

Matthew 28:11-15

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[0 : 00] I invite you to turn with me to the passage we just read, Matthew chapter 28, beginning in verse 11. And as you turn there, I have a goal today.

It's good to set goals, right? This passage is about Christ's opponents trying to discredit the resurrection.

And so my goal is to bolster your confidence in Christ Jesus. Or, if you don't yet have confidence in him, if you don't yet know him and are sure about him, to show you why you ought to consider placing your confidence in Jesus Christ.

And that's my goal today, because here Matthew has just presented to us the report about the death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth. And if what he has reported is true, that's the most important news.

The most important fact of history. If it's true, that means that the man who claimed to be God the Son backed it up by rising from the dead.

[1 : 22] If that's true, we have to listen to him. To the one who trampled death underfoot. There's no other option. There's no hearing that news, right?

Hey, did you hear about the guy who's not dead anymore? And just shrugging that off. You know, someday, I suspect, we'll find the cure for cancer.

Or more likely, we'll find multiple cures for multiple kinds of cancer. But just run with me here, right? The team that finds that, right? We're going to give them the Nobel Prize. Time is going to call them, you know, people of the year.

We're going to give them the Presidential Medal of Freedom. Every other accolade that we can give them. But the people we've already lost to cancer, it won't be good news for them.

And people will still die in car accidents and from heart attacks. Right? The team that develops that cure. They'll still die.

[2 : 27] Not of cancer anymore, but of something. Right? So that news story. Cancer defeated. The news story of the year. Of the decade. It's not the ultimate good news.

But if the claims of Christianity are true. If something supernatural really happened in Jerusalem 2,000 years ago.

If Jesus really rose from the grave. Actually. Historically. Factually. And if he offers resurrection. To all who repent and believe. That is the ultimate good news. So the question is. Is it true? Is it fact?

And that's what his opponents are trying to discredit in this passage. And that's what we'll examine today. So pray with me. And let's consider.

[3 : 30] Is it true? Lord our God. As we come to your word. We know that it reveals.

That you are. The God of truth. And as we examine. This most important fact. We ask Lord. That you would. Help us. Teach us. Would you guide us into truth. So that we may. Rest our confidence. On Jesus Christ.

Amen. As we set out on this question today. About. The historicity. Of the resurrection. I want to dispel. Before we begin.

Even. A common misconception. And it has to do with the word. Faith. Right. That's an important word. In the Christian. Life. It's an important word. In the idea.

[4 : 28] Of religion. In general. When the Bible. Says. Faith. I mean. Christians. When we say. Faith. I don't think.

We mean. What a lot of people. Think we mean. Faith. And that's. Particularly. Because. The world. Around us. Makes. On one hand.

Makes bad assumptions. And on the other hand. We. Often. Don't do a great job. Of explaining. You know. Ourselves. So. When our culture. Uses the word. Faith. In a religious context. They tend to use it. In one of two ways. First. In place. Of the word. Religion. Right. So and so. Practices. Such and such. A faith. Right. This person. Practices. The Buddhist faith. Or. They mean. Blind faith. Right.

[5 : 22] Oh. It must be nice. To have faith. Like that. Right. Believing. Without evidence. Right. And I think. That those. Those definitions. Sometimes. Color. The thinking. Of people.

Inside the church. As well. Right. When someone. Has a hard question. Or is doubting. Sometimes. You'll hear. Oh. You just got to have more faith. As if that. Answers their questions. Right. And that can be a caricature. Especially. Our culture believes. That's the caricature. Of. Christianity. Right. Check your brain. At the door. Believe. Without evidence. Or. Sometimes. It appears. Within the church. Right. Don't ask questions. That's a sign. That you're. You know. You're out of line. But that is not. At all. What the Bible. Talks about. When it speaks. Of faith. When the apostle. Paul. Says. By grace. You have been saved. Through faith. He's not.

[6 : 18] Commending. The Christians. In Ephesus. For having. Turned off. Their brains. Faith. As the Bible. Uses it. Is reasoned.

