

Mission Possible 7-16-06

Matthew 28:11-20 (NIV)

¹¹ While the women were on their way, some of the guards went into the city and reported to the chief priests everything that had happened. ¹² When the chief priests had met with the elders and devised a plan, they gave the soldiers a large sum of money, ¹³ telling them, "You are to say, 'His disciples came during the night and stole him away while we were asleep.' ¹⁴ If this report gets to the governor, we will satisfy him and keep you out of trouble." ¹⁵ So the soldiers took the money and did as they were instructed. And this story has been widely circulated among the Jews to this very day.

¹⁶ Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. ¹⁷ When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. ¹⁸ Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

Early Sunday morning, a group of women had come to the tomb to anoint the body of Jesus with spices. When they arrived, they were greeted by an angel that rolled the stone away from the tomb and invited them in for a look. He told them that Jesus had risen from the dead. The guards that had been protecting the tomb had all passed out at the sight of the angel. As the women went to tell the disciples what they had seen and heard, Jesus met them. He told them He was going ahead of the disciples to Galilee and gave them a location at which to meet Him. (Matthew 28:1-10)

Matthew tells us the rest of the story about what happened to those guards. ¹¹ While the women were on their way, some of the guards went into the city and reported to the chief priests everything that had happened. The chief priests, with Pilate's permission, were the ones that had given them the assignment. They had heard Jesus' predictions of rising from the dead in three days. In fact, they told Pilate that Jesus made that very claim. (Matthew 27:63) They asked for the guards under the pretext of a concern that the disciples would steal the body, but remember, these priests knew of Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead. (John 11:46-47) They had seen His miracles of healing. I think their concern was that Jesus would do exactly what He claimed, rise in three days. After all, everything else He taught He also lived out. The thing the chief priests feared the most had come to pass.

¹² When the chief priests had met with the elders and devised a plan, they gave the soldiers a large sum of money, ¹³ telling them, "You are to say, 'His disciples came during the night and stole him away while we were asleep.'" It is hard for believers to relate to the hardness of the chief priest's hearts. I can't imagine bribing someone to lie about an angelic encounter. Can you? You would think the chief priests would have fallen to their knees and repented, realizing that Jesus was the Messiah, but a hardened heart will always find an excuse not to repent. (2 Corinthians 4:4)

Commented [notes1]: 63 "Sir," they said, "we remember that while he was still alive that deceiver said, 'After three days I will rise again.' Matt 27:63 (NIV)

Commented [notes2]: 46 But some of them went to the Pharisees and told them what Jesus had done. 47 Then the chief priests and the Pharisees called a meeting of the Sanhedrin. "What are we accomplishing?" they asked. "Here is this man performing many miraculous signs. John 11:46-47 (NIV)

Commented [notes3]: 4 The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. 2 Cor 4:4 (NIV)

These soldiers had reason to worry. They had lost a prisoner of Rome, and for that they could have been executed. They were caught in the web the Jewish religious leaders had made to hang on to power, but the chief priests and elders devised a plan. They would bribe the guards to lie about what happened. One of the problems Rome had with its soldiers was their constant effort to make money on the side. The bribery scheme would work well on these soldiers, and the priests thought it would keep people from believing Jesus had risen. Didn't they wonder what people would think when Jesus was seen by others?

They also worked out a plan to keep the soldiers from any retributions. ¹⁴ *If this report gets to the governor, we will satisfy him and keep you out of trouble.* "The soldiers could trust them to live up to their end of that bargain because they knew what really happened and the chief priests didn't want that news getting out. We don't know how they took care of Pilate, perhaps with another bribe, or more lies, but whatever they did, it worked. ¹⁵ *So the soldiers took the money and did as they were instructed. And this story has been widely circulated among the Jews to this very day.*

This does prove to us one thing. There is no doubt that the body of Jesus was missing. Some will argue that they mistook the grave for another or that Jesus was never buried etc. If any of those desperate scenarios were true, Matthew would not have mentioned that the story circulating at the time of writing his Gospel was that the body was stolen. The claim that it was stolen is to cover the fact that it was indeed missing from the place it should have been, in Joseph of Arimathea's tomb.

