

Whose Verdict Counts?

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[0 : 00] Heavenly Father, you are good. Everything you do is good. What you want for us is good.! So we pray, Lord, that we really would be convinced that everything we hear today is for our good and for your glory.

We pray that in Jesus' name. Amen. Do get your Bibles back open to 1 Peter, 1 Peter chapter 2. I haven't got a page number. If someone has a page number, they could call out. That would be quite helpful.

1, 2, 1, 8. 1, 2, 1, 8. Yeah, well, I was going to say it. 1 Peter chapter 2 from verse 4.

So we've already had it read. I want to start with this question today. It works on the screen.

Brilliant. Whose verdict counts?

I think we all care about verdicts. The GCSE exam envelope. I think parents, kids and parents care about that. The job interview phone call.

[1 : 15] The decision on your parking ticket. We care about what people think about us, don't we? But whose verdict counts?

Now, if you follow Jesus, that question will really resonate with you because how people treat you shows you what their verdict on you is.

I was talking to a lady here who goes to this church recently. What it's like to be a Christian in the day to day. And she said, you know, you don't really get called names.

You don't really get insulted. People are too British for that. But she said, you get treated differently.

Does that resonate with you? Here's one thing that she said to me that really stuck out.

She said, when people swear or they make a crude joke, they'll suddenly kind of stop and say, oh, sorry. I'm so sorry for swearing.

[2 : 15] Oh, cover your ears. You can't hear that. They didn't say anything rude, did they? But she said that she could feel it in how they treated her.

You know, singling her out a little bit. You know, passing a silent verdict on her. Different. Too serious, maybe. A bit boring.

Putting her in another box. You know, she even said she felt kind of just generally just unattractive.

You know, in every sense, if someone doesn't really want to go out for drinks with her. After work.

Written off. And to be clear, you know, most people aren't kind of setting out to be unkind to us, are they? It's just not how people are these days. You know, most people aren't, you know, judgmental like that.

But without kind of meaning, I think, people could make us feel shamed. Shamed. Do you know that feeling? The awkward silence when you mention church and the bewilderment on someone's face?

[3 : 20] When you say that you actually believe everything in the Bible. The silent verdict is not something that people say is a silent verdict. Maybe strange. Maybe even intolerance.

And those silent verdicts, well, they subtly shame us. Go to the next slide. I don't think shame is too strong a word.

Okay, so I think it's more than embarrassment. If you're thinking embarrassment is the word, it's probably more than that. Because I think shame puts you in a different category. That you don't belong.

I think shame also goes down to our identity of who we are. It's more than embarrassment, isn't it? Not you act like this, but you are this.

And I think it makes us a little bit quieter. A little bit less willing to share our faith. When we're ashamed, we stop wanting to proclaim about the Lord Jesus.

[4 : 24] But whose verdict counts? We've been in 1 Peter and they're facing, the original readers, they're facing subtle suffering. We've said that before. Not a threat to your life, but a threat to an

easy life.

But today, something a little bit more targeted than that. I think it's subtle shaming. The shame word, if you look down, is explicitly in verse 6.

At the end of verse 6. And that word precious throughout the passage, it's just the word, literally, the Greek word for honour. Honour is the Greek word there. Shame and honour.

But today we see people's verdicts on us cannot shame us. Humanity's verdict on us crumbles. Only God's verdict counts. Only God's verdict counts. Go to the next slide there. Firstly, humanity's verdict crumbles as point one.

[5 : 29] Next slide. Not sure this is working. Brilliant. Humanity's verdict crumbles, verses 4 to 8. Because it actually is not true. Next one. Next slide.

Thank you. Verse 4. As you come to Jesus, verse 4, the living stone, rejected by humans, but chosen by God and precious to him.

Two verdicts. Humanity's verdict on Jesus. Verse 4, rejection. You know, when people shame us, it's because they reject Jesus, isn't it? We follow him.

But God's verdict. Chosen and precious. Literally, chosen and honoured. Chosen and honoured. Verse 6. Look down verse 6. See, I lay a stone in Zion. I'd chosen an honoured cornerstone. And the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame. Jesus is the cornerstone.