Confidence. In someone. Specifically. The Lord. It's like this. In the Navy. In the Coast Guard. When a commanding officer. Qualifies. Someone. As underway. Officer of the deck. That commanding officer. Is saying. Based. On. Your performance. And my examination. Of your ability. I am. Entrusting. You. With the safety. Of this ship. And her crew. I'm putting my faith. In you. In the home. Parents. Interview. A nanny. Or a babysitter. Right. They call for references. They deliberate.

[7 : 11] And then they say. We believe. You are. Trustworthy. And capable. We're going to. Entrust. Our children. To your care. We're placing. Our faith in you. That's what the Bible. Is talking about. When it talks about faith. A reasoned. Thoughtful. Thinking. Deliberative. Confidence. Where we say. I believe. That the tomb. Is empty. So if that's the case. I'm going to listen. To Jesus. And it means. That he is the savior. That he claims to be. So I'm going to cast myself. Into his mercy. And trust my life to him. That's what biblical. Faith. Is. Not blind faith. It's eyes wide open. Faith. Not thoughtless. Faith.

[8 : 06] It's reasoned. Confidence. Not a faith. Tradition. It is a personal. Reliance. On Christ. Because he has proven himself.

And so if we're going to do that. There are two questions. That we need to answer today. That spring from this passage. First. Was the tomb empty? If so. It's the best news ever. And we have to listen to him. Was the tomb empty? And secondly. If so. Why? Was it empty? And so it is not my goal. To whip you up. Into an emotional frenzy. I don't want to drum up. False. Exuberance. Or confidence. Or conversion. It is my goal. To give you. Fact. And reason. That you may. Honestly. Confidently. Rest. Your souls. On Christ. So those are the two questions.

[9 : 05] Was the tomb empty? And if so. Why? First. What? Was the tomb empty? I'll start with three.

Historical facts. That set the stage. These are not contested facts. Or controversial. At all. Historians agree on them. Christians. And atheists. Alike. Agree. On these. These ideas. First. Historians agree. That there was. A first century. Jewish rabbi. From Nazareth. Called Jesus. Jesus. Whatever it was. That he did. He wasn't a legend. There are too many. Accounts of his life. From too many. Of his contemporaries. For him to have just been. A mythological figure. There was a real man. Secondly. Historians. All agree.

[10:00] That Jesus. Was crucified. In Jerusalem. By the Roman government. Obviously. Christians report that. We've been reading the Bible's. Account of it. Also. The Jewish.

Writers. Record it. And the Roman writers. Record it. It's not. Something that we. Debate. He was crucified. And historians agree.

That the followers of Jesus. Whether they were right or wrong. We'll talk about that later. Whether they were right or wrong. They immediately. Began teaching. That his.

That he was. Raised from the dead. Immediately. That teaching. Created. The Christian movement. It wasn't an idea.

That developed. Over time. It didn't get added in. At a later date. The resurrection. Was the centerpiece. And the fuel. Of the Christian religion. From day one.

[10:57] So. Those facts. Are not. In dispute. First. That he was a real. Question. A real person. That he was crucified. By the Roman government.

And that his. Followers. Immediately. Began preaching. That he wasn't in the grave. That he had risen. Now. If you'd like. To talk about the documentation. Of those facts. I would be happy.

To point you. To primary sources. Those three facts. Don't yet. Answer. However. The question. Right. Does it. Does this mean. That the tomb. Is empty. Well. There are only. Three. Interested parties. Right.

Groups. Who have skin. In the game. Who might have had. Anything to do. With Christ. In his tomb. The first is. Rome. Right. Roman soldiers. By the decree.

[11:50] Of their governor. Pontius Pilate. They were the ones. Who executed. Jesus. So Pilate. Has an interest here. Also. The chief priests. Right. They were the ones. Who got this going.

In the first place. And then there were. Jesus own disciples. No. No one else. Really has an interest. In the tomb of Jesus. Right. Certainly not enough.

To mess with Rome. Right. Mess with the Roman soldiers. Mess with the Roman seal. Defy. Pilate. And. They'd also be. Upsetting. The chief priests. And the Pharisees. Who really would like.

