



**Sill Risen – A Response to “The Lost Tomb of Jesus”  
Matthew 27:62-Matthew 28:15**

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.

Matthew 28:1 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.

5 But the angel answered and said to the women, "Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified.

6 "He is not here; for He is risen, as He said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay.

7 "And go quickly and tell His disciples that He is risen from the dead, and indeed He is going before you into Galilee; there you will see Him. Behold, I have told you."

8 So they went out quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy, and ran to bring His disciples word.

9 And as they went to tell His disciples, behold, Jesus met them, saying, "Rejoice!" So they came and held Him by the feet and worshiped Him.

10 Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid. Go and tell My brethren to go to Galilee, and there they will see Me."

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.

The opponents of the Gospel have long recognized the critical importance of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. As we have seen from Gospel account of Matthew, a first century document written by one of Christ's 12 Apostles and an eyewitness to the events he chronicles, Jesus had only just been laid in the

tomb of Joseph of Arimathea when his principle opponents came to Pilate and insisted that the door of the tomb be sealed with official seal of the Roman Government and a Roman Guard be placed at the entrance.

You see the Pharisees had asked Jesus to provide them with miraculous sign to prove that He was in fact the promised Messiah, they had asked *"Teacher, we want to see a sign from You"* and they remembered that Jesus had replied to their request by saying *"An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth."* They knew that what Jesus was saying was that His contention that he was the Messiah, the Son of God, would be finally proven when he did something that no one else in history had ever done; it would be proven when he physically arose from the dead after three days.

Of course the Pharisees and Chief Priests, refused to believe Christ's claims, and having had him executed by the Romans, they did not believe that he would rise again from the dead. But their fear was that his Apostles might steal his body and *claim* that even though no one had seen it, Jesus had arisen. So they insisted that the tomb be sealed and secured. The penalty for breaking that seal would have been death, and by Roman law the guards themselves would have been put to death had someone succeeded in opening the tomb and stealing the body. They knew that would end that possibility, and indeed the gospel writers tell us that following Christ's death the Apostles were in disarray, despairing, and hiding in a locked room.

A Roman seal and a human guard were certainly sufficient to stop a motley group made up mostly of fishermen from stealing a body, but what they could never do was stop the Son of God from rising from the dead. And on the morning of the third day, Jesus Christ, the Son of God rose again from the dead just as He had promised.

That morning there was an earthquake and an angel descended and rolled away the rock before the door, not to let Jesus out, but to show that He had already risen. The guards of course were petrified and as soon as they had recovered they ran off, now they knew that if they went back to their own commanders they would be executed, so instead they went to the tell high priest what had happened, and he was very eager to make sure that their story wouldn't get out, so they were bribed to say *"His Apostles stole the Body."* To which they would have thought *you want us to say we didn't do our duty? Falling asleep on Guard is a death penalty offense, when Pilate hears of it, we'll be the next ones being crucified on Golgotha!* So the Chief Priests said, *don't worry, we'll make sure he sees it our way and understands that the true story cannot be allowed to spread.* And so the Priest probably said to Pilate, ***"Pilate, do you know what the people would do to you and to us if they became certain we'd crucified God's Messiah, the one they'd been waiting for thousands of years for?"***

So they spread a false story and one which was picked up on and as Matthew says widely reported among the Jews to his day which was between 70-85 AD, and historical sources from the first and second centuries confirm that. The execution of Jesus for "apostasy" is actually reported in the Talmud which was compiled in about 135 AD, Justin Martyr writing in 150 AD says that Jewish leaders had sent specially trained men around the med and as far as Rome to spread the story, and Tertullian writing in 200 AD confirms that.

Now the opponents of Christianity had to spread that story, precisely because He ***had*** risen, and they didn't have a body or a well-known tomb to appeal to as evidence that Jesus hadn't arisen. If they had,

they would have done so eagerly and it would have been the ultimate debate ender. You can't say someone rose from the dead if everyone knows he's buried in the family plot just down the road.

Now, unless you've taken a vow not to watch TV or listen to the Radio or surf the internet or talk to co-workers, you'll have heard that James Cameron, the producer of Titanic and Simcha Jacobovici the producer of documentaries like 2005's "*Yummy Mummy*" have announced that they have discovered the "Jesus Family Tomb" outside of Jerusalem which they believe to be the final resting place of the bones of Jesus, Mary Magdalene, Mary his Mother, Matthew one of his disciples, and Judah whom they claim is Jesus' son with Mary Magdalene. They claim to have statistical and DNA evidence "proving" this beyond a shadow of a doubt. And so after a whirlwind week of interviews and conferences they are releasing a movie on Discovery Channel tonight to accompany Jacobovici's also just released book: *The Jesus Family Tomb: The Discovery, the Investigation, and the Evidence That Could Change History*

