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The God of the Impossible

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Matthew 27:62-66 (ESV)

The next day, that is, after the day of Preparation, the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered before Pilate and said, "Sir, we remember how that impostor said, while he was still alive, 'After three days I will rise.' Therefore order the tomb to be made secure until the third day, lest his disciples go and steal him away and tell the people, 'He has risen from the dead,' and the last fraud will be worse than the first." Pilate said to them, "You have a guard of soldiers. Go, make it as secure as you can." So they went and made the tomb secure by sealing the stone and setting a guard.

Luke 24:1-12 (ESV)

But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they went to the tomb, taking the spices they had prepared. And they found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they went in they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. While they were perplexed about this, behold, two men stood by them in dazzling apparel. And as they were frightened and bowed their faces to the ground, the men said to them, "Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen. Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, that the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men and be crucified and on the third day rise." And they remembered his words, and returning from the tomb they told all these things to the eleven and to all the rest. Now it was Mary Magdalene and Joanna and Mary the mother of James and the other women with them who told these things to the apostles, but these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them. But Peter rose and ran to the tomb; stooping and looking in, he saw the linen cloths by themselves; and he went home marveling at what had happened.

Every time I read the Easter story from the gospel readings, I find myself marveling at what's recorded there, and I really wish I could have been there. I mean, maybe not on Friday when Jesus was arrested and falsely accused and whipped and beaten and spat upon. I mean, the gruesomeness of Friday is hard to comprehend. I mean, I can't even hardly watch the reenactments of it in today's modern movies, but on Saturday and on Sunday. Oh, I would have loved to have been there.

I mean, on Saturday, Matthew tells us, Matthew 27, verse 62, we don't have a lot of what happened on Saturday after Jesus died. But we know this. The chief priests and the Pharisees, they went back to Pilate. Now, they'd been there twice the day before, trying to get him to allow Jesus to be crucified, to condemn Jesus to be crucified. They wanted him dead. But why are they going back there now after Jesus has been crucified? I mean, they sent the temple guards to him on Thursday night when he was praying in the garden. And strangely, when they came to arrest Jesus, he didn't put up a fight at all. He just surrendered himself to them. Now Peter, one of his closest followers, raised his sword and cut off one of the ears of the guards. But Jesus reprimanded him and put the ear back on the guard, and then allowed them to arrest him and took him, and they roughed him up and beat him.

And then he was given a fake trial before the council, the religious council of the day. And it was Annas at the chief priest's house who did this. And then, of course, that wasn't enough. They had him ruffled up a little more, and they gave him another mock trial. They had no power, these religious leaders, but they were trying to capture him and find a reason to have him killed. And so then Caiaphas stood before him and they were frustrated and irritated with Jesus. And so finally they brought him before Pilate. And Pilate found no fault in him. Pilate sent him to Herod, and Herod sent him back. Herod just happened to be in Jerusalem because of the celebration of this time. And Herod sent him back to Pilate. And Pilate then didn't know what to do. The crowds began to yell to him to crucify Jesus, and he didn't want to have Jesus' blood on his hands. But Matthew tells us, Matthew 23 with loud shouts, they insistently demanded that Jesus be crucified. Their shouts prevailed, so Pilate granted their demand. This is April 7th, 30 AD. Jesus was hauled off to be crucified, whipped, beaten, and crucified. And then he died. Hanging up on that cross. They stuck that spear in his side after he cried out, "Into your hands, Father, I commit my spirit."

And he said, "It is finished." Then he died, and they stuck that spear in his side, and water and blood oozed from the hole, a sign that he was dead. And Joseph of Arimathea took his body and had it laid in a tomb. And they went in to Saturday, which was the Sabbath, a quiet day. And of course, the Pharisees and the religious leaders were always trying to trick Jesus into being accused of doing something wrongful on the Sabbath, Saturday, the Sabbath. But now they didn't care. They themselves went before Pilate. They went back to him. Why? Jesus was dead. They got what they wanted, but they went to Pilate and they said, "Sir, we remember that while he was still alive, that deceiver said, 'After three days I will rise again.'" I think they were nervous. I think Jesus had them rattled. I think they were still unsettled. They said this. "Remember that deceiver? After three days, he'll rise again." So give the order for the tomb to

be made secure until the third day. Here's what they're doing. They're trying to control what happens. They're trying to control the message that goes out about Jesus. They're trying to control the narrative. They're trying to control their reputations. They're trying to control their professions. As religious leaders in the day, Jesus has them all ruffled up and they're nervous.

