

Matthew 27:57-28:15
 Easter Sunday 2016
 IM160

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 Easter: Resurrection

The Resurrection

INTRODUCTION: In the theaters today is a motion picture titled *Risen*.

1. A Columbia Pictures release, and a production of LD Entertainment and Affirm Films, directed by *Kevin Reynolds*, and starring *Joseph Fiennes, Peter Firth, Tom Felton* and *Cliff Curtis* (as Jesus). Released February 19, 2016.
2. Storyline: A Roman Tribune named *Clavius* (Joseph Fiennes) is sent by Pontius Pilate to find the “stolen” body of Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified a few days earlier. His search brings him into contact with the Roman guards at the tomb, Mary Magdalene, the eleven apostles, and others who claim to have seen the risen Christ.
3. Critics have scored the film at 51 out of a possible 100, while film-goers have given the picture an A- rating.
4. The movie has raised interest in the gospel account of Christ’s resurrection, drawn primarily from *Matthew’s Gospel*, and our text for today.
5. Each and every Easter Sunday, for 35 years, I have preached on some aspect of the *Resurrection*.
 - a) One would think, “*What new insight could he possibly find to say about a story told year after year, for 2,000 years?*”
 - b) I know; I’ve asked myself the same question!
 - c) But I, over the years of preaching, noticed these four things:
 - (1) The resurrection found its way into every sermon recorded in the Book of Acts. It appears that the resurrection was a cornerstone doctrine for the Apostles.
 - (2) Christianity rises and falls on this one point: Did Jesus rise from the Dead? Paul openly states:

For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, (1 Cor. 15:3-4)

Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain. We are even found to be misrepresenting God, because we testified about God that he raised Christ, whom he did not raise if it is true that the dead are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied.

But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep. (1 Cor. 15:12-20)

(3) **Eugene Peterson:** *The Message*

If there's no resurrection for Christ, everything we've told you is smoke and mirrors, and everything you've staked your life on is smoke and mirrors...And if Christ wasn't raised, then all you're doing is wandering about in the dark, as lost as ever... If all we get out of Christ is a little inspiration for a few short years, we're a pretty sorry lot.

(4) Christ's resurrection is the divine power of “new life” working in all true Christians.

Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith—that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead. (Phil. 3:8-11)

If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you. (Romans 8:11)

(5) People who are **not** Christians seem to think, correctly, that everything about the truth of the Christian religion rides on the historic reality of the resurrection of Christ.

(6) Hence: *Americans interest in a movie like “Risen”.*

6. **Paul Beasley-Murray:** *The Message of the Resurrection; pp. 15-16*

Easter Sunday is the most exciting Sunday of the year. It is the day when we sing almost non-stop hallelujahs to our risen Lord...And yet for all the excitement, preaching at Easter can be among the most boring of the year. For so much Easter preaching is predictable, simply more of the same, year by year. I know, because I've been a preacher for over thirty years. For my sins I've kept copies of all the sermons I've preached over the years. With a fair degree of embarrassment, I've reread my Easter sermons and discovered that for the most part they have all been variations on a theme: ‘Face the facts – Jesus rose from the dead. The evidence is incontrovertible. The tomb was empty. The appearances were for real. Jesus is alive. Hallelujah!’ Even many of the illustrations get recycled. Perhaps after all there is a reason why church people go away at Easter time! In one sense, of course, preachers need not be ashamed if their message is the same. There is but one message: ‘The Lord is risen!’ Yet somehow preachers need constantly to find new ways of repackaging the message, if the message is to remain fresh and vibrant in the hearts and minds of their congregations. I have no doubt that the best way to retain this freshness and vibrancy is to expound Scripture.

7. So, I think it is good, useful and honest to revisit the records of the Gospels, and examine again *The Resurrection of Jesus Christ: Is it true? Or is it a religious myth?*

8. I will attempt to do this using Matthew's account (Matthew 27:57-28:15)
9. **Note:** All four evangelists, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, are very explicit about Jesus rising from the dead. And, as each one includes different details, they all tell the same, the identical, the overlapping story: **Jesus Christ rose from the dead.**
10. Matthew includes four salient pieces of information
 - a) Jesus' burial (27:57-61)
 - b) The Guards at the Tomb (27:62-66)
 - c) The Eyewitnesses to the Risen Christ (28:1-10)
 - d) The Story of the Jewish Leaders (28:11-15)