But what about that claim? Is it possible that the disciples stole the body and hid it? First, I'd doubt the ability of these fearful, uneducated men to confront trained soldiers. (John 4:13) Jesus had already told them not to use the sword. (John 18:11) Even if they were successful, being Galilean, they were out of their native area and would have a hard time hiding the body from Roman and Jewish searches.

What if the guards fell asleep? There are problems with that too. Ever try to move a large stone without noise? And if they were able to, why did they unwrap Jesus? It would be easier in their haste to carry a decomposing body wrapped. If the guards slept, a crime punishable by death, how did they know it was the disciples? Why wouldn't they hunt them down rather than to risk punishment? Even the Sanhedrin did not organize or even demand a search be made for the body. Supposing they were successful at overpowering the soldiers and hiding the body, why would they suddenly become so bold? A lie causes most people to be more timid and reticent, but they started preaching in the streets. Something more than a lie transformed them into bold preachers that would end up dying for their declaration of the resurrection of Jesus. (Acts 4:9-10)

Then there is the problem of the many witnesses. Some claim it was mass hallucination. That theory has been debunked. Something like that could possibly happen once, but again and again with different people is just not in the realm of a realistic possibility. And remember, this Gospel of Matthew was circulating in the lifetime of the witnesses. They could have disputed the story.

Commented [notes4]: 13 When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus. Acts 4:13 (NIV)

Commented [notes5]: 11 Jesus commanded Peter, "Put your sword away! Shall I not drink the cup the Father has given me?" John 18:11 (NIV)

Commented [notes6]: 9 If we are being called to account today for an act of kindness shown to a cripple and are asked how he was healed, 10 then know this, you and all the people of Israel: It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you healed. Acts 4:9-10 (NIV)

Why would the chief priests have paid the soldiers if they had failed to keep the disciples from stealing the body of Jesus? If that was the case, the chief priests would rather have seen them punished by Rome for failing to do the job they assigned them. The most obvious conclusion is that Jesus rose from the dead as He predicted and nothing could have been done to stop Him. No amount of guards or opponents would have made any difference.

Before Jesus arrest, He had told them, ³² *But after I have risen, I will go ahead of you into Galilee.*" Matthew 26:32 (NIV) They didn't remember Him telling them He would rise, and the certainly didn't remember that He would go ahead of them to Galilee. He had to send messages, and even show up several times to get them to leave their locked room and head back to Galilee. When they returned to Galilee, Peter encouraged some of the men to go fishing with him. Jesus called from the shore to ask if they had caught any fish, and what ensued was a repeat of the miraculous catch when Jesus first called them to follow Him. Peter swam to shore and had some one on one time with Jesus. (John 20) The church that was built on that spot (Peter of Primacy) is pictured in your bulletin. The ancient steps that led to the boat landing are still there. Nearby stands a bronze of Jesus restoring his call to Peter.

It was probably after this that the 500 met with Jesus on the mountain. (1 Corinthians 15:6) ¹⁶ *Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go.* I can't find any reference to which mountain this is. I suspect it was what we call today the Mount of Beatitudes, the place where the 5000 were fed, and where Jesus gave the sermon of Matthew 5-7. Just like Jesus used the repeat of the miracle of the huge catch of fish to call Peter out of his doldrums to confidence in Jesus, there may have been a connection with this mountain and the miracle of the loaves and fish and what Jesus was commissioning His followers to do.

Do you remember the time that on that mountain the disciples mentioned the hunger of the crowd and Jesus told the disciples to feed them? (Matthew 14:16) You see, Jesus is about to tell these 500 to feed the world with the living bread. If they will put the little they have into Jesus' hands, He will use them to feed a spiritually starving world, just as He took what that little boy had and fed the 5000. The call goes out to us as well. We have what the starving world needs.