So they're back before Pilate saying, "Ah, you know, he said he would rise again on the third day. So Pilate, would you secure the tomb? Would you lock it down tight? Would you send some guards there, give orders for the tomb to be made secure?" Let me ask you something. Have you ever tried to control anything? Are you trying to control anything? Today, people try to control things when they're afraid and they're nervous. Usually, where we go to look to exercise control over something, that's the very place where we feel very insecure, where we lack faith. These are insecure men trying to control the narrative around Jesus who's threatened them, who's upset their lives, who's upset their comfortable and profitable way of doing things. And so they're before Pilate and they're asking him to seal down this story. And they said, otherwise his disciples may come and steal the body and tell people that he has been raised from the dead. And this last deception will be worse than the first. So Pilate said, "Take a guard, go make the tomb as secure as you know how." So they went and made the tomb secure by putting a seal on the stone and posting the guard. They got him killed, and now they're trying to control him in the grave. But like all of us, they haven't been in control at all the whole time.

They just think they have. It's just some sort of illusion we talk ourselves into, you know, we can control our responses to things, but we are gravely out of control with what God wants to do in the world. As a matter of fact, when Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred up saying, "Who is this?" And this question has been being asked about Jesus ever since. I mean, no one controlled him. There's no chance the Pharisees, the Sadducees, the religious leaders, Pilate, Herod, any person was going to control this man. He came in. He stirred up the whole city. He stirred up the entire history of humanity. Ever since we've been asking this question since he showed up on the scene. Who is this man? I recently picked up a new copy of a Life magazine here in the United States. It's from February of this year, 2024. It's a picture of Jesus on the front. It says, "Under life. Who do you say that I am? Who is this man?" Okay, so here's Saturday. The religious leaders are back in front of Pilate, trying to secure the tomb, trying to control the narrative, trying to control what was happening around them. And then you have Sunday morning on the first day of the week, very early in the morning, the women took the spices they had prepared and went to the tomb.

It was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary, the mother of James, and the others with them. And here's what they found. Wouldn't you have liked to have been there? And they found the stone rolled away from the tomb. Now we just read what happened on Saturday. I mean, they were trying to control the narrative. They were trying to control Jesus in the tomb. And yet when the women went there the next morning, the stone was rolled away from the tomb. And when they went in, they didn't find the body of the Lord Jesus. They were perplexed about this. I want to ask you something. Have you ever been perplexed yourself? I mean, we are now entering the realm beyond rational thinking, friends. What happened in that tomb? They were perplexed. I don't know if you've felt perplexed in your life, but I feel this way all the time. I mean, life itself is perplexing to me. Where I'm placed in the world is perplexing to me. How the world supports life and humanity and is designed just for supporting and nurturing and caring for life. There are so many things in my life have happened that are perplexing to me. There are things beyond our ability to figure out we're entering the realm of God. We're entering the realm here in the story beyond the rational mind, into the supernatural mind.

And the question that continues to persist down through history is not just who is this man, but what happened in that tomb on April 9th, 30 A.D., that morning? What happened there? And what difference does it make? Was a man named Jesus just killed by crucifixion back there in 30 A.D., and his body's never been found? Or was there something more going on?

Along with many others, spiritual leader Mahatma Gandhi refused to accept anything more than the death of Jesus, saying this: "His death on the cross was a great example to the world, but that there was anything like a mysterious or miraculous virtue in it my heart could not accept." Now Matthew 28 tells us some of the guards went into the city. The very guards who were there, who were guarding the tomb. They went into the city and told the chief priests all that had taken place. We know from other scriptures the ground shook. They became like dead men. The stone was rolled away. Jesus' body was gone. I don't know how they explained this to the chief priests, but when they had assembled with the elders and taken counsel, they gave a sufficient sum of money to the soldiers and said, "Tell the people. His disciples came by night and stole him away while we were asleep." So they took the money and did as they were directed.

