

The Mind of Christ

The Resurrection

Part Seven

INTRODUCTION:

- I. Last week in our studies about the resurrection of Jesus Christ we played the role of Crime Scene Investigators, as we began investigating the scene of the empty tomb of Jesus.
 - A. We began by examining what Crime Scene Investigators call the “Scene Documentation” which is a detailed record of everything an investigator sees when they first arrive on the scene.
 1. In our investigation, we examined the detailed record of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John because it provides the only account of the physical evidence that was discovered at the tomb of Jesus on the Sunday morning following His crucifixion.
 2. And, here’s what we found:
 - a. First, we learned that the guard was missing (I believe the evidence will show the guard was a detachment of Roman Soldiers).
 - b. Second, we learned that the wheel-like 1 ½ to 2 ton stone door had been moved a distance away from the TOMB – not just the ENTRANCE of the tomb, but from the tomb itself –

and the place where it was found gave the appearance that someone lifted the stone door and carried it away from the tomb. And, in the process of removing the stone door, the Roman SEAL that would have been placed on the door was broken.

- c. Third, and perhaps most significant, we learned that the body of Jesus was missing.
- d. Fourth, we learned that the tomb was cut or hewn out of solid rock, and we took note of the fact that there was only one entrance – there was no other visible way to get in and out of the tomb.
- e. And finally, we learned that the only physical evidence found INSIDE the tomb was the grave cloths that were still wrapped in the cocoon-like shape of a body, but the body was missing from inside – almost as if it had somehow evaporated – and the napkin or handkerchief that had covered the face of the body was OUTSIDE this cocoon-like shell of grave cloths, and was folded or rolled neatly off to the side.

B. And so, with all this in mind, we now want to turn our attention to the evidence itself and begin our crime scene investigation.

1. To do this we're going to investigate the following:

- a. First, we want to know who guarded the tomb of Jesus, why did they leave the tomb, and is it possible that they were negligent and allowed someone to steal the body.
- b. And then we want to investigate the disappearance of the body of Jesus to see if there is any NATURAL way of explaining why His tomb was empty three days following His crucifixion.

BODY:

- I. Let's begin by asking, who guarded the tomb of Jesus – were they Jewish temple police, or a detachment of Roman soldiers?
 - A. When we read Matthew's account, it shows the Jewish authorities were concerned that the body of Jesus might be stolen, and so they went to Pilate to demand that the tomb be secured with an armed guard.
 1. **Matthew 27:62-66** – *On the next day, which followed the Day of Preparation, the chief priests and Pharisees gathered together to Pilate, 63 saying, "Sir, we remember, while He was still alive, how that deceiver said, 'After three days I will rise.' 64 Therefore command that the tomb be made secure until the third day, lest His disciples come by night and steal Him away, and say to the people, 'He has risen from the dead.' So the last deception will be worse*

than the first." 65 Pilate said to them, "You have a guard; go your way, make it as secure as you know how." 66 So they went and made the tomb secure, sealing the stone and setting the guard.

- B. There has been a lot of discussion about the statement of Pilate: "*You have a guard; go your way, make it as secure as you know how.*" The question most often asked is whether these guards were Jewish Temple police or a detachment of Roman soldiers?
1. However, this whole issue is actually NOT as important as SOME make it out to be, because the training, professionalism, and dedication to duty of the Jewish temple police compared to Roman soldiers is really quite comparable.
 - a. Jewish temple guards would have guarded the tomb of Jesus with the same intense dedication to duty as would a detachment of Roman soldiers.
- C. However, the evidence clearly points to the guard being comprised of detachment of as many as 16 highly trained, fully armed, combat-ready Roman soldiers. Here's why we say this:
1. When asked for a guard, Pilate told the Jewish leaders, "*You have a guard; go your way, make it as secure as you know how.*"
(Matthew 27:65)

