

I. Scripture

- A. *“Now while they were going, 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.”* (Matthew 28:11-15)

II. Welcome

- A. Welcome to our ongoing series, the Mysteries of the Resurrection, getting ready for our giant Easter Celebration. This is part 6 in the series.
- B. My talk today is called **“The Mystery of the Frustrated Skeptics.”**
- C. There are two kinds of laws that govern your life. And it is crucial—eternally important—that you understand the difference between them.
- D. The first kind of law is a regulation. Think of the speed limit on Interstate 5. That sign says 70 miles per hour. That is a regulatory law. If you choose to, you can break it. You can push your foot to the floor, watch the needle climb to 95, and completely defy that law. You might get a ticket. You might lose control. Face consequences. Anything. But it is entirely within your power to break a regulatory law.
- E. The second kind of law is different. It’s not a regulation; it’s a reality. Think of the law of gravity. You cannot break the law of gravity. If you walk to the edge of a cliff and step off, you don’t break the law of gravity. You prove it. Tragically.
- F. You cannot break a law of fundamental reality. You can only break yourself against it.
- G. When you deal with God, you are not dealing with a traffic cop handing out citations for breaking regulations. You are dealing with the Architect of Reality. You cannot break God’s truth. You can only break yourself against God’s truth. No one can break God’s laws; you can only break yourself against God’s laws.
- H. It’s like bashing your skull against a granite boulder, hoping that if you hit it hard enough, the boulder will crack.
- I. Is this you? You do this. You hammer your head against the bedrock of reality because you are addicted to your own control, committed to doing what is right in your own sight.
- J. That is exactly what we just read in Matthew 28. In this paragraph, we are witnessing some very powerful, very religious, very desperate power-brokers colliding head-on with a fundamental reality they cannot fight against and win: The tomb is empty. Jesus Christ is alive.
- K. This isn’t like a speed limit they can ignore. This is gravity.
- L. And instead of surrendering to that reality, instead of falling on their faces in worship, they fight it. They buy their way out of it. They pull out “a large sum of money” to manufacture a lie, hoping they can bribe reality into submission.
- M. Today, we are going to look closely at their strategy, because their story is a mirror. It shows us the high price, the sheer exhaustion, and the absolute absurdity of fighting God’s truth.
- N. But more than that, we are going to see that the very Rock these men were trying to destroy is the only foundation that can actually save you.
- O. Let’s look at what happens when human pride goes to war with a divine reality.

III. Reality Check

- A. Look at the text. Look at what happens when human beings decide to go to war with a fundamental law of the universe.
- B. When you fight God’s reality, a very predictable, tragic sequence of events unfolds.
- C. First, by definition, fighting reality makes you nuts.
1. You lose your mind, your sobriety, your common sense.
 2. Look at the Roman guards. These are hardened, professional killers. But when they collide with the reality of the angel and the empty tomb, they faint like dead men. And when they wake up, they don’t report to their commanding officer. They run to the priests. Why? Because their worldview just broke.
 3. And look at the religious leaders. When they hear the tomb is empty, they don’t go investigate. They don’t look for the truth. They panic. They convene a back-room conspiracy.
 - a) When you fight a reality you cannot control, your common sense is the first casualty.
- D. Second, you step all over your own value system.
1. When you go to war with truth, you start doing stuff that goes against your own principles.
 2. You do stuff you swore you’d never do.
 3. You wake up one day in a very bad place, and ask, How did I get here?
 4. Look at the chief priests. These are the theological elite of Israel. They dedicate their lives to the Law of Moses. They know the Ten Commandments by heart: “Thou shalt not bear false witness.”
 5. Yet here they are, opening the temple treasury to pay off soldiers to lie to the public. It goes against everything they claim to stand for. It nags at their conscience, but they suppress that truth with a giant pile of hush money.
 6. Verse 12 says they gave a “large sum”—sufficient silver—to the soldiers.
 7. You might not be bribing Roman guards, but have you been there? Have you found yourself stepping all over your own morals, compromising your own integrity, just to prop up an illusion?
 8. You know this will cost you, but you push that thought down and just keep funding the lie.
- E. Third, fighting reality forces you to believe the absurd.
1. Because you suppressed the truth, you have to invent a story to take its place. And usually, that story is irrational.
 2. Look at the lie they concoct in verse 13: “Tell them, ‘His disciples came at night and stole Him away while we slept.’”
 3. Think about the absurdity of that statement.

