



St. Paul Evangelical Community Church (SPECC)

Worship Address : Cerritos High School Auditorium
12500 E. 183rd St., Cerritos, CA 90703
(Enter at Bloomfield, across Heritage Park)

Mailing Address : 11428 E. Artesia Blvd. # 4 ; Artesia, CA 90701
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July 19, 2009

Theme: The Resurrection. Is it Fact or Fiction?

Text: Matthew 28:1-15

Matthew's entire gospel has been leading up to the event that is reported in this chapter. Apart from His resurrection, Jesus' words are meaningless and even fraudulent. If Jesus did not rise from the dead, the promises which Matthew records are empty and his reputation amounts to nothing. He is merely one more Jew among many who was crucified by the Romans.

The preaching of the historical reality of the bodily resurrection of Jesus was the essence of the preaching of the Church which began to emerge from the Jesus Movement a mere fifty days after his death. This historical fact produces two pieces of evidence which declare that Jesus' bodily resurrection is a historical fact. (1) The Jewish authorities continued to be hostile to the Jewish Movement and wanted to stamp it out. The Christians began to preach about the resurrection from the first day the church was formed. This means that it would have been easy for them to eliminate the Jesus Movement from the face of the earth. They could have stamped it out immediately by producing the body of Jesus. But they did not because they could not. (2) All of the apostles except John died for their faith in the bodily resurrection of Jesus. This means that they didn't just make it up. It is difficult if not impossible to believe that they would have died for something they knew to be false.

People reject the historical truth of the resurrection of Jesus for various reasons. But there are good reasons to believe that it actually happened and that the disciples did not invent the story. One of them is that all four Gospels present women as the first people to testify about the resurrection of Jesus. No one who was inventing this kind of story would have done that. Women had a rather low social status in the Israel of Jesus' day. Their testimony, for example was not accepted in court. Therefore, no male author would have presented women as the first witnesses because they simply would not have been believed.

As with the death of Jesus, a great earthquake is connected with the revelation of His resurrection. An angel, who looks like lightning rolls away the stone covering the doorway to the tomb. It may be that he has another work to perform. His presence protects the women from being harmed by the soldiers. These well-trained and battle-hardened soldiers faint at the sight of the angel. But the angel quickly says to the women, "Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus the Crucified One. He is not here; he has risen just as he said." Then he invites the women to come and see the place where Jesus had been laid. The stone had not been rolled away to let Jesus out. It had been rolled away to let the women in to see the empty tomb.



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In the Gospels no one actually witnesses the resurrection. In other words, no one actually saw Jesus rise from the grave. What they did see was the empty tomb and Jesus himself. In fact the angel tells the women that they will see Jesus. This stresses the physical nature of the resurrection. It is not the case that Jesus' disciples had some mystical experience which led them to believe that Jesus was alive. It is not the case, as some have claimed that Jesus lives on through the teaching of the apostles. It is not even the case that the disciples of Jesus would simply believe that Jesus rose from the dead. The angel promises that women that they will see Him. The Christian faith is based on the claim, which Jesus' followers made, that they saw him alive three days after he was crucified. Christian faith lives or dies with the truth of this claim.

The woman ran away from the tomb afraid, yet filled with joy. They were afraid because they had had an encounter with the supernatural realm. At the same time they were filled with joy because they had seen Jesus. Before he died, Jesus had promised his disciples that they would a joy that no one and no thing would be able to take away from them. "Now is your time of grief, but I will see you again and you will rejoice, and no one will take your joy away from you." Christian faith is a faith that promises deep joy that no one and no thing can take away from us if we live by faith.

Matthew has given us the response of women who believed to the news of the resurrection. He now gives us the response of unbelievers to the resurrection. When the Roman soldiers saw the angel, they "...shook and became like dead men." It is possible that these trained warriors fainted when they saw the angel. When they returned to consciousness the reported what had happened to the chief priests. The chief priests may brought the matter to the Sanhedrin. They came up with a plan. They bribed the soldiers to say that the disciples had come and had stolen the body of Jesus while they were sleeping.

This is the greatest cover-up in all of history. It is unbelievable for several reasons: (1) Either the soldiers were sleeping or they were not sleeping. If they were not sleeping, they would have prevented the theft of Jesus' body. If they were sleeping, they would not have witnessed the theft of Jesus body. (2) As Roman soldiers, they faced the possibility of execution for doing things like falling asleep. At least some of them would have been awake to prevent the disciples from stealing Jesus' body. (3) The disciples were in state of great fear. They would not have had the courage to try to overpower Roman soldiers to steal the body of Jesus. (4) The disciples were not trained warriors—they were ordinary men. They would not have been able to overpower the Roman soldiers to steal the body of Jesus. We may certainly conclude that this cover-up was the fraud and not the Church's message that Jesus had risen.



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The attempt of the Sanhedrin to cover-up the historical fact of the resurrection of Jesus was a failure. Their attempt to stamp out the Jesus Movement was a failure. They failed because Jesus was alive and had appeared to more than 500 people. They failed because Jesus' resurrection power would transform the lives of many people. They failed because they could not produce the body of Jesus to disprove that the church's message that Jesus had risen from the dead.