



4 | MATTHEW 27:62-28:15

AT THE EMPTY TOMB

Jesus has conquered death

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Welcome to our worship time. We are so glad you could join us.

Call to Worship (Cedric Andrews)

Luke24:1-6a

But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they went to the tomb, taking the spices they had prepared. ² And they found the stone rolled away from the tomb, ³ but when they went in they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. ⁴ While they were perplexed about this, behold, two men stood by them in dazzling apparel. ⁵ And as they were frightened and bowed their faces to the ground, the men said to them, "Why do you seek the living among the dead? ⁶ He is not here, but has risen.

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See, What a Morning

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AT THE EMPTY TOMB

Matthew 27:62-28:15

Introduction

Offering: You can give over Zelle through your bank with no fees. You can also give by sending a check to Living Hope, 6N171 Gary Avenue, Roselle, IL 60172.

Open your Bibles to **Matthew 27**. The title of our message today is “At the Empty Tomb.” The traditional greeting for Resurrection Day is “Christ is risen.” And the response is “He is risen indeed!” So let’s try that!

- Christ is risen! (Pastor **Matt**)
- He is risen indeed! (Pastor **Mike**)

Harry Houdini

Have you ever heard of Harry Houdini? Many of you have. He died in October 1926. But, his claim to fame was that he was a magician who specialized in spectacular escapes. As a matter of fact, he was said to have laughed at locks and to have sneered at chains. They said of Harry that he had the nine lives of a cat. They did all kinds of things to try to bind him.

- They **buried** him alive in a **coffin**—he escaped.
- They **riveted** him into a **boiler**—he escaped.
- They **sewed** him up into the **belly of a whale**—he escaped.
- They locked him in a **large milk container**—he escaped.
- They chained him upside down in a **water tank** —he escaped.
- They put him in a **maximum-security prison cell**, and Houdini escaped.
- But then, in October 1926, **death** laid his cold hands upon Harry Houdini, and put him in a grave; and, **he has yet to escape**.

As a matter of fact, he told his wife one time:

“If there is any way out, I will find it. If there is any way out, I’ll make contact with you—and, we’ll do it on the anniversary of my death.”
— **Harry Houdini**

For 10 years, she kept a light burning over his portrait each night. He was to blow it out, and show he’d escaped. After 10 years, she turned out the light. **Harry Houdini could not escape from death.**

Jesus Conquered Death

Death laid his hands on the Lord Jesus Christ, as well. And, Death put Jesus in that tomb outside of Jerusalem. And, there was a **stone** in the mouth of that tomb, and the **seal** of the Roman government was placed upon that tomb. But, on the third day, **Jesus Christ stirred Himself**. He rose from the sleep of death. And, He left those **grave clothes** that were wrapped around him, like a butterfly leaving its cocoon.

You see Jesus didn't just **escape** death, He **conquered** death! Death could not hold him. The grave could not bind him. He conquered the grave that day!

Jesus Christ passed through the walls of that tomb. The stone wasn't rolled away to let Jesus out—it was rolled away to let the disciples in to see that Jesus had come back from the dead.¹

Worship the Risen Christ

This morning, we you should feel safe and secure in Jesus. He's got you. His **witnesses**, his **words** and his **worth** testify that you are safe, because Jesus has conquered death. Let's be comforted first, by the very diverse group of witnesses that testify of Christ's resurrection.

1. CHRIST'S WITNESSES COMFORT US (Mt 27:62-66; 28:1-4)

The **witnesses** surrounding the resurrection of Christ bring great comfort! There were many who witnessed Jesus' resurrection. Listen to their testimony and be in awe. We want to call witnesses today:

- Roman **soldiers** who guarded Christ's tomb
- Jewish **women** who discovered the empty tomb
- **Angelic beings** who announced his resurrection

THE SOLDIERS AS WITNESSES (27:62-66)

Let me call the Roman soldiers as the first witnesses to attest to the resurrection. They had seen him crucified. Some participated in putting him to death.

