

THE LIE THAT PROVES THE TRUTH
Matthew 28:2-15

Who were the first witnesses of the resurrection? Peter? John? Mary? Actually, none of the above. The first witnesses were someone you wouldn't expect at all.

Matthew 27:66 [the priests] *went, and made the sepulcher sure, sealing the stone, and setting a watch.*

Matthew 28:2 *And, behold...the angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat upon it. :4 And for fear of him the keepers did shake, and became as dead men. :11 ...some of the watch came into the city, and shewed unto the chief priests all the things that were done.*

These were the first witnesses to the resurrection: Roman guards, eye witnesses to supernatural events which scared them nearly to death.

Now, we don't know exactly what else they saw, but we know that they saw an angel rolling away the stone. How could they have known that unless they saw it? Whether they saw the risen Lord or not is not clear, but they saw enough to know that the tomb needed to be investigated. And so they did, and they found it empty.

Unfortunately though, they lied about it. Still, you can learn a lot from a lie.

Matthew 28:12 [the priests] *gave large money to the soldiers. :13 Saying, Say ye, His disciples came by night, and stole him away while we slept. :14 If this come to the governor's ears, we will persuade him, and secure you. :15 So they took the money, and did as they were taught: and this saying is commonly reported among the Jews until this day.*

What do we learn from this lie? First, it proves absolutely that the tomb was empty. Second, it proves that there is no natural explanation for the tomb being empty. Because they had no better story than the one they made up and that story is impossible to believe. And why is their story impossible to believe? Because: [1] If the guards had fallen asleep, that would have been executed. That's why they were uncomfortable with the lie because it incriminated themselves so that they needed assurance (and a great deal of money) from the priests to protect them from the governor. [2] We cannot imagine disciples rolling away the large, sealed stone without waking the guards. Indeed, when the angel rolled away the stone, it *did* wake the guards. [3] We cannot imagine disciples who fled when Jesus was alive suddenly getting brave now that he is dead. [4] How could the guards know what happened while they were asleep?

So the account given by the priests and the guards is not only a lie but a conspicuous lie.

And where does that leave us? With an empty tomb with no natural explanation how it got empty.

But there is a perfectly good supernatural explanation, which is as the angel said:

Matthew 28:6 *He is not here: for he is risen.*