

Against All Evidence **Matthew 28:11–15**

11 Now while they were going, behold, some of the guard came into the city and reported to the chief priests all the things that had happened. 12 When they had assembled with the elders and consulted together, they gave a large sum of money to the soldiers, 13 saying, "Tell them, 'His disciples came at night and stole Him away while we slept.' 14 And if this comes to the governor's ears, we will appease him and make you secure." 15 So they took the money and did as they were instructed; and this saying is commonly reported among the Jews until this day.

We would like to think that if you show someone the truth they will believe it. But isn't that really is a little bit Naive.

I guess we would like to think that people will not respond contrary to the truth. But we have an example of exactly that in our passage before us this morning.

It is true that none of the disciples actually saw Jesus arise from the dead. It is also true that none of the women actually saw Jesus arise from the dead.

But there were some people there who very probably did see him rise from the dead. They were the Roman soldiers sent to guard the tomb.

I read a beautiful story written by some pastor the other day about how the conversations between the soldiers might've been after this event. I never really thought about that too much until that time, but I suppose that it is true.

The religious leaders had thought that once Jesus was crucified dead and buried their problems were over. But the problems had only begun.

They were the ones who insisted that Pilate provide a guard for the tomb. Had they never done that there might have always remained a question as to what really happened at the tomb.

So by their own design they would authenticate the most marvelous event in all of human history, the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

I am not here today to prove to you the resurrection of Jesus Christ. For you cannot prove something to someone unless they want to see it.

I. Let's set up the situation

- A. Matthew 27:62 On the next day, which followed the Day of Preparation, the chief priests and Pharisees gathered together to Pilate, 63 saying, "Sir, we remember, while He was still alive, how that deceiver said, 'After three days I will rise.' 64 "Therefore command that the tomb be made secure until the third day, lest His disciples come by night and steal Him away, and say to the people, 'He has risen from the dead.' So the last deception will be worse than the first." 65 Pilate said to them, "You have a guard; go your way, make it as secure as you know how." 66 So they went and made the tomb secure, sealing the stone and setting the guard.

- B. I am sure that the chief priest and the Pharisees did not think that they would keep anyone from rising from the dead.
- C. They really were convinced that Jesus was a deceiver and that his disciples would carry on the deception by trying to remove the body and claim he rose from the dead.
 - 1. It's funny really that the disciples could not remember that Jesus said he would rise from the dead but the religious leaders did.
 - 2. No one was more amazed on Easter Sunday morning than the disciples to find that the tomb was empty.
 - 3. It was only afterward that they remembered how Jesus said he would rise again.

II. What actually happened early that morning

- A. Matthew 28:1-4; Now after the Sabbath, as the first day of the week began to dawn, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to see the tomb. 2 And behold, there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat on it. 3 His countenance was like lightning, and his clothing as white as snow. 4 And the guards shook for fear of him, and became like dead men.
- B. The guards would have been guarding the tomb.
 - 1. There were three guards that would stand guard at a time.
 - 2. They would change off after a few hours so the others could rest.
 - 3. No one would've been asleep at any time.
 - 4. For to do so would've been the death penalty.
- C. I am sure that God put on quite a show.
 - 1. There was an earthquake of some magnitude.
 - 2. Angels appeared with a light of God's glory around them.
 - 3. And an angel came and rolled away the stone that covered the tomb which was no doubt a very large stone since the women were concerned how they would move it.
 - 4. And all of this within arms length of the soldiers.
 - 5. No wonder they became like dead men, petrified.
 - 6. They literally became almost scared to death.

III. The report of the soldiers

- A. Now the soldiers were not stupid.
 - 1. I mean they knew the others would say, “How hard can it be to guard a dead man.”
 - 2. After they gained consciousness they would've looked into the tomb to see if the body was still there but it was not.
 - 3. Now what were they going to do?
 - 4. What type of excuse could they possibly have?
 - B. They report what they had seen to the leaders.
 - 1. Maybe first of their fellow soldier leaders.
 - 2. But eventually they would have to tell the priests.
- IV. The response of the religious leaders.
- A. Notice the hearts of deception among the Chief Priests.
 - 1. They were the ones who said in Mark 15:31; Likewise the chief priests also, mocking among themselves with the scribes, said, “He saved others; Himself He cannot save. 32 “Let the Christ, the King of Israel, descend now from the cross, that we may see and believe.”
 - 2. They would not believe even if He had descended from the cross.
 - 3. Because they did not believe when He rose from the dead.
 - B. When confronted with undeniable proof they still denied.
 - 1. Saving faith is not an intellectual decision.
 - 2. Saving faith is an operation of the Spirit of God.

“I know the resurrection is a fact and Watergate proved it to me. How? Because 12 men testified they had seen Jesus raised from the dead then they proclaimed that truth for 40 years, never once denying it. Everyone was beaten, tortured, stoned and put in prison. They would not have endured that if it weren't true. Watergate embroiled 12 of the most powerful men in the world and they couldn't keep a lie for three weeks. You're telling me that 12 apostles could keep a lie for 40 years? Absolutely impossible.” Charles Colson

1 Corinthians 15:3-8; 3 For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, 4 and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures, 5 and that He was seen by Cephas, then by the twelve. 6 After that He was seen by over five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain to the present, but some have fallen asleep. 7 After that He was seen by James, then by all the apostles. 8 Then last of all He was seen by me also, as by one born out of due time.