Jesus had predicted he would rise from the dead on the third day. So the Romans, afraid of this, set a guard of soldiers in front of his tomb. A **guard** consisted of **four sets of four soldiers** placed at Jesus' tomb, sixteen in total.

Though a small number of centurions believed on Christ at his death (Mt 27:54), in reality, Roman soldiers would be the last people on earth to believe in Christ. So, these soldiers are credible witnesses.

Pastor Mike, would you read Matthew 27:62-67?

MATTHEW 27:62-66 | The next day, that is, after the day of Preparation, the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered before Pilate⁶³ and said, "Sir, we remember how that impostor said, while he was still alive, 'After three days I will rise.'⁶⁴ 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."⁶⁵ Pilate

¹ The Adrian Rogers Legacy Collection - The Adrian Rogers Legacy Collection – Sermons.

said to them, “You have a guard of soldiers. **Go, make it as secure as you can.**”⁶⁶ So they went and made the tomb secure by sealing the stone and setting a guard.

“After 3 Days I Will Rise”

Jesus predicted his death. On at least **four distinct occasions** in Matthew, Jesus predicted his death and that he would rise again on the third day (Mt 16:21–28; 17:22-23; 20:17-19; 26:1-2).

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Pastor Mike, a lot of people have trouble with this since Friday evening to Sunday morning is not 3 separate 24 hour periods. How do you explain that?

Pastor Mike: Keeping in mind that the Old Testament regularly reckoned a part of a day as a whole day, we understand that Jesus was in the tomb for a part of three days. Dying at approximately 3:00 p.m. on Friday, he was placed in the tomb before sundown (day one). He remained in the tomb all day Saturday (day two) and from sundown Saturday until his resurrection on Sunday morning (day three). Thus, he was raised on the third day, as he prophesied.²

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“Go Make it As Secure As You Can”

Pilate told the soldiers, “Go, make it [the grave] as secure as you can” (27:65). Sixteen heavily armed Roman soldiers were set there in front of the tomb.

They should have known that death has no power over the Prince of life! The grave could not hold him. The soldiers, with all their weapons and the seal of the Roman governor could not hold back the one who conquered death! They waited and guarded, but soon they would witness the greatest battle in the history of the world: Jesus vs. Death. Death had no chance! We’ll come back to the guards in a moment, but let’s look at another set of witnesses to the resurrection: the women.

THE WOMEN AS WITNESSES (28:1-3)

Another group of witnesses is the women. **Pastor Mike, would you read?**

MATTHEW 28:1 | 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.”

Matthew mentions just two of the women that were there: the two Marys (Mary Magdalene, and the other – Mary the wife of Cleopas – *who we see later on the Emmaus Road walking with Jesus*). The other Gospel writers name several other women who were there:

- In addition to **Mary Magdalene & Mary, wife of Cleopas** (cf Mt 27:56; Jn 19:25)
- **Joanna** (Lk 24:10)

² Wilkins, M. J. (2004). *Matthew* (p. 936). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House.

- **“Other women”** (Lk 24:10) – **Salome** (the virgin Mary’s sister, Mk 16:1) was there, among others.

THEY PREPARED SPICES

These women had rested on the Sabbath day.³ The Sabbath would have ended at sundown on Saturday, so these dear ladies would have been **working at that time to prepare the perfumes and ointments** to be applied to the Lord’s dead body, perhaps through the night. They truly thought he was dead.

THEY HAD SEEN HIM BURIED

They had seen him buried. **Matthew 27:59-61** clearly says they saw Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus wrap Jesus’ body in a clean linen shroud and place the body in the tomb.

MATTHEW 27:59-61 | And Joseph took the body and wrapped it in a clean linen shroud ⁶⁰ 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. ⁶¹ Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were there, sitting opposite the tomb.

THE TWO TON STONE

They watched as Joseph of Arimathea and probably some servants put a TWO-TON stone in front of the grave. These women were **eyewitnesses** of his burial.