To keep Jesus down. So. If you're going to mess. With that tomb. You're going to be ruffling. A lot of feathers. And remember. These people just got. Someone crucified.

Right. No one else is going to touch this. So. Jesus. Was truly. Crucified by Rome. And there are only. Three parties. Who could possibly.

[12:44] Have been involved. With this report. Of an empty tomb. Pilate. He wouldn't want this. Coming up again. He finally relented. And allowed Christ. To be crucified.

To avoid a riot. He doesn't want this. Coming back up. And obviously. The priests. Didn't want. The tomb to be empty. Right. Jesus dead and buried.

Is a victory for them. Right. They don't. They don't want this coming back. They're the ones who asked. For the guard. To begin with. Leaving only. Jesus disciples. If anyone.

Messed. With the tomb. It would. Only be them. Now. Of course. They're going to report. That the tomb is empty. But is that the case? Here's what's really interesting.

Both. Of the other parties. Report. That the tomb is empty. Don't they? Look with me. At verse 11. While they were going.

[13:41] Behold. Some of the guard. Went into the city. And told. The chief priests. All that had taken place. Rome reports. That the tomb is empty.

Look with me. Verse 12. And when they had assembled. With the elders. And taken counsel. They gave. A sufficient sum of money. To the soldiers. And said. Tell people.

His disciples. Came by night. And stole him away. While we were asleep. And if this comes. To the governor's ears. We will satisfy him. And keep you out of trouble. So what are the priests.

Also admitting. Right. They're. They're the ones. Who want him dead. They want him to stay that way. They're the ones. Who asked for the guard. And right. If Jesus had.

Risen from the dead. Right. What. What an. Absolute. Indictment. Against them. Who had had him crucified. Right. But their response. In verse 12.

[14:36] Is so telling. Right. For. First of all. It doesn't make sense. Right. This is really the only option. They have available to themselves. If that tomb is empty. Right.

They can't admit. That it was a miracle. And they already know. That nobody else. Would have touched it. So they have to say. That it was the disciples. Does that make sense though?

A number of pastors. And apologists. Have hypothesized. What that conversation. The conversation. The conversation. That they paid the soldiers. To have. What that would have looked

like.

Let's do a thought experiment here. Here's what the priests. Were paying the soldiers to do. Here's the conversation. Between Pilate. And the soldier. On the report.

Right. Pilate says. All right. What. What happened to the tomb? And the soldier says. Hey. I'm really embarrassed. To tell you. But. We all fell asleep.

[15:36] And they came. And stole the body. How many of them were you? It was like a dozen.

Right. Yeah. Yeah. Like a dozen. We.

And you all fell asleep. Yeah. Everybody fell asleep. Yeah. Sound. Asleep. Yeah.

You. Sleep that well outdoors. Right. You didn't bring beds with you. Outdoors. No beds. I mean.

You fell. All of you.

Fell so sound asleep. That eleven guys. Came through the graveyard. Stepped over. Your sleeping bodies. Broke the seal.

Rilled that huge stone away. Went in. Grabbed the body. Carried him back out. Over your sleeping bodies. And not one of you heard it.

[16:30] Yep. Yep. And you did all of this. Knowing. The strict consequences.

That the Roman military. Has for. For falling asleep at your post. Like you're not new here. Right.

Yeah. I mean like. I'm just. I'm just so embarrassed. Pilot. I'm just so embarrassed.

Okay. Okay. One last question. You said you're asleep? Yeah. Yeah. We were asleep. Then how do you know what happened?

The story. This is the only story. That's available. To the priests.

Because no one else is touching it. This is the only story. That's available to the priests. And it's nonsense. It doesn't bear up to the lightest scrutiny.

[17:35] Second. If the tomb. Were. Not. Empty. You would expect. A very different. Kind. Of response.

From his enemies. Wouldn't you? Right. If they believe. That the tomb. Wasn't empty. What would they do? Would they. Decide to concoct a lie. About why it was empty?

