

The next day, the one after Preparation Day, the chief priests and the Pharisees went to Pilate. ⁶³ “Sir,” they said, “we remember that while he was still alive that deceiver said, ‘After three days I will rise again.’ ⁶⁴ So give the order for the tomb to be made secure until the third day. Otherwise, his disciples may come and steal the body and tell the people that he has been raised from the dead. This last deception will be worse than the first.”

⁶⁵ “Take a guard,” Pilate answered. “Go, make the tomb as secure as you know how.” ⁶⁶ So they went and made the tomb secure by putting a seal on the stone and posting the guard. (NIV84)

Theme: Irony of the Passion: He said, “I will Rise Again.”

Have you ever been teaching someone something and they simply just couldn't understand it. It can be frustrating for everyone involved. I took 2 1/2 years of Latin in High School and another two years in College. There is part of me that thinks that I passed (barely) only because I tried hard and that the professors no longer wanted to put up with me! I heard the words that the professor was saying, but I didn't understand half of the lingo that he was using and the other half I struggled to put into practice. I'm sure you've felt the same way—perhaps when you were teaching your kids how to tie their own shoes or with their math homework (or maybe you didn't understand it now because of common core). Maybe it was when you were trying to break in some newbies at work. We've all been there before—probably on both ends of the occasion. They heard what was said, but they just didn't understand.

We see the same thing with the Jewish leaders in our text for today. They were successful, they got rid of a thorn in their side—a teacher named Jesus who was usurping their authority and humiliating them in public with his teachings. But doubt crept up in their hearts and minds. So on Saturday, the day after Jesus died the Jewish leaders went to Pilate and asked to guard the tomb in which Jesus was laid so that the disciples couldn't steal his body and claim that Jesus rose from the dead.

Now why would Jesus' rising from the dead three days after his death ever enter into the minds of the Jewish leaders as a possibility?

Because Jesus said it would happen. As they told Pilate, **we remember that while he was still alive that deceiver said, ‘After three days I will rise again.’** The ironic thing about the chief priests and the Pharisees is that they often heard and understood what Jesus was saying. They knew that Jesus prophesied about rising from the dead after he died; but they didn't believe him. They rejected everything about him and every word that Jesus said about himself, despite all the evidence that what Jesus said was true.

Hindsight is 20-20, of course. It's easy to see that the Jewish leaders were foolish. But what about us? Sadly, we often do the same thing. Not necessarily about the resurrection—although attacks from the unbelieving world and our own reason and logic might lead us to doubt even the resurrection of Christ from time to time.

But the Lord also promises to watch over us, to guard and protect us against all harm and danger. Yet, bad things happen in our lives—we lose our job, a loved-one gets sick, or there are family issues that you have to deal with. You know God's promises, you know what he says in his Word. But you have a hard time believe what he says. Maybe it's some horrible thing you've done wrong; you know it was wrong and you feel horrible about it. And you wonder if God could ever forgive you for all the stupid and sinful things you have done. You know and hear God's promises of forgiveness and you even understand them; but you just are sure if they actually apply to you. If Jesus didn't rise from the dead, then the Jewish leaders would have been right. If Jesus didn't rise from the dead then he certainly was an imposter and a deceiver and everything he said was a lie—nothing could be trusted. After all Jesus did prophecy about his death and resurrection again and again.

He did this because his resurrection was always the goal. The goal wasn't simply to die—anyone can predict that they are going to die, and if you are questioning the authorities you might even have a good idea when you are going to die. But to prophesy that you are going to rise from the dead—and then to actually do it? That's a different story. Easter was always the goal—everything hinged on his resurrection. As Paul says, **if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins.**

And that is where the chief priests and the Pharisees had it wrong. They bet that Jesus wouldn't rise from the dead because they rejected him. But Christ truly did rise from the dead! In 1 Corinthians 15 Paul says, **Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.** It happened just as Jesus said it would—three days from his death, he rose from the dead. Death could not hold him back, he showed his completely power and authority over all things—including death, which controls us all, expect Christ!

Another ironic thing about the chief priests and other Jewish leaders? They found out from the guards that Jesus truly did rise from the dead. And what did they do when they found out that someone they had killed rose from the dead on the exact day that he said he would? That an earthquake took place and that angels came down from heaven? They paid off the guards and claimed that the disciples surprised and overpowered the guards and stole Jesus' body! They heard what the guards said. They understood what they were saying, and yet they didn't really understand what just happened because they rejected Jesus as God, the promised Savior. No matter what Jesus said or did, no matter how many prophecies he fulfilled, they had already made up their minds about him and they rejected him. The Jewish leaders posted the guards and put a seal over the tomb so that Jesus' disciples couldn't come and steal his body, claiming that he rose from the dead. The guards were defeated and the seal was broken—they were no match against the Lord.

But in an ironic twist, the guards and the seal actually help us. They are proof that the disciples didn't come and steal the body. It would have not been possible for them to do so. The only logical thing that could have happened is what Scripture says happened—that Jesus truly did rise from the dead. The disciples and others knew this to be truth. They travelled the world with this message, risking their lives, and in many cases, actually did die for telling others of the resurrection—something they wouldn't have been willing to do if they stole the body and lied about Jesus' resurrection!

What, then, about the doubts and fears that creep into our hearts and minds? They are removed by Christ's resurrection! His resurrection means that we are saved. The fact that God raised Jesus from the dead is proof that God accepted his payment for our sins—that the shedding of his blood paid the ransom price for all of our sins, that he suffered

through an eternity of hell on the cross, and that his perfect life was credited to us. His resurrection means that we now stand as pure and innocent in the eyes of the Lord and that he has already declared us not guilty! There is no sin that is too great that Christ did not pay for it; all of your sins—each and every one of them, no matter how horrible they may seem have been paid for by Christ. Paul puts it this way in Romans 4, **He (Jesus) was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification.**

And his resurrection is also a guarantee—a guarantee that we too will rise from the dead. Because he lives, we know that we too will live. This is a guarantee not to be immortal, but to live even though we die. Jesus is the first-fruits of those who have fallen asleep. Just like a the first fruits that appear on a tree or a plant are a guarantee that more are to follow—so is Christ the firstfruits of those who have died. He is the first; and that means that there are many more to follow. We know that on the Last Day we will be raised from the dead and be given a perfect and holy live; and together body and soul we will dwell with the Lord forever!

And if Christ was able to keep his promise about rising from the dead, he can and will most certainly keep all his other promises. Everything he has ever said in his word, every single promise he makes is kept. His resurrection, then, is a guarantee of his promises so that we have no reason to doubt any part of his Word!

There may be a lot of things we hear about or are taught, but simply do not understand—like me and Latin. Christ and his resurrection is that way for those who reject him like the Jewish leaders. But for us? It's the sweetest gospel; the most comforting words we can ever hear. Jesus lives. He won the victory over sin, death, and the power of the devil. And that victory is now ours! He lives and because he lives we too will live with him in heaven forever. Amen.