¹⁷ *When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted.* Let me ask you again, if they were making this all up, would they have said that some doubted? That phrase does not detract, it adds to the credibility of the account. Jesus wanted them to meet Him there so that He could be alone with them, but also that they could have an opportunity to see and believe that He rose from the dead. It is what Christianity hinges on. Without the resurrection there is no faith. (1 Corinthians 15:14) It was the main message of the early church, "He is risen!" It was not so small a crowd that we can explain it away, nor was it too large a crowd that each could not have some personal interaction with the risen Lord and decide for him or herself.

¹⁸ *Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.* This is a statement we need to hear and understand. Jesus was saying,

Commented [notes7]: 6 After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep.
1 Cor 15:6 (NIV)

Commented [notes8]: 16 Jesus replied, "They do not need to go away. You give them something to eat."
Matt 14:16 (NIV)

Commented [notes9]: 14 And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith.
1 Cor 15:14 (NIV)

"I am sovereign over all!" He set that aside when He came to earth as a man, (Philippians 2:7) but now, as a resurrected man, the authority He had from the beginning was restored to Him. He is not one of many ascended masters; He is the ascended Master! All authority is in the hands of the man that has experienced our temptations and struggles. (Hebrews 4:15) All authority in heaven and earth is in the hands of the man that faced death in my place, with my sins upon Him. If He loved me that much, what have I to fear now that all authority is in His hands? Would you want it in the hands of any other? When men become sovereigns in their own countries they turn into Lenins, Edi Amins, Saddams. Thank God all authority in heaven and earth is in the hands of the One that loved us enough to give His life for us. What a sigh of relief we can breathe because of that truth!

Commented [notes10]: 7 but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.
Phil 2:7 (NIV)

Commented [notes11]: 15 For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are--yet was without sin.
Heb 4:15 (NIV)

Many times we are tempted to doubt this all-encompassing declaration of the risen man who is God, Jesus. We look at man's inhumanity to man, or even the things that people do daily to one another and we wonder how all authority can be in Jesus' hands. He still allows us to make our choices, and they are often the wrong choices. The world is still in a fallen condition. Sickness and disease still plague mankind. But for those who love God and are called according to His purpose, we can know that even the worst situation can result in good for us, because all authority is in Jesus' hands. (Romans 8:28) One day, He will exercise that authority over governments, over sickness and death, over all things and the kingdoms of this world will become the Kingdom of our LORD. (Revelation 11:15) But for now, His kingdom is in our heart and we can rest assured that He has all authority.

Commented [notes12]: 28 And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.
Romans 8:28 (NIV)

Commented [notes13]: 15 The seventh angel sounded his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, which said: "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign for ever and ever."
Rev 11:15 (NIV)

¹⁹ Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, Therefore... because all authority is His, go and make disciples of all nations. Go, and as you go train others. I don't think Jesus was telling them that every believer is called to be a missionary. I know that those disciples were. They ended up in places as far away as Spain, India, and England. The principle is true for us all. "There is no omission in the Great Commission."- Adrian Rodgers "As we go out into the world, we should all share Christ. Mark records this as, "Go into all the world and preach the Gospel to everyone." (Mark 16:15) God will give every believer opportunities to convey the love and life of Jesus through our words and our lives. We must be examples of the message before others will want to hear the message. I'm not saying we must be perfect first or no one will ever hear. We do need to be living a life surrendered to God and open to the Holy Spirit. That is part of the telling. (1 Peter 2:12)

Commented [notes14]: 12 Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.
1 Peter 2:12 (NIV)