The Roman government was very ripe for a Jewish rebellion. Christ had openly prophesied of his resurrection, so what they did is they stationed a Roman garrison of 16 soldiers in front of the tomb.

They came to bring spices and anoint the body of Jesus. They saw him buried, **and it is very clear, they think Jesus Christ is dead.**

The Women Were Eyewitnesses

Biblical scholar Richard Bauckham, goes to great lengths in his book “Jesus and the Eyewitnesses” to demonstrate that **these women were well known in the early church** and could be interviewed as eye witnesses of the death and burial of Christ at the time of the writing of Mark.⁴ He says:

This account has all the marks of how ancient historians verified historical accounts in those days. Ancient historians gave more credence to the oral testimony of living eyewitnesses than written documents. Why? Because you could cross examine them and verify what they said. When you see these women’s names put down over and over and over again, you have the earmarks of well-documented history.

Interview the Eyewitnesses

Paul uses the same method in **1 Corinthians 15:1–8**. Paul gives a litany of witnesses in this passage including 500 eyewitnesses that he says, **“most of whom are still**

³ Campbell, I. D. (2008). *Opening up Matthew* (p. 174). Leominster: Day One Publications.

⁴ Richard Bauckham. *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2006), 50.

alive” to this day. So these women, among hundreds of others, were **eyewitnesses that were interviewed over and over and over again through the years.**

We know that these women were alive at the time of the writing because of the way Mark has emphasized the credibility of their testimony. In other words, what Mark was saying was, if you want to verify these accounts, talk to the two Marys. Talk to Salome. Paul says, talk to the 500 witnesses. You can find them and interview them and cross examine them and verify their testimony. This was the most trusted, verifiable, and unrelenting method of recording and authenticating history at the time. **And the idea is that many had already done that.** And the result was that the Gospel spread—rapidly.

THE ANGELS AS WITNESSES (28:2-3)

MATTHEW 28:2-3 | 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. ³ His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow.

An Earthquake!

With the angel comes an earthquake. Here we experience an earthquake, see an angel and a rolling stone! The God who remained apparently silent on Good Friday is having the last word.

“The earth, which trembled with sorrow at the Death of Christ now leaps for joy at His Resurrection.” — **Cornelius à Lapide**⁵

SIGNIFYING THE NEW COVENANT AGE

What God is doing in the earthquake is not just an extraordinary **miracle**, displaying his **supernatural power** to shake the earth. God is signifying the start of something new, beginning the new world promised long ago in the prophets. A whole new world is opening up in front of them⁶ and in front of us. Behold the Risen King! Behold the New Covenant! Behold a day of grace and love and mercy! It is such an amazing day, this day of Christ’s resurrection. It is appropriate that **an earthquake** should welcome the New Covenant age.

A Welcome!

An angel of the Lord descended from heaven and moved the stone. At the same time he caused the earth around the grave to tremble violently, welcoming all to see the empty tomb.

You see, the angel had come to open the secured and sealed grave, and when he arrived he **rolled away the stone and sat upon it.** **He wasn’t trying to let the Lord out.** The Lord didn’t need help. If Jesus had the power to raise himself from the dead, which he did (**Jn 10:18**), he certainly had the relatively minor power required to escape a sealed grave.⁷ He had already risen from the dead. He could have moved the stone himself. **The angel wasn’t letting the Lord out but was letting the women in to see the empty tomb.**

⁵ Robertson (quoting Cornelius à Lapide), “Matthew,” *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, 1:240–41.

⁶ Wright, T. (2004). *Matthew for Everyone, Part 2: Chapters 16-28* (pp. 198–199). London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge.

⁷ MacArthur, Mt 28:2.

The Angel's Glory

The angels had witnessed Christ when he came as an infant to Bethlehem, and now an angel witnesses his resurrection.

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Pastor Mike, why does the Bible says that the angel's appearance **was like lightning**? Why include that detail.

