

*1Now after the Sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to look at the grave. 2And behold, a severe earthquake had occurred, for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled away the stone and sat upon it. 3And his appearance was like lightning, and his clothing as white as snow. 4The guards shook for fear of him and became like dead men. 5The angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid; for I know that you are looking for Jesus who has been crucified. 6"He is not here, for He has risen, just as He said. Come, see the place where He was lying. 7"Go quickly and tell His disciples that He has risen from the dead; and behold, He is going ahead of you into Galilee, there you will see Him; behold, I have told you."*

*8And they left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy and ran to report it to His disciples. 9And behold, Jesus met them and greeted them. And they came up and took hold of His feet and worshiped Him. 10Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid; go and take word to My brethren to leave for Galilee, and there they will see Me."*

*11Now while they were on their way, some of the guard came into the city and reported to the chief priests all that had happened. 12And when they had assembled with the elders and consulted together, they gave a large sum of money to the soldiers, 13and said, "You are to say, 'His disciples came by night and stole Him away while we were asleep.' 14"And if this should come to the governor's ears, we will win him over and keep you out of trouble." 15And they took the money and did as they had been instructed; and this story was widely spread among the Jews, and is to this day.*

1 Chron. 28:9 "As for you, my son Solomon, know the God of your father, and serve Him with a whole heart and a willing mind; for the LORD searches all hearts, and understands every intent of the thoughts. If you seek Him, He will let you find Him; but if you forsake Him, He will reject you forever.

Does that sound like a religion to you, or a relationship?

The world is full of religions. Even secularism is a religion. Religions

all have in common that they require you to DO something. Jump through these hoops. Bow toward the east and pray X amount of times each day. Lay on nails. Crawl on your knees saying some rote prayer every 5th step. Wear funny underwear. Whatever.

The Bible is about a relationship lost, and regained. Adam and Eve would meet with the Lord in the cool of the day. They would visit. Then sin entered and that connection was blocked. Sin made a separation.

Then when Jesus said on the cross, It Is Finished, the veil in the temple was torn in two. The possibility of friendship between a Holy God and fallen men was purchased by the awful price of the blood of the Son of God.

His death opened an avenue of relationship. The sin that caused a separation between sinful me and Holy God, was imputed to His Son. He paid the price of my sin. And the righteousness necessary to enter into a friendship with a Holy God was imputed to me.

Imputation. It is a legal term. To credit to a person. In this case, my sin, all of it, is imputed to Jesus. He takes it to the cross and pays my unpayable debt. Likewise, His righteousness, His sinless purity, is imputed to me.

Because of that transaction, the avenue of friendship between me and a Holy God is opened. This is the gospel.

But back to the idea of seeking God. I began my study this week by asking, *why were these women the first ones to know about the resurrection of Jesus from the dead.*

And the answer is pretty simple. They were the seekers. They loved the most.

Luke 7:36 *Now one of the Pharisees was requesting Him to dine with him, and He entered the Pharisee's house and reclined at the table.*  
37 *And there was a woman in the city who was a sinner; and when she*

*learned that He was reclining at the table in the Pharisee's house, she brought an alabaster vial of perfume, 38and standing behind Him at His feet, weeping, she began to wet His feet with her tears, and kept wiping them with the hair of her head, and kissing His feet and anointing them with the perfume. 39Now when the Pharisee who had invited Him saw this, he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet He would know who and what sort of person this woman is who is touching Him, that she is a sinner."*

*40And Jesus answered him, "Simon, I have somewhat to say to thee." And he replied, "Say on, Master." 41"A moneylender had two debtors: one owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. 42"When they were unable to repay, he graciously forgave them both. So which of them will love him more?" 43Simon answered and said, "I suppose the one whom he forgave more." And He said to him, "You have judged correctly." 44Turning toward the woman, He said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave Me no water for My feet, but she has wet My feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. 45"You gave Me no kiss; but she, since the time I came in, has not ceased to kiss My feet. 46"You did not anoint My head with oil, but she anointed My feet with perfume. 47"For this reason I say to you, her sins, which are many, have been forgiven, for she loved much; but he who is forgiven little, loves little." 48Then He said to her, "Your sins have been forgiven." 49Those who were reclining at the table with Him began to say to themselves, "Who is this man who even forgives sins?" 50And He said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace."*

Jesus, responds to love. The disciples are dazed and confused.  
Clueless. Fearful. Hiding. Keeping a low profile.

These women, there are others also mentioned in Lukes and John's gospels, the women who loved Jesus are driven to do the last thing they can to serve Him.