11. **Fairness demands** that we approach this historical book of the Gospel of Matthew as we would any other historical piece of literature. *We assume the eyewitnesses know more accurately the events of their own time than we do, 2000 years later.*

I. JESUS CHRIST WAS BURRIED BECAUSE HE WAS REALLY DEAD (Matt. 27:57-61)

When it was evening, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who also was a disciple of Jesus. He went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Then Pilate ordered it to be given to him. And Joseph took the body and wrapped it in a clean linen shroud and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had cut in the rock. And he rolled a great stone to the entrance of the tomb and went away. Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were there, sitting opposite the tomb. (Matthew 27:57-61)

1. Joseph of Arimathea, a wealthy man who was also a secret disciple of Jesus. He was a respected member of the *Sanhedrin* (Mk. 15:43)
 - a) He risks his own safety (and family) by going to Pontius Pilate to ask for Jesus' body
 - b) Why? In order to give it a proper Jewish burial.
 - c) He would use his own family tomb for the burial.
 - d) This fulfilled even another prophecy about Christ.
 - (1) *And they made his grave with the wicked
and with a rich man in his death,
although he had done no violence,
and there was no deceit in his mouth.*
(Isaiah 53:9)
 - (2) crucified between two wicked men
 - (3) buried with a rich man's family in his tomb

2. Joseph's request was *unusual*: most crucified victims were left hanging on their crosses, dead and decaying, as both an act of shame and dishonor toward them, and as a deterrent to others not to cross the power of Rome!
3. Joseph, a member of the Jewish ruling council (Sanhedrin) was very aware of the Law of Moses:

And if a man has committed a crime punishable by death and he is put to death, and you hang him on a tree, his body shall not remain all night on the tree, but you shall bury him the same day, for a hanged man is cursed by God. You shall not defile your land that the Lord your God is giving you for an inheritance. (Deut. 21:22-23)

4. One Problem: Jesus died at around 3:00 pm on a Friday, and the Passover Sabbath began at 6:00 pm (sunset), when no such work as a burial could take place. *Joseph and the disciples had to work quickly to ...*
 - a) *take Jesus off the cross*
 - b) *wash his body of “defilement”*
 - c) *anoint him properly (ceremonially)*
 - d) *wrap him in proper cloth*
 - e) *and seal the tomb*
 - f) *all in three hours!*

5. **R.T. France:** *Matthew: TNTC; p 408*

This little section emphasizes two things: first, that Jesus was truly dead, and secondly that, contrary to custom, he was given a decent and reverent burial. The Romans did not normally bury a crucified body, but simply threw it out on the ground. Jewish piety forbade this, but executed criminals were buried in a public plot, without honour, and were not allowed to be placed in their family tombs.

6. One of the “explanations” of the Resurrection is the *swoon theory*: that Jesus was not dead, but nearly so, and once tended to by the disciples and placed in a cool tomb, he revived, woke up, and left the tomb.
- Impossible.**

- a) Romans made certain every crucified “criminal” was dead before they were taken off the cross
 - (1) *Since it was the day of Preparation, and so that the bodies would not remain on the cross on the Sabbath (for that Sabbath was a high day), the Jews asked Pilate that their legs might be broken and that they might be taken away. So the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first, and of the other who had been crucified with him. But when they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. But one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once there came out blood and water. (John 19:31-34)*
 - (2) Certification of death by a Roman Centurion
 - (3) At the request of the Sanhedrin
 - (4) Evidence that Jesus died of *hypovolemic shock* (excessive loss of blood and body fluids), *suffocation* (liquid filling his lungs), *heart failure*.
- b) **D.A. Carson:** *John: Pillar NTC; p. 623*

In tests performed on cadavers, it has been shown that where a chest has been severely injured but without penetration, hemorrhagic fluid, up to two liters of it, gathers between the pleura lining the rib cage and the lining of the lung. This separates, the clearer serum at the

top, the deep red layer at the bottom. If the chest cavity were then pierced at the bottom, both layers would flow out. However the medical experts work this out, there can be little doubt that the Evangelist is emphasizing Jesus' death, his death as a man, his death beyond any shadow of doubt.

- c) Moving Jesus down from the cross, transporting a body “in shock,” and wrapping him in cloth that restricted both his breathing and his muscle movements would have killed a man in shock!
- d) A dehydrated, hypovolemic man with a severe chest wound that had penetrated chest lining, lung and perhaps the heart, would not revive in a cave over a period of 39 hours! It would kill him!

