

The Resurrection

📖 Matthew 28:1-15

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📅 May 17, 2017

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Last time in Matthew 27:57-66 we looked at the burial of Christ and the sealing of the tomb. In 27:57, the phrase “when it was evening” refers to any time between 3 and 9 pm. In this case it was immediately after Jesus yielded up His Spirit, about 3 pm. At that time there came a rich man of Arimathea, named Joseph, who himself had also become a disciple of Jesus. This means more than the fact that He had believed Jesus was the Messiah. It meant that he was a follower of Jesus. The parallel says he was a secret disciple, meaning he had been kept secret from the Sanhedrin in order to fulfill the prophecy of Isa 53:9, that the Messiah would be assigned a grave with wicked men, but He was with a rich man instead. This was a turn of events that no one could have predicted and shows that how some prophecies will be fulfilled is not exactly clear until they are fulfilled. In 27:58 this Joseph went to Pilate, parallels say he gathered up courage to go to Pilate and ask for the body of Jesus. He had to gather up courage because from this point forward it would be known to the Sanhedrin that he was a follower of Jesus, and that was dangerous. When he asked for the body Pilate was astonished that Jesus was already dead. It often took up to two or three days for a person to die of crucifixion because no vital organ was penetrated. In the parallels Pilate had the centurion report to him Jesus’ condition. And after confirming He was dead, Pilate ordered the body to be given to Joseph. In 27:59, Joseph took the body, but we know from parallels that Nicodemus joined him at this point and they took the body and wrapped it in a clean linen cloth saturated in myrrh and aloes provided by Nicodemus. In 27:60 they laid His body in Joseph’s own new tomb, a tomb in which no one had ever been laid, a tomb which he had hewn out of solid rock and they rolled a large stone against the entrance of the tomb and went away. In 27:61 Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were sitting opposite the tomb so they would know where He was laid and could return on the day after Sabbath. The purpose of these verses is to show that Jesus’ burial fulfilled the prophecy of Isa 53:9; that though He would have been assigned a grave with the wicked in the Valley of Hinnom, He was with a rich man instead. This shows He was innocent. He was perfect. He was the Lamb of God who took away the sin of the world. So the burial is evidence that He truly did die on the cross. He did not merely swoon so that He was rescued by His followers later and nursed back to health. In 27:62 we come to a section that is almost entirely unique to Matthew. This deals with the sealing of the tomb, showing how securely the tomb was made so as to avoid any mischief. It was the next day, the day after the preparation, which was Sabbath. On that day the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered together with

Pilate. This was a violation of the Sabbath. They hated Him so much they would break their own Law of Sabbath, the Law they condemned Jesus for breaking not long before. In 27:63 they said, "Sir, we remember that when He was still alive that deceiver said, "After three days I am to rise again." Therefore, give orders for the grave to be made secure until the third day, otherwise His disciples may come and steal Him away and say to the people, 'He has risen from the dead,' and the last deception will be worse than the first." Pilate had already granted the greater thing, the execution, so he granted the lesser thing, the guard, saying in 27:65, "You have your guard." This was a Roman guard and not the Jewish temple police because they would not need permission to get the Jewish temple police. So Pilate said, "Go and make it as secure as you know how." He let them decide how to secure it. In 27:66 they set the guard until the third day and had them place an official wax seal across the stone and tomb. Thus it would be very easy to see if someone tampered with the tomb. Little did they know that by requesting the Roman guard they would only end up supplying more witnesses of the resurrection. The enemies of God end up only fulfilling the plan of God. Seeing how the tomb was hewn out of solid rock with only one entry, having several Roman guards keeping watch for the three days and with the wax seal, it would seem the tomb was completely impenetrable. Matthew's purpose with this section was to show the wickedness of the religious leaders, how they hated Jesus so much that they would violate the Law of Sabbath, how they were hypocrites, and thereby prompt Jewish unbelievers to investigate these things more thoroughly and be convinced that Jesus really is the Messiah, even though Messiah's kingdom is not here. It would also encourage Jewish believers to remain strong in their faith that Jesus really is the Messiah despite the apologetic of many Jews that He could not be Messiah because Messiah's kingdom was not here. Of course, the kingdom had been postponed as far as its arrival on earth, the reason was because that generation of Israel rejected the Messiahship of Jesus. If we don't learn this from the Gospel of Matthew we haven't learned much. This is the primary lesson of Matthew.

