

***Covering Up the Truth***  
**Matthew 27:62 - 28:15; Text: 11-15**  
**By Rev. Keith Davis**

Beloved congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, as you know, the story of Christ's resurrection is revealed to us in the written accounts of four men: Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. These men were followers of Jesus and they were among the many who saw the risen Christ in the flesh.

Although the accounts they wrote of the resurrection were four different accounts, each *unique*, each told from a slightly different perspective, each written to a slightly different audience, the fact is, these are not four *differing* accounts of Christ's resurrection.

These are not four *contradictory* accounts or four *conflicting* accounts. Nor is it accurate to say (as many are fond of suggesting) that their resurrection accounts are merely each individual apostle's *perception* of what happened that Easter morning.

In this way, people have tried to liken the apostle's accounts of the resurrection to what happens at the scene of a crime or an accident. The police arrive (or the Crime Scene Investigators arrive) and they interview the eye witnesses; they gather and examine the physical evidence; and then they try to piece together what really happened (like a jigsaw puzzle).

The problem with that approach, of course, if that even after all the piecing-together is done, the truth of what *really* happened could still be a mystery; all you have is speculation. But that's *not the case* when it comes to the resurrection. The apostle's accounts are neither *conjecture* nor *speculation*, nor are they (as others suggest) wild stories driven by fanatical devotion.

Rather, what we read in each Gospel account is the unadulterated truth of what happened that Easter morn. We know this, on the one hand, because we believe in the inspiration of God's Word—that God's Holy Spirit inspired these men to write their accounts, and God does not lie.

But we know that the Apostle's account is also true and reliable based on what else happened that morning. For the actions of the enemies of Christ--the fact that they are in "full conspiracy

mode” once again; the fact that they’re doing everything in their power to hide the truth, to squelch the truth, to cover up the truth of the resurrection—that also proves that what the Apostle’s recorded was indeed true.

As we know, this is the way the devil works. Through his agents of deception, the devil seeks to cover up the truth of God’s Word; he seeks to cast doubt over what the Apostles say; the devil convinces people to look at Easter as a great myth, as an intricate fabrication of the church.

For everyone knows that dead men do not rise from the grave. Or as the liberal theologians would have us believe, Christ’s resurrection was a spiritual resurrection. Christ’s lives today, in so far as the memory and Spirit of Christ remains alive in us. And so the devil attack against Word of truth carries on to this very day.

So here in Matthew 28, we’re going to consider the original attack on the truth, the original conspiracy and cover up: Here, **God’s Enemies Conspire to Cover-up the Truth of Christ’s Resurrection**. Notice two points: God’s Enemies are:

- 1. Forced to Face the Truth;*
- 2. Content to Spread the Lie.*

**1. God’s Enemies are Forced to Face the Truth :** In the opening verse of our text (in vs. 11), we see that the resurrection has already taken place, and now two different groups, two different parties are on their way to report to others what they have seen; to report what has happened.

We read that the women were on *their* way. Where were they going? If you read the parallel accounts in Mark, Luke and John, then you’d read that the angel in the tomb told the women to go and tell the others that Jesus was not there, but that he had risen just as He said.

Then Matthew tells us (vv. 9-10) that as the ladies were leaving the tomb, Jesus greeted them on their way. They fell at his feet and worshipped Him; after that Jesus also commanded them to go and tell the disciples; to tell them to go to Galilee where they would see Him.

So ironically, the women were the first to spread the news of Christ's resurrection; they were used by God to bring the good news to the downcast disciples. But what about the other group mentioned here in vs. 11? Who else is on their way to report what happened?

It's the soldiers. As we learned back in chapter 27: 62ff. the chief priests and Pharisees convinced Pilate to post a guard at the tomb to ensure that no one would come and steal the body of Jesus. So Pilate agreed and he ordered soldiers to stand guard at the tomb, and he even ordered the guards to put a seal on the large stone that was rolled in front of the tomb.

Now as it turns out, these soldiers were actually a very privileged bunch; as far as we can tell from the Biblical accounts, these were the only people who were there when the stone was actually rolled away from the tomb.

Look back at chapter 28: 2-3. It states, *There was a violent earthquake, for the angel of the Lord came down from heaven, and going to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat on it. His appearance was like lighting (the radiance of being in the presence of God) and his clothes were white as snow. The guards were so afraid of him that they shook and became like dead men.*

Now I think it bears mentioning that neither the soldiers nor the women actually saw Jesus physically leave the tomb. We assume that Jesus (in His new risen body) passed through his grave clothes and the tomb made of rock much like he would later pass through the door into the room with His disciples.

So the angel rolled the stone away not to let Jesus out, but to reveal (to the soldiers and women) that Jesus was not there; that He had indeed been risen from the dead. I think an astounding detail of that first Easter morning is that there was only one group of people who saw everything from the start.

There was only one group of people who *knew* and who *saw* how the stone was rolled away. They felt the earthquake; they saw the angel; they witnessed and experienced the unmistakable power of God; even though these were strong, battle tested soldiers, men carrying swords and

spears, trusted guards sent by Pilate himself, these men quivered and shook in their war boots; they were so stunned by what they had seen, that these soldiers lay as dead men on the ground.