If they could simply. Walk to the tomb. And say. Yeah. Not empty. That would be the end. Of Christianity. Smothered. Before it ever. Had breath.

But in fact. The excuse that they gave. That the disciples. Stole the body. That is an admission. That the tomb. Is empty. We're in the middle.

Of an election. Cycle. Right now. Could you imagine. Getting. Donald Trump. And Joe Biden. To agree on it.

[18:36] On any facts. Right this moment. Or maybe even worse. You know. Your friend on. Facebook. One who thinks. That Trump can do no wrong. And others. Who think that.

Joe Biden is flawless. Right. To get. Them to agree. On a major idea. Right. That would be. A settled fact. And that's what.

That's exactly. What's going on here. The disciples said. The tomb is empty. He is risen. And the priest said. The tomb is empty. Because they stole him.

However it happened. Whatever the cause. These two. Waring factions. Agree. That the tomb is empty. But the second question.

That's a little bit harder. Right. Why. Was the tomb empty. Right. If the priest agreed. That the tomb. Was empty.

[19:37] They still didn't believe. That it was a miracle. At least they didn't want. Anybody else to believe. That it was a miracle. And they wanted. The disciples. To take the fall for this.

They wanted to blame them. For stealing. The body. Now. Is that likely. I think not. First.

Because the disciples. Didn't. Actually expect. An empty tomb. They weren't looking forward. For that. Right. Peter. Back in chapter 16.

Told Jesus. Excuse me. Told Jesus. That he would never let him. Be crucified. Right. He wasn't expecting. An empty tomb here. The disciples. They weren't expecting.

Jesus. To reign. Victorious. Over death. As he was arrested. In the garden. What did they do there?

They didn't stand and watch. And be like. Watch this. No. They fled.

[20:35] They weren't confident. Even Peter. Who witnessed. The trial. Right. He wasn't. He was there. Denying Jesus. Not saying. Just you wait and see.

And the women. Who went to the grave. Who found it open. Right. What were they going there. To do. They were not going there. To witness the resurrection.

They were there. In their minds. To anoint. A dead body. So first. They weren't even expecting. An empty tomb. It doesn't make sense. That they would be the ones. Who caused it. Second. For the reasons. We already mentioned. That hypothetical conversation. Between pilot and the soldier. The sheer absurdity. Of that report. The disciples. Had stolen. The body.

[21 : 31] It's unbelievable. Not credible. That they managed. To do that. To sneak in. Roll away the burial stone. Steal the body. And get away. All under the noses.

The Roman guard. Not. Not possible. And even more preposterous. Would be the idea. That they were able. To somehow overpower. The guard. And make it happen. And third.

And most important. Is what they did next. Right. What have they been up to. Until now.

Right. They. You know. They haven't gotten it. Peter in chapter 16. They're still not. Expecting.

Expecting. A resurrection. Right. These are not exactly. Men of action. Up till now. Right.

The. The most active thing. They have done recently. Is. Chapter 26. Right. Then all the disciples.

Left him. And fled. That's like the most active thing.

[22 : 27] They've done. Recently. Maybe that. And Peter. Denying him. Three times. They're not people. Who expect a resurrection. They're not people.

Who are bold enough. To fake. A resurrection. Nor do they have the ability. To do it. But then.

When they see. The empty tomb. When they've seen.

The risen Christ. When they've been convinced. What then do they do. Where once they were.

Timid.

And fearful. They are now. Bold. And forceful. Where once they had. No idea. That the resurrection. Was coming. Soon.

We will. Start a sermon series. In the book of Acts. And we will see. That the apostles. Focus.

Everything. On the empty tomb. The resurrection of Christ.

[23 : 24] Where once they didn't even have it in their minds. Now it is their theme. And where once they feared. The authorities. Ran away. Suddenly.

Suddenly. They are going to be. Walking. Walking. Right. Back. Into Jerusalem. Into the temple courts. Preaching. The resurrection. Of Jesus Christ.

Day. By day. By day. This is the biggest. 180. You've ever seen. In your life. And you may.