We come tonight to Matthew 28. This is the last chapter and here we see two things; the Resurrection and the Great Commission. After these I plan to give a lesson on the nature of the kingdom since Matthew is so interested in the kingdom. So we'll look at what the kingdom will be like; it's economy, it's politics, it's religion, it's environment, etc... That way we will have a better idea of what we should be seeking and what it will be like when it comes. That may take a few weeks. After that I plan to teach either Genesis, Joshua or Ruth. But tonight let's march onward, the Resurrection, Matthew 28:1-15.

There are three opening points I'd like to make about resurrection. First, the doctrine of resurrection is an indispensable part of the gospel. And when we talk about resurrection we are talking about the literal, bodily, physical resurrection of Christ. Paul said in 1 Cor 15:3-4 that the gospel consists of two things; the death of Christ for our sins and His resurrection on the third day. Those verses talk about the burial and the appearances too, but those are not the gospel, those are historical evidences of the truth of the gospel. So the gospel is the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. We don't want to add anything to this gospel and we don't want to take anything away from it. If we do Paul said it is no longer the gospel. And if you study Peter and Paul's evangelistic

sermons in the Book of Acts you will always find the gospel at the heart of their message. This does not mean that other things aren't mentioned in those sermons. What they did was give the gospel inside the larger frame of reference for history. But they always lead to the death and resurrection of Christ. And when we talk about the gospel we are not talking about man's response to the gospel. Man's response is supposed to be faith but faith is not a part of the gospel. The gospel is simply the objective divinely interpreted facts of the death and resurrection of Christ. It is all about Him and what He did. Therefore, if we are to be true to the Scriptures and apostolic preaching, when we preach evangelistically we must preach the indispensable truths of the death and resurrection of Christ. Second, it is difficult to show a harmony of the resurrection passages. How many angels were there? What is the order of events? How many times did Mary Magdalene go to the tomb? Etc., etc., etc... We are convinced there are no contradictions but the reason it is difficult to harmonize the accounts is because each of the gospel authors is making his own argument and therefore he emphasizes and organizes details in a particular way to support his larger argument. In the end, the important thing is to understand that there is a harmony, even though all may not agree on which harmony is best. Lastly, the day of the resurrection is a Sunday, not a Monday or a Tuesday. The reason the early church began to meet on Sunday was because it was the day of resurrection. Yet Sunday did not become the Sabbath. The Book of Acts continues to refer to the Sabbath as the day from Friday at sunset until Saturday at sunset and the day the Church met as the first day of the week, Sunday. That means that Sunday is not the Christian Sabbath. There is no such thing as a Christian Sabbath. The Sabbath was for the nation Israel. It is the one of the Ten Commandments that is not repeated for the Church. So the early church met on Sunday but even that does not mean that we have to meet on Sunday. They also met on other days. And their meeting on Sunday was a practice, not a principle. In Romans Paul goes so far as to say, "One man considers one day above another, another considers every day alike, let each be convinced in his own mind." So consideration of one day over another day should not be a point of division. But we should gather ourselves together and the early church did meet on Sunday, and that day was chosen because Christ was raised on Sunday.

We're going to be jumping around a lot tonight in putting this harmony together. In Matthew 28:1 we meet two ladies from the Galilee who came that morning; **Mary Magdalene** and **the other Mary** who we are told elsewhere was the mother of James and Joseph. The parallel in Mark 16:1 adds "Salome," and John's account adds other unnamed women. So a band of women set out, Matthew says, **after the Sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week.** In other words, it was still dark when they set out. The parallel in John 20:1 says "Mary Magdalene came early to the tomb, while it was still dark." He doesn't mention the other women but I think it's the same account. She's very prominent in these events. And it's interesting to note that as the women made their way to the tomb they apparently did not know that the tomb was under Roman guard. The reason is because the Jewish leaders went to Pilate to request the guard on Sabbath and these women were keeping Sabbath. So here they are on their way, unaware of anything since He was laid in the tomb.