They might not have understood all that had happened, or how it happened, but they knew beyond a shadow of a doubt that the crucified and deceased body of Jesus—the body which was laid to rest in that tomb Friday evening, was now gone.

And most importantly it had vanished without any human intervention, without any foul play. They had witnessed something super-natural. They had witnessed something truly divine. And just as the women go on their way to tell what they had seen, so, too, the soldiers go on their way to tell what they had seen.

So isn't that an interesting juxtaposition? Both parties who left the tomb that morning had essentially the same story, didn't they? Both the women and the soldiers *knew the truth*. They both were going to bear witness to that truth to others, to tell them that the tomb was empty.

They were going to bear witness to the fact that Christ's body was not stolen: the soldiers knew that the body of Christ was not spirited away by the disciples in a mock resurrection; and the women were now assured that Christ's body was not hidden or stolen by grave robbers or others who might have attempted one final act of humiliation against their Lord.

However the guards went into the city *to tell their news to the chief priests*. Verse 11 Matthew assures us that *they told them everything--**everything** that had happened!* It's very important that we understand that point. We're not told that the guards *withheld* information. We're not told that the guards *changed their story* to spare themselves ridicule and embarrassment by the chief priests. They told the truth, just as it had happened.

This is an important point, because Matthew is writing to a Jewish audience. That's very likely why he alone records these details. He wants the Jews to know that there were other *eye witnesses* to the truth. He wants them to know that these *unbiased* soldiers saw the whole thing.

Not only that, but their religious leaders—the chief priests heard the truth as well. And you know what’s really amazing? The chief priests believed them. We don’t see the chief priests laughing this off, or shooting down their story, or telling the soldiers that they must have been delusional.

Instead, they appear to accept and believe the story which the soldiers told. That’s the real irony of this passage. God’s own enemies—*the chief priest and the elders, the very ones who were responsible for arranging the arrest and crucifixion of Jesus Christ*—they are now forced to face the truth that the tomb is empty, that Jesus had risen just as he said.

But because their hearts are so hardened against Christ, their belief does not lend itself to repentance and true faith. They’ve already seen many miraculous works of Jesus and remained unaffected. You may recall the final words spoken in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus: Luke 16:31 *'If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.'* Jesus did rise from the dead; they know it, but they do not believe!

What poetic justice, when you think about it. God has a way of making a fool out of his enemies; God causes them to swallow their pride. He puts them in their place. God shows his enemies how weak they are when compared to His strength, how futile their plans and conspiracies are when compared to His sovereign, unchangeable plan of salvation. He shows how vain it is to stand in God’s way and prevent the glory of God from being revealed.

That’s such a vital encouragement to us, congregation, because in the world in which we live, it can seem like God’s glory and God’s agenda is the furthest thing from view. We are fed a steady diet of humanity’s agenda; it seems that we have to stand by the sidelines and watch helplessly as secularism wins over a growing percentage of the population.

And in many social and political and moral issues, we see God’s enemies advancing their agenda; we see immorality taking hold and the so called ‘religious right’ is marginalized; and because of our beliefs, Christianity is stereotyped as extremism.

The Christian faith is called a religion of hate, a religion which encourages bigotry, homophobia, racism, male-chauvinism, and it encourages a general disregard for the findings of science. All this is a part of the lies and deceptions of Satan.

But why is there such bitter hatred and vehemence towards Christ's church, towards the Gospel, towards the teachings of Christianity? Because the devil knows the truth, and as Paul says in Romans 1, the spirit of fallen man knows the truth, but man suppresses the truth in unrighteousness, and the devil plays on that.

The devil is invested in the lie. He's invested in covering over the truths of God that He has made self evident throughout the world. Darwinism and neo-Darwinism is the lie the devil uses to cover over the truth of the Creation and intelligent design.

In fact, I just saw a 5 minute video clip of an upcoming movie entitled *Expelled*; it's a movie produced by Ben Stein, a speech writer for two former Presidents and a very well known, very well respected figure in Washington and in Hollywood, he's producing a movie that tells a story that no one wants to be told—that there are world renown scientists and teachers and professors who have lost their jobs, their careers because they have tried to teach that there is scientific data which supports intelligent design in human beings and creation.

But they have been blackballed and silenced. He queries, why is it that politics and human sexuality and other major hot button issues can be discussed taught and discussed in the class room, but creationism is one area where free speech is not allowed. It's because of fear. Fear of the truth. God's enemies know the truth, and they will stop at nothing to deny it, to hide, it, to cover up. That's exactly what we see next in our text.

## **2) *God's Enemies are Content to Believe a Lie.***

***God's Enemies are Content to Believe a Lie.*** Verse 12 tells how the chief priests, after hearing the story from the soldiers, after having the truth set squarely before them, call a meeting to devise a plan of action.

