that God offers you. By raising Jesus from the dead, God proved that this offer isn't a fluke. The bodily resurrection of Jesus from the dead confirms that Jesus paid for sin.

The second response involves ***Relating to Jesus as Lord.***

If the resurrection declared that "Jesus is Lord," we should relate to Him as our Lord/master. Paul referred to himself as a bondservant of Jesus - as someone who willingly submitted to Jesus as Lord. If you believe that His death secured your salvation, are you submitting to Him as your Lord? Or has the term "Lord" become something of a religious cliché for you?

We have recorded in Luke 6:46 a question that Jesus asked, a question that is very appropriate on this day when Christians affirm that because of the resurrection "Jesus is Lord." Jesus asks:

46 "Why do you call Me, 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I say?"

Jesus' question is based on the premise that there should be consistency between the titles we use for Him and the way we relate to Him. If we call Jesus "Lord," we should hang on His every word; we should pay attention to how He taught us to think, speak, and act. Lack of obedience to the teachings of Jesus is sometimes called "the great omission" in the Great Commission. In Matthew 28 Jesus told His followers, "go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son, and

the Holy Spirit, teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.” Learning to do what Jesus commanded is very reasonable if He really is Lord. If He is just a good guy who had some good advice, that’s one thing. But if the resurrection vindicated Jesus and established Him as Lord, we really should learn to do what He says. Learning to obey what Jesus our Lord has commanded is a core aspect of our discipleship.

Please don’t hear me merely saying that if you’re a believer, you need to start trying harder. You may need to start trying harder; effort is involved in everything that really matters. And since Jesus is Lord, obeying Him really matters. But what I’m really urging all of us to do is to relate to Jesus as the Lord He is.

Try this exercise this week. Imagine that Jesus is beside you everywhere you go - everywhere. He is with you when you’re at work with others; He is with you when you’re at home alone. He is always willing to listen. He is always willing to speak. He is always willing to help you in times of need. Jesus isn’t bodily “with us,” but He did say, “I am with you always - even to the end of the age.” Jesus as a present help isn’t make believe. He really is with His people.

What if this week instead of living our lives independent of Jesus, we live in continual fellowship with Him. What if we abide in Him and let His words abide in us? What if we defer to Him when we have options? For example, when we are wronged, we bless instead of curse. What if we fix our eyes on Jesus and believe that our Lord loves us more than we can fathom and that He is “for us”? What if we pray in Jesus’ name, believing that He is Lord?

The Lordship of Jesus isn’t some burdensome obligation; the Lordship of Jesus is our birthright, our delight, our greatest joy. God declared that Jesus is Lord by raising Him from the dead.