4. How can you be a witness to an event that happened while you were unconscious?
 - a) "Yes, your honor, I was fast asleep, but I can tell you for a fact it was Peter and John who moved the two-ton stone!"
5. It's delusional.
6. The Bible predicts there will come a day when the whole human race gets sucked into "strong delusion."
 - a) You see it everywhere today.
 - b) The absurdity that the universe is a cosmic accident... but you can still find meaning.
 - c) The absurdity that truth is subjective... but you get mad when somebody lies to you.
 - d) The absurdity of demanding grace for all your own mistakes... but justice for everyone else's.
 - e) The absurdity that humans are just a collection of chemicals and energy... but you still love and value your children and call them precious.
7. Anyone who refuses to yield to the Ultimate Reality will find themselves defending the indefensible and believing the unbelievable... in a futile attempt to avoid the unavoidable.

IV. The Deniers: Simon Greenleaf

- A. History is full of frustrated skeptics. Brilliant men and women who looked at the empty tomb, grabbed their sharpest hammers, and said, "I'm going to smash this myth to pieces."
- B. Simon Greenleaf
 1. Let's travel back in time to the year 1833.
 2. We enter the grand, hushed library of Harvard Law School. Dark polished mahogany. The smell of old paper, leather bindings, and gaslight.
 3. Sitting there in the dim shadows is man named Simon Greenleaf.
 4. Professor Simon Greenleaf. He is a lawyer. He is a professor of law. But he is more.
 5. He is the law. He was one of the founders of Harvard Law School.
 6. Greenleaf actually wrote the definitive, multi-volume textbook on legal evidence. He is a man who lives entirely by the speed limits of human logic.
 7. And to him, the resurrection of Jesus Christ is a joke. An insult to the rational mind.
 8. One day, his law students challenge him: "Professor, if you are the master of evidence, why don't you apply your own unforgiving rules of cross-examination to the evidence for the resurrection?"
 9. Greenleaf takes the bait. He smirks. He sets up a mental courtroom right there in that venerable library. He summons Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Paul, James, plus the Roman writers, the Jewish writers to the witness stand.
 10. They are hostile witnesses.
 11. Greenleaf begins his ruthless cross-examination. He looks for contradictions. He probes for collusion. He searches for the motive of a cover-up. He is sure the accounts will crumble under the pressure of a brilliant legal mind, just like the flimsy story the Roman guards were paid to tell.
 12. But as the days turn into weeks, the atmosphere in that library begins to change.
 13. Greenleaf starts pacing. His smugness fades. A cold knot forms in his stomach.
 14. The witnesses aren't breaking. Their testimonies don't read like coordinated lies—if they were colluding, their stories would match perfectly. But they don't.
 15. They read like authentic, independent accounts from different angles of an explosive, terrifying event.
 16. He looks for their motive. Why would they lie? What did they get out of it? Wealth? No. Power? No. They got beatings, poverty, exile, and execution. Greenleaf knows human nature. So their motive torments him.
 17. He tries to find the loophole. He tries to manufacture an alternative theory.
 18. But to maintain his atheism, the great Simon Greenleaf realizes he has to believe a greater absurdity: that a band of terrified, uneducated fishermen pulled off the greatest heist in military history, stole a corpse, and then scattered across the world to bear witness, and then joyfully die for their own hoax.
 19. He is backed into a corner of his own courtroom. Greenleaf's gavel feels like lead in his hand. He is staring at a reality he swore he would never accept.
 20. Simon Greenleaf, the master of evidence, lowers his gavel. The evidence has cornered him. He is forced to conclude that the resurrection of Jesus Christ is the absolute, best-attested event in ancient history. The frustrated skeptic is conquered by the reality he couldn't disprove.
 21. In 1846 Greenleaf wrote:
 - a) The Testimony of the Evangelists Examined by the Rules of Evidence Administered in Courts of Justice (Published in 1846).
 - b) Greenleaf famously argues that the apostles' testimony would be accepted in any court of law and that the resurrection "did in fact happen."
 - c) "For myself, I must say, that having for many years made the evidences of Christianity the subject of close study, the result has been a firm and increasing conviction of the authenticity and plenary inspiration of the Bible. It is indeed the Word of God."
 22. Greenleaf spent the rest of his life proclaiming a risen Savior.

