

Matthew 27:57-28:20
The Resurrection of Jesus

- I. Preface: This is the conclusion to our study in Mt (Dec 2018). I am sending it out a week prior to Easter so you can think about it as we approach Easter Sunday.
- II. Intro
 - A. You probably heard about the audio controversy last summer (2018) over whether people hear Laurel or Yanny. It went viral on the internet. It made the news and was even a few daytime talk shows. When the audio is played some people hear Laurel and others Yanny.
 - 1. And then there was the color of the dress picture. Some people saw a black and blue dress while others looking at the picture saw a white and gold dress. Same dress. People just saw it differently.
 - 2. And now the latest one – is if you say the word GULLIBLE slowly it sounds like ORANGE.
 - a. Try it and listen. Try again.
 - b. I wonder how many people actually fall for that. “GULLIBLE”...”I don’t hear orange.” “Say it again...”
 - B. In Dec 2018 Steph Curry, a basketball player, said in a podcast that he did not believe that the US ever landed on the moon. NASA offered to show him some moon rocks to help him out. ¹
 - 1. Now here’s the thing. Does he really not believe that we landed on the moon or is he spoofing us? I don’t know. He is an educated guy...went to Davidson. There are a fair amount of people who do not believe we landed on the moon. They think it is a hoax. I have some college educated friends who believe it was a hoax.
 - C. And now we come to the gospel and the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. Did it really happen or is it a hoax and we Christians are just a GULLIBLE bunch of people?
 - 1. The reason most people give for not believing in the resurrection is something along the lines of what we find in Lewis Carroll’s Through the Looking Glass where Alice meets the White Queen and the Queen asks Alice how old she is and then she tells Alice how old she is: “Now I’ll give you something to believe. I’m just one hundred and one, five months and a day.” “I can’t believe that! Says Alice....there is no use trying...one can’t believe impossible things”. ²
 - a. Most people who do not believe in the resurrection of Jesus (or landing on the moon) don’t believe it because it is impossible. It does not happen. When you are dead you are dead. Three days dead and you are dead and not coming back to life. Impossible.
 - 2. I read commentaries from different perspectives as I study. There are commentators, educated people, whose field of study and life work is in the

¹ <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/12/10/sports/stephen-curry-moon-landing.html> Steph Curry has since said that he made the statement in jest.

² Through the Looking Glass. Wool and Water. P. 251

gospel, who do not believe that Jesus rose from the dead. It is a myth. It does not happen. It is something the church made up.

- a. Here is what one commentator says: “*Matthew the evangelist did not engage in the deliberations about the reality of the resurrection. That issue became necessary for modern people only....*”³
- b. And I have to say that I think this commentator just absolutely missed Matthew’s point. I think it is very clear in our text that Matthew, even more than the other gospel writers, is engaging in the deliberation about the reality of the resurrection. It is the very heart of his ending of his gospel. And it is the central issue for his first readers. It is first and foremost for them and then us.

III. Let’s look at our text.

A. The first thing to remember is that Matthew is writing to the Christians in Antioch of Syria. These are believers who, as we saw early on in our study of Matthew, mostly originated from Jerusalem or of Jewish origin. They fled Jerusalem after the death of Stephen and were dealing with Jewish religious leaders like the ones who put Jesus to death. Those same kind of leaders with their anti-Christian views were bringing trouble to these believers. They were pursuing and persecuting them in Antioch and beyond. We read about that in Acts and Paul’s letters.

1. And so as Mt writes his gospel he has them in mind. He is writing his gospel to aid them in their faith and belief in Jesus.

B. And so he has elements in his gospel that the other gospel writers don’t. For example, in our text this morning, Matthew is the only gospel writer to tell the story of the sealing and guarding of the tomb (27:62-66) and the bribing of the guards (28:11-15) and the story that was spread regarding Jesus’ resurrection - “**His body was stolen**”. “The disciples came in the night and stole it away. That is why the tomb was empty. Jesus was not resurrected. The resurrection story is just another fraud story – a hoax (27:64) that is like the rest of the Jesus stories that are told.” That kind of “news” was being spread.

1. And **Matthew is the gospel writer who tells us** that this story - that Jesus’ body was stolen – the whole thing is a hoax – a fraud – was **wide spread** among the Jews even to this day. (28:15).
2. Now, **how believable is this story of the stealing of Jesus’ body? Well, I would say it is pretty believable.** It is the reasonable thing to believe. “*One can’t believe impossible things!*” to quote Alice.
3. And if your faith is being tested and you are facing persecution and even death for your belief in Jesus then this is the most logical position for those opposed to our faith to attack. “His body was stolen! He was not resurrected! Impossible!”

IV. And here is the kicker. I think Matthew as he writes **most** (not all) of the concluding sections of his gospel opens his readers up to the possibility that Jesus’ body may have been stolen. (**He certainly does not lock it down the other way.**) He leaves the story open to the possibility that the body of Jesus could have been stolen. This is the story his readers have all heard and are having to deal with. Listen to this story as

³ Luz..ad loc p. 603

Matthew tells it and see for yourself if Matthew does not open it up that the body of Jesus may have been stolen.

