

EASTER SUNDAY INTERLUDE

The Certainty Of Christ's Resurrection And The Believer's Hope (Matthew 28:11-15; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18)

Introduction: (To show the need . . .)

Recently, our beloved Deacon of Seniority, Mike Brunetti who had ministered in our Church for over three decades, went home to be with the Lord. At such a time, we like to dwell on the hope of the believer's resurrection at the rapture of the Church, a hope that is based on the resurrection of Christ, for the Apostle Paul in 1 Thessalonians 4:14-17 KJV wrote, "For **IF** we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him" to be raised from the dead so we can meet them again "in the clouds . . . in the air" ever to be "with the Lord." That word "if" is a first class condition form of the conditional clause in New Testament Greek where "if" can accurately be paraphrased to read "**since**" as in the English Standard Version (U. B. S. Grk. N. T., 1966, p. 710; Dana & Mantey, A Man. Gram. of the Grk. N. T., 1955, p. 289). The Apostle Paul was affirming that Jesus **had indeed** died and **miraculously risen** from the dead!

However, **IF** Christ did **NOT** really rise, 1 Corinthians 15:12-19 KJV claims that those believers who have physically died "are perished," our faith is also "in vain" since we would still be in our sins so that we would be "of all men most miserable," most to be pitied! It is then absolutely necessary that we establish the **validity** of Christ's resurrection this Easter Sunday, for not only does it affect our hope of meeting our beloved Deacon of Seniority once again, but our entire Christian faith stands or falls on this critically important belief about Christ's bodily resurrection!

Need: *So we ask, "What evidence do we have of the validity of Christ's resurrection on which our hope is built?!"*

- I. The author of Matthew's Gospel clearly understood his need to give BELIEVABLE evidence of Christ's resurrection in view of his own background where he had OFTEN been GREATLY DISTRUSTED!**
 - A. Matthew had been a Jewish tax collector who received tax revenues from fellow Jews (Bible Know. Com., N. T., p. 15-16). Since such tax collectors used the power of Rome to overcharge taxpayers, Matthew had long faced distrust from his countrymen who hated him as a traitor, Zon. Pict. Ency. of the Bible, vol. Five, p. 606.
 - B. Matthew wrote his gospel to convince fellow Jews that Jesus was the Messiah in part for the miracle of having risen from the dead (Ryrie Study Bible, KJV, 1978, p. 1337), so Matthew knew from personal experience that he faced a difficult task in trying to prove his case to an unbelieving readership of fellow Jewish countrymen!
 - C. To prove his case, Matthew at Matthew 28:11-15 used the story given by Jesus' enemies, Israel's religious leaders, about Jesus' missing body, what would be credible to Matthew's readers **only IF** he could show how the story *itself* supported the resurrection of Christ *opposite* what the enemies of Jesus wanted to occur.
 - D. Matthew also claimed that the story that Jesus' enemies gave to explain how His body went missing was still being "spread widely" (*diaphemizo*, Arndt & Gingrich, A Grk.-Eng. Lex. of the N. T., 1967, p. 189) when he wrote his gospel (Matthew 28:15b), giving his readers opportunity to test the validity of his claim! Matthew's willingness to leave himself vulnerable to being tested this way is strong evidence that the religious leaders were indeed still circulating such a story! [Incidentally, second century Christian writer Justin Martyr, in his work Dialogue with Trypho, supported Matthew's claim, asserting that Israel's religious leaders "sent special representatives throughout the Mediterranean world to counteract the story of the empty tomb with the explanation that His followers stole the body." (Josh McDowell, A Ready Defense, 1990, p. 232)]
- II. Accordingly, Matthew provided STRONG evidence for the VALIDITY of Christ's resurrection from the STORY being WIDELY CIRCULATED by Jesus' ENEMIES, Israel's religious leaders (as follows):**
 - A. The story that Jesus' enemies gave was that His disciples stole His body when the guards of the tomb slept, but the story itself is absurd because sleeping men do not know what occurs around them when they sleep, Matthew 28:11-13; Ibid., Bible Know. Com., N. T., p. 93.
 - B. In addition, no soldier would readily admit to sleeping on guard duty because such a dereliction of duty in the time of Christ was punishable by a torturous execution. (Ibid.; Ibid., McDowell, p. 234-235)
 - C. No one would steal Jesus' body to claim that He had risen, for as noted in the conversation of the disciples on the road to Emmaus, even godly Jews in Jesus' day believed that a self-professing but crucified, dead Messiah like Jesus was a false Messiah (Luke 24:13-21), ending any desire to steal Jesus' body from an armed guard!
 - D. Had the disciples actually stolen the body, the religious leaders could have tortured them into confessing its whereabouts so the enemies of Jesus could retrieve it and disprove claims of His resurrection, and no Jew would willingly submit to torture to uphold a lie about the resurrection of a self-professed but dead Messiah!