V. The Deniers: Dr. Viggo and Jane Olsen

- A. For Dr. Viggo Olsen, a brilliant young surgeon and his brilliant wife, Joan, Christianity wasn't just a myth; it was nauseating. They were a modern, secular power couple. They believed in progress, biology, and their own intellects.
 1. When Joan's parents became Christians and started talking about Jesus, it infuriated them. They got sick of hearing about it.
 2. Finally, Joan's parents issued a challenge: "Just investigate it objectively for yourselves."

3. Viggo and Joan agreed, but with a secret agenda. They weren't looking for the truth; they were looking for a weakness, a fatal flaw. They were going to perform a scientific autopsy on the Christian faith. They were going to dissect it, expose it, and be done with it forever.
 4. Imagine Viggo and Joan, 2:00 AM, sitting across from each other in their study. Viggo, the surgeon, with his medical textbooks open. Joan, pouring over history and archaeology. They are meticulously slicing into the biblical narrative, looking for the fatal flaw. The historical error. The medical impossibility that will bleed the whole religion out.
 5. Joan digs into the ancient records, fully expecting to find proof that the Bible was fabricated centuries later.
 6. Viggo analyzes the crucifixion, ready to apply the "swoon theory"—the idea that Jesus just passed out on the cross and woke up in the cool tomb.
 7. But a strange, terrifying thing happens in there study.
 8. As a surgeon, Viggo knows exactly what a Roman scourge (whip) does to human flesh. He knows what crucifixion does to the lungs. He knows what happens when a Roman spear is thrust into the pericardial cavity and blood and water flow out. Jesus didn't pass out. He was clinically, undeniably dead.
 9. And Joan? Every time she tries to find a historical error, she finds that when archaeologists put a spade in the dirt, the Bible is vindicated. The history is precise.
 10. It is 2:00 AM. Their house is silent. Viggo and Joan look at each other across the desk. The terrifying reality is setting in. Every skeptical theory they try to apply requires more blind faith than simply believing the tomb was empty. To keep their secular pride, they are going to have to commit intellectual suicide.
 11. They are both standing on the edge of a leap of faith they swore they would never take.
 12. The reality becomes clear to Joan first, and she surrenders her resistance to Jesus.
 13. A few days later, her proud husband follows his wife. He drops his intellectual weapons. He falls to his knees in their home, and the man who set out to destroy Christianity gives his entire life, and his medical career, to the Risen Christ.
 14. After receiving Christ, they didn't just join a church and enjoy a lucrative medical career in America. They packed up and moved to the jungles of Bangladesh.
 15. They wanted everybody to find the love they found when they found Christ.
 16. There was no hospital. So, they built one.
 17. The couple who used to think Christianity was an outdated myth spent the rest of their lives practicing world-class surgery and showing world class love in the jungle, saving thousands of lives, and sharing the Gospel with the Muslim and Hindu villagers.
 18. Times were hard, but they stayed. They stayed through war. They stayed through waves of massacres. They stayed through evacuation orders.
 19. They had met a Savior whose gospel was worth any price. They literally put their own bodies between hostile armies and the people Jesus died to save.
 20. Here is their story: Doktor: Diplomat in Bangladesh
 21. Olsen wrote:
 - a) "The resurrection of Christ became to us the hinge or crux of the whole question... After they claimed to have seen and talked with their resurrected Lord, the proof of those encounters was undeniable. Every one of them suddenly became courageous and bold and fearless. Even though it meant that most, if not all, of them would face horrible executions in the years ahead, the disciples never backed down or backed away again."
- B. What happened to these brilliant people?
1. It hit them in the face what the chief priests in Matthew 28 refused to admit:
 - a) You can't argue with gravity.
 - b) You can't fight reality.
 - c) You can't explain away that empty tomb.
 - d) You can't break God's truth.
 - e) There's a price to pay for fighting reality. There's a crash at the bottom of the drop. There's a pain in the heart. There's innocence lost, joy sacrificed, and love broken.
- C. When you collide with the God-ordained reality of the cosmos, you only have two choices.
1. You can beat against it or...
 2. Or you can bow before it.
- D. The chief priests beat against it.
1. They paid a fortune to convince the world that the dead body was still hidden, and they spent the rest of their lives looking over their shoulders, exhausted by defending a lie they knew wasn't true.
- VI. The Cross
- A. Now please, compare all this to the cross of Christ.
 - B. Just three days before that empty tomb, Jesus paid something too.
 - C. He didn't pay with silver. He paid with His precious blood.
 1. He didn't pay to hide a reality; He paid to open up a new one, the reality of forgiveness of sins and of eternal salvation for all who will receive him.
 - a) One price was paid in secrecy.
 - (1) The other price was paid in public.
 - b) One price was paid to purchase a lie.
 - (1) The other price was paid to purchase your soul.