A. First notice who Matthew cites as **the witnesses to the burial of Jesus**.

1. **The 12 disciples are nowhere to be found.** The last we heard of them they took off when Jesus was arrested. Judas hung himself. We did have Peter who trailed Jesus from a distance when he was at Caiaphas' house, but he denied Jesus 3 times and the last we heard of him in this gospel - he is that he was off crying someplace.
2. Mt tells us that Joseph, a rich man from Arimathea **who is a disciple**, goes to Pilate and requests the body of Jesus. Pilate allows him to have it. Then Joseph wraps the body in linen and laid it in the tomb. And the only witnesses to this are a couple of women who were not in the tomb, but sitting away from it. Mt. 27:61
 - a. How is this lining up with the "the disciples stole the body story?" (28:13)
3. It goes along with the story that the religious leaders who are opposed to the gospel tell as well. Their story is that the body was stolen **in the night** by the disciples. Here it is evening (27:57), and **a disciple, Joseph**, has the body.
 - a. **Now in Mark**, Joseph is not called a disciple. He is identified as a "**respected member of the council**" 16:43; **Luke...**"**a good and righteous man who did not consent**" with the judgment against Jesus. **John** calls **him a secret disciple**. Matthew goes with disciple. The story the religious leaders told was that Jesus' disciples stole his body. (28:13).
 - 1) **Mt could have gone with good and r'ous man**, like Mark but he chose disciple. The story that was being told is that a disciple took the body.
 - b. **I saw a picture** on one of the Twitter hashtags of a man who took a couple of **garbage bags** and wrapped leaves up in them and shaped them into the form of a human body and put it on the roadside. It looked real. Scared people.
 - c. This Joseph disciple could have done the same thing. Bring in something wrapped in linen that looks like a body while all the while the real body of Jesus is elsewhere. That is not precluded in the story Matthew tells of Jesus' burial.
 - d. And **the two women** (and women were not considered very good witnesses back then) never really saw the body of Jesus. It was evening and they were opposite the tomb. So, the anti-Jesus/anti-resurrection crowd would say you can't count on them to verify the burial of Jesus.
4. **And then 27:62 – the next day** the chief priests and Pharisees ask Pilate if he would put a guard up around the tomb of Jesus. Pilate tells them, "You have a guard, make it secure." So it is not the legendary Roman guards, but Jewish temple guards (mall security –Barney and Gomer) who are positioned before the tomb to guard it.
 - a. Pilate says (27:65) "You have a guard. Seal it the best you can" There is every indication in Pilate's words that he did not believe these guards would succeed.⁴ Matthew's record of this implies that these guards are

⁴ Gundy ad loc

not that great. It would be easy with these guys guarding the tomb for the body to be stolen. (Afterward, their superiors provide an excuse for them. The lie. Many of you were in the military. Is this kind of thing done? No. The superiors also knew this guard was not up to the task.)

- b. And then notice, **the tomb was left unguarded a whole night** before any guard was posted. Great opportunity for some disciple to come in and steal the body. The tomb had not yet been sealed. Did anyone check to see if the body had already been stolen? Or did they just seal the tomb after the body was stolen?
- B. The day of Resurrection. Let me read how Mk and Lk and John tell a portion of this story.
1. **Luke 24:1ff** - But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they went to the tomb, taking the spices they had prepared. And they found the stone rolled away from the tomb **but when they went in they did not find the body** of the Lord Jesus.
 2. **John 20:1ff** - Now on the first day of the week Mary Magdalene came to the tomb early, while it was still dark, and saw that the stone had been taken away from the tomb. So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him." So Peter went out with the other disciple, and they were going toward the tomb. Both of them were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. And **stooping to look in**, he saw the linen cloths lying there, but he did not go in. Then Simon Peter came, following him, and **went into the tomb**.
 3. **And Mark**, whose gospel Matthew follows, says **16:5-6** - And **entering the tomb**, they saw a young man sitting on the right side, dressed in a white robe, and they were alarmed. And he said to them, "Do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has risen; he is not here. See the place where they laid him...**And they went out and fled from the tomb**
 4. Now notice how Matthew tells the story. Notice what he omits. Mt 28:6ff - 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**
 - a. The tomb is opened. The women are invited to see the place where Jesus lay, but **Matthew omits** the part about anyone **entering the tomb or looking in the tomb**.
 - b. And when he describes the women leaving the tomb, notice what he omits that Mark included. **Mark says they "went out and fled from the tomb."** Matthew simply says they departed quickly from the tomb. He leaves out the "went out" part of the tomb.
 - c. He leaves us with the impression that **they never looked in** the tomb to see if the body of Jesus was indeed there or not. They hear the word of the angel and depart with fear and joy. Matthew does not care if they looked in the tomb or not.

