

Mark 16 9-20

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.

When I was a kid I was tearing down a shed. Part of what I needed to do was pull the nails from the boards. My brother had a wooden framing hammer. It had a claw so I assumed it would be a good thing to pull nails with. Jack can probably guess what happened next. I snapped that wooden handle. Naturally I hadn't gotten permission to use the hammer, so breaking the news to Butch about his hammer didn't go overly well. But the first thing Butch said to me was, "It wasn't made for that". The hammer didn't break because there was something wrong with the hammer. It broke because there was something wrong with me. I didn't know what the hammer was for. I didn't know how to properly use it.

When we look at our lives we will find the same thing. We all have places of deep regret. We all have memories we wish we could erase. And even now, we have times in our lives that are wasted and ruined, not so much caused by our circumstances, but how we choose to view our circumstances. And what is the problem? We are acting like we don't know what our lives are for. We are acting like I was with the hammer. We aren't using our lives as they were designed.

Scripture teaches us what the life of a believer is ultimately for. It is designed to glorify God for eternity. It is designed for a fellowship with a loving God and all the people and beings who love Him. And sometimes we believe it. And **when we do**, we experience the peace and joy this communion provides us. But often we do not believe it. We can tell what we believe by how we respond.

Think about it. How do we evaluate your current lives? In other words, what are we thinking about that makes us miserable? How do we measure our circumstances, our relationships, our life's position? What causes your dark places?

Maybe we don't think our lives are as fun as we would like them to be? Maybe they are not as pain free as we would like. Maybe we are not as appreciated as we would like to be? Maybe what we love is at greater risk than we want it to be. Maybe we are not treated as fairly as we would like to be. Maybe the struggle to just get by is harder than we want it to be. Maybe people don't love us as well as

we would like them to. Maybe they overlook us. Maybe they have lied to us. Maybe they have promised things they have not delivered. Maybe we have been rejected by those who should have loved us. And we become fixated on those thoughts and we spin round and round and our thoughts get darker and darker. And the odd thing is, our circumstances often don't have much to do with our outlook. Our problem lies more in **what we expect** than **what actually happens**. If we took believers in Haiti and put them in our current lives they would all think we had **nothing at all** to complain about. We have food, clothing, shelter and the promise of eternal life. What more could we want?

But we tend to want more. And those expectations, those wishes, those demands, or maybe we should say **those idols** are the source of our discontent, our misery, our darkness.

And our problem comes back to, we aren't using the hammer for what it is for. We are expecting it to have a different use than it does. We are disappointed that it doesn't live up to our expectations when we use it wrongly. We aren't going by the hammer instructions.

Now, what does this have to do with our text? What we are about to see is irrefutable evidence of the resurrection of Christ. A non believer can argue that our text isn't true. There is a great weight of proof that says that **it is true**, but it could still be argued. But if the text is true, there is no refuting what **it proves**. Christ rose from the dead. When we combine today's text with all the rest, the case is made in such a way any lawyer could win the case.

And ultimately, in our illustration, that is what our hammer is for. Our lives are intended for eternity. They are intended to be lived in a sin free existence with a loving God among obedient people. We need a **resurrection** to experience everything we are intended to be. So this life on this earth is going to be a huge and continual disappointment if we expect it **to fulfill us in any way**. The scripture uses a huge amount of ink on the topic of the resurrection. The belief in the resurrection is vital to our Christian walk. It is the hope that makes all the pain worthwhile. The suffering will serve a purpose if nothing but to wean us from our trust in this life's satisfactions.

The world around us doesn't understand this. They don't realize that they were created for something bigger than this life. The human heart needs more than this life to be content. Its deepest yearnings can only be satisfied in eternity. I think we can even see it in the political unrest all around us. People are expressing their displeasure with their god. Many around us expect the government to be the source of providing a utopia, the world our hearts long for. The **government has to do it** because most people no longer believe in a **true God who has revealed Himself in Jesus Christ**. And the government is failing on every level to provide that utopia, that eternity that our hearts long for. What we are

seeing in our world is what happens when people worship idols. They are disappointed. What we all need is a resurrection. That is what we are created for. That is what **we need to believe in** to keep a proper perspective in this world. We need a Resurrected Lord who will raise us from the dead to be with Him forever. That is what the hammer is for.