- a. The statement of Pilate is actually in the form of the PRESENT IMPERATIVE in the Greek – which would be more correctly translated as, "*HAVE A GUARD!*" In other words, Pilate is telling them they CAN have a guard, rather than saying "you already have your OWN guard."
 - (1). In fact, a marginal note in the English Revised Version (1885) says Pilate meant, "*TAKE*" a guard.
 2. Add to this the fact that Pilate used the Greek word "koustoodian" (translated "Roman sentry"), and which means, (according to Robertson's Word Pictures in the New Testament), "a guard of Roman soldiers, not mere temple police."
 3. Therefore, the statement of Pilate meant he was granting permission for a detachment of Roman soldiers to go with the Jewish authorities and guard the tomb, making it as secure as they knew how.
- D. But, perhaps the best evidence for determining whether these guards were Jewish or Roman comes from the dialogue between some of the guard and the chief priests and elders FOLLOWING the resurrection of Jesus.
1. **Matthew 28:11-15** – ... *behold, some of the guard came into the city and reported to the chief priests all the things that had*

happened. When they had assembled with the elders and consulted together, they gave a large sum of money to the soldiers, saying, "Tell them, 'His disciples came at night and stole Him away while we slept.' And if this comes to the governor's ears, we will appease him and make you secure." So they took the money and did as they were instructed; and this saying is commonly reported among the Jews until this day.

- a. At first, it almost sounds as if these guards WERE temple guards because they came immediately to the chief priests **FIRST. (v. 11)**
- b. But when we see WHY they came to the chief priests first – fearing they would be immediately put to death for allowing the body of Jesus to be taken – we see they must have been Roman guards. **(v. 14)**

- II. So, why were THESE guards so concerned that news of the disappearance of the body of Jesus might reach the ears of the Governor?
 - A. To answer that question, we need to look at a critically important piece of evidence given in Matthew's record – what law enforcement investigators would call THE CHAIN OF CUSTODY.

1. The CHAIN OF CUSTODY is a record of the persons who have PHYSICAL POSSESSION of evidence at any given time, AND who are RESPONSIBLE for maintaining the SECURITY and the INTEGRITY of that physical evidence.
 2. The chain of custody is ALSO designed to ensure that only AUTHORIZED INDIVIDUALS are allowed have possession of the evidence, and that they are PERSONALLY RESPONSIBLE for STORING evidence, and monitoring it's SECURITY at all times.
- B. So, let's look at Matthew's account and follow this CHAIN OF CUSTODY concerning the BODY OF JESUS, and I think we'll quickly see why this CHAIN OF CUSTODY is so important in answering our question about why the guard was so worried about the disappearance of the body reaching the ears of the governor.
1. Since Jesus had been crucified by the order of Pilate, the Procurator of Jerusalem, the body of Jesus was INITIALLY under the custody of ROME. But...
 - a. **Matthew 27:57-58** – *As evening approached, Joseph, a rich man from Arimathea who was one of Jesus' followers, went to Pilate and asked for Jesus' body. And Pilate issued an order to release it to him.*

2. At the request of Joseph of Arimathea, Pilate issued an official order in which he TRANSFERRED the CHAIN OF CUSTODY of the body of Jesus from ROME to Joseph of Arimathea.
 - a. While in HIS possession, Joseph prepared the body for burial.
 - b. **Matthew 27:59-61** – *Joseph took the body and wrapped it in a long linen cloth. He placed it in his own new tomb, which had been carved out of the rock. Then he rolled a great stone across the entrance as he left. Both Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were sitting nearby watching.*

3. As we've already read, the Jewish religious leaders were concerned that Pilate had released custody of the body of Jesus to Joseph of Arimathea, and they were concerned for a good reason.
 - a. **Matthew 27:63-64** – *They told him, "Sir, we remember what that deceiver once said while he was still alive: 'After three days I will be raised from the dead.' 64 So we request that you seal the tomb until the third day. This will prevent his disciples from coming and stealing his body and then telling everyone he came back to life! If that happens, we'll be worse off than we were at first."*
 - b. The Jewish religious leaders wanted Pilate to REASSUME CUSTODY of the body of Jesus, and place it under

PROTECTIVE CUSTODY until three days had passed – which, in their opinion, would be sufficient time to prove that Jesus had NOT been resurrected from the dead and was, therefore, a FALSE Messiah.