But this was not the first thing that happened that night because Matthew 28:2 tells us **And behold, a severe earthquake had occurred.** The aorist tense translated **had occurred** means there had been an **earthquake** during the night, toward dawn. This is another earthquake in addition to the one three days before in connection with the crucifixion, which was Friday. So sometime during the night on Sunday, toward dawn, there was another **earthquake**. The cause of which is said to be **an angel of the Lord** who **descended from heaven** and so not a natural **earthquake**. Then the angel **rolled away the stone and sat upon it**. He probably had a snack. No, he's been stationed there to interact with the visitors, to make an announcement, the greatest announcement the world has ever heard. So he rolled the stone away. This was not when the resurrection occurred. The resurrection had already occurred. Jesus was already gone. So if we're being really strict; event one, resurrection, event two, angel comes and earthquake, event three, the stone is rolled away. And remember that the stones were flat on each side and circular on the outer edge so that they were like a wheel and while easy enough to move into place by way of a channel that was cut in the rock for the stone, removing them was much more difficult. But it was no difficulty for this **angel** because angels are powerful beings. In verse 3 we see his appearance. **And his appearance was like lightning, and his clothing as white as snow.** Note **his appearance**, not her appearance. All references to angels in Scripture are to males. They always appear as males. There is not even one reference to a female angel in the whole biblical revelation. Of course, this doesn't mean that there are not female angels, but it does cast serious doubt upon it. And yet almost every angel reproduced by popular culture is a female or child. I think this is a very skewed view of angels. Angels are amazing celestial beings, who often appear as mean and are always portrayed as awesome in appearance. Now the description here is that he was **like lightning**, meaning a gleaming brilliance, probably not too different from the light that is put forth when someone is welding, an overwhelming brilliance. This is because the angel has been in the presence of God. Just as Moses' face glowed after being in the presence of God so the angels glow from being in the presence of God. They radiate His glory. And **his clothing was as white as snow**. In verse 4 **The guards shook for fear of him and became like dead men**. In other words, when they saw the angel they did not see a nice fluffy angel with wings, they saw an awesome being, very frightful, and they started shaking and then they fainted to the ground. Now, they were Roman soldiers. So you can imagine how frightful it must have been for them to faint.

Now this is just an observation, but the only ones who observed the earthquake and the angel appear and roll away the stone were the Roman guards. The women didn't see it. They were still on their way to the tomb. So if this was only witnessed by the Roman guards then how do you think we came to know about it? Because one of them must have talked. As we'll see later, after they come to, they all flee, but only some of them go and report these things and so only some of them are paid off to keep their mouths shut. Maybe they kept them shut, maybe they didn't, but some of them never got paid off anyway, and one of them talked. Other than direct revelation to Matthew, there's no other way we could have ever received this report. So the first thing that happened was the resurrection, then the angel came and caused a severe earthquake and then he rolled away

the stone and sat upon it. At that time the Roman guards shook for fear and fainted. Sometime after they came to and fled.

Now, if Jesus was already resurrected, why did the angel open the tomb? J. Vernon McGee said, "Why was it necessary to roll back the stone? To let Jesus out? No, He was "already" gone when the stone was rolled back. The tomb was not opened to let Him out but to let *them* in."¹ In other words, so they could see that His body was not there. This is historical evidence.

