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### The Sage from Galilee: Rediscovering Jesus' Genius

In David Flusser's *The Sage from Galilee: Rediscovering Jesus Genius* we receive a rare opportunity to understand and interact with the life of Jesus in a contemporary way. For many Jesus is presented as a beacon of hope or an impactful individual who is the face of the world's largest religion, Christianity. ("What Is the Most Widely Practiced Religion in the World?") But Flusser brings out the reality of Jesus as a whole giving him the historical and theological respect his story is owed. As stated in the preface it is not his goal to give Jesus from the Jewish context but to "learn as much as he can about Jesus." (Flusser and Notley 150) In the 3 chapters Love, Ethics, and Death, Flusser explores the complexities of Jesus's love despite the shallowness of Jewish society, His ethics as uniquely revolutionary and how His death shifted the culture of his time and of the present world to come.

#### Love

Flusser begins by making note of Jesus's understanding of love, it was not a new rock that hadn't been turned over before. His fierce commitment to it echoed a Jewish scribe Antigonos of Socho so said "Be not like slaves who serve their master for the sake of reward, ward, but like slaves who serve their master with no eye on any reward; and may the fear of heaven be among you." (Flusser and Notley 733) Serving or love is done at the reverence for who one simply belongs and outward expression of a much deeper quieter respect for a master. He then connects Luke 6:38 stating it's parallel to Matthew 5:48: "*You must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is*

*perfect.*" The best way of translating this saying is, "*There must be no limit to your goodness, as your heavenly Father's goodness knows no bounds.*" Matthew 5:48 is merely the conclusion to a short homily where Jesus teaches that God reaches out in love to all people, regardless of their attitude and behavior toward him, "for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust." (Flusser and Notley 757) In this Jesus is not far from the humane attitude of other Jews. His stance is remarking the simple completion Jesus has done for the action of love that was already rooted in his Jewish beliefs, His power rested in His ability to act it out perfectly in His peculiar human life. Against His societal norms He ate with sinners and console those deemed outcast and invaluable In this I also agree, Jesus's understanding of love as an action prompted him to complete the beginning of miracles in the Bible that still impact us today, many of them prefaced with the fact that he was "moved by compassion." (*NIV Bible*, Mark 1.41) While Flusser makes it a point to state it isn't the most remarkable mystery, I believe it is the most powerful one we have.

### Ethics

Flusser highlight an interesting fact that Jesus's understanding of justice was completely separate from everyone else of his time. They made clear laws that prompted clear punishment but made valleys for secret sin that benefited a profitable majority. This is evident in John 8 with the woman accused of adultery and is brought out to Jesus by the Pharisees to be stoned. In an effort to test Jesus's morality they are stunned by his response in "Let any one of you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her."(John 8.8) There Jesus is left alone and instructs the "woman to go and leave her life of sin" (John 8.11) Jesus being left alone in the equation as all others walk away highlights the reality of Him being the only one worthy of such judgment. It

correlates with Flussers point “Jesus did not reject this general opinion, but at the same time he rejected the current application of this view as simplistic. Instead of the vulgar ethics, he called to Israel, “Repent or perish!” (Flusser and Notley 952) relaying the fact that our ethics went beyond right and wrong but a deeper call to repentance to God. As it is humanly impossible to keep such a commitment to internal cleanliness, a stronger force is needed to aid in the event. I agree that this call was questioned by Flusser when he stated “Jesus questioned the moral. Both were executed. Can this be mere chance?.” (Flusser and Notley 959)

### Death

Lastly Flusser’s research concerning Jesus’ death wasn’t as clear to me as love and ethics were in regards to a case being made. It provided me with a realistic play by play of Jesus’s death and its significance in salvation for the world with a simple question. Flusser first gives us the description of how the chief priests had conspired many times to catch words out of Jesus for indictment since Luke 20 but Jesus seeing through their schemes foiled them everytime. They eventually decide to accuse him of oppressing the Roman economy through his teachings along with blasphemy by proclaiming He is the Messiah. It led Him to be labeled a tyrant and was condemned to death as Flusser writes “Roman law prescribed that "instigators of a revolt, riot, or agitators of the people" were to be "either crucified, thrown to wild animals, or banished to an island." The punishment was determined by the perpetrator's position in Roman society. Jesus' status earned him crucifixion. (Flusser and Notley 1781–83) He then poses an interesting question when stating, “The Romans suppressed messianic movements, because the Messiah was believed to be the king of the Jews. To make even more certain of getting rid of this troublesome incendiary, the high priest said to Jesus, "If you are the Christ, tell us." Jesus replied, "From now on the Son of Man shall be seated at the right hand of the power of God" (Luke 22:69). How

could Jesus speak in this manner? He must have known that he had come to the end of his life. (Flusser and Notley 1660–61). Surely it was peculiar for a man waiting to die to make such a claim but I believe it was a testament to Jesus's belief in His own resurrection. But it was more than Him coming back but the completion of the overthrowing of an unjust system involving God's people and the world alike. Truly it was Jesus's dedication to God's truth and appliance of His holiness in daily life that threatened the Jewish culture that suppressed people and profited from their bondage. Jesus's end was the dawn of a new era of freedom for His people and the world alike. His confidence rested in the knowledge that the work was indeed finished

Overall the book was really helpful in giving me an opportunity to look at Jesus' life in a more professional manner. When it comes to everyday conversation or evangelism, we as believers tend to stick to our own understanding of Jesus and the bible to speak on behalf of His mission. And while these conversations are helpful and powerful in connection, I believe that Flusser gave us an opportunity to read how much Jesus's life really spoke for itself and a deeper revelation of it in all the aspects he layed out gives us the chance to see Him for what He always was, alive.

#### Works Cited

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