- E. Thus, the fact that the religious leaders never tortured the disciples to retrieve the missing body of Jesus indicates that the religious leaders **themselves** believed the disciples **never ACTUALLY stole Jesus' body!**
- F. The presence of the guard at the tomb as was acknowledged had existed in the story the religious leaders circulated indicates that a guard had been set by Jesus' tomb to keep it from being robbed! Matthew 27:62-66 explains this matter more fully, that the religious leaders had asked Pilate for the guard specifically to avoid the disciples' stealing Jesus' body and claiming that He had risen, for they recalled that Jesus had predicted He would rise on the third day after His death! Thus, the religious leaders' later wide circulation of the story that the disciples stole Jesus' body in **stunning contrast** to what they had **initially** tried to **avoid allowing to occur** reveals than an event more threatening to the interests of Jesus' enemies had happened to Jesus' body than that His disciples had stolen it! No event could be more threatening to the cause of the religious leaders than the actual bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead!
- G. Also, the fact that the religious leaders believed the disciples did not steal the body reveals some evidence to that fact must have existed! John 20:4-7 with 19:38-40 offer a reasonable explanation, claiming that the very sticky, thick, wrapped up grave clothes in which Jesus' body had been wrapped were still lying in the same position in which His dead body had lain, only without the body in them, what neither would have occurred nor even could have occurred by the work of any grave robbers in that era of antiquity! The graveclothes themselves were evidence of Christ's resurrection as it was for John, a disciple of Jesus, John 20:6-9.

Lesson: *The religious leaders' absurd story that the disciples stole Jesus' body when the guards of His tomb slept, a story that even distrusting readers of Matthew's Gospel could verify was still being widely spread by these leaders when Matthew wrote His gospel, provides powerful evidence that Jesus actually rose from the dead!*

Application: *(1) May we believe in Christ for salvation from sin, John 3:16. (2) May we trust the validity of the Christian faith as built on the credibility of Christ's bodily resurrection even by the testimony of Jesus' enemies, Israel's religious leaders! (3) May we then also accept the truthfulness of the resurrection of believers at the rapture, for it is based on the validity of Christ's resurrection according to 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18!*

Conclusion: (To illustrate the message . . .)

SINCE we **DO** believe that Jesus died and **ROSE** again as 1 Thessalonians 4:14 claims, we can dwell on the doctrine of the rapture and be blessed in God's comfort over the passing of our beloved Deacon of Seniority.

(1) We know that when our brother in Christ believed in Christ as personal Savior, John 5:24 claims he would no longer come into condemnation to end up in hell when he died, for the instant he trusted in Christ, he was "once-for-all passed out of the state of eternal spiritual death over into the state of the [eternal] life." (***metabebeken***, third person singular **perfect** indicative of ***metabaino***, "to go or pass from one place to another," The Analytical Greek Lexicon (Zondervan), 1972, p. 265; U. B. S. Greek N. T., 1966, p. 340) The perfect tense in New Testament Greek indicates a state that occurred in the past, the effects of which continue in the present and on into the future. The believer's unconditional salvation security is thus taught in the tense of the Greek verb ***metabaino*** in John 5:24!

(2) Also, the instant he dies, a believer is absent from the body and present with God in heaven, 2 Corinthians 5:8. No believer in Christ goes to some intermediate state somewhere like a purgatory for further purification in order to enter heaven at a later date. Rather, he immediately enters the presence of the Lord in heaven!

(3) 1 Thessalonians 4:14-17 then reveals that at the rapture of the Church, every Christian who has physically died will have his spirit brought by Christ from heaven with Him, and while the Lord waits in the air, that believer's spirit will descend to the earth to enter his deceased body, that body will be resurrected by God's power in glory and be caught up to be with the Lord Jesus in the clouds in the atmosphere. Then, we believers who remain alive will see our bodies also changed into the glorious likeness of Christ's resurrected body, and we will be caught up together with these resurrected believers of all Church History, and all together, we will proceed with our Lord back to heaven according to John 14:1-3. This whole event will occur in a split second of time according to 1 Corinthians 15:52.

(4) The whole Church of glorified saints will then always be in the presence of the Lord, 1 Thessalonians 4:17.

(5) Knowing these truths and dwelling on them is important for encouraging one another especially upon the departure of fellow Christians in death to be with the Lord according to 1 Thessalonians 4:17b-18.

(6) However, for us to be able to be reunited with our beloved Deacon of Seniority, we like him must receive Christ as personal Savior like he did, that we also might have eternal life and end up in heaven with him, John 3:16!

May we believe that Christ died for our sins, was buried and bodily rose from the dead! May we also personally trust in Him for salvation from sin and anticipate the blessed hope of the rapture of the Church!