The description may suggest that God transmitted some of His own Shekinah glory to the angel, just as He had transmitted a measure of it to Moses on Sinai when the covenant was renewed (Exo 34:29).⁸ So much so, that Moses had to veil his face.

Now the glorious angels who guard the presence of God are welcoming us into the presence of God. Before God's people were kept out of the presence of God by a veil. Now they are greeted by the same angels that guard the glory of the Lord in heaven (Isa 6:1-3).

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BACK TO THE GUARDS (28:4)

Mt 28:4, "And for fear of him the guards trembled and became like dead men."

It is interesting as we consider the Resurrection of our Lord that God chose Roman soldiers to be the first to see our Lord Jesus raised from the dead. Remember, there were **four sets of four soldiers** placed at Jesus' tomb, sixteen in total.

The **guards** were so awestruck that at first they **shook for fear of him**. After a brief moment of shaking, they then **became like dead men**, completely awake, but paralyzed with fear.⁹

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Pastor Mike, why is the presence of the soldiers at Christ's tomb so significant?

The stone was closed and sealed with Caesar's seal. The penalty for falling asleep for these men or deserting their post was crucifixion. A Roman garrison consisted of 16 soldiers. They all "did shake" and became like dead men. These 16 soldiers should have been put to death, but we all know they were not. Why? Because what they were eyewitnesses of the resurrection. It was so believable the authorities did not put them to death. They merely made the soldiers lie about it.

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Wow, so we have several immediate witnesses to Christ's resurrection: the women, the angels, and the soldiers. This isn't some made up story. The resurrection is a historical event with credible eyewitnesses from various realms: Jewish women, Roman soldiers, and angelic beings. Let's be comforted at the empty tomb.

Something else comforts us: not only Christ's **witnesses**, but Christ's **words** at the resurrection.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ MacArthur, Mt 28:4.

2. WORDS OF ANGELS COMFORT US (Mt 28:5-8)

The words surrounding the resurrection of Christ bring great comfort!

A WORD ABOUT COMFORT: DON'T BE AFRAID

Don't Be Afraid (28:5)

MATTHEW 28:5 | 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. He has risen from the dead.”

Look also at **verse 10**, Jesus meets these same women and says, “**Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee, and there they will see me.**”

Of course, they are afraid. They've seen an angel. And then they see Jesus raised from the dead. What does Jesus say? “Don't be afraid – Go and tell.” Don't be afraid to proclaim this Good News boldly to people. Do not fear.

Maybe you are like the two Marys. Everything is confused. It seems like everything is going wrong, and all of a sudden, everything is so right! It's almost too good to be true! They are afraid because it's never gone this right in life.

And there is fear. Of course, there is an angel. That's a fearful thing. And most of all, Jesus is risen. It's too good. They are trembling.

Dear saint, tremble because of God's goodness. Jesus is alive. But don't be afraid. God means this all for good. You no longer need to be afraid. Jesus is alive.

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Pastor Mike, what are some things we might be afraid of these days?

You might be afraid of **illness**, like this corona virus. Listen, the brokenness of this life is not final. You may be sick now but will not be sick forever.

Are you afraid of **death**? Because of the resurrection, death is not final. Jesus conquered death.

Perhaps you are afraid of your **sin**, that you are too weak at times to follow Jesus. Because of the resurrection, your sin does not have to have dominion over you. Christ not only removes your sin, but He also renews you and promises to empower you to walk in holiness.

Are you afraid that **God doesn't love you**? Listen saint, he loved you when you were still in your sins, when you had zero power to please him! Christ proves his love by his death and resurrection!

“**Don't be afraid!**” There is no condemnation because of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Every promise of God is true to you because of the resurrection.

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Now that Christ is alive, we don't have a heart of fear, but a heart of boldness and love. “For God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control” (**2 Tim 1:7**). I love this word of **comfort!**

A WORD ABOUT POWER: HE HAS RISEN

Here's another word from Jesus for us. We don't have to fear. Why? The power of Jesus resurrection is about to change the world.