Before we look at the text I would like to borrow very heavily from John MacArthur again. We are going to look at the theories people have come up with to disprove the Resurrection. You will see the wisdom of God in giving us all the details of the Resurrection. The details disprove all of the theories attempting to disprove the Resurrection. Often even the minor details provide us with facts that refute the bogus theories.

These are the names of the theories:

Swoon theory

no-burial theory

hallucination theory

telepathy theory

séance theory

mistaken identity theory

Hysterical delusion theory

A theory based on disappearing matter

Theft theory

The "**swoon theory**" proposes that Jesus did not actually die but went into a deep coma, or swoon, from the severe pain and trauma of the crucifixion. While in the cool atmosphere of the tomb and with the stimulating aroma of the burial spices, He revived and was somehow able to unwrap Himself and escape after the grave was opened. When He showed Himself to the disciples, they erroneously **assumed** He had been raised from the dead.

That theory was not dreamed up until around 1600, by a man named Venturini. But the idea flies in the face of many eyewitness reports, not only by Jesus' followers but also by His enemies. The Roman soldiers standing guard over Jesus at the cross were the first to report His death. They were experts at execution and would stand to forfeit **their own lives** if they allowed a condemned man to escape death. They were so certain He was dead that they did not bother to break His legs, and when the spear thrust brought forth blood and water, they had final proof of His death. Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus, with many women as witnesses and perhaps as helpers, worked with Jesus' body for an hour or so as they wrapped it in the linen and spices. They would easily have sensed any spark of life still remaining.

For that theory to be true, Jesus would have had to survive the massive loss of blood from the scourging, the nail wounds, and the spear thrust. He would also have had to survive being wrapped tightly in the linen cloths that were filled with a hundred pounds of spices. Besides all of that, in His extremely weakened condition He would have had to endure more than forty hours without food or drink, manage to unwrap Himself, singlehandedly roll the stone away from the inside of the tomb, walk out unchallenged by the guards, and then convince His followers He had actually been dead and miraculously raised. He would have had to have developed the strength to travel countless miles in that condition to make the many appearances to His disciples over a period of forty days. Finally, He would have had to delude the apostles into thinking He entered a closed room without opening the door and ascended to heaven before their eyes. The absurdity of that theory is too obvious to be accepted by any clear-thinking person, believer or not.

The "**no-burial theory**" contends that there was actually no interment, that Jesus was never placed in the tomb and therefore would not have been in it on Sunday morning. His body was instead thrown into a mass grave for criminals, according to Roman custom. But neither the Jewish leaders nor the Roman guards would have bothered to secure and seal the tomb if they knew Jesus' body was not inside. Not only that, but to disprove Jesus' resurrection they would only have had to retrieve His body and put it on display.

The "**hallucination theory**" maintains that everyone who claimed to have seen the risen Jesus simply experienced a hallucination, induced by an ardent expectation of His resurrection. But Thomas was not the only believer who was slow to believe the Lord was alive again. Every gospel account makes clear that most of His followers, including the apostles, did *not* believe, either before or after the crucifixion, that He would be raised. Besides that, how could more than 500 people hallucinate in exactly the same way?

The "**telepathy theory**" proposes that there was no physical resurrection, but rather God sent divine telepathic messages to Christians that caused them to believe Jesus was alive. But that theory, among other things, makes the God of truth a deceiver and the apostles and gospel writers liars. And if such mental images did come from God, they were defective and slow to produce the intended result, because in a number of instances Jesus was not recognized when He first appeared to individuals and groups who knew Him intimately.

The "**seance theory**" suggests that a powerful spiritualist, or medium, conjured up the image of Jesus by means of occult power and that His followers were thereby deluded into thinking they saw Him. But if that were so, how did they hold onto His feet, put a hand in His wounded side, and eat a meal with Him? Seances deal

strictly in the noncorporeal and ephemeral and are not made of such physical and tangible things as those.