7. **Bottom Line:** *Jesus was crucified, dead and buried*, just as the **Apostles’ Creed** says He was.

8. The only way for a dead man to live again is not revival but *resurrection*.

II. JESUS CHRIST’S TOMB WAS SECURED BY ROMAN GUARDS (Matt. 27:62-66)

The next day, that is, after the day of Preparation, the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered before Pilate and said, “Sir, we remember how that impostor said, while he was still alive, ‘After three days I will rise.’ Therefore order the tomb to be made secure until the third day, lest his disciples go and steal him away and tell the people, ‘He has risen from the dead,’ and the last fraud will be worse than the first.” Pilate said to them, “You have a guard of soldiers. Go, make it as secure as you can.” So they went and made the tomb secure by sealing the stone and setting a guard. (Matt 27:62-66)

- 1. The Sanhedrin (*the chief priests and scribes*) ask for Roman guards to be placed around Jesus Christ’s tomb for 3 days so that His disciples not come by night, steal his dead body, and tell the world that He had risen.
 - a) They’d heard Jesus *repeatedly* promise/predict that He would rise from the dead “on the third day”
 - b) Something Jesus said **three times** in the last month of His life:
 - (1) *From that time Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised.* (Matt. 16:21)
 - (2) *As they were gathering in Galilee, Jesus said to them, “The Son of Man is about to be delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill him, and he will be raised on the third day.” And they were greatly distressed.* (Matt. 17:22-23)
 - (3) *And as Jesus was going up to Jerusalem, he took the twelve disciples aside, and on the way he said to them, “See, we are going up to Jerusalem. And the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and scribes, and they will condemn him to death and deliver him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified, and he will be raised on the third day.”* (Matt. 20:17-19)
 - c) The Jewish leaders feared the “*impostor*” (Jesus) would be immortalized by His disciples by “*the last fraud*” of a fake resurrection (i.e. a stolen body)
- 2. Here is an interesting fact: *The Romans did not fear this at all.*

- a) Pilate said to them, “You have a guard of soldiers. Go, make it as secure as you can.” So they went and made the tomb secure by sealing the stone and setting a guard. (Matt. 27:65-66)
 - b) But to keep the Jews happy Pilate tells them to select a guard detail and post it.
 - c) Note: these guards are called *soldiers* in 28:12, and they are accountable to Pilate
 - d) i.e., these guards were Roman Legionaries: trained soldiers well-equipped to thwart a grave robbery attempt by a handful of fisherman!
 - e) “*sealing the tomb*” an act by Pilate the Procurator – a wax seal, with the Imperial insignia, making any tampering with the tomb a capital offense!
3. Pontius Pilate does this for political reasons: “*With a free hand in this matter they (the Jews) would not be able to complain that Pilate had let them down if things went wrong*” (**Leon Morris: Matthew: Pillar NTC**; p. 732) ...
- a) They picked their own Roman soldiers,
 - b) posted them in sufficient number to guard the tomb,
 - c) sealed it with Roman Imperial authority,
 - d) and made the guards accountable to Pilate!
4. **The only way** for Jesus to get out of that tomb – dead or alive – was for a higher authority than the Sanhedrin, with greater power than Rome, to open that tomb and set Jesus free!
5. **By the way:** *An Imperial decree, either by Tiberius (the Emperor when Jesus was crucified) or Claudius (Emperor when the Acts of the Apostles took place) reads thusly:*
- a) *It is my pleasure that sepulchres and tombs, which have been erected as solemn memorials of ancestors or children or relatives shall remain undisturbed in perpetuity. If it be shown that anyone has either destroyed them or otherwise thrown out the bodies which have been buried there or removed them with malicious intent to another place, thus committing a crime against those buried there, or removed the headstones or other stones, I command that against such person the same sentence be passed in respect of solemn memorials of men as is laid down in respect of gods. Much rather must one pay respect to those who are buried. Let no one disturb them on any account. Otherwise it is my will that capital sentence be passed upon such person for the crime of tomb-spoilation.*
 - b) death for disturbing a tomb of the dead!
6. **Bottom Line #2:** It would have been impossible for the Disciples to ...
- a) Overpower a unit of Roman soldiers with a small band of terrified (and hiding) fisherman in order to steal Jesus’ body,
 - b) These Disciples would not be able to move a huge tombstone by rolling it out of its groove.
 - c) The Seal of Rome, once broken, would have created a need for the death of these disciples
 - d) But ... Rome never executed one of Jesus Disciples for the “*spoliation of tombs*,” as Roman Law decreed ...
 - e) ... because Pontius Pilate did **not** believe the tomb was raided!