*Now if it were true, how important would this be?* Well it would mean that the New Testament was a fabrication from beginning to end and that considering we have multiple copies and fragments of the gospels that go right back to 110 AD it would mean that they were written from the beginning as lies, that virtually every other early Christian, Gentile, and anti-Christian documents were also lies. It would mean the Apostles died for what they knew to be all lies. It would mean that the early followers were willing to believe things they knew to be falsehoods, and so on. Quite simply if this story were true it would be the end of the Christian faith, if you say *that's going too far, listen to what Paul says:*

***1 Cor. 15:12 Now if Christ is preached that He has been raised from the dead, how do some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?***

***13 But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ is not risen.***

***14 And if Christ is not risen, then our preaching is empty and your faith is also empty.***

***15 Yes, and we are found false witnesses of God, because we have testified of God that He raised up Christ, whom He did not raise up -- if in fact the dead do not rise.***

***16 For if the dead do not rise, then Christ is not risen.***

***17 And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins!***

***18 Then also those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished.***

***19 If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable.***

On a personal note, if I believed it were true, this would be my last sermon ever. Friends, there is no way I could go on preaching what I knew to be untrue and ultimately profitless, and I'm sorry, but being a Pastor is far too difficult to do it in my own strength for the sake of comforting lies. I'd advise you it was time for you to go to your closest Orthodox temple, because we are all still waiting for the Messiah. Because the OT tells us that the Messiah will be GOD WITH US will never see corruption.

***So is this my final sermon? Well before I answer that, let's talk – briefly - about the story of this tomb and analyze the "evidence" for their claims.***

In 1980 workers in Talpiot, a southwestern suburb of Jerusalem, were excavating an area to build an apartment block when they came upon a tomb. This was no big deal, there were countless tombs in the area, and you really can't put a spade down in Israel and dig without hitting history in very quickly. So they called in the archaeologists who excavated the large tomb which contained Ten Ossuaries and the remains of up to 35 people. An Ossuary is a carved stone "bone box" used during the period of the second temple, that is up until the Romans destroyed the second temple in 70AD. Generally, they were

only used by wealthy people. You would bury someone in a winding shroud in a niche in the family tomb, and then a year later you would go back and collect their bones, which were bundled together, and sometimes you put them into one of these smaller boxes called Ossuaries. That way you could keep reusing the niches in the family tomb for new burials. These Ossuaries are so common in Israel that wealthy people actually buy them and use them for planters.

Six of the Ten Ossuaries had names on them, the tenth is missing, but the original archaeologists on the dig, Joe Zias and Amos Kloner, report it was blank. The names were Yeshua bar Yehosef (Jesus Son of Joseph), Mariamenou-Mara (they are translating it as Mary known as the Master it is actually Mariam known as Martha), Yehuda bar Yeshua (Judah son of Jesus), Matia (Matthew), Yose (a form of Joseph), and Maria (and Mary). All of the inscriptions are in Aramiac except for Mariamenou-Mara which is in Greek.

Now why when the Archaeologist saw those names didn't they say OH MY we've discovered the LOST TOMB OF JESUS! Was it because none of them had read the New Testament? NO. It was because they saw those names on Ossuaries ALL THE TIME. In fact for instance, 21% of all the Jewish women in the first century were named Maria or a variant of Mariam. 3.4% of all men had the name Yeshua which is the name Joshua. That makes it more common than my name Andrew is today.

They just filed it away and moved on, it wasn't until Simcha Jacobovici began to get involved that the profile got jacked up. From the start he was looking to make a connection between these Ossuaries and Jesus Christ. In effect he was doing archaeology backwards. The big problem with the cluster of six names was Mariamenou-Mara, and indirectly Yehuda bar Yeshua, neither of which are mentioned in the Bible.

But aha, Jacobovici finally manages to find a gospel of sorts which mentions a Mariamne, a Gnostic gospel called the Acts of Phillip which may have been written in the 5<sup>th</sup> century but the earliest copy we have of it dates to the 14<sup>th</sup> century. In it, Mariamne is called the sister of Phillip the Apostle and sister of Martha and in this gospel she does amazing things like evangelizing foreign nations and when persecuted "*became like an ark of glass full of light and fire and every one ran away.*" The Acts of Phillip doesn't say she is Mary Magdalene but one scholar says that is who she is, and that scholar is who Simcha chose to believe. The Acts of Philip meanwhile doesn't say she married Jesus nor had children either. But since the current vogue following the Da Vinci Code says that's what Mary Magdalene did, it follows that if Mariamne is Mary Magdalene she must have been Jesus' wife.

So they tested mitochondrial DNA from the remaining bone fragments in the Yeshua and Mariamne boxes and found out that A) they were both Jews and B) They did not have the same mother. Therefore Simcha concluded they must have been **MAN AND WIFE!** What they did not tell you in the book was that the same DNA lab that did the tests told them they could have been: *father and daughter, paternal cousins, half brother and sister or simply two unrelated individuals in the same burial tomb.*

But if you don't believe the DNA Then there is the statistical evidence. It is, according to Simcha, a 600 to 1 possibility that these 6 names could occur together, so they must be the family of Jesus Christ.