The "**mistaken identity theory**" is based on the assumption that someone impersonated Jesus and was able to dupe His closest friends and companions into thinking he was really their Lord come back to life. But the imposter would have had to have himself scourged, crowned with thorns, pierced in his hands and feet, and wounded in the side to make such an impersonation even close to convincing. He would also have had to mimic Jesus' voice, mannerisms, and other traits to an unimaginable degree of perfection. He would have had to steal Jesus' body from the tomb and hide it. He would also have had to be an insider among Jesus' followers in order to identify and talk convincingly with the many people he met during the appearances. He would also have had to know exactly where to find the people on every occasion and been able to perform such illusions as materializing through walls and appearing and vanishing at will. And he would have had to be **prepared in advance** even of the crucifixion to do all of those amazing things, because the first appearance was early on resurrection morning. The noted French philosopher Renan debunked the resurrection by foolishly claiming the whole idea was based on the **hysterical delusions** of Mary Magdalene (*The Life of Jesus* [New York: Carleton, 1886], pp. 356-57). But Mary was but one among more than 500 witnesses, all of whom testified to the same reality.

In his book *Risen Indeed*, G. D. Yarnold advances the idea that the "material of which [Christ's] earthly body had been composed **ceased to exist**, or was annihilated" ([New York: Oxford, 1959], p. 22).

Besides their own unique shortcomings, all of those theories fail to explain how the apostles could be transformed from **cowards to heroes** and how such a dynamic entity as the church could come into existence, produce thousands of followers **willing to die for their beliefs**, and manage to turn the world upside down, if their faith was built on illusions and falsehoods.

Such unbelieving critics also fail to explain **what happened to Jesus' body**. If the resurrection were falsified, in whatever way, the deceit could have easily and quickly been exposed by producing the dead body. But neither the Jewish leaders nor the Romans even attempted to make such a disclosure.

The "**theft theory**," which contends that someone managed to steal the body and hide it, is the only one that attempts to explain the missing body. But the only ones who might have had a motive for stealing it were the disciples, in order to try to fulfill Jesus' prediction that He would rise from the dead on the third day. That, as Matthew explains in the present passage, was the explanation promulgated by the Jewish leaders.

Yet Matthew's narrative of this strange episode reveals that even that deceitful scheme became a rich and compelling apologetic not **against** but **for** the resurrection. Matthew first describes the plot itself and then briefly tells how the proposed lie was propagated.

MacArthur New Testament Commentary, The - MacArthur New Testament Commentary – Matthew 24-28.

Now let's look at our text.

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.**

The "they" in this sentence were the women who had gone to the tomb less Mary Magdalene who ran faster than the rest and got to the tomb first.

So Matthew is letting us know in what time frame this was all happening. We see earlier what had happened to the guards.

Matthew 28:2-4

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*.**

So the guards were doing their jobs when all of a sudden an earthquake happened. Then an angel came down out of the sky. And he rolled back the stone.

Now, imagine you are on **guard shift** that night. What happens this night will never happen to anyone again. This is not going to be something these guys ever forget. This glowing angel comes out of the sky. I'm hoping we will get to see the replay of this somehow in heaven. It will be better than any science fiction we have ever seen.

So the earth is shaking. The guys are fully alert. And they see the angel descend. They were freaked out and scared senseless. And then they probably lost consciousness. Now remember, these were Roman guards. They were tough guys. But no human is ever tough enough to stand up to the glory of God. They are reduced to a shivering mass.

So while the women were going to find the disciples, the guards came into the city and told the chief priest all the things that had happened.

These guards were the first eyewitnesses of the supernatural activity that surrounded Christ's resurrection. According to Matthew they told the chief priests everything. So here are war hardened Roman guards telling the chief priests how they were overcome by a spiritual being. The Jewish leaders would

have had no reason to believe these guys were lying. They heard a first hand report of the work of God from heathen witnesses. And they must have believed the report or they would have responded differently.

Here is their moment of truth. If they could have claimed ignorance before this, they no longer can. They know now for sure that Christ was someone blessed of God, someone from God. They may not have known that Christ raised from the dead. But they did know that His body was not stolen. There were no human beings in this story.