Now the women were on their way and if we turn to the parallel in Mark 16 we see their conversation along the way. In Mk 16:1, "When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome, bought spices, so that they might come and anoint Him." In other words, did they expect His body to be there? Yes. Did they expect Him to raise from the dead? No. They're coming to anoint His body. So even though Jesus had stated several times that He would be raised on the third day, they did not understand what He was talking about. So here they come to anoint Him. And verse 2, it was "Very early on the first day of the week, they came to the tomb when the sun had risen. They were saying to one another, "Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance of the tomb?" This was their conversation along the way. And then, verse 4, "Looking up, they saw that the stone had been rolled away, although it was extremely large." So the second event was these three women arrived at the tomb, it was just as the sun had risen, they had not expected the resurrection and they had not expected the stone to be rolled away. But as McGee pointed out, the stone was already rolled away, not to let Jesus out, but to let these women in. To let them see that He had not just risen spiritually from the dead but He had raised physically. Then in verse 5, "...entering the tomb." We're not told here what they first saw but the parallel in Luke 24:3 says "when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus" and "they were perplexed about this." So the first thing they saw was not the angel but the empty tomb. This caused confusion. Surely they had come to the right tomb? They had seen Him laid here on Friday. But you see they did not understand that He would be raised from the dead on the third day. After this they saw the angel. Mk 16:5 says "they saw a young man sitting at the right, wearing a white robe." If you go to the Garden Tomb in Jerusalem they will often point out that this could be the tomb because as you enter the shelf where bodies were laid is to the right and the angel was sitting at the right. But there's a 50% chance it would be to the right. In any case, Mark says they saw a young man, so I imagine that if that's any indication of what we will look like in the resurrection, then we will appear young. There's no proof of that, and angels don't have bodies, but it seems likely that it is a representation of a youthful appearance, and certainly Jesus, in His resurrection body, appeared as He did while in His 30's. In any case, while Mark reports only one young man, Luke 24:4 reports "two men suddenly stood near them in dazzling clothing." This is not a contradiction as Mark emphasizes the angel who took the lead while Luke emphasizes there were two angels. In any case, both men appeared dressed in a gleaming white brilliance. Upon seeing the angel, Mark 16:5 says the women were "perplexed" signifying a state of being surprised and confused at the same time so that they were in a state of excitement. And Luke 24:5 says "the women were terrified" signifying a state of fear from being startled. Putting all these things together they

were startled in much the same way that the Roman soldiers were startled. But rather than faint and then flee Luke 24:5 says that they “bowed their faces to the ground” and the angels said to them, “Why do you seek the living One among the dead? He is not here, but He has risen.” If you turn back to the account in Matthew, the angel said in 28:5, **Stop being afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus who has been crucified. He is not here; for He has risen.** So the angels tried to calm their fears and then stated the fact of the empty tomb and the explanation, **Jesus has risen.** The parallel in Luke 24:6 says the angels also said, “Remember how He spoke to you while He was still in the Galilee, saying that the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again. And they remembered His words.” So as surprising as it may sound, they had heard Him say He would rise again, but they did not understand His words. This means there were believers before the cross who were genuine believers who did not believe in the resurrection. How then can I have said earlier that the resurrection is an indispensable part of the gospel? Because I mean it is an indispensable part of the gospel after the death and resurrection. Before the death and resurrection, they couldn’t put their trust in that content. The content of the gospel has changed over history, beginning with the promise to Adam that the seed of the woman will come to solve the sin problem, and that promise was developed through the seed line, but it was not until the death and resurrection that the content of the gospel became set, so to speak, so that there is no further development of the content of the gospel. Now it is totally clear. And I point that out because clearly the eleven apostles and these women and others were all believers, but they did not understand the Messiah would be resurrected.

In Matt 28:6 the angels said, **Come, see the place where He was lying. Go quickly and tell His disciples that He has risen from the dead.** So they looked where He had been lying. And then they were to go quickly and tell the disciples this message, **He has risen from the dead.** The four-fold message **come, see, go, tell** becomes a part of the great commission for the soon to be built Church. The Church is built upon the resurrected Christ. It could not have begun before the resurrection of Christ. So the basis for the Church has been laid. It will be another 50 days before the Church is founded. But things are getting in place.

Now before any Christian can go and witness in the building up of the Church he must be convinced of the truth of the Resurrection. J. Vernon McGee said, “He must have it settled in his own mind that Christ died for his sins and was buried—“Come, see the place where the Lord lay”—and that Christ rose again—“He is not here: for he is risen.” Then with these convictions, he can “go quickly, and tell.” My friend, you and I are to *go* and we are to *tell*.”² We can’t see in the sense that they saw, but we can become convinced. And so we are to **go** and we are to **tell**. That means you, that means me, that means all of us. It’s not a special calling to go and tell, it’s a general calling. All Christians are to go and tell. These women were to **go quickly...and tell His disciples...**and they were also to tell them that **He is going ahead of you into Galilee** and **there you will see Him**. So there is now an appointment made to see Him in the **Galilee**. It doesn’t necessarily mean they won’t see Him before, only that He has appointed them to **see Him** in the **Galilee** and that will come to be a foretaste of things to come, in

the sense that it was near the Galilee of the Gentiles and the gospel was about to go forth to the Gentiles when the Church got underway.

