

We open the Word of God to Matthew 28:11-15. We have been in Matthew for several years and are coming very quickly to the end. It's been a wonderful journey as we've looked at the King, the Lord Jesus Christ. Before we look at the verses, let me grab your attention by thinking a little bit. Imagine if someone could say to the world today, especially some medical expert, that, "We have discovered a way to have life after death, guaranteed. It's proven to be true. We have undeniable verification. We have discovered the key to immortality. We have discovered a way to be resurrected from the dead and we are going to start going through the graveyards and raising everyone from the dead. There is guaranteed power over the grave."

Certainly if someone were to say that and could somehow prove it—because that's what everybody would say, prove it—and they could demonstrate someone who died and rose again, you would think that people would be clamoring to know more. There would be mass hysteria. How does this work? Where do I sign up? Indeed, that is the gospel message, and what is the response: rejection, scoffing, ridicule, granite indifference. The greatest event in the history of the world was the bodily resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ, yet the vast majority of the world refuses to believe it. There are many theories that are out there today, and the greatest theory that would refute this incredible claim is that the disciples stole the body. Of course the majority of skeptics have never really studied the evidence and many people who have studied the evidence still refuse to believe it, despite the overwhelming proof of the resurrection of Christ. In fact, many people will say that there are many other explanations about that resurrection thing. When I hear that said I like to say, "Such as?" and they begin to stammer and stutter.

It's the same type of thing when they say some people believe in the Bible but it's filled with discrepancies and myths. Oh really? Such as? And then you watch them do the Nashville two-step. People believe what they want to believe, dear friends, despite the evidence to the contrary. Today's text is a perfect example of that very thing. There is no other event in the history of the world that has been so thoroughly scrutinized and proven to be true, than the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Still people refuse to believe it. Of course this raises another question: Why are people this way? Not just towards the resurrection of Christ but towards Christianity itself? People refuse to believe that God is the Creator, they refuse to believe that Christ was the Son of God, that He died for our sins and rose again the third day. They refuse to believe He's coming again in power and great glory. The answer can be seen in the events of this historical cover-up concocted by the enemies of Christ to try and deny the resurrection of Christ. We're going to see an example of how people can refute the obvious. This will be a cover-up so easily disproved that it actually becomes further evidence proving the resurrection.

We're going to look at verses 11-15. Let me give you further context. The angel has now appeared, there has been a great earthquake, the stone has been rolled away, the women have come to the scene as have Peter and John. They have returned and they're all astounded. They see the grave clothes but no body, and Jesus has appeared to Mary Magdalene in verse 10, "Then Jesus said to them, 'Do not be afraid; go and take word to My brethren to leave for Galilee, and there they shall see Me.'" Now we look at verses 11-15 where we will focus our attention.

"Now while they were on their way, behold, some of the guard came into the city and reported to the chief priests all that had happened. And when they had assembled with the elders and counseled together, they gave a large sum of money to the soldiers, and said, 'You are to say, *His disciples came by night and stole Him away while we were asleep.* And if this should come to the governor's ears, we will win him over and keep you out of trouble.' And 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."

I believe the Spirit of God would have us understand three primary concepts as we look at this text. There are several lessons we can learn from this colossal cover-up. First, we will look at the divine apologetic proving the resurrection. Second, we will examine the severity of Israel's apostasy, and third, I want us to think about the depths of man's depravity that is so manifest in this text.

First we consider the divine apologetic that proves the resurrection. God purposely ordained this crowning event in the life and ministry of Jesus, His Son, to be essential to saving faith. In other words, if you don't believe this you cannot be a Christian. Romans 10:9 says, "If you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved." And because the resurrection is so essential to the gospel, God also knew that Satan would do everything that he possibly could to somehow discredit it. The devil's deceptions always make perfect sense to those who love themselves more than God. People will believe anything other than the truth if it will support their agenda, whatever it may be. Knowing all of this, the Holy Spirit not only documented in the Gospels the perfect righteousness of Christ and the staggering injustices that were perpetrated against Him, but in these five verses He gives to us the most ingenious evidence to prove the veracity of the resurrection that anyone could possibly imagine. Here He reveals to us the clandestine conspiracy contrived by His enemies: the religious elite of Israel.

Had the defense of the resurrection come from His friends, from the disciples, people would have claimed they were hopelessly biased in their own favor, and trying to promote some great hoax to advance their agenda. But rather, in the omniscient genius of God, He carefully reveals this surreptitious scheme of the Christ-haters, a scheme that would, in the long run, give credibility to the resurrection, not detract from it.

Now let's examine the text. Beginning in verse 11 it says, "Now while they were on their way," in other words when the women were going to Jerusalem to tell the disciples that Jesus told them to meet Him in Galilee, "behold, some of the guard came into the city and reported to the chief priests all that had happened." I can imagine what the guards were thinking. They were thinking, "We are in serious trouble. The body is gone. Our lives are at stake." And so we see that some of them are going to go into the city and some of the rest remained at their post. It's hard to know how many there were. I'm sure they were thinking to themselves, "Nobody is going to believe our story." They come in to the chief priests and they have to say, "I'll tell you what happened. First there was this incredible earthquake, and it caused the stone to roll away. Then this angel came and reflected this blinding light and it scared us to death. He sat upon the stone and that's all we can remember. Later on we came to and the body was gone. Just the grave clothes were there." Certainly the soldiers must have been thinking that the response from the chief priests would be, "What have you guys been drinking?" But they didn't say that. They believed them.

That's proven by the fact that there was no attempt to verify what the soldiers said. There was no intense questioning. Rather, they knew it was true. Certainly they had to have been horrified at the reality of it, but they immediately went into damage control. Had they not believed them, they would have put out a massive search for the body. They would have told Pilate and asked for the soldiers to make a sweep of the area, dispatched thousands of soldiers, put out a reward, and found the body. "Let's find the disciples. They are the likely suspects that stole the body." You would think that rather than doing all of that they would have been horrified to think that He was who He said He was, and that it was true that they had been denying it and we need to fall down on our face and worship Him. But they didn't do that. The reason why they didn't is because they already knew all of that.

I want to digress for a moment. These people who were representatives of apostate Israel were the eyewitnesses to His deity. These priests, these Pharisees, these leaders of Israel, all saw with their own eyes His supernatural power and yet they willfully chose to reject Him. They knew of His miracles, they saw irrefutable demonstrations of the Holy Spirit who had empowered the God-Man Jesus, the incarnate Christ, yet they refused to bow. Worse yet, they attributed His works to Satan. Can you imagine that? Such blasphemy is irremediable, it is unforgivable. This is the wickedness of a calloused heart that has exchanged the truth for the lie. In fact, this was the basis of Jesus' damning accusation in Matthew 12:31-32 where He said, "Therefore I say to you, any sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven men, but blasphemy against the Spirit shall not be forgiven."

You may remember that God forgives a whole range of sins, anything that man commits, even certain forms of blasphemy in a general sense. He will forgive insolent language towards God, a defiant irreverence. Peter blasphemed the Lord and he was forgiven. Paul blasphemed the Lord and was forgiven. In 1 Timothy 1:13-14 he admitted he was "formerly a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent aggressor." But he was "shown mercy because [he] acted ignorantly in unbelief; and the grace of our Lord was more than abundant, with the faith and love which are found in Christ Jesus."

Indeed, whenever we doubt God's goodness, His love