4. So, to please the Jews, Pilate REASSUMED CUSTODY of the body of Jesus by placing the tomb under the PROTECTIVE CUSTODY of Roman soldiers, AND by placing a SEAL on the tomb that signified the tomb and it's contents were NOW the official property of the ROMAN EMPIRE.
 - a. **Matthew 27:65-66** – *Pilate replied, "Take guards and secure it the best you can." 66 So they sealed the tomb and posted guards to protect it.*
- C. However, there's a very important point we need to remember. According to Matthew's record, the body of Jesus lay in an unprotected tomb through the night of the Passover.
 1. It IS reasonable to assume that if someone WANTED to steal the body of Jesus, THAT would have been a perfect opportunity.
 2. But Pilate would have been aware of this fact AS WELL, which is why he ordered the guards to SECURE and SEAL the tomb.
 - a. Since the body of Jesus was NOW under the protective custody of Rome it would be IMPERATIVE to assure that the

body of Jesus was STILL in the tomb BEFORE the tomb was SECURED and SEALED. That's the PURPOSE of the SEAL.

3. The act of SEALING the tomb was an OFFICIAL ACT of placing sealing clay on the stone door as well as on the tomb itself, then stringing some kind of cord between them and embedding each end into the sealing clay, and then STAMPING a signet mark on the clay.
 - a. This is what Matthew meant when he said, **Matthew 27:66** – *"So they went and made the tomb secure, SEALING THE STONE and setting the guard."*
 - b. Strong's Expanded Greek-Hebrew Dictionary, says the word SEAL means, "to stamp (with a signet or private mark) for security or preservation..."
4. In PERFORMING this act, those who SEALED the tomb were signifying TWO THINGS:
 - a. First, sealing the tomb VERIFIED and AUTHENTICATED the CONTENTS of the tomb. In other words, the seal VERIFIED that the body of Jesus was STILL IN THE TOMB at the time the tomb was SEALED and the guard was posted.

- b. Second, sealing the tomb signified the tomb was NOW the property of the ROMAN EMPIRE, and the CONTENTS of the tomb were being PRESERVED as a matter of SECURITY.
- D. Therefore, we can be ASSURED of the fact that the body of Jesus was STILL IN THE TOMB when the tomb was SEALED and SECURED.
1. This is the very reason WHY the Jewish authorities asked Pilate REASSUME CUSTODY of the body of Jesus by sealing the tomb and posting a guard.
 - a. They wanted to be ASSURED that the body of Jesus was STILL in the tomb, and that it would REMAIN in the tomb until three days had passed.
 2. This would ALSO indicate that PILATE thought it would be a good idea to keep the body of Jesus under protective custody for three days to dispel any rumors that this Jesus was really the Messiah and had been raised from the dead.
 3. Furthermore, this indicates that the GUARD responsible for sealing and securing the tomb would have been a ROMAN guard.
 - a. If Pilate told the Jewish authorities to use their OWN guard to seal and secure the tomb, he would have been transferring CUSTODY of the body of Jesus to THEM – to the Jewish

authorities – which would mean Pilate was NOT concerned about the body being stolen.

- b. But since Pilate REASSUMED CUSTODY of the body, the guard would have been ROMAN SOLDIERS, under the command of Pilate, that means Pilate WAS ALSO concerned the body of Jesus might be stolen.
- c. And, according to historical documents about Roman military policies and procedures, a detachment of guards would have been no fewer than 4 and up to as many as 16 men – men who were armed and trained to defend their ground against an entire attacking army.
- d. And considering the IMPORTANCE of guarding the tomb of Jesus, it is HIGHLY likely this was a detachment of 16 Roman guards.

E. All THIS explains why the guard was fearful that word of the disappearance of the body of Jesus was about to reach the ears of Pilate.

- 1. Under Roman law, the punishment for soldiers who failed to properly guard something as important as the body of Jesus, would have been summary execution. They would have been executed

on the spot – no trial, no testimony, no attorney's, and certainly no plea bargaining.

2. In fact, Roman military law prescribed that soldiers be executed for a number of offenses, including: desertion because of cowardice... deserting one's post for ANY reason... leaving the night watch... and sleeping while on guard duty.
 - a. There is record of one particular occasion where Roman guards were caught sleeping while on guard duty. They were immediately bound, and thrown over a cliff to their deaths.
3. This is why the entire detachment of guards NEVER slept AT THE SAME TIME while on guard duty.
 - a. The detachment of this size would have been divided into FOUR GROUPS of FOUR MEN EACH, who would have been on guard duty for no more that FOUR HOURS EACH.
 - b. Of the 16 men that would have made up a detachment of guards sent to guard something as important as the tomb of Jesus:
 - (1). Four men would be guarding the tomb for the next four-hour period.
 - (2). The four men who just got off duty would be relaxing and making preparations to sleep.