He Has Risen: the Power that Will Change the World

MATTHEW 28:6 | "He is not here, for **he has risen**, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay."

We have a message to share. Jesus has changed the economy of death. Death is no longer final. It's conquered. What power!

I don't know anyone who has come back from the dead. Only one has done that on his own power: Jesus. Jesus keeps his word. He said he would rise again. He did exactly as he said. This is the most significant event in world history: a power has been released that will change the world.

The angels said, "Why do you seek the living among the dead? ⁶ He is not here, but has risen" (**Lk 24:6**).

Peter said in his sermon at Pentecost...

Acts 2:24, "God raised Christ up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it."

THE MOST POWERLESS PEOPLE

Historians have always wondered how in the world Christianity spread so rapidly as it did. God started and continues the spread of Christianity with **the most powerless people**. You must remember Christianity started with a little tiny group of marginal people...

- people, a vast majority of whom were slaves
- people who were by and large not educated
- people who had no social standing
- people with a poor financial standing
- just outcasts, marginal people to say the least.

Yet in 200 years, these simple Christians swept the Roman Empire and became the dominant force in it.

God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty... that no flesh should glory in His presence (1 Cor 1:27, 29).

One Yale historian said:

"Never in so short a time has any other religious faith, or for that matter, any other set of ideas – religious, political, or otherwise – without the aid of physical force, achieved so commanding a position in such a short time in such an important society." – Kenneth Scott Latourette, Yale Historian

Why Did Christianity Spread so Rapidly?

Later in this chapter (Mt 28), Jesus, our risen Lord, is going to say,

“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all nations...And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age” (Mt 28:18-20).

Simple, poor, powerless Christians choose to obey him as those who heard and saw him were eyewitnesses of his resurrection, and it radically changed the disciples. And those disciples in turn changed the society they lived in.

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Pastor Mike, how did Christianity spread so rapidly?

Tim Keller notes at least three reasons.

(1) **Christians died well.** Historians will say, Christianity spread because the Christians **died so peacefully**. They died with courage and with love. It was such an amazing sight, that they used to say, “The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church.” They counted it a privilege to die for Christ.

(2) **Christians were compassionate.** Historians note the unusual compassion of the early church. It was common to put baby girls out in the streets. There is a story told about the Alexandrian church in Egypt and the women of that church would round up the baby girls in the streets and bring them into their own homes to adopt them and raise them as their own.

(3) **Christians were inclusive.** Historians will say, another thing, Christianity spread so rapidly because Christians were so **inclusive**. I don’t mean morally inclusive **but ethnically and economically inclusive**. “Every other religion tended to favor a particular ethnic group or tended to favor a particular class. Some of the religions were for the very educated. Some were for the very, very uneducated. Some were for certain ethnic groups, and so on. Christianity was the only one, the first one, that ever came along and united and embraced every class, every race, every gender, as you can see.”¹⁰

Christians have always been the ones to “run into the burning buildings” where the outcasts are. They want to help the societal lepers. We need to spread the news that Jesus is no longer in the tomb. He is risen. That should give us a boldness and compassion to reach the lost.

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“A Vast Release of Energy”

The Yale same historian – he goes on to say,

“The more one examines the factors which seem to account for the extraordinary victory of Christianity, the more one is driven to search for a cause underlying them all. It is clear that at the very beginning of Christianity there must have occurred **a vast release of energy**,

¹⁰ Keller, T. J. (2013). *The Timothy Keller Sermon Archive*. New York City: Redeemer Presbyterian Church. April 7, 1996. “Easter Sermon.”

virtually unparalleled in history, without which the future course of the religion is unexplainable.” — Kenneth Scott Latourette, Yale Historian¹¹

This historian says there must be “a vast release of energy.” He doesn’t know what to call it! I’ll tell you what it is! **It’s the resurrection of Jesus Christ.** That’s what propelled Christians to **die with courage**, to be **compassionate**, and to be so **ethnically and economically inclusive**.

