

“Reversing the Verdict?”—Acts 2:22-24

The text for this sermon, the theme of which is, “Reversing the Verdict?”, is Acts 2:22-24 → *Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through Him in your midst, as you yourselves know—this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. God raised Him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for Him to be held by it.* This is the text.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ Jesus:

“Guilty!” This is the verdict declared in a court of law upon those who have committed a crime based upon the evidence presented. Once such a declaration takes place it is quite a process to seek a reversal of the verdict. If, after attempts have been made to appeal to “higher” courts of law, the person is still declared guilty there is no reversing the verdict. Still, some have tried years later to reopen a case in order to reinvestigate and present evidence in an effort to reverse the verdict as they strived to see their loved one released from prison or clear his name for posterity.

Did you know that God’s desire is to reverse the verdict? This is the

message of Peter to the people on the Day of Pentecost as he strove to explain to them why Christ's disciples were speaking in various tongues. Jesus sent the Holy Spirit so that there would be a complete reversal in your life through God's reversing the verdict on Jesus' death.

Since God's verdict reversal can only take place through faith in the Christ, the Messiah Savior promised in the Old Testament Scriptures, Peter began speaking about a man by the name of *Jesus of Nazareth*. While it may be obvious to you that Jesus is the Christ, the people with whom Peter was speaking were in Jerusalem because they were still looking for the coming of the promised Messiah. His reference specifically to *Jesus of Nazareth* would bring the discussion into focus on the guy Who had been declared guilty of blasphemy by the Sanhedrin and crucified fifty days ago. Some of those present would have experienced this verdict and sentencing firsthand while others would have only heard about it.

In verse 22 of our text Peter referred to Him as *a man attested to them by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through Him in their midst*. He was trying to show the people that Jesus is truly God's Messiah for their salvation, despite the verdict of guilty which had been placed on Him. Jesus Himself had made reference to His Person by pointing to His Works. He said: *The blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the*

dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them.

Then He gave the promise: *Blessed is the one who is not offended by Me.* (cf. Matthew 11:5-6) Unfortunately, the religious rulers did take offense with Jesus and ended up crucifying *the Lord of glory.* (cf. 1 Corinthians 1:8)

We know from the New Testament Scriptures that their dealing with Jesus in this way was actually based upon their plans motivated by sinful, arrogant, self-righteous, self-preservation and envy. (cf. John 11:45-53) They had been planning and plotting for quite awhile, seeking basis for which they could pin a verdict of “guilty” upon Him. Why? Because Jesus came pronouncing the proper verdict upon the human heart, including the hearts of these religious leaders. John 2:25 says Jesus *needed no one to bear witness about man, for He Himself knew what was in man . . .* and His purpose was to expose the sinful heart so that the verdict upon you could be reversed. At the same time, many of the people Jesus encountered also wondered about Him being the promised Messiah (cf. John 6:14) and even confessed Him as such (cf. John 11:27), experiencing God’s verdict of “guilty” being reversed to “not guilty.”

Proverbs 16:9 says: *The heart of man plans his way, but the LORD establishes his steps.* Peter acknowledged this in verse 23 of our text, telling them that even though they *crucified and killed Jesus by the hands of lawless men,* He was *delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God.* Yahweh established the steps involved

with Jesus' crucifixion years prior to their plans. In fact, His plan was revealed immediately when sin showed its ugly face in the Garden of Eden when Yahweh said to the devil that an offspring from the woman would destroy Satan's power!

However, before this would happen Satan's offspring would bring suffering upon Him. Since the verdict upon all of us sinners in God's justice is "guilty" because of our sin, punishable by eternal suffering and separation from Him in hell, God actually made it possible in His love to reverse the verdict to "not guilty" in the death of Jesus. God provided the perfect sacrifice for you to be declared righteous, forgiven and not guilty in His sight through faith in this *Jesus of Nazareth*. Jesus recognized God's plan in the midst of men's plans and **willing** paid the redemption price as He said in John 10:18 → *No one takes My life from Me, but I lay it down of My own accord.*

Even though all this happened *according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God* this is not to say that they were not responsible for their sin in it all. On the contrary! Peter "nails" them for their sin in it all in verse 23 of our text: **you** *crucified and killed*. Even though not everyone present had some direct say in the events connected with Jesus' crucifixion they were still guilty because all our sins took Jesus to that cross. Romans 3:23 says *the wages of sin is death*. Jesus willingly paid the "wage" of your death for you!

But wait! The verdict reversal isn't over yet. God sealed the reversal of His verdict upon you when He reversed the verdict put forth by those who killed Jesus. Verse 24 of our text says: *God raised Him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for Him to be held by it.* They killed this *Jesus of Nazareth* but God reversed their verdict by raising Him from the dead! Thus, Romans 3:23 goes on to say, ***but*** *the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.* Thus, the situation is one which God worked out for the good of all sinners, for our eternal salvation. 1 Peter 1:20-21 says: *Jesus was foreknown before the foundation of the world but was made manifest in the last times for the sake of you who through Him are believers in God, Who raised Him from the dead and gave Him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God.* Notice that the direction of your life is different because *your faith and hope are in God*, not in your own plans.

Confessing your sin and trusting in God's pre-determined plan of salvation in *Jesus of Nazareth*, you can function confidently in God's kingdom as you receive His reversal of the verdict upon your soul from "guilty" to "not guilty" in absolution. This verdict led the apostles as forgiven sinners to function in God's kingdom differently by the power of the Holy Spirit. They recognized **God's plan** involved with to whom, when and where they testified to the Gospel. When persecuted they interpreted it in light of the Old Testament Scriptures, again

acknowledging what God's *hand and . . . plan had predestined to take place* and then praying for more boldness to continue preaching in the name of Jesus. (cf. Acts 4:23-31) Their whole life was directed by God's will and plan **according to His written Word**.

How about your life? On what basis is it directed? On the basis of self-serving plans which strive to manipulate God and others? Or on the basis of God's written Word which reveals His verdict reversal for all people by faith in Christ? That verdict reversal began at your baptism and through faith in the resurrected Lord Jesus God continues to reverse the verdict in your life from "guilty" to "not guilty!" This does not mean you act indifferently, as if you have no control over your situations because God is ultimately in control. However, you act differently by fulfilling your vocations and tasks in life and relationships, trusting in your risen Lord for Him to work them out properly for His desire. Amen.

*Many are the plans in the mind of a man,
but it is the purpose of the LORD that will stand.*

(Proverbs 19:21)

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