III. THE WITNESSES TO THE RISEN CHRIST (Matt. 28:1-10)

Now after the Sabbath, toward the dawn of the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. And behold, there was a great earthquake, for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled back the stone and sat on it. His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. And for fear of him the guards trembled and became like dead men. But the angel said to the women, “Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. He is not here, for he has risen, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples that he has risen from the dead, and behold, he is going before you to Galilee; there you will see him. See, I have told you.” So they departed quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples. And behold, Jesus met them and said, “Greetings!” And they came up and took hold of his feet and worshiped him. Then Jesus said to them, “Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee, and there they will see me.” (Matt 28:1-10)

1. On Easter morning (Sunday), after the Passover weekend, the two Mary's who'd seen Jesus buried went to His tomb.
 - a) *And Joseph took the body and wrapped it in a clean linen shroud and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had cut in the rock. And he rolled a great stone to the entrance of the tomb and went away. Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were there, sitting opposite the tomb.* (Matt. 27:59-61)
 - b) *Now after the Sabbath, toward the dawn of the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb.* (Matt. 28:1)
 - c) Why? To finish the ceremonial *anointing* of Jesus' body, not completed on Friday, due to lack of time.
 - d) *And they were saying to one another, “Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance of the tomb?”* (Mark 16:3)
 - e) They were concerned if the soldiers would ...
 - (1) allow the tomb to be unsealed,
 - (2) help them roll the tombstone away,
 - (3) permit them to enter the sepulchre.
 - f) **Note:** According to Mark there were actually three women who returned to the tomb.
 - (1) *When the Sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, so that they might go and anoint him.* (Mark 16:1)
 - (2) John mentions only Mary Magdalene
 - (3) Luke simply says “they” returned to the tomb
 - (4) Matthew focuses on the two Marys who saw the tomb closed (? sealed?)
 - (5) *Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James and Joses.*
2. When we put the four resurrection accounts together, we find a great deal of concurrence and agreement, but each with different emphasis. Here's what happened – *composite account*:

- a) **Interesting fact:** *If the resurrection story was a fabricated myth, the Apostles would not make up a story that hinged upon three women's testimony. In Jesus' time women were not considered reliable witnesses or allowed to testify in a court of law!*
- b) At dawn, on Sunday (*Easter sunrise*) Mary Magdalene, Mary the (wife) of James and (mother) of Joses, and Salome set out to anoint Jesus' body.
- c) While on their way an earthquake occurred as an Angel (*one Angel*) appeared like the blazing sun, and easily rolled the stone away. Then he waited for the women.

And behold, there was a great earthquake, for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled back the stone and sat on it. His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. (Matt. 28:2-3)

- d) Meanwhile: The Roman guards are struck with such fear that they are immobilized as dead men – but they *saw* and *heard* all that transpired –
 - (1) *And for fear of him the guards trembled and became like dead men.* (Matt. 28:4)
 - (2) *While they were going, behold, some of the guard went into the city and told the chief priests all that had taken place.* (Matt. 28:11)
 - (3) The Angel's arrival, Jesus coming out of the tomb, any conversation Jesus and the Angel had, and what the Angel told the three women!
- e) As they approach the open tomb Salome hangs back in fear, but the two Mary's approach the open tomb, stepping around the dead-like soldiers.
- f) The Angel then gives them **The First Gospel Message of Easter!**

But the angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. He is not here, for he has risen, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples that he has risen from the dead, and behold, he is going before you to Galilee; there you will see him. See, I have told you." (Matt. 28:5-7)

- g) The three ladies depart, where the two Mary's go back to the Upper Room, to tell the Apostles.
- So they departed quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples.* (Matt. 28:8)
- h) Mary Magdalene seeks out Peter and John to give them the details; then she follows the two of them as they run to the empty tomb.
 - i) Peter and John check out the empty tomb, and then leave to report to the other 9 Apostles.
 - j) Mary hangs back, weeping because she thinks the Jews came to rob the grave and hide Jesus' body.
 - k) Two Angels assure her that Jesus is alive.
 - l) Then Jesus appears to her and tenderly shows her that he is alive.