The jews had a theory. They believed the spirit stayed with the body 3 days but on the fourth day, because of decay, it departed. That could be part of the motivation of these women who loved Him to anoint Him with spices, one last time.

The seekers, the ones who loved most, are the first to know that He is risen from the dead. *If you seek Him, He will let you find Him;*

They were up at 0-darkthirty, going to the grave with spices. That is a driven love. They know the grave is sealed with a giant stone. They know about the guards and Rome's seal. They don't really have a plan. All they know is their hearts are broken at the loss of . . Him. They'll take any remnant they can get. Just be near Him one last time. Anoint the body with spices. Anything. This is a driven love.

I spent some time in prayer this week. Discouraged. Lord, it's been 3 years of faithful teaching. I guess I expected more of a response. I thought the church would wax strong with the teaching of sound doctrine. That has been my theory, learned from what I witnessed when I was a young christian at Grace Community Church in Southern California.

Preach the word. Faithfully. And God will be in your midst, making the saints strong. The church will burst forth on the offense. Look out Tonopah. But here we are on life supports 3 years in. We watch the heart beat monitor. Blip Blip Blip. Apparently we're not dead. Yet. There's still a heart beat.

The Lord has answered my complaint the same day. Quickly He answers my call. When was the last time you were up at 0-dark thirty. With spices. Going into the unknown, without any shred of a plan, because you're desperate to be near me. Your heart is breaking to have more of me. You'll do anything, just to be near me.

When's the last time I shed tears of grief over my sinfulness. Washed His feet with my tears and wiped them with my hair. Never, that's when.

This is a relationship. Not a religion. And relationships are all about response. Even as bad at relationships as I am, I do understand that relationships are all about investment. Time. Love. Heart.

I'm not brilliant, but after a while, I learned if I wanted a response from my wife, the vacuum cleaner was a good place to start. A small investment. A larger than deserved response.

*1Now after the Sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to look at the grave.*

Mark and Luke tell us that they had prepared spices to anoint the body. Other names are mentioned also in some of the other gospels.

Some day it will be fun to ask them. What was your plan? What did you figure you would do with the large stone and the Roman seal? Whatever their plan, if they had one, it wasn't necessary.

*2And behold, a severe earthquake had occurred, for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled away the stone and sat upon it. 3And his appearance was like lightning, and his clothing as white as snow.*

An earthquake. The second one in a 3 day period.

MacArthur says Jesus was already gone when the stone was rolled away. The angel rolled the stone away to let us in, not to let Jesus out. The risen Christ can not be held by any grave.

But we needed to see that the tomb is empty. We need to be told by a heavenly visitor to come inside and see where He was laid. To witness that He is not there. His grave clothes are there. The place where He lay is there. He is not.

*4The guards shook for fear of him and became like dead men.*

The word for the shaking of the guards is the same one that describes the shaking of the earth during the earthquake. Sheer terror has caused first some shaking, and then, a paralyzing effect.

*5The angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid; for I know that you*

*are looking for Jesus who has been crucified. 6“He is not here, for He has risen, just as He said. Come, see the place where He was lying.*

Notice the construction of this sentence. Do not be afraid; FOR

The reason for them to not be afraid is because the angel knows they are there looking for Jesus with a motivation of pure love.

The guards on the other hand, should be afraid. They are soldiers on the wrong side. One angel, maybe this one, slew 185,000 Syrians. If you're fighting on the side of the army against God, and an angel shows up, you should be terrified.

You're out of your league, fighting against God and His angels.

This angel tells the ladies, you need not fear. Why? Because these women are beloved by God. They belong to Him. Angels are God's servants to minister to people who God loves. The elect. Esteemed of God.

And the angel has a conversation with them. This angel is on a mission, sent by God, to communicate some truth with these ladies. Here's his message to them;

*6“He is not here, for He has risen, just as He said. Come, see the place where He was lying*

These women are the first witnesses of more than 500 according to the apostle Paul, of the evidence of a risen Christ.

Think about it. Our belief is based on evidence. Written evidence. The case is closed. The evidence has been filed.

*In 20...27 Then Jesus said to Thomas, “Put your finger here and look at My hands. Reach out your hand and put it into My side. Stop doubting and believe.” 28 Thomas replied, “My Lord and my God!” 29 Jesus said to him, “Because you have seen Me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen, and yet have believed.” ...*

Thomas, doubting Thomas, didn't believe, and Jesus makes this statement. We don't get to put our fingers in the nail holes and our hands in His side where He was pierced. We have to base our belief on evidence. Reliable evidence. Reliable witnesses who saw first hand. What they saw is recorded in a record book.