Now they get to show what they are made of.

We have all been in situations like this when we realized we have been found out. We see that we are wrong about something we believed. We see a prior course of action that we chose was wrong. Now it is to our disadvantage to tell the truth, to repent, to admit we were wrong. What will we do?

Watch what these leaders do.

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.'

If you had been there, what might have been the first thing you might have suggested if you really wanted to know the truth? Wouldn't you have sent someone to check this out? Wouldn't you have sent someone to discern the truth? That is what you would do if truth was the most important thing.

Also, if you really thought that the body was stolen, what might be the second thing you would do? Wouldn't you try to get the body back? These guys probably had the Roman government in their pocket on this one. Why not appeal to Pilate to use Roman resources to get the body back? The most obvious answer is they knew they couldn't get the body back because they knew it wasn't stolen.

We see here all the evidence we need to know that truth was not what these guys were interested in. They were interested in keeping their positions of power and influence. These men were not going to allow truth to change them, just as Jesus had explained in his parable of Lazarus and the rich man.

Luke 16:27-31

²⁷ Then the rich man said, 'I beg you therefore, father, that you would send him to my father's house, ²⁸ for I have five brothers, that he may testify to them, lest they also come to this place of torment.' ²⁹ Abraham said to him, 'They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them.' ³⁰ And he said, 'No, father Abraham; but if one goes to them from the dead, they will repent.' ³¹ But he said to him, 'If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rise from the dead.' "

Verse 12 of our text describes a formal meeting of the Sanhedrin. Imagine this meeting. They are confronted with evidence that Christ actually rose from the

dead, just as He said. He had Roman guards reporting this fact at risk of their lives. And look at the purpose of the meeting. Look what they accomplished.

First, they would have had to discuss how to **silence the truth**.

Second, they had to come up with a story that **replaced the truth**.

Third, they had to come up with a plan to **protect the lie**.

If we would have been in this meeting it would have been obvious from beginning to end that **truth** was not even a consideration. They knew exactly what they were doing at this point. They were destroying truth. They were planning a lie. And they didn't even seem to be embarrassed by it.

It is interesting to note here that false religion does not destroy **all truth**.

Sometimes it tells a **great deal of truth**. Christ said these guys were good at explaining parts of the law. But false religion **will always withhold that piece of truth that sets men free from their sins**. It will let out the part that allows people to come to Christ just as they are to receive His grace. Because that is the part that removes the power, money and sex incentives of the false teachers.

Religion **may actually be** man's invention to control people. We need to not be too critical of the people who claim that it is. But that is not true of Christianity.

The real message of Christ **sets men free** from the inordinate influence of humans. In our story these leaders did not want to lose that power. So they were doing everything in their power to keep it.

So, the first thing the leaders did was to pay off the guards. Now, since when do you buy people off to tell the truth? No one does that. You pay people to lie.

You make it worth their while to back a story they know isn't true.

Now these guards are in a bind. The only way to **even hope** to remain alive was to tell the truth. If these guards were to tell their superiors that they fell asleep and allowed someone to steal Christ's body, they would be dead men. But if they told the truth that they were victims to a supernatural event like no other in human history, they might have a chance of living. It is unlikely, but possible.

The Jewish leadership understands this. So they had to remove the two points of resistance to their plan. **First** they have to incent the guards to lie. And very rarely is anything more useful for that purpose than **personal monetary gain**.

They were given a great deal of money to lie instead of telling the truth. This is great evidence that the story they were told to tell was not true.

The second thing the Jewish leadership had to do was to remove the **disincentive** to tell this lie. The disincentive was that dead men cannot spend money. The leaders had to remove the death threat. So that is what they did. They told these guards that they would see to it that Pilate did not have them killed. It is assumed that they were basically telling the guards that the Jewish leadership would vouch for the truth if they were ever called to do so. They would tell Pilate the truth, because the truth is all that could possibly keep them alive. It was either that or

they would cut a deal with Pilate so that he would be powerless to harm the guards. Whatever the case, the guards knew that the leaders could likely deliver on their promise to keep them safe. And this was probably their best hope for survival.