[6 : 30] What's that? It's the foundation building block of a building. And Jesus is actually the foundation of God's big building project in the world, in the universe.

In the Old Testament, you might notice, God promised a new temple. Not made of stone, but made of people where actually God would dwell with people.

All of God's plans. His purposes are kind of heading there. And Jesus is the cornerstone.

He's the foundation of that future. God dwelling with man. That is the furthest thing.

That is the furthest thing from being shamed. That is the furthest thing from being rejected, isn't it? Jesus is not shamed. He is honoured. And those who trust in him will never be put to shame.

[7 : 33] But importantly, it's actually true. Look at verse 7 again. Verse 7. The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone. The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone.

At the resurrection, after Jesus is rejected, Jesus becomes the cornerstone. Do you see that in the verse? He becomes the cornerstone.

Did Jesus rise from the dead? Yes. Then God's verdict on him is true. So to state the obvious, humanity's verdict isn't true.

It's actually irrelevant. It's irrelevant. Thanks very much. Humanity's verdict is irrelevant. The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone.

At the cross, people try to get rid of Jesus. But I kind of imagine it's a bit like God says. Thank you for your feedback there. I'll take that on board. You reject Jesus. Okay.

[8 : 39] But I'm going to raise Jesus anyway. Because I'm God. Thank you. God overturns humanity's verdict. Theirs is irrelevant. It's like some people's verdicts on chocolate.

Okay. You know, you can hate on chocolate until you're blue in the face. But I'm afraid that's just not factually true that chocolate isn't nice. It is really good. Okay. The same with Jesus. Except, you know, this is actually a fact with Jesus.

Right. You can reject Jesus until you are blue in the face. Because what God says about him is true, it makes zero difference if you reject him.

So it doesn't matter what the majority say. Everyone could vote against Jesus. And they kind of did at the cross, didn't they? But only God's verdict counts.

So humanity's verdict has no sway over you. You are not rejected like you think you are. But this is what really makes humanity's verdict crumble, I think.

[9 : 51] It backfires. It backfires. Have a look at verse 7 again. The stone that the bill is rejected has become the cornerstone, verse 8. And a stone that causes people to stumble.

A rock that makes them fall. Rejecting Jesus means you will stumble over him and fall. I think it's like an episode of Grand Designs.

Gone completely wrong. Okay. So imagine they get the architect's plans. They're building their dream house. But they look at the plans of the foundations. And they go, concrete? Concrete? Nah, I think I'll go with this sponge instead.

It's stupid. It's absurd. But it's not just what they think is irrelevant about foundations. Their verdict will harm them in the end, won't it?

The house will crumble and fall on them. Same with rejecting Jesus. It doesn't just harm... It doesn't harm him. It doesn't harm us in the end.

[10:54] It harms you if you reject him. Jesus is a stone that causes people to stumble. So the shame people throw at you kind of bounces off and goes back onto them.

They might pity you for being a Christian. But if anything, we should pity them. It's not a good future for them. So whose verdict counts?

Humanity's verdict crumbles. It's irrelevant. It backfires. Only God's verdict does. And Peter's showing us this because shame bites hardest when the world's verdict feels plausible.

See that? Because maybe then you think, maybe I am odd. Maybe I am on the wrong side of history. Maybe I do deserve to feel quite ashamed for being a Christian.

But their verdict collapses under the weight of God's true verdict. And that means it cannot shame us anymore. It doesn't have... It's lost its punch. I'm surprised you still believe that in the 21st century.

[12:10] Silent verdict. Naive. Silent verdict. Maybe even immoral. It packs no punch. God's verdict stands.

Humanity's verdict crumbles. And because of that, it does two things, I think. Firstly, it helps us to see more fully and more fully believe God's true verdict on us.

Okay? We might feel on the edge of culture. We might feel rejected. We might feel like we don't really belong anywhere in this world.

But Jesus, the stone the world rejected, is the cornerstone of everything God is doing in the world. And because we're built on him, we share his verdict too.

Have a look at verse 5. Verse 5. God's rock-solid verdict on Jesus is also his rock-solid verdict on you.