But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb, and as she wept she stooped to look into the tomb. And she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had lain, one at

the head and one at the feet. They said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping?” She said to them, “They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him.” Having said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing, but she did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?” Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, “Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away.” Jesus said to her, “Mary.” She turned and said to him in Aramaic, “Rabboni!” (which means Teacher). Jesus said to her, “Do not cling to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to my brothers and say to them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’” Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, “I have seen the Lord”—and that he had said these things to her. (John 20:11-18)

- m) Jesus then met and greets Mary the wife of James and Salome, as they returned to the tomb –
And behold, Jesus met them and said, “Greetings!” And they came up and took hold of his feet and worshiped him. Then Jesus said to them, “Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee, and there they will see me.” (Matt. 28:9-10)
- n) Jesus then has a private meeting with Peter – No doubt to forgive him, restore him and affirm him after his three denials of Jesus on Friday morning.

And they rose that same hour and returned to Jerusalem. And they found the eleven and those who were with them gathered together, saying, “The Lord has risen indeed, and has appeared to Simon!” (Luke 24:33-34)

- o) Christ appears to two disciples, Cleopas and another, on the way to the town called Emmaus, and reveals Himself to them.
And their eyes were opened, and they recognized him. And he vanished from their sight. They said to each other, “Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the Scriptures?” (Luke 24:31-32)
- p) Toward nightfall Jesus comes to 10 of the 11 Apostles in the Upper Room, on Easter evening.

On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, “Peace be with you.” When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.” And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. (John 20:19-22)

- q) Thomas is absent, and does not believe the others when they tell him Jesus is alive.
- r) 8 days later, the next Monday, Jesus comes a second time to see the Apostles and this time Thomas is present.

Eight days later, his disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.” Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe.” Thomas answered

him, “My Lord and my God!” Jesus said to him, “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.” (John 20:26-29)

- s) Over the next few weeks Jesus appears to others – as many as 500 at one time, in some form of gathering.
- t) Including his own brother *James*.
- u) Then, he meets with 7 apostles by the Sea of Galilee, as they are fishing, and eats breakfast with them.
- v) Christ meets repeatedly with the Apostles over the next 40 days preparing them for their mission,

He presented himself alive to them after his suffering by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God. (Acts 1:3)

- w) Finally, He takes them to some undisclosed mountain in Galilee, gives them the great commission, and ascends into heaven.

3. Paul summarizes all this in his statement in 1 Corinthians 15 –

- a) *For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me.* (1 Cor. 15:3-8)
- b) at least 519 persons and more
- c) Perhaps even into the thousands!
- d) Plus! *The Roman Guards!*

4. **Ask yourself:** *Before any jury in America, regardless of the issue or charge, if you could produce 519 eyewitnesses, or more, numbering into the hundreds or a thousand, what jury would not rule in your favor?*

5. **Lord Charles John Darling** (1849-1936), a chief justice in England, had this to say about the resurrection (**Josh McDowell**, *The New Evidence that Demands a Verdict*; p. 219)

“We, as Christians, are asked to take a very great deal on trust; the teachings, for example, and the miracles of Jesus. If we had to take all on trust, I, for one, should be skeptical. The crux of the problem of whether Jesus was, or was not, what He proclaimed himself to be, must surely depend upon the truth or otherwise of the resurrection. On that greatest point we are not merely asked to have faith. In its favour as living truth there exists such overwhelming evidence, positive and negative, factual and circumstantial, that no intelligent jury in the world could fail to bring in a verdict that the resurrection story is true.”

6. **Bottom Line #3:** The eyewitnesses to the resurrection are irrefutable.