Ask. Well. Maybe they're wrong about it. Maybe they were. Very well convinced. But. Maybe they were just wrong. Maybe it was grief. Grief brought them to remember.

That Jesus had said. You know. Oh. I am going to. Rise. From the dead. Would that make them.

Grow a backbone. Like this. Maybe they did steal the body.

[24 : 21] Because. They started remembering it. Well. If that's the case. If you believe that. Right. You also have to believe. This.

The apostles. All. Died. With the exception of John. We think he probably died in prison. All. Died. Martyrs. Deaths. And so. If we believe that they really did. Fake the resurrection. We. We are saying then.

That they. Died for a lie. Now. It's a sad truth. That many people have died. For a lie. Right. Nazi soldiers. Died.

For a lie. The Jonestown cult. Died. For a lie. Many. Have been deceived. Throughout history. And died.

[25 : 18] For a lie. But that's just it. They were deceived. If the empty tomb. Was a hoax. The apostles.

Knew it. And each died for it. Anyway. Think. Of yourself. Perhaps.

You find yourself. Down the line. You've concocted. Concocted a hoax. I don't know what it is. That you would concoct. But. You've concocted a hoax. That puts you at the center. Of a new movement.

You're raking in the attention. The accolades. And the money. And incidentally. That is the exact opposite. Of what the. Apostles get. For this. If it's a lie. It's not one that profited them.

At all. Paul recounts. In 2nd Corinthians 11. Here's what he got. For his troubles. Of proclaiming.

[26 : 14] The resurrection. Of Jesus Christ. He says. Five times. I received. At the hands of the Jews. The 40 lashes. Less one. Three times. I was beaten. With rods. Once. I was stoned.

Three times. I was shipwrecked. A night. And a day. I was adrift at sea. On frequent journeys. In danger from rivers. Danger from robbers. Danger from my own people. Danger from Gentiles.

Danger in the city. Danger in the wilderness. Danger at sea. Danger from false brothers. In toil. And hardship. Through many. A sleepless night. In hunger.

And thirst. Often without food. In cold. And exposure. All of that. For preaching. The resurrection. Of Christ. There's not a lie. That profited them. Right. Where do I sign up.

For that. But even if they had. A life. A life. Of wealth. And ease. From the hoax. All but one.

[27 : 09] Are martyred. For their faith. If the apostles. Died for a lie. It was not like. Nazi soldiers. Dying for a lie. If the apostles.

Died for a lie. It was their own lie. Something. Transformed them. From doubting.

From ignoring. Jesus message. About resurrection. To proclaiming it. At astronomical cost. To themselves. Something transformed them.

From abandoning Jesus. To protect their own lives. To abandoning their lives. To protect the message. Of his resurrection. Would you face down.

You. Today. Would you face down. Death. Would you go. To the chopping block. To a cross.

[28 : 07] For a lie. That you knew was a lie. Because you were the one. Who fabricated it. Would you do that? A lie that.

Brought you. A lifetime. Not of fame and fortune. But of suffering. And poverty. Would you do it? Would you follow through?

To a cross. risk their lives, and give their lives to protect the gospel.

As John Stott once said, hypocrites and martyrs are not made of the same stuff. Was the tomb empty? That's our first question today.

Yes. Warring factions all agreed, shook hands, so to speak, about that fact. Obviously, the disciples proclaimed the tomb was empty.

[29 : 38] So, too, did the priests. Question remains, why was the tomb empty? How many of you would give your lives for a lie?

A lie that brought you nothing but suffering. And then death. And how many of you? So, could you convince ten other people to do the same?

Think in your head, who are the people you could convince to die for a lie? Who are they? What are we to do with this?

As I said at the outset, I have a goal. If you belong to Christ, I want to solidify and confirm your confidence in him.

Matthew has shown us here the world's testimony against the resurrection. And it's not very strong. Right?

[30 : 44] That story that the soldiers had to bring to Pilate is laughable. Literally, you laughed at it. Friends, Christ is risen.