- c) One price was paid to ensure political power.
 - (1) The other price was paid to ensure a kind of love we still don't have words to describe.

VII. Conclusion

- A. All of life is leading every person to a giant reality check. That day of that reality check coming for every single one of us.
- B. It's called Judgement Day.
 - 1. One day, you will see Jesus with your own eyes.
 - 2. He will either be your Savior or your Judge.
- C. God's truth is an anvil that has worn out a million human hammers. You cannot break it.
- D. Stop fighting. Drop your hammer. Drop your pride. Bow to the reality of the empty tomb, and receive Him right now."
- E. And I would like to show you how to do that right now, right here, today.

VIII. Salvation Prayer

- A. Lord Jesus,
- B. I ADMIT that I am a sinner and I need a Savior.
- C. I BELIEVE that You died on the cross for my sins and rose from the dead.
- D. Right now, I CHOOSE to trust You as my Savior and receive You into my life.
- E. Forgive me, save me, and make me Your child forever.
- F. In Jesus' name, Amen.

IX. PRAYER

- A. Father,
- B. I am not praying for the people in this room to be comfortable. I am praying for them to become dangerous.
- C. We have just stared into the blinding reality of an empty tomb. A reality that shattered the Roman Empire, broke the smartest skeptics in history, and demands the complete devotion of our lives.
- D. Lord, I ask that You would strip every ounce of cowardice, complacency, and compromise from this congregation. We confess that too many times we have tried to apologize for Your truth or blend into a culture that is drowning in delusion.
- E. Fill these men and women with the terrifying, undeniable power of the Resurrection. Let them walk into their offices, their schools, and their homes this week not as victims, not as debaters, but as living, breathing proof that Jesus Christ is King.
- F. Make their integrity so sharp it cuts through the noise. Make their love so relentless it breaks the hardest hearts. And make their conviction so absolute that the world has no choice but to reckon with the God we serve.
- G. We are not waiting for the end of the story; we know the final score. The grave is empty. The war is won. Now, give us the courage to believe like it.
- H. In the matchless, unconquerable Name of Jesus.
- I. Amen.