And this story has been spread among the Jews to this day. The question remains, friend, with these kind of stories promulgated, people unable to believe the supernatural, yet the body of Jesus never found. And all of this evidence around this, what really happened? What do you believe happened that Sunday morning? 30 A.D. in that tomb. What is your life? Say you

believe. Speaker Tim Keller says this: "If Jesus rose from the dead, then you and I have to accept all that he said. If he didn't rise from the dead, then why worry about any of what he said? The issue on which everything hangs is not whether or not we like his teaching, but whether or not he rose from the dead. What happened there? If the resurrection isn't true, we should all quit this religious business. It's a lame hobby." Jared Wilson says we're wasting our time. I mean, what good is religion? It's like an opiate of the people. Karl Marx would quote, author Adrian Rogers says the resurrection is not merely important to historic Christian faith. Without it, there would be no Christianity. It is the singular doctrine that elevates Christianity above all other world religions. Either its leader, Jesus, is still alive or he isn't. End of story.

I can tell you this personally: if the resurrection isn't true, and I don't say this lightly. If the resurrection isn't true my whole career, 30 plus years as a minister has, and I can say this, it's been a waste of time because whatever I've done to help people intrinsically yet that's fine and that's encouraging. But my whole goal in ministry is to help people come to know the living Christ. And I do this by faith because I've experienced him. I've come to know him. I walk with him daily. Here's the thing. Not only do I think it's true, I believe it's true. And in my soul I know it's true. I can feel it. Can't you feel it? Have you ever felt the power of the resurrected Christ inside of you? The power. The same power that raised Christ from the dead. The Spirit of God stirring in you. It was Billy Graham who, if you've watched him, he was stirred by the Spirit of God. So many times he said, "There is more evidence that Jesus rose from the dead than there is that Julius Caesar ever lived, or that Alexander the Great died at age 33." I mean, what happened back there? Friends, it is by faith that you and I proclaim that the universe was formed at God's command. And it is by faith we understand and proclaim that God, by His Spirit entered that tomb back in 30 A.D. he went into the body of Jesus Christ, who was God Himself, and he conquered death there.

He resurrected his body, conquered fear and Satan and sin once and for all, so that you and I might have life. What happened back there is crucial for the history of all mankind. It is our hope.

What we're talking about here, friends, is the work of God in history. No one else could do what needed to be done for you and me to find the salvation of our souls. No one. We're talking about the God of the impossible, the God of the supernatural, the God of the irrational, the God of all things invading our world by Himself, encompassed in His Son, going to the cross to pay the penalty for human rebellion and human sin. It's more than virtuous, friends. It is love displayed, demonstrated by our creator for all of humanity, giving us... What does this

mean? Giving us hope, giving us peace with Him through the shed blood on the cross. It's by His punishment that we're healed, by His stripes that we're healed. It is His bearing of our sin in His body on a tree that gives us forgiveness. To have peace with God through Him, through Christ. It means that new life in Christ is available to us, that all of His promises are true, that the abundant life is available now, that eternity with God, eternal life with God, is available to anyone who would come to Him through Christ.

It means that God has taken steps to redeem this lost world, that there's hope for ourselves, that there's hope for our world. Real hope. I don't mean trivial political hope, not hope in humanity, but hope in God. God working in the hearts of men and women with His resurrection power by His Spirit. It means that we better stay at doing what He's instructed us to do in His Word. It means that we're going to be accountable for all that He's told us in His Word and the instructions He's given us. It means that we'll stand before Him one day. It means that He's coming back. The living Christ is coming back, friend. What happened in that tomb some 2000 years ago? I can't even comprehend how significant it is that Jesus Christ came. Paul said this, "At first importance was crucified, died, was buried, and raised to new life on the third day." And all of our hope is found here.

Let's pray together. Father, thank you. Thank you for coming into our world and demonstrating your power through your death and through the resurrection of your Son. We give you praise today. We honor you. We thank you, open our hearts to not only see, but to believe and to live in the new life you've offered us in that resurrection power. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.