Without physical force, without military, without modern technology to communicate to thousands, how could this happen? Why is the world turned upside down so quickly? Because our Lord Jesus kept his word. It’s just as the angel said: “He is not here, for he has risen!”

The same power that raised Jesus from the dead is at work in you (Eph 1:20; Rom 8:11).

A WORD ABOUT WITNESS: GO TELL!

Go, Tell His Disciples (28:7-8)

Then we have a word about witnessing and boldly proclaiming the Lord’s resurrection.

MATTHEW 28:7-8 | “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.” ⁸ So they departed quickly from the tomb with fear and **great joy**, and ran to tell his disciples.”

The women got a further word from the angels. These women were to tell the disciples that Jesus was alive. The disciples, we find out, are to go and tell the world (Mt 28:18-20).

Has it occurred to you that Jesus Christ is risen from the dead? That should bring you great joy as well! We are to **tell the world** that Jesus is alive. We are to do as Jesus said in **Mark 16**.

Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to every creature (Mk 16:15).

That means to every person you see! What are we to tell?

3. CHRIST’S WORSHIP COMFORTS US (Mt 28:9-15)

THE WOMEN’S WORSHIP OF JESUS

So here are these women – obediently, fearfully, and joyfully – running off to Galilee “to tell his disciples.” As they ran...

MATTHEW 28:9 | Jesus met them [*the women*] and said, “Greetings!” And they came up and took hold of his feet and **worshiped him**.

¹¹ Kenneth Scott Latourette, Yale Historian as quoted by Tim Keller.

Can you imagine? They met the risen Christ! And he greeted them! And what does Jesus say to them?

MATTHEW 28:10 | Jesus Then Jesus said to them, “Do not be afraid; **go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee**, and there they will see me.”

They see Jesus, hear Jesus, and they **worship** Jesus! These women now knew with certainty that Jesus is the risen Messiah, the divine Son of God, and that adoration and praise were the only proper responses to His presence. They did what every person, unbeliever as well as believer, will do one day.¹² When Jesus comes again,

“Every knee will bow ... and ... every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Phil 2:10–11).

These women **took hold of the feet of the glorified Christ** and worshipped him! They could now do nothing but adore and worship him. This was an acknowledgement of his deity. Later on, when Thomas sees the risen Lord, remember what he says?

Thomas answered him, “My Lord and my God!” (Jn 20:28).

As Deity, Jesus Receives Worship

Notice that Jesus receives their worship. Listen, angels are not to be worshipped. No humans should be worshipped. God alone is worthy of worship.

Do you see here that by allowing this act of worship here Jesus accepts the acknowledgment of his deity? And so, these women now prostrate themselves before the Risen One, who is rightly to be accorded that honor.¹³

Let us do the same! Let us worship the Lamb who was slain and is now risen again from the dead! He is worthy of our worship! This world cannot satisfy. Let us worship the risen Christ!

THE GUARDS' REJECTION OF JESUS

Matthew records this:

MATTHEW 28:10 | While they [*the women*] were going [*to Galilee to report the resurrection*], behold, some of the guard went into the city [*Jerusalem*] and told the chief priests all that had taken place.

The **women** who worshipped Jesus immediately obey their risen Master by hurrying to tell the miraculous story of the resurrection, but the **Roman soldiers** hurry back to Jerusalem to talk the chief priests, and likely their **superior officers** of the Temple guard.

With such a serious breach of their responsibility to maintain the integrity of the sealed tomb, the guards need to inform their superior officers. Other officers are left back at the tomb. Their **report** presumably includes what transpired up to the point when they fainted away—

- the earthquake,
- the stone being rolled back,

¹² MacArthur, Mt 28:9.

¹³ Wilkins, *Matthew*, 941.

- the appearance of the brilliance of the angel, and
- the empty tomb.¹⁴

THE COMFORT OF MONEY

Matthew records this:

MATTHEW 28:11-15 | And when they [*the chief priests*] had assembled with the elders and taken counsel, they gave a sufficient sum of money to the soldiers ¹³ and said, “Tell people, ‘His disciples came by night and stole him away while we were asleep.’ ¹⁴ And if this comes to the governor's ears, we will satisfy him and keep you out of trouble.” ¹⁵ So they took the money and did as they were directed. And this story has been spread among the Jews to this day.