[13:22] You also like living stones. The world might see Jesus as a stray stone. You just want to kick off your driveway. He doesn't really care about us. You might feel like you don't belong.

Sideline, slandered, treated differently. But no matter how you're treated or you're silently labelled, you do belong. You do belong at the heart of God's plans on an immovable foundation.

What you do is accepted by the only person who matters for something to be accepted by. Not on the sidelines.

You're right in the sweet spot of everything God is doing in the universe. But I think the biggest thing this does is to see humanity's verdict crumble, is that it frees us from shame to proclaim.

Humanity's verdict crumbles, so we're freed to proclaim. Verse 9 to 10. Let's go from verse 9. But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession.

[14:35] That you may declare. The praise of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. I think humanity's verdict has the potential to sort of shackle us down, you know, to make us quiet about our faith.

You know, on Monday morning, when someone asks you about your weekend, you might have sort of skipped over talking about church. Maybe it's a bit embarrassing, too shameful to talk about it.

But when we see humanity's verdict for something that cannot shame us, it crumbles when you put it under pressure, you're free to just live out your purpose.

You're free to live out who you are, who God says who you are. He says you are a chosen and royal priesthood. Why is that good?

Well, the whole job of priests in the Old Testament, do you know what it was? It was to bring God to the people. Now, we're priests. That's our whole job.

[15:35] We're to bring God to the people around us. That you may declare the praise of God who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.

So you aren't useless. You are a spare part. You have a purpose. And you're freed up to do it. You could buy a really fast sports car.

Well, there's a potential to go really fast, but it could get a ticket. It could be ticketed on the side of the road. It could be clamped down. You can't go anywhere. Take away the clamp.

Well, it can do what it's made to do. It's the same with us. We feel clamped down by humanity's shaming verdict. But this passage removes the clamp.

And it frees us to proclaim just freely and honestly. Like we want to do it. Notice how Peter puts this.

[16:34] It's not evangelism. It's not apologetics necessarily. It's not forcing people to believe what you believe.

What does it say? What does it say? Declaring the praises of God. Showing the world how good God is.

That when you're convinced about something that's really good, you will tell the world about it. People do it with their football teams. They do it with other things. I've just started taking Actimel. It sounds like a small thing, but it's done wonders for my immune system.

I'm declaring the praises of Actimel to everybody that I'm talking to at the moment. It's just so good. Why don't you declare the praises of God?

Evangelism. That's an unhelpful word, I think, sometimes. Sounds scary. Sounds weird. What we're called to share is to share how good God is.

[17 : 41] Have you ever thought of it like that before? Have you ever considered that your identity is a priest and a priest's job is to proclaim? Have you thought about that?

That's who you are as a Christian. It's your whole purpose. Now, what are those praises? Well, I think one of them, at least one of them, is verse 10.

Have a look at verse 10. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God. Once you have not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

It's not that people out there are really bad and we're really good in here. That is not the case. We all, by nature, reject Jesus, don't we? But here's the good news.

Here's the praiseworthy news, you know. We're Jesus rejecters who've received mercy. God sent his son to rescue a people in darkness.

[18 : 40] A people who were stumbling over the cornerstone. A people destined for shame. That's what we all were like. That people became God's people.

That people were shown mercy. Jesus bore on himself that shame so that we could be honoured, didn't he?

That's why we're still so imperfect here. That's why we still mess up and we rub each other up the wrong way. You know, we're not better than people out there, if you want to say that.

I don't think there's really loads of difference in some ways. I mean, of course the Holy Spirit is changing us. That's a good thing. But we're not finished articles. We're just people who've received mercy.

That's the difference. Isn't that the good news to shame? Doesn't that make church a more realistic and attractive thing for people? Well, so what would it look like to not feel shame but to proclaim?

[19 : 44] What would that look like? Well, I know Christmas is a bit of a long way off. The shops don't think so. But maybe we'd push past that pain barrier. And we'd invite our friends, our colleagues to a carol service.

You know, maybe when someone asks, So what did you get up to this weekend? Maybe we wouldn't skip over church. And we'd talk about something we learnt in the sermon. Or someone encouraged us after the service.