(3). Four more would be allowed to sleep for only four hours, but must sleep in a semi-circle around whatever they were guarding with their heads in and their feet out, and with their weapons at their side, ready to respond at a moments notice to any threat.

(4). And the final group of four men would have just been awakened and would be preparing themselves to assume guard duty.

4. If AT ANY TIME the four men ON guard duty fell asleep, the ENTIRE DETACHMENT of 16 men would be SUMMARILY EXECUTED for dereliction of duty.
5. So, you can be ABSOLUTELY CERTAIN, that the four men who just got OFF guard duty, and the four men about to go ON guard duty, would make CERTAIN the four men ON guard duty would NOT fall asleep. Their lives depended on it.
6. Now you can understand why those members of the guard who came to the Jewish religious authorities were so worried about news of the disappearance of the body of Jesus reaching the ears of Pilate.

7. This also may explain why only SOME of the guard came to the chief priests and elders of the people. The REST of the guard were probably taking the first stage coach out of town.
- III. Now that we can be reasonably sure that the guard were Roman soldiers, let's ask this question: Was the body of Jesus was stolen by the disciples of Jesus while the guard slept, or was it moved by someone else?
- A. To do this we need to look for possible suspects. In other words, who are the most LIKELY suspects, what would be their MOTIVE for stealing the body, and would they actually have the ABILITY or OPPORTUNITY to steal the body?
 1. The FIRST group of possible suspects are THE DISCIPLES of Jesus – in fact, they have been specifically ACCUSED of stealing the body. But upon further examination, this seems HIGHLY UNLIKELY. Here's why:
 - a. First, after the disciples had a brief confrontation in the Garden of Gethsemane with those who had come to arrest Jesus, the disciples all fled for their lives – probably fearing they TOO would be arrested. **(Matthew 26:56; Mark 14:50-52)**
 - (1). In fact, Peter, who followed at a distance, denied the Lord three times when someone identified him as a follower of

Jesus. **(Matthew 26:69-75; Mark 14:66-72; Luke 22:54-62; John 18:15-18, 25-27)**

- b. Second, the disciples apparently weren't expecting Jesus to be resurrected from the dead because when the women came to tell them that Jesus had appeared to them, the disciples didn't believe them. **(Mark 16:1-12; Luke 24:8-12)**
- c. Third, after learning about the resurrection of Jesus, and very possibly after hearing the rumors THEY had STOLEN the body of Jesus, the disciples had locked themselves behind closed doors because they feared the Jewish leaders! **(John 20:19-20)**
- d. Therefore, it's HIGHLY UNLIKELY that a group of men who DESERTED Jesus and DENIED even KNOWING Him, and who didn't believe Jesus had ACTUALLY BEEN resurrected from the dead, and who were HIDING BEHIND LOCKED DOORS after LEARNING of His resurrection, would somehow have the COURAGE OR THE MOTIVE for stealing the body of Jesus – let alone the ABILITY to do so by confronting 16 Roman soldiers who would fight to the death to defend the tomb and the body inside.

2. The SECOND group of likely suspects would be the Jewish religious authorities.
 - a. It could be argued that they removed the body of Jesus to safeguard it and prevent it from being stolen.
 - b. But that doesn't make any sense either. THEY were the ones who went to Pilate asking him to RE-ASSUME custody of the body and to safeguard it until three days had passed to PREVENT the disciples from stealing the body. **(Matthew 27:62-66)**
 - c. The Jewish religious authorities wanted the body of Jesus to STAY RIGHT WHERE IT WAS, so that in three days, if the disciples began claiming Jesus had been resurrected from the dead, they could OPEN the tomb and PRODUCE the body of Jesus.
 - d. Furthermore, if the Jewish religious authorities actually HAD the body of Jesus, why didn't they PRODUCE it on the day of Pentecost when the apostles claimed Jesus was the Christ and that He had been resurrected from the dead?
 - e. And, there's one more passage that we often overlook. Remember in Acts chapter 5 when the apostles were brought before the Sanhedrin for preaching a resurrected Jesus?