So in Matt 28:8 **they left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy**. Notice the mixed emotions. They had **fear** but they also had **great joy**. They didn't really understand what had happened, but they **ran to report it to His disciples**. Now the account in Matt 28:9 seems to indicate that they met Jesus along the way to make the report. But in reality this is a later appearance altogether. Matthew skips some information. The next thing that happened was they made the report. The parallel in Luke 24:9 says they "reported all these things to the eleven and to all the rest. Now they were Mary Magdalene and Joanna and Mary the mother of James; also the other women with them were telling these things to the apostles. But these words appeared to them as nonsense, and they would not believe them." A woman's testimony at the time was considered almost worthless. You see then that it was not just the women who did not believe in the resurrection, it was also the eleven apostles. The parallel in John 20:2 adds that Mary Magdalene in particular told Peter and John "They have taken away the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid Him." Is that what the angel said to report? No. What did the angel say to report? **He has risen from the dead**. But Mary Magdalene did not understand. She still thinks that someone stole His body away and laid Him somewhere else. I'm not sure what we would have thought. But I don't think we would be any different than her.

Now turn to John 20:2, because it's at this point that John reports the race to the tomb between Peter and himself. You can see these guys were excited and bewildered at the same time. "So Peter and the other disciple [John] went forth, and they were going to the tomb. ⁴The two were running together; and the other disciple [John] ran ahead faster than Peter and came to the tomb first; ⁵and stooping and looking in, he saw the linen wrappings lying *there*; but he did not go in." John didn't enter, he only looked. Verse 6, "And so Simon Peter also came, following him, and entered the tomb;" He bolted in, "and he saw the linen wrappings lying *there*, ⁷and the face-cloth which had been on His head, not lying with the linen wrappings, but rolled up in a place by itself." Now the significance of this description of the tomb is that the body had not been stolen. The reason is because thieves would not take the time to unroll the linen wrappings from the body, much less to fold up the face-cloth very nicely and put it in a separate place. Pentecost said, "The fact that the strips of linen cloth were undisturbed and that the burial cloth that had been around Jesus' head was neatly folded up by itself was evidence that the body had not be stolen. Thieves either would have left the burial cloths in disarray in the tomb, or, more likely, have carried off the body wrapped, leaving no cloths behind."³ John goes on to report in 20:8, "So the other disciple [John] who had first come to the tomb then also entered, and he saw and believed." This is the first statement that someone believed in the resurrection and so the first one to believe it was John. And verse 9 explains why, "For as yet they did not understand the Scripture, that He must rise again from the dead." In other words, they had a Messianic profile that they had gleaned from the OT. But that profile did not contain the death and resurrection of Messiah. Now Ps 16 presented it, through David, though I take this Psalm as entirely Messianic, in the words, "You will not abandon My soul to Sheol, Nor will You allow Your Holy One to undergo

decay." In other words, resurrection. And figuratively it was presented in Jonah who was three days and three nights in the belly of a fish so that Jesus could say in Matthew 12 that no sign would be given this generation except the sign of Jonah the prophet. But they did not have this as a part of their Messianic profile. So when He stated clearly that He would die and rise again in Matt 16:21; 17:9; 17:22; 20:19; 27:63, they did not understand and therefore they could not believe. You see, you have to understand before you can believe. I hear people say all the time, I don't understand it, but I believe it. Friend, you can't believe something you don't understand. You at least have to understand the objective statements. I don't mean you have to understand it exhaustively. I mean you have to understand what is being said and accept it as true so that you are confident in it. But until this point they had not understood and so could not believe. But now John had understood and believed, and probably Peter too. And John 20:10 adds that "the disciples went away again to their homes."