It says they *synagogued* together; they met together for the purpose of concocting a *conspiracy*. They are trying to figure out how to do damage control, how to keep the truth from getting out—at least as far as they're concerned. They can deal with the disciples spreading their stories, but they don't want their own soldiers going around *verifying* what the disciples saw.

So, what's their strategy? It's very simple. They're going to bribe their way through this. That's what they're used to by now. They used 30 pieces of silver to buy the false witness of Judas Iscariot, to advance the conspiracy against Jesus which led to his death.

Now, they will use silver again in an attempt to keep Jesus dead. They will simply buy the false testimony *of these guards*. So the chief priests and elders gave these soldiers a large sum of money, and they command them (not requested, but commanded them): *You are to say this: Jesus' disciples came along at night while we were sleeping and they stole his body away.*

So, all the soldiers had to do was spread the lie; to start filling the city with their version of what happened. They would tell the Jews that Jesus' body was stolen by the disciples (never mind that the tomb was under heavy and constant guard by order of Pilate. Never mind that the Jews would know that guards don't fall asleep for fear of death).

But as we know, petty details like that will not stop a lie from being believed. There are always people who are willing to believe the conspiracy theory, who are ready and willing to trade in the truth for a lie.

Now there can be no doubt, that over the next few days in Jerusalem, the Jews heard murmurs of *both* accounts of the resurrection. We can be fairly certain that almost everyone *heard* the women's account; in fact, as Jesus over the next several weeks, Jesus appeared to hundreds of people, so Jerusalem must have been buzzing with reports of these sightings.

But we can also rest assured that the soldiers were getting their lies out here. Matthew attests to this himself. It's believed that Matthew wrote this gospel account over two decades after the

resurrection and ascension of Christ; so he adds in vs. 15 that the soldier's story *has been widely circulated among the Jews to this very day!*

And so the Jews themselves had heard both accounts of the story, but to that day (and still to this day) many of them preferred to believe the lie of the soldiers, over the truth declared by the Apostle's. But as we said before, people are willing to believe a lie, especially when the truth collides with their world and life view; especially when the truth convicts and condemns them.

But you see, that's just the way it is with man's sinful nature; that's the way it is with God's enemies. This is just another example of why we Christians can't *reason our way* to the truth with an unbeliever. Because the sheer burden of proof, sheer evidence is not enough to convince someone of the truth of the Good News.

Many people try that approach to Christianity and the Gospel; they think that if we can prove that the preponderance of Biblical and historical evidence points to the validity of a historical Jesus who really did live, and die, and rise from the dead, that then people will be convinced of the truthfulness and integrity of Christianity and then they will follow Jesus.

But again, that's not the way fallen human mind and heart works. Man's sin has blinded him to the truth, even though the truth is staring him all in the face every moment of every day. But the fact is, *those who are enemies of God don't care about evidence.*

They don't care about truth. They don't care about facts. They trade it all in for the lie. And that's why on Easter Sunday we have parents taking their kids to the park or to the mall for Easter egg hunts, or to see the Easter bunny.

Never mind that the Easter bunny and decorating eggs, and eating jelly beans and chocolate eggs have absolutely nothing to do with Christ or His resurrection. Since when did the truth ever matter? Since when do we allow the truth to get in the way of a good time, a little Holiday fun?

People ask, “Why can’t those Christians stop trying to ruin everyone’s fun, why don’t they try to loosen up and live a little? After all, what’s the harm? It’s all innocent fun”? But again, congregation it all come down to the truth verses the lie.

Even in seemingly “innocent” ways the world denies the resurrection. We see it in not so subtle ways as well. If Sunday is any indication, a day which the New Testament church set aside to worship in celebration of the Lord’s resurrection, the world has succeeded in secularizing the Lord’s Day, in minimizing it’s importance so that now, if anything, Sunday is **man’s day**, a day for sport, a day for relaxing, a day for us. That’s a vestige of the lie of the resurrection.

But beloved, lest we forget, *we* can contribute to the lie as well. Don’t forget, Christ calls us, by our own lives, by our own conduct and behavior, to bear witness before the world that Christ is alive. Sure, we may say that we believe the truth—that Christ rose from the grave.

But as God’s people we have to couple that testimony, that confession with a life of good works. We have to live out the truth of Christ’s resurrection. Christ rose *to new life*, so that we could have new life. Christ rose from the tomb to give us victory over sin and death and hell.

As John writes in I John, we can’t claim to believe the truth, but then live out a lie. If we truly believe that Jesus Christ rose from the dead, that our Lord burst forth from death’s dark prison, that He took captivity captive and destroyed sin’s hold over us, then we’ve got to live in the power of Christ’s resurrection everyday.

Because if you and I don’t, if you and keep falling prey to the same temptations, if we keep falling into the same cesspool of sin time and again, then there’s only one conclusion that can be reached: it’s that we don’t believe the truth; we don’t believe in the power of Christ’s resurrection, and to deny that is to deny the resurrection itself.

So let’s not fall prey to the devil’s schemes. Let’s not assist the devil in spreading lies. Let’s spread the truth, and tell the truth and live out the truth of Christ’s resurrection. Amen.