(1). What's so SIGNIFICANT here is the statement of

Gamaliel: **Acts 5:34-39** – *Then one in the council stood up, a Pharisee named Gamaliel, a teacher of the law held in respect by all the people, and commanded them to put the apostles outside for a little while. 35 And he said to them: "Men of Israel, take heed to yourselves what you intend to do regarding these men. 36 For some time ago Theudas rose up, claiming to be somebody. A number of men, about four hundred, joined him. He was slain, and all who obeyed him were scattered and came to nothing. 37 After this man, Judas of Galilee rose up in the days of the census, and drew away many people after him. He also perished, and all who obeyed him were dispersed. 38 And now I say to you, keep away from these men and let them alone; for if this plan or this work is of men, it will come to nothing; 39 but if it is of God, you cannot overthrow it — lest you even be found to fight against God."*

(2). Gamaliel, along with all the OTHER members of the Sanhedrin, knew the body of Jesus WAS missing from the tomb, but in GALAMIEL'S mind that even though this

whole thing MIGHT be the work of MEN, but it could ALSO be OF GOD. And if it IS OF GOD, *"you cannot overthrow it — lest you even be found to fight against God."* (v. 39)

- f. Therefore, I think we can safely conclude that the Jewish religious authorities didn't have either the MOTIVE OR the ABILITY to steal the body of Jesus. And if they HAD the body, they would have SURELY produced it to prove the resurrection of Jesus was a lie.
3. When we look at OTHER possible suspects, it's ALSO highly unlikely THEY stole the body.
 - a. Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus certainly had no MOTIVE for stealing the body of Jesus – they were the ones who prepared the body for burial and closed up the tomb by rolling a large stone door in front of the entrance.
 - b. Pilate certainly had no MOTIVE to remove the body of Jesus from the tomb – he was JUST AS CONCERNED as the Jewish religious leaders that rumors of a resurrected Jesus would disrupt the peace and security of Jerusalem, and so he ordered the body and the tomb of Jesus to be placed under the protective custody of ROME until three days had passed.

- (1). Furthermore, if he HAD taken the body of Jesus, why didn't HE produce it when word that Jesus had been resurrected swept across the city on that first Sunday?
4. So... where does all this leave us. It simply means we have to conclude THERE ARE NO SUSPECTS, because there is NO MOTIVE, NOR would it have been POSSIBLE to steal the body!
5. And with NO SUSPECTS, NO MOTIVE, and NO ABILITY or OPPORTUNITY to steal the body of Jesus, we're forced to come to only one conclusion – there is NO EVIDENCE to support the claim that the body of Jesus was STOLEN.

CONCLUSION:

- I. However, even though there is no evidence to support the claim that the body of Jesus was stolen, skeptics have come up with OTHER theories to explain the resurrection story of Jesus.
 - A. In our next lesson we'll look at some of these theories, including:
 1. The Unknown Tomb Theory – which says the body of Jesus was probably buried in a common unmarked grave
 2. The Wrong Tomb Theory – meaning the disciples all went to the wrong tomb and automatically ASSUMED Jesus had been resurrected.

3. The Legend Theory – which claims the resurrection story is nothing more than a legend that developed over the centuries
 4. The Spiritual Resurrection Theory – meaning the resurrection was not a literal bodily resurrection but a spiritual resurrection.
 5. The Hallucination Theory – which contends that Jesus was NEVER resurrected, but that the disciples were actually hallucinating when they said they saw the resurrected Jesus.
 6. My favorite, The Resuscitation (Swoon) Theory – which says Jesus didn't actually die, but lost consciousness and was revived by the coolness of the tomb.
 7. And finally, The Passion Plot Theory – which is a conspiracy that allegedly involved a plot hatched by Jesus, Joseph of Arimathea and some young man to fool the disciples into thinking Jesus had actually died and was resurrected.
- II. I realize most, if not all, of us believe Jesus was resurrected from the dead.
- A. But at times, even the faith of us VETERAN CHRISTIANS needs to be strengthened.
 1. I've always believed that those who drift away from the Lord have, somewhere along the way, lost confidence in the Story of Jesus.

2. And I've always believed that those who never obey the gospel of Christ have never HAD confidence in the Story of Jesus.
3. Could that be you? Do you have confidence in the gospel – the good news about Jesus?
 - a. Could it be you've NEVER had confidence in the gospel until NOW, and that NOW you see the evidence and realize you need to surrender your life to Christ?
 - b. And for the rest, could it be that some of you have LOST your confidence in the gospel until NOW, and that NOW you want to come back to your first love?