Maybe when that colleague you've been praying for finally, finally says, So why does this Christian thing, why does this matter to you so much? Why do you bother going to church every Sunday?

Maybe you won't apologise. You'll declare. You'll declare what Jesus has done. And I'm not a good person, but I've been shown mercy. And I get to belong.

I've got a purpose. And God can show you mercy too. So we've been thinking about this question on the screen.

[20 : 51] Whose verdict counts? We often don't hear people's verdict on us. Sometimes we do, but mostly we feel people's verdict on us.

In the tone and the silence. In the way that we're sidelined. And like Peter's readers, we start to believe it. We start to, and before long, we start to think we're small.

We're too ashamed. We're too ashamed to speak for Jesus. But whose verdict counts? Yes. Now when I left a job before working for church, I got given this gift.

It was a notebook. A really nice notebook given by lots of lovely people who I work with. But they knew I was a Christian. And this was kind of partly a way to slightly tease me.

A little. Slightly. No, not fully. In the front, I won't read them all out. But there's nice kind of messages left for me.

[21 : 56] But there's a kind of general sense in the messages where people thought I was a little bit eccentric. Maybe for leaving a career. Like a career that's sort of stable. Good pension and all that.

To work in a church. What are you doing that for? Are you going to be a priest? Ooh. Do this sort of thing. You know. There's a quote from Buddha in here. Just to kind of enlighten my mind a little bit. The notebook itself is actually Islamic artwork. I think they kind of knew what they were doing. And they weren't mean. You know. And it was a joke. And I don't think they were meaning to be harsh. I don't think people are really like that. Maybe we'll get to that stage. But I'm not saying everyone's judgmental. But I think without kind of realising their silent verdict on me nonetheless was a bit weird.

A bit too into it. From other conversations I had, that verdict was, well, came out a bit more verbally. You were a bit intolerant. You know. You're anti-science.

[23 : 03] Whatever it was. You know. Subtle shame. A bit less willing to speak for Jesus. Now, what would you say to younger James to encourage him?

Well, I think we should say to him, people's verdict on you, on Jesus, just doesn't hold water. It crumbles. It's not true. It's irrelevant. It backfires.

But also, James, get clear on this. Get clear on this. Only God's verdict counts. Only what God thinks of you actually matters.

So you can rest in that, James. You can rest in that. I think this is to current James too, actually. This is to current James as well. They said Jesus was irrelevant.

But rest assured. God says Jesus is chosen on us. People imply you don't belong. But rest assured. God says you sit on the most sure foundation.

[24 : 08] Jesus, the cornerstone. People imply you are this. People imply you are that. God's verdict means you can rest assured in the identity he's given you.

What he says about you is right. He says you're chosen. He says you have a purpose. He says you are my special possession. I say you are a living stone.

You'll never be moved. I say in that moment of feeling ashamed, you are not. You are honoured. In a world that forces us to find our own path.

Forces us to find our own identity. It's never set in stone. God gives us a verdict that is set in stone on the cornerstone. Only God's verdict counts.

And he says whoever trusts in Jesus will never be put to shame.

[25 : 07] Let's pray. Father, thank you for the clarity of your word.

What you say about us. Lord, thank you that we've seen how much your Holy Spirit through your word has undermined humanity's verdict on us.

It doesn't hold water. It crumbles. It collapses. Thank you, Lord, that what you say about us and what you think about us is so true. Please, Lord, would we know that for sure?

Please, Lord, would we know that and then want to tell people about how good you are unashamedly? And we pray that in Jesus' name. Amen.

Amen. We're going to sing a song in a minute. But before that, I just wanted to show a video, a song on the screen that you can sing along to if you know it.

[26 : 12] But if you don't know it, don't worry. It's just mostly for reflection. And the song is called I Am Who You Say I Am. What God says about us, that's the thing that matters.

So we're going to have a time of reflection and then the band are going to lead us. Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you.

[29 : 02] Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. There's a place for me.

I'm a child of God. Yes, I am. In my Father's house, there's a place for me.

I'm a child of God. Yes, I am. I'm a child of God.