Listen to a quote from Sir Edward Clarke, former Justice of the High Court of England.

*Quote: As a lawyer, I have made a prolonged study of the evidences for the events of the first Easter day. To me, the evidence is conclusive, and over and over again in the High Court I have secured the verdict on evidence not nearly so compelling. Inference follows on evidence, and a truthful witness is always artless and disdains effect. The gospel evidence for the resurrection is of this class, and as a lawyer, I accept it unreservedly as the testimony of truthful men to the facts they were able to substantiate.*

The evidence for the truth of the resurrection is available for anyone to find out. This book is the most printed book in history. The evidence is obtainable without cost.

Most men will go to perdition because of neglect. The evidence is compelling and easily obtainable. They don't care.

*7“Go quickly and tell His disciples that He has risen from the dead; and behold, He is going ahead of you into Galilee, there you will see Him; behold, I have told you.”*

The angels task was to relay a baton. He is tasked to relay information to these witnesses. He does so with proof. See, the grave is empty. He is not here. He is risen from the dead. They are witnesses and as such, they are instructed to carry that baton ahead to other witnesses. *behold, I have told you.*

They have seen a messenger from God. Brilliant in light. White and clean. Terrifying to his enemies. And they have received important

information. Evidence. Angel seen. Says Jesus has risen. Showed us the empty tomb where He was laid, and the folded grave linens He was formerly wrapped in.

That's a lot of evidence. But in God's grace, there will be much more.

*8And they left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy and ran to report it to His disciples.*

This is the action of someone who needs no further convincing. An angel is enough evidence. They believe. They are overcome with excitement. Fear and great joy. And they are running to find the disciples to relay the information.

But God, in His grace, is going to increase their evidence by magnitudes.

*9And behold, Jesus met them and greeted them.*

The word here for greeted them is interesting. This greeting is the most ordinary one possible. Nothing fantastic. Like saying hello to someone in the post office.

They're running to find the disciples, half crazed after seeing an angel and being ordered to relay important information, and Jesus says, Hi Mary.

One of the things that makes this record, this book, so believable is what the lawyer of the High Court above called artlessness that disdains effect.

In other words, the people act like regular people. If someone were making this up, Jesus would have a voice like the rushing of a mighty wind and He would be hovering in a fiery chariot and He would say "*Who Shall I Send*"

No, He just intercepts the women and says "good morning!" The same way He had said it a thousand times before to them. They are His

sheep. They recognize His voice.

*And they came up and took hold of His feet and worshiped Him. 10 Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid; go and take word to My brethren to leave for Galilee, and there they will see Me."*

The Galilee reference is important. The Jews were waiting for a Messiah to sit on the throne of David in Jerusalem. They murdered that Messiah. A day will come when He will return and sit on that throne for a 1000 years in Jerusalem . . . but that isn't now.

He says, I'll meet you in Galilee. New plan. Old plan actually but different than what anyone saw or expected. Paul calls it a mystery. The nations. Galilee of the Gentiles. The church age has spanned almost 2000 years. It begins in Galilee with a fish breakfast.

And so ends Matthew's account of the first witnesses to the resurrection of Jesus the Christ from the dead. But there is more. Another witness provided by the providence of God, by His enemies. This is the proof of absurdity.

*11 Now while they were on their way, some of the guard came into the city and reported to the chief priests all that had happened.*

What had happened. What did they report. That an earthquake and corresponding heavenly visitor had happened. An angel, magnificent in gleaming white, rolled the stone away and sat on top of it.

They had to report that the very thing they had been sent to do, to guard against anyone tampering with the body of Jesus had been over-ruled by a higher power. They were helpless to do anything about it. That an angel was presently giving tours of the empty tomb. Their mission was a complete failure, but it was a failure because they were over-ruled by forces that overwhelmed their powers.

They were wise to go to the chief priests and not to Pilate. For Roman soldiers under orders of a governor, to fail is to pay with your life. Maybe these rulers of Israel could intervene.

*12And when they had assembled with the elders and consulted together, they gave a large sum of money to the soldiers, 13and said, “You are to say, ‘His disciples came by night and stole Him away while we were asleep.’ 14“And if this should come to the governor’s ears, we will win him over and keep you out of trouble.”*

The chief priests now have a dilemma of far greater proportions. Their plan has backfired. Kill Jesus. Make Him go away. And assign a guard to ensure that He stays dead.