Your confidence is true. Your life is safe with the one who trampled death underfoot. Rejoice. Rejoice in him.

And take heart. And if you're considering Jesus, I want you to wrestle with this.

There is no doubt that Jesus existed. That the Romans crucified him. And that the disciples immediately began preaching his resurrection. And there is also, no doubt, by the testimony of his disciples and by his enemies, that the tomb was empty.

All that is left to you to decide is why. Is it because he was who he said he was?

[31 : 51] And did just what he promised? As his followers testified to with their very lives. Or was it all a ruse?

An elaborate, costly hoax. That cost its founders their lives. For no reason and for no gain.

And for all of us. As we consider the empty tomb. If that tomb is empty. We have to listen to him.

To everything he has to say. We have to listen to him. When he says, I tell you. Unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees.

You will never enter the kingdom of heaven. And we have to listen to him. And we have to listen to him. When he says, the son of man came not to be served.

[32 : 56] But to serve. And to give his life as a ransom for many. And we have to listen to him. When he says, I am the way. The truth.

And the life. No one comes to the father except through me. We have to listen to everything he says. And.

We have to recognize. How the empty tomb changes. Every circumstance. Of my life. When things don't go my way.

When I am disappointed. And friends. Are we not all disappointed. Day by day. In various things. Big and small. When things don't go my way.

The empty tomb. Puts things in perspective. It's true for little things. Right. Last week. The football team. I root for. Lost kind of a heartbreaking. Last moment.

[33 : 54] Goal line stand situation. And. I was watching the game with Tim. And I was like. Hey man. Christ is still risen. Right. It's. It's true in the little things.

What's in perspective. But it's true also. In the big things. When we lose. Loved ones. We do not grieve.

As those. Who have no hope. Because Christ is risen. Or when I am slandered. And insulted. I. I can say man.

That really stinks. But like. In the grand scheme of things. The tomb is empty. And I'm found in Christ. And so no matter the disappointment.

No longer. No matter the loss. No matter how great. Our troubles are. No matter what. Comes my way.

[34 : 49] Or what I witness. In this life. Christ. Is still. Risen. Forever. Over. The resurrection. Also puts my goals.

In perspective. No matter how. Big. My ambitions. No matter how. Tightly. I hold to them. And whether or not.

I achieve them. Think. Yourself. What do you hope. To achieve. What are you gunning for?

There is no. Bigger. Victory. Than the one. That is found here. As Jesus Christ.

Trampled death. Underfoot. My ambitions. Pale. In comparison. It puts.

[35 : 53] My. Ambitions. In check. Doesn't it? There is. Nothing. Bigger. For me. To be associated with. Further.

When death. Comes for me. When the grave. Opens. Its iron. Jaws. And friends. Especially younger friends. The reaper.

Cometh. Might not feel like it today. But life is a vapor. It is so short. When the grave.

Opens. Its jaws. To take you. What did you just sing? What did we. As a congregation. Just sing? Unto the grave.

What shall we sing? Christ. He lives. Christ. He lives. Friends.

[36 : 54] I hope. That your faith. In Jesus Christ. Is not blind. I hope. That it is a. Reasoned. Confident. Glad. Expectation.

That he. Who began. A good. Work. Will complete it. I hope. I hope. I hope. That you find. Rest. No matter. Where you are.

In life. Or where you go. I find. I hope. That you find. Rest. In the living. Arms. Of our.

Risen. Savior. France. Let's pray. Let's pray. Lord.

I'm grateful. That you have not called us. Turn off the brains. That you gave us. That instead.

[37 : 53] You have given us. Testimony. Lord.

That you have called us. To put our confidence. In Christ. For good reason. Lord.

I pray. That you would. Solidify. In our hearts. Not by. Emotional manipulation. Not by.

Clever. Words. Or anything else. But by the powerful. Testimony. Of the truth. Of your word. Lord.

Solidify.

In us. A trust. In Jesus Christ. May our hope. Rest. On him. Pray all these things.

[38 : 56] Confidently. In the name of our king. Amen. Amen.