So this is where the first false theory against the resurrection of Christ originated and was promoted. The Jewish leadership became the party **most responsible** for hiding one of the most important truths for the salvation of a human being. And these **guards** became the first spreaders of these lies. Think about what that money will have been found to have cost them. Think about when they stand before Christ one day and they are forced to face the penalty for the harm they intended toward this all powerful Christ.

We would do well to make sure we never find ourselves in the guards' shoes, where we **deny the truth** because of something earthly we hope to gain and something earthly we don't want to lose. And that is exactly where most spiritual compromises happen.

Matthew 28:11-15

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.

John MacArthur brings out another interesting fact.

The Sanhedrin's lie was still common among the Jews of the second century. The church Father Justin Martyr wrote in chapter 103 of his *Dialogue with Trypho*, "You [Jewish leaders] have sent chosen and ordained men throughout all the world to proclaim that a godless and lawless heresy had sprung from one Jesus, a Galilean deceiver, whom we crucified, but his disciples stole him by night from the tomb... and now deceived men by asserting that he has risen from the dead and ascended into heaven" (*The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 1 [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973], p. 253). That same falsehood can be heard even today.

MacArthur New Testament Commentary, The - MacArthur New Testament Commentary – Matthew 24-28.

It is interesting that the cover up the leaders devised actually proves more evidence of the resurrection. Why did no one look for the body? That is the one thing that is missing that **would not be missing** if the story was true. There was never any attempt at locating the body. Why? There was no body and the parties that would have initiated the search already knew the truth.

The other problem with this theory is that we have been given the psychological condition of the disciples. They were not looking for Christ's resurrection. They were sitting around in a complete state of confusion and loss and discouragement

and grief. They had none of the attributes of body stealers. They knew that without a living Christ they were at a loss.

Another problem is that the way the Roman government broke up a watch, it was only usually 3 hours. It is highly unlikely that two guards would fall asleep at the same time at the risk of their lives when they only have to stay awake for 3 hours. And another problem is who here knows **what goes on if you are asleep when it happens?** No one. The story is absolutely absurd. Even if they had fallen asleep, all that would have proven is that they had **no idea** what happened to the body. Another thing to note is, what would you have done if you thought that someone stole the body while you were asleep? Would you not do everything you could to find that body before Pilate learns of your failure? That is what every one of us would do. But instead these soldiers run to the Jewish leadership, of all people. The Jewish leadership and the Roman government had every incentive **to find** the dead body of Christ and they had no incentive to leave this issue unresolved. It would have been an easy thing for the body of Christ to have been found. But no search was ever made. Why not? This is all proof of the resurrection of Christ.

Simon Greenleaf, famous nineteenth-century professor of law at Harvard wrote, "All that Christianity asks of men... is, that they would be consistent with themselves; that they would treat its evidences as they treat the evidence of other things; and that they would try and judge its actors and witnesses, as they deal with their fellow men, when testifying to human affairs and actions, in human tribunals.... The result... will be an undoubting conviction of their integrity, ability and truth" (*Testimony of the Evangelists, Examined by the Rules of Evidence Administered in Courts of Justice* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1965; reprint], p. 46).

MacArthur New Testament Commentary, The - MacArthur New Testament Commentary – Matthew 24-28.

This morning we see the importance of the resurrection. And we see the evidences **for it**, we see the enmity **against** that truth, and we see how the story of the enemies actually is used by God to bolster the truth of the Resurrection. Believers are created for a resurrected life. That is what our lives are for. If we want to live in this world as we should, we must live with this in view. We are made for forever. We have to see our lives from that perspective in order to see them as God sees them. It will put our suffering and temptation in the proper framework. It will free us to think as we should.

If you have never committed your life to Christ,
if you have never trusted Christ's death on the cross as the penalty paid by Him for all your sin.

If you have never believed that Christ arose to ultimately raise all believers in newness of life.

If you have never entered the benefit of God's saving grace, today is the day.

Sing 118 He arose