Such is the veracity of reliable witnesses, 12 or so men under orders with penalty of possibly losing their lives, to do a simple job, keep Jesus in His grave. The Sanhedrin understands, correctly, that if the reason of the guards failure is combined with other reliable witnesses, *ie* an angel came and rolled the stone away and gave tours of the empty tomb, like it or not, everyone will believe it.

They're in a bad spot. Their plan has backfired. Over-ruled by a higher power. So they convene and consider their options. And the best option for dis-belief, is to concoct an equally unbelievable story.

We all got sleepy. We figured guarding a dead guy was a ridiculous assignment. We knew He was dead. Mac, there, is the very guy who seeing He was obviously dead, didn't bother to break His legs, but did in fact thrust a spear into his heart cavity and drained the water and blood out of Him.

So we had some beers. Quite a few beers. And we got pretty groggy. And the disciples who to a man did not understand or believe in a resurrection, and who were cowering somewhere afraid and trying to stay undiscovered, dazed and confused, those very same disciples came and somehow rolled that stone away and stole the body of Jesus.

That's your story boys, and even though it paints a pretty bad picture of you all, here's a pile of money to help. And we'll fix it with Pilate. Don't worry about old Pilate. We've got him in a tight spot. We can handle him. We won't let him give you any trouble over this. That's

the Jim embellished version.

*15And they took the money and did as they had been instructed; and this story was widely spread among the Jews, and is to this day.*

That story works two ways. For those of us who are willing to believe the accounts of reliable men, it makes the story of the resurrection much more compelling.

Only God could send a force to completely overwhelm a Roman guard. They were grossly outnumbered. One angel, 12 guards. They were rendered helpless.

The very thing they were to ensure, keeping Jesus in that grave, is rendered impossible by a higher authority. They are helpless to keep Him in the grave. But the fact that they were there makes the story that much more compelling.

All of man's armies are helpless against one little finger, one little breath of God. To men, 12 roman guards or whatever the number was, is a potent force to be reckoned with. Add to that the Roman seal. To disturb a Roman seal is to tamper with all of the powers of Rome.

To the thinking mind, the only possible way to overcome all of those safeguards would be for God to intervene and render all of that, impotent.

So God has providentially used the enterprises of His enemies to prove beyond a doubt; something supernatural happened here. Something happened to render all of man's attempts to safeguard the scene, useless. A higher power has overwhelmed the abilities of men. Guards and seals are useless against the finger of God.

But notice something else remarkable, and we see this plainly to this day. For the mind of disbelief, the heart that is predisposed to be hardened against God, believing the impossible is possible.

Tell someone that they were born dead in their sins, hopelessly ordered

by sin and death, duped and ruled by Satan, but that Jesus has opened the possibility of being grafted into the very family of God Himself by the remission of sins, proven by His resurrection from the dead. They'll laugh you to scorn.

But tell them that some fantasmagasmical Jesus, not described in this book, came here and buried some plates in the ground and an angel gave a very sinful guy some magic glasses and told him where to dig, and they'll eat that up.

Jesus himself gets to the root of this conundrum in John chapter 3, speaking to Nicodemus. 19 *“This is the judgment, that the Light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the Light, for their deeds were evil. 20 “For everyone who does evil hates the Light, and does not come to the Light for fear that his deeds will be exposed.*

The lie is ridiculous. The truth is based in rock solid evidence recorded by reliable witnesses. But the truth means giving up sin. So the evil heart goes quickly to the ridiculous solution. Anything is better than bowing the knee to God. Put something ridiculous out there. Evil men will grasp at it because the alternative is a God who rules the universe and judges sin.

Evolution is completely ridiculous. Disproven by modern science, easily, when we understand DNA and genetics. Yet it's in all of secularisms textbooks because the alternative is impossible. A God who created all things and owns all things and who has moral standards clearly written down, and who judges all who will rebel against Him.

All of a sudden, evolution becomes the less of two perceived evils. Love sin. Gotta have sin. We'll go with evolution.

Love sin, gotta have sin, we'll go with the guards ridiculous account paid for in full by wicked unbelieving Israelites. And so it goes, to this very day.

In the 1970's, a man named Hardy wrote a book and his premise is

based on 2 questions.

1. Has anyone, anywhere, ever beat death? And if so, question 2
2. Did He make a way for anyone else to also beat death?

The evidence is compelling. Jesus was in the grave 3 days. And He arose from that grave, miraculously. And that same Jesus said *In a little while, the world will see Me no more, but you will see Me. Because I live, you also will live.* Jn. 14:19

Those simple words answer both questions. All that remains is: What do you love more? Your sin, OR Jesus the Christ, risen from the dead.