A week ago Wednesday night we watched the End of the Spear. It was the story of some missionaries that went to a murderous group of natives in Ecuador. Those missionaries were obeying Jesus' command to go. In the process they were killed. But it didn't end there. Even if it had, they were obedient to try to take the message to those who had never heard. The wives and children of those men ended up living with the Waodani people and taught them the Bible in a way their culture could relate. But it was the loving care for an enemy tribe that really affected the ones that did not want to convert. They could see the enemy defeated by love more powerfully than the spear. It was the smile of joy on the face of the new believers that added to the message. We must tell the message, but we must live the message as well. And once

they are won to Christ, we must train them. That is what it means to disciple. We must teach them the Words of Christ. We must teach them to walk in obedience to the Spirit. We baptize them in the name of the triune God and they die with Christ on the cross and are buried with Him and raised to newness of life. (Romans 6:3-4)

Because all authority is in Jesus' hands, we should share with those we meet the good news of what He did for us. There are so many ways to do this. Some in this church use evangelism cards. Some people use friendship and form a trusting relationship first. Some invite those they meet to church. Others go on short-term missions, and many of you support missions. Some use the internet, and some are gifted evangelists that can sit down and talk to anyone. We have so many options available to us today. The important factor in every outreach is to be led by the Spirit of God. It is the Spirit that brings life. (John 6:63) All our efforts without the leading of the Spirit will just be dead works. Let God give you the words, the illustrations, the timing and you will see results. (John 15:16)

²⁰ and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." We are to not only train them in the basics, but to relay the full teachings of Jesus. We need to get the Bible in their hands so that they can learn to feed themselves. (1 Peter 2:2-3) I have a series of 12 classes on-line to disciple new believers called Solid Rock. It helps them understand what Jesus has commanded us. This series of preaching through Matthew has been fulfilling that very command of teaching them everything He has commanded us.

How is it possible to live out this command in its fullness? How can we, with all our failures and weaknesses obey such an all-encompassing demand? Joshua wondered how he could lead the children of Israel into the Promised Land. (Joshua 1:9) The disciples were wondering how they were going to go from fearful betrayers of Christ to feeding the whole world with the Living Bread. (John 6:51) The answer for us is the same as it was for Joshua and the disciples. *"Surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."* We can't do it on our own, but we are not alone. Jesus is with us! He is living in us, empowering us, guiding us, giving us the words. (John 14:26) It isn't a mission impossible because the One that can do it is with us. His presence makes it mission possible. You and I just need to turn to Him and ask Him for the words. We just need to ask Him to open the doors.

God told Abraham to walk before Him. (Genesis 17:1) Just be aware of His presence. Do what you do in light of His presence with you. Ask for direction because His presence is with you. Watch God at work, cooperate with Him, and you will see fruit that remains. Friends and even loved ones will abandon us, but Jesus never will. (Matthew 10:35-36) He is the only One you can count on, the only One you need to rely on. He is with you. Walk before Him and He will give you opportunity after opportunity to share His life with others.

This is our call to arms in this spiritual battle for the souls of men. Our Commander has given us our marching orders. Is your daily life focused around obedience to His command? Have you found how your heavenly Father would have you reach out to those you meet? Or are you trying to be the omission in the Great Commission?

Commented [notes15]: 3 Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?
4 We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.
Romans 6:3-4 (NIV)

Commented [notes16]: 63 The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life.
John 6:63 (NIV)

Commented [notes17]: 16 You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit-fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name.
John 15:16 (NIV)

Commented [notes18]: 2 Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation,
3 now that you have tasted that the Lord is good.
1 Peter 2:2-3 (NIV)

Commented [notes19]: 9 Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go."
Josh 1:9 (NIV)

Commented [notes20]: 51 I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world."
John 6:51 (NIV)

Commented [notes21]: 26 But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.
John 14:26 (NIV)

Commented [notes22]: 1 When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to him and said, "I am God Almighty; walk before me and be blameless."
Gen 17:1 (NIV)

Commented [notes23]: 35 For I have come to turn "a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law-- 36 a man's enemies will be the members of his own household."
Matt 10:35-36 (NIV)