Brothers and Sisters, there is good reason that Mark Twain commented once that there are "***Lies, Darned Lies, and Statistics.***" Use them right and you can prove or disprove *ANYTHING*. Brothers and Sisters, it is actually statistically far, far, less likely than 600 to 1 that in the modern day one family

would consist of six people bearing the names Andrew, Joy, Margaret, Victor, Graham, and Isabel. Based on statistics, you can show just how unlikely it is that my family actually exists.

That's it, that's really all they have for their theory. Some common names, a DNA test that actually proves nothing you haven't assumed already, and a far-fetched theory from a Gnostic Gospel. Oh that and a lot of support from the media, people who want to make money, and the eager to disbelieve Christianity side of the scholarly community. Perhaps the worst example of this support is from James Tabor, chair of religious studies at UNC-Charlotte, who previously wrote a book named *the Jesus Dynasty* arguing that Jesus was the illegitimate child of a Roman soldier named Pantera. Now he has come out supporting *The Lost Tomb*, which assumes that according to the inscription Jesus is the son of Joseph! In other words, he supports any theory other than what the Gospels tell us, that Jesus is the Son of God.

Now in the *evidence against* the Lost Tomb Category, I could go on all day. Let me give you just a few.

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- 1) The tomb itself was not secret it was ornamented, prominent, and would have been well known. If the Jews had know where Jesus' family plot was they would have dragged out his ossuary every time the Apostle's preached. The Apostles would have been the laughing stock of Jerusalem.
- 2) If Jesus had a son name Judah, whom Simcha argues wrote Gnostic Gospels including the Gospel of Thomas which was written in Coptic Greek well over 100 years after the death of Christ (one scholar wonders "was there a fax in that ossuary, I wonder?") Also, he is never mentioned, on even in the Gnostic Gospels, and they would have loved to have mentioned him.
- 3) Why is Matthew, who wasn't related to Jesus, buried in his family tomb?
- 4) Jesus is NEVER called "Son of Joseph" by his family members or Apostles; in fact we only have one reference in John 6:42 and that is from his enemies.
- 5) No DNA evidence can prove any relation to the actual Jesus, we have no control sample. Also why only test the Yeshua and Mariamne DNA?
- 6) Mary Magdalene is always called Maria in all first century literature
- 7) The names on the Ossuaries are in three languages suggesting a multi-generational tomb of long use. Certainly there is no reason for a family that spoke Aramaic to record names in three languages in two generations.
- 8) Why would the Jesus family tomb have been in Jerusalem, he was born in Bethlehem and His Family lived in Nazareth?
- 9) The So-called James Ossuary has definitively been shown not to have come from this tomb contrary to Jacobovici's theory.

***So why, when the evidence is so pitifully thin, would we be bombarded with this theory now?***

Well obviously coming on the heels of Da Vinci Code fever there is a lot of money still to be made and in recent years the new media tradition has been to celebrate Easter by producing investigative specials attempting to debunk Easter. *One wonders why they don't celebrate Ramadan with TV specials debunking the Koran or exposing the real life of Muhammad?* Could it be because attacking Christianity doesn't get your head cut off or force you to go into hiding?

I don't think that's just it; I think it has more to do with the nature of the spiritual warfare that Christ and the Apostles and you are engaged in. The grand struggle *against principalities, against powers,*

against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places (Eph.6:12). And here I speak from prior experience, this kind of theory is the kind of thing that prior to becoming a Christian my unbelieving heart would have thrived on, I would have embraced this theory without requiring even the thing evidence they offer. ***Why didn't I attack Islam like I attacked Christianity when I was an unbeliever?*** Why doesn't the world attack Islam the way they attack Christianity? Because as Jesus put it that would be Satan rising up against himself and totally counter-productive to his ultimate agenda. Let's face it, the only religion that gets shredded this way in print or media is the Christian faith and Jesus warned:

***John 15:18 " If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you.***

***19 "If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.***

***20 "Remember the word that I said to you, 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you. If they kept My word, they will keep yours also.***

So as you've probably guessed, I plan to be back to preach this evening, and unless God calls me home to meet the bodily resurrected Savior I've been preaching, this is where I'll be. I hope you will be too.

In closing, let me warn you, while you are living in this world, get used to this sort of thing. Kids you will grow up bombarded by vicious unbelief, like no other generation since the end of the Roman persecution. And so I exhort you, make up your mind about the resurrection, now.

The evidence for it is overwhelming, scriptural, historical, and experiential and without it you wouldn't have a Christian faith. Peter's Pentecost sermon would have been a giant flop. Your prayers wouldn't be heard, and you want statistical evidence, ever consider the amazing rate at which your prayers in this church are answered??? Brothers and Sisters, Jesus really rose on the Third Day, He is Still Risen. All the hate and scorn the world can pour forth won't change that, so don't give credence to it there is no hope in it, not here or hereafter.

***1 Cor. 15:51 Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed --***

***52 in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.***

***53 For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality.***

***54 So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: "Death is swallowed up in victory."***

***55 "O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory?"***

***56 The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law.***

***57 But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.***

***58 Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.***