- C. The resurrected Jesus then meets the women along the road and tells them to tell the disciples to meet him in Galilee and there they will see me.
 - 1. Matthew's story moves more towards Jesus being resurrected, but this is only **a couple of women** who have seen Jesus. And those who are opposed to the story of Jesus' resurrection would probably write this part of the story off as a couple of over excited women. No proof.
- V. Now why in the world would Matthew write his gospel and leave the story that Jesus' body was stolen as such a possibility. Why didn't he tell his story in such a way that the lie would be put to rest? Why did he tell it this way?
 - A. I think the answer resides in the lie that the Jewish opposition was out there telling. They said that the disciples stole Jesus' body. And that is a very believable lie. And very reasonable as well.
 - 1) Matthew tells his story of the resurrection of Jesus in such a way that he does not enter the "His body was stolen" "No it was not" "Yes it was"... kind of endless argument. There is no benefit in an argument like that.
 - B. I love Bill Gaither and his hymns. I love "Because He Lives" There is a line in that gospel hymn that says, *"He lived and died to buy my pardon
An empty grave is there to prove my savior lives"*
 - C. Well for Matthew and his readers who have heard the lie and are tempted to believe it because it is the more normal thing to believe – the more reasonable thing to believe – **the empty grave is not what leads us to believe. An empty grave does not prove my savior lives. An empty grave is not the reason we suffer or will face persecution for our faith.** There is an explanation for an empty grave that does not involve the improbable resurrection of Jesus. His body was stolen!
- VI. Matthew is a great gospel writer. I love the way Matthew ends his gospel. The 11 disciples go to Galilee like the women told them to. And they go a mountain where they probably met and often sat under Jesus' teaching while he was in Galilee. And when Jesus shows up there, after his death and resurrection, some of the disciples believe. Others doubt.
 - A. We are not told why they doubt. But based on the lie story which immediately precedes this story, it may be that they believed the easy thing to believe. The lie. And so they doubted.
 - B. So how does Matthew deal with the resurrection of Jesus and why should any of us believe it? 28:18 – **"Jesus came and said to them"**. Jesus spoke to them and sent them out into the world to make disciples and teach and baptize.
 - 1. And then bam. He ends his gospel. And his readers and we are left sitting here and the question we ask ourselves now is why, **why do I believe in the resurrected Jesus? What proof is there?**
 - 2. It is because these disciples, who often fumbled their way through Matthew's gospel and had their doubts, and ran when Jesus was crucified, and was not there at his death; and most were nowhere around when he was raised on the 3rd day; all that, but: **when they all saw and heard the resurrected Jesus - they went out and did just what Jesus on this mountain told them to do.** Make disciples of all nations and teach them what he had taught them. And Matthew's audience was the product of that. They believe because the

disciples – to a man - out of belief and obedience to the risen Lord did what he commissioned them to do. They were changed men the moment the resurrected Jesus came and spoke to them.

- a. You don't go and spend your life and suffer for a myth - for something that is not true. **They saw the resurrected Jesus** and heard him speak to them. His resurrection was no hoax. An empty grave – yes it was empty because Jesus left it. But it is not the empty grave that convinced them. It was the resurrected Jesus himself who convinced them. They saw him. They heard him. They acted in obedience to his word to them, even though it lead to their own suffering and persecution. They remained true.
- b. Emily Dickenson has a poem that is her reflection on the catechism question and answer: Who wrote the Bible: Holy Men inspired by the Holy Ghost.

The Bible is an Antique Volume –

Written by Faded Men

At the suggestion of Holy Spectres⁵

- 1) No. That is exactly what it is not. These men were **once faded**...but when they saw and heard the resurrected Jesus that all changed.

VII. Let me ask you. Why are you here today? Why is the church here and the gospel gone forth in all the world?

- A. It is because the 11 men (and others, the women too) who saw the resurrected Jesus knew the truth of his resurrection and proclaimed and even suffered for it.
 1. If the moon landing had been a hoax, what are the chances that some NASA employee would have exposed it by now...50 years later? There is money and fame in that. The believable thing is that we landed on the moon.
 2. If the gospel was not real...and if Jesus' resurrection was a hoax then it would have been denied by some of those *once* wishy washy disciples by the time Matthew wrote. But it was not. It was preached by them, and they even suffered for the truth. They were changed by the resurrected Jesus.
 3. We Christians are here because at some point in our life the resurrected Jesus spoke to us through his word and the Holy Spirit and changed us.
 4. Even if you are a non-believer or skeptic – the reason you are here is because something real happened after Jesus' death. Those faded men were changed. They saw something real – the resurrected Jesus and went out and told people. None of us would even have heard this story otherwise.
 5. The church is here and Christians are here because the resurrected Jesus told his disciples that he had all authority and sent them out. They went and had no doubts. They had seen, heard and experienced the risen Lord.
 - a. Think about that this Easter. How is it that you ever came to know any of this resurrection story? Why would it have ever made it to you?

⁵ Lundin Emily Dickenson and the Art of Belief p.199-200