IV. THE REPORT OF THE GUARDS TO PILATE (Matt. 28:11-15)

While they were going, behold, some of the guard went into the city and told the chief priests all that had taken place. And when they had assembled with the elders and taken counsel, they gave a sufficient sum of money to the soldiers and said, ‘Tell people, ‘His disciples came by night and stole him away while we were asleep.’ And if this comes to the governor’s ears, we will satisfy him and keep you out of trouble.’ So they took the money and did as they were directed. And this story has been spread among the Jews to this day. (Matt. 28:11-15)

1. The Roman Guards become the first evangelists! They tell the Sanhedrin about the resurrection, as eyewitnesses.
2. The Jewish leaders bribe them to say something that would get them killed! *Roman soldiers asleep on guard duty were executed.* (and Pontius Pilate was a harsh, strict disciplinarian)
3. A fraudulent report arose that persists to this day: While Roman guards slept, the Apostles came, cut away the wax seal, rolled a huge stone away, unwrapped Jesus body, rolled up the burial cloth, carried out the body – *all this without awakening one single guard.*
 - a) either those Roman soldiers slept more deeply and soundly than most human beings
 - b) or the report is ridiculous!
4. And why did Pontius Pilate **not** interrogate and execute those soldiers for –
 - a) sleeping on duty?
 - b) taking a bribe from Jewish leaders?
 - c) and either lying to him or withholding evidence from him?
 - d) **Assuming that the widespread report of Christ’s resurrection never reached his ears?**
5. **Key fact:** The existence of such a fraudulent report points to the fact that the tomb really was empty, and so a non-resurrection story had to be concocted. And was!
6. **Here’s what really happened:** As the story of Jesus’ resurrection grew and spread abroad, all over Judea, Pilate would have heard of it.
 - a) He would have summoned the guard detail (and examined them, even using torture to gain access to the truth.)
 - b) They all – to the man – would have told him the same story, causing Pilate to question the Jewish myth.
 - c) When the Sanhedrin explained that the guards were asleep, all of them at the same time, Pilate would have moved to execute them all.
 - d) Then the Jewish leaders would have told the truth – the guard’s story, the bribe, and the cover up.
 - e) Pilate would ...
 - (1) fear this Jesus whom he crucified,
 - (2) left the guards alive to tell the false story,
 - (3) joined the Sanhedrin in the cover up!

7. **Bottom line #4:** *The concocted story belies the motive for covering up the truth. As Shakespeare wrote, “Methinks he doth protest a bit too much!”*

Conclusion: All in all, by any measure of objective consideration of evidence, and the rule of cross-examination, the story of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead must be true.

1. Add to this historic evidence the fact that all the Apostles – 12 of them – and hundreds of other disciples, like Stephen and Paul ...
 - a) Went to a martyr’s death without cracking under pressure and denouncing the resurrection as a fraud.
 - b) Millions of people throughout history and the world would have likewise died for or died in the hope of this story of the resurrection.
 - c) Billions of people worldwide today base their life hope and their comfort in death on this one fact: *Jesus rose from the dead.*
 - d) *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,* (1 Peters 1:3)
2. Now, honestly, we can’t *all* be naïve, gullible, stupid, conniving, dishonest and sinister frauds, living and dying for a story that’s false.
3. We have been *convinced* and then *converted* by the irrefutable and irresistible power of the Living Christ: *“Christ in you, the hope of glory.”* (Col. 1:27)
4. **Illustration:** If I said to you this morning, “I am the toughest, strongest, most fearless man in this room today. I can whip any of you!” You’d all laugh, until … I stepped off this platform, went up to the heavyweight champion of the world, let him hit me square on the face, as hard as he could, and then smiled and knocked him out with one punch! Then you’d believe whatever I said about myself!
5. **The boast is only as good as the follow through!**
6. The Bible tells us that Jesus did exactly that; Putting an end to our strongest enemy – **death**. With one, swift, Easter blow!
 - a) *For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death. For “God has put all things in subjection under his feet.” But when it says, “all things are put in subjection,” it is plain that he is excepted who put all things in subjection under him. When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to him who put all things in subjection under him, that God may be all in all.* (1 Cor. 15:25-28)
 - b) If Jesus said, “kill me and I will rise on the third day,” and did,
 - c) … then anything else He *boasted* must be true!
 - d) Like this!

“I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die.” (John 11:25-26)

"I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.
(John 14:6)

"Truly, truly, I say to you, an hour is coming, and is now here, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live. For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself. And he has given him authority to execute judgment, because he is the Son of Man. Do not marvel at this, for an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment. (John 5:25-29)

7. Is it too much or too unreasonable for me to ask you to *believe* in the Gospel message, *receive* Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, and *enter into* the resurrection life?
8. This is **the essence** of Christian faith – Jesus rose from the dead, and so do those who trust in Him.
9. Paul's question to a Roman governor and a Jewish King is a fair question to ask us all –

Why is it thought incredible by any of you that God raises the dead? (Acts 26:8)