How sad and shocking that the **Jewish leaders** can witness the ministry of miracles that Jesus had and still reject him.

How sad and shocking that the **Roman soldiers** can witness the earthquake at his death and then another earthquake at Jesus' resurrection, see angels, see the stone rolled away, and still reject him.

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Pastor Mike, how could these of all people be so blind to all the miracles of Jesus?

The idol of **comfort** and **money** are so powerful that they can blind you to your need for Christ. We all need to take stock of ourselves, because there is power and money all around us in America.

Jesus asks, “What does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul? For what can a man give in return for his soul?” (Mk 8:36-37).

I think there was fear of losing their lives. But we must not be so blind. All the comfort and power and money we have in America cannot save us.

“It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment” (Heb 9:27). The comfort we need is found in the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ.

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THE SOLDIERS' ESCAPE WAS ONLY TEMPORARY

Nonetheless, the Jewish leaders and the Roman soldiers tried to stop the power of the risen Christ.

The **Christians** would proclaim: “The Lord is risen!”

The **Jews** said: “No, his disciples stole away his body.”

Christians: “The 16 guards at the tomb would have prevented any such theft upon penalty of death.”

Jews: “No, his disciples stole away his body while the guards slept.”

Christians: “Then why are the 16 Roman soldiers who guarded our Lord's tomb still alive?”

¹⁴ Ibid., 942.

The Absurdity of the Soldiers Escaping Execution

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Pastor Mike, why is it so strange that the Roman soldiers were living witnesses of the resurrection of Jesus?

You see the penalty for Roman soldiers falling asleep was **crucifixion**. Why were they not hung before all for their negligence? And how would 16 soldiers fall asleep all at the same time?

The Roman soldiers were eyewitnesses of the resurrection of Christ. They were present when the angels rolled away the stone and were terrified by it. They went to the religious leaders to report what had happened. Angels came! The earth quaked. The stone was rolled away! The body is not there!

The only reason they were not put to death is that their claims of angels, earthquakes and the resurrection was **believable**. Why would 16 soldiers lie?

The sad thing is the Roman soldiers took the money. They saw a miracle, and money was enough to keep their mouths shut. Some of you here today, you might say, "Well if I saw Christ risen from the dead I would believe as well." Well here you have 16 soldiers who saw Christ risen from the dead, and **they choose temporary comfort** over eternal salvation! **The soldiers escape was really only temporary.**

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So the soldiers **escaped execution**, but they **did not escape the final judgment**. One day those soldiers would see the risen Christ again: not for salvation, but for judgment. **How frightening to see the risen Christ but reject him** and then face him again at the Last Judgment.

Perhaps you are listening today, and you have not yet come to Christ. Don't think you are above rejecting the risen Christ. If you are lost in your sin, call out on him now! Ask him to open your eyes. Believe on him. Worship him. Give him your life, your mind, your heart, your goals and desires, and your ambitions. Lose your life in Christ that you might find it!

Conclusion

The eyewitnesses of Christ's resurrection said:

We cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard
(Acts 4:20).

And 2000 years since, we can say that all the world's religious leaders are dead.

- Muhammad is dead.
- Buddha is dead.
- Joseph Smith is dead.

But Jesus Christ is risen from the dead. He's alive! Joy to the world! He is risen! He is more than a man; he is the God-man. He is more than a leader, he is the Lord of lords and the King of all kings. He is the first and the last, the Almighty!

Come to the Lord this Resurrection Sunday morning! Jesus said come as a child. He said,

“Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (**Mt 11:28**).

Come humbly. Don't wait. This world will not satisfy you. Don't wait another second.

“God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble” (**Jas 5:5**).

Come and worship the risen Christ!