

The Accusation

Imagine that you are one of the disciples called up to answer charges that you, or others of Jesus' followers, stole his body from the tomb and then spread a story that he'd risen. How would a cross-examination by the prosecution go?

Prosecution: What have you done with the body of this Jesus of Nazareth?
Disciple: Nothing.
Prosecution: So why is it not still in the place it was put?
Disciple: I believe he has risen from the dead, like he said.
Prosecution: Like he said? When?
Disciple: He said so before he came up to Jerusalem.
Prosecution: And you believe this nonsense?
Disciple: I do.
Prosecution: I put it to you that you and other followers of the Nazarene are spreading a vicious lie so as to keep your cult alive and continue dividing the people.
Disciple: I am telling the truth.
Prosecution: You do realise that you are danger of losing your life - if you are lying?
Disciple: All the more reason for me to tell the truth. There's no point in dying for a dead cause.
Prosecution: I have a witness here who will testify that your Jesus was nothing but an unstable and violent fool. Bring in the first witness!

Witness enters and stands before the assembly. Disciple sits down.

Prosecution: Do you swear by the living God to tell the truth?
Witness: I swear.
Prosecution: Tell the assembly, if you will, your name and your livelihood.
Witness: I am Joseph of Bethlehem and until recently I was a money changer in the Temple.
Prosecution: Explain to the assembly how you lost your livelihood.
Witness: Well, I was working as usual in the courtyard of the Temple changing Roman money into Jewish for the sacrifices when a man - this Jesus - went crazy all of a sudden and started to smash up the place.
Prosecution: Smash up the place?
Witness: Yeah, took a whip and stick and broke up all our stalls. Never seen anything like it. I lost nearly all my money in the scramble to get away. Twenty honest years of hard graft down the drain in a few minutes.
Prosecution: Did this man give a reason for this act of violence?
Witness: Not really, I think he said he was protecting the place from thieves.
Prosecution: Do you consider he meant yourself and other traders?
Witness: Seems like it.
Prosecution: So because of his groundless suspicion he destroyed the lives of many honest, God-fearing families?
Witness: Yeah, I don't know what I'll do now.
Prosecution: You have the assembly's deepest sympathies. Thank you.

Witness stands down.

Prosecution: So far, good gentlemen, we have heard nothing but rumours and half truths from his follower and yet we know for a fact he committed a violent, unprovoked assault on people and their livelihoods. He was crucified for being an instigator and blasphemer, stirring up ignorant crowds for his own glory. How do you answer that?
Disciple: He was a man of peace. He tried to end the mockery traders were making of the House of God.
Prosecution: A mockery, you say?
Disciple: Yes.
Prosecution: What about the mockery you are making of people's intelligence by claiming your so-called saviour has risen from the dead? Did you really believe he was the Messiah?
Disciple: I really believe he is the Messiah. And so do many others.

Prosecution: Many others? Surely you don't mean that mob who chanted Hosanna when this Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey?

Disciple: I mean all those who have the spirit of truth within them.

Prosecution: A donkey - a messiah on a donkey?

Disciple: He is a humble saviour. He is not an earthly messiah.

Prosecution: Oh, yes, he is not an earthly messiah - but a heavenly one. His kingdom is not of this world, but another - we heard all this nonsense at the Nazarene's trial, you remember?

Disciple: No.

Prosecution: Were you not there, praying for your messiah?

Disciple: No. I deserted him.

Prosecution: Deserted him? You are not only a liar but a coward.

Disciple: I am not a liar - but I was a coward. We all were. We all left him when he needed us most. I am not proud of that.

Prosecution: But you all regained your courage to overpower a couple of guards and roll away the stone and rescue your dead messiah. All done, no doubt, with the secret agreement of the owner of the tomb - one Joseph of Arimathaea.

Disciple: That is not true.

Prosecution: Joseph of Arimathaea is a member of the Nazarene cult, is he not?

Disciple: *(whispers)* Yes.

Prosecution: Speak up! Let the assembly hear!

Disciple: Yes.

Prosecution: What puzzles me is why an educated wealthy man like the Arimathaeon could be taken in by such a trickster. It's easy to fool a bunch of fishermen.

Disciple: Jesus has the words of eternal life.

Prosecution: Prove it!

Disciple: You must first believe and then you will need no proof.

Prosecution: Oh, we must believe, must we? If we believed every tinpot messiah and false prophet where would we be then? Consider another promise of the Nazarene: he said that he could destroy the Temple and in three days build it up again. What do you make of that?

Disciple: He was not speaking of stones and mortar, but of his body.

Prosecution: Oh, how stupid of us! We should have known. So when he quoted the Psalms of David at us: *It was the stone rejected by the builders that became the keystone*, he was again speaking of himself?

Disciple: That is true.

Prosecution: But then when he said: *The Temple is going to be destroyed and not one stone will be left on the other*, tell me: did he mean himself or the Temple?

Disciple: I believe he meant the Temple.

Prosecution: It's very confusing trying to understand this messiah of yours. Sometimes Temple means Temple, sometimes Temple means his body. If this body, or Temple, of Jesus of Nazareth has risen from the dead, are we permitted to see him? We could apologise for asking for his death. We could worship your messiah.

Disciple: He is risen, and has shown himself to those who will believe in him.

Prosecution: But not to us?

Disciple: It is up to Jesus to whom he shows himself.

Prosecution: And there's the problem. Surely if this Jesus was alive again he could enter into this assembly and testify for himself. He could clear your name. There'd be no fear of harm since we'd all believe in him.

Disciple: You would not. He worked many miracles for all to see; and yet the more wonders he worked, the more hardened your hearts and minds became.

Prosecution: Oh, but if he walked in now...

Disciple: You would still not believe. You would claim that his powers were from Beelzebub.

Prosecution: And are they not? A violent and unstable man who stirred up trouble wherever he went, attracting the crowds for the sake of a few paltry miracles and luring them away from worship of the living God.