So they ran to get there first. Mary apparently followed, but she was far enough behind that they had already gone to their homes by the time she arrived and we find her at the tomb for the second time in John 20:11, "standing outside the tomb weeping; and so, as she wept, she stooped and looked into the tomb; and she saw two angels in white sitting, one at the head and one at the feet, where the body of Jesus had been lying." These were the same two angels she had already seen before, the ones who commissioned her to go and tell the disciples that **He has risen from the dead** but she didn't tell them that, she said someone had moved the body. So in verse 13, "they said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping?" "She said to them, "Because they have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid Him." "When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing *there*, and did not know that it was Jesus." Why did she not know that it was Jesus? Some have speculated it was because she had been weeping and her vision was blurred. That's possible. She was in mourning. Others say that she did not expect to see Him. Of course that's true too. And it could have been a combination of these things. Others say He looked different, that the resurrection body is very different. But later accounts of His appearances militate against this, since they recognize Him immediately. In verse 15, "Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?" Supposing Him to be the gardener," which is a logical conclusion, she was in a garden. "she said to Him, "Sir, if you have carried Him away, tell me where you have laid Him, and I will take Him away." ¹⁶Jesus said to her, "Mary!" She turned and said to Him in Hebrew, "Rabboni!" (which means, Teacher)." When He addressed her in this way she knew immediately that it was Him. Verse 17, "Jesus said to her, "Stop clinging to Me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to My brethren and say to them, 'I ascend to My Father and your Father, and My God and your God.'" Now some have gone into great speculation saying that He did not want her to touch Him because she might stain Him with sin and He had not yet offered His blood on the altar in heaven. But He had already done those things the moment He breathed His last, the evidence being that the veil was torn from top to bottom when He said, "It is finished!" So what He means "stop clinging to Me" is that there is much to do before My ascension and there is little time, so stop holding on to Me and go and tell my brethren. Time was of the essence. In verse 18 she obeyed, "Mary Magdalene came, announcing to the disciples, "I have seen the Lord," and *that* He had said these things to her."

So the first resurrection appearance was to Mary Magdalene. And she is the third to understand and believe. John was first, Peter was second, and Mary Magdalene third.

Now if you go back to Matthew he picks up with the second appearance. Matt 28:9-10. Some of the other women who had gone earlier that morning, and perhaps others, were now heading to the tomb again, somewhere behind Mary Magdalene. In verse 9, **And behold, Jesus met them and greeted them. And they came up and took hold of His feet and worshiped Him.** Note, as Pentecost said, "Unlike Mary Magdalene, the other women immediately recognized Him when they saw Him and heard His voice." This indicates that He was recognizable in His resurrection body. And so the resurrection body is similar in appearance to the present body. And an additional point of importance is that they **worshiped Him.** They recognized Him for who He truly is, very God of very God. Since only God is to be worshiped and to worship anyone other than God is idolatry then for Jesus to permit Himself to be worshiped is to claim that He is God. And these ladies were Jewish monotheists, so they had no trouble admitting a diversity within the unity of God and worshipping Jesus as God. So much for the JW's and the Mormon's and every other cult that denies the deity of Christ. In verse 10 **Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid; go and take word to My brethren to leave for Galilee, and there they will see Me."** This message was once again to be taken to them. The message was given multiple times to confirm that indeed it was from Him. Everyone was coming with the same reports.

Now at this point Matthew tells us something no other gospel writer tells us, and this is about the Roman guards and how they went to the chief priests who cut a deal with them to spread a lie. In 28:11, **Now while they were on their way, some of the guard came into the city and reported to the chief priests all that had happened.** That would mean that they told them about the angel and his appearance like lightning and the earthquake and how he rolled the stone away and obviously, that the tomb was empty and the linen cloths were the only thing left. So the **chief priests** heard all this report from a Roman guard who had no personal interest in Jesus or the resurrection. But would they believe in Him? No. They were determined not to believe in Him. So in 28:12 they had a special meeting. **And when they had assembled with the elders and consulted together** they came up with this plan; let's bribe them, So **they gave a large sum of money to the soldiers, and said, "You are to say, 'His disciples came by night and stole Him away while we were asleep.'** Here again we see the corruptness of the Jewish leadership. They have all this evidence directly from the Roman **soldiers**, which must have been the truth, because they had no axe to grind, and yet they refuse to believe in Him and don't want others to believe in Him either. So **they gave** them a lot **of money** and told them to say, **'His disciples came by night and stole Him away while we were asleep.'** Pentecost said, "The desperation of the Sanhedrin can be clearly seen in the explanation that was offered. These witnesses certainly could not support their testimony as to what had happened, for they were asleep. Their story was at best only a guess. A large sum of money would have been necessary to persuade the guards to perjure themselves because, if they were asleep as they stated, they could be executed by the governor for dereliction of duty." But they assured them, in 28:14, that **if this should come to the governor's ears, we will win him over and keep you out of trouble.** The

governor was Pilate, of course, and we have already seen that the Jewish leaders had their way with Pilate. More critically, Constable pointed out, "Their devised story was a weak one that a critic might easily discredit. If the guards had been asleep, they could not have known of the theft. If one of them was awake, why did he not sound an alarm? It was also incredible that the disciples who had abandoned Jesus out of fear would have summoned enough courage to risk opening the guarded tomb. Moreover, if the Sanhedrin had any evidence against the disciples, they surely would have prosecuted them, but they did not."⁴ Raiding tombs was a capital offense in the ancient world, but they never pursued them in this manner. So the Roman soldiers, with the assurance that the Jewish leaders would go to bat before them if this came before Pilate, and despite the danger, in verse 15, **took the money and did as they had been instructed; and this story was widely spread among the Jews, and is to this day.** That is, until the day Matthew wrote his gospel, which was probably around AD50-51. So the theft theory was the first attempt to explain away the resurrection, and it has not been the last, maybe He just swooned, and the reason it has been such a controversy is because the theological implications of resurrection are too great. What are the implications? A resurrected human has already walked in this world. That means that the first part of the new heavens and new earth has already appeared in history. Thus, this present heavens and earth are going to be judged by a resurrected human who cannot be stopped. This is a powerful apologetic against unbelief because it is by definition the ultimate threat to unbelief. Unbelief in the resurrected Christ spells ultimate doom. And the one who believes in the resurrected Christ is ultimately unstoppable. We have nothing to fear.

Why did Matthew record this? First, to show the number of witnesses to the resurrection. The angel of the Lord and the second angel. The Roman soldiers, who evidently explained truthfully what had happened. The religious leaders who heard this testimony but denied. The women who declared it to the disciples. Second, as an apologetic to unbelieving Jews to the effect that the religious leadership were corrupt and they needed to investigate these claims more closely so as to be convinced that Jesus is the Messiah and He is risen from the dead. If He is risen from the dead then everything He said is true and He is coming again to establish His kingdom.

So that's the resurrection, it's an indispensable part of the gospel, and if it didn't happen we are false witnesses because we are testifying against God that He raised Christ whom He did not raise. And if He is not raised then our faith is worthless and we are still in our sins. And if He is not raised then those who have fallen asleep in Christ will not be raised. And if there is no resurrection then we have put our hope in Christ in this life only and we are of all men most to be pitied. And if Christ is not raised then let us just eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we die! But Christ is raised from the dead, the firstborn among the dead, and those of us who are Christ's will be raised like Him at His coming. The future kingdom belongs to a resurrected race, a new species created anew in Christ Jesus, not transformed into His likeness by billions of years of evolution, but in a moment, in a twinkling of an eye, for we shall see Him as He is...

¹ J. Vernon McGee, *Thru the Bible Commentary: The Gospels (Matthew 14-28)*, electronic ed., vol. 35 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1991), 196.

² J. Vernon McGee, *Thru the Bible Commentary: The Gospels (Matthew 14-28)*, electronic ed., vol. 35 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1991), 197–198.

³ J. Dwight Pentecost, *The Words and Works of Jesus Christ*, 500.

⁴ Tom Constable, *Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible* (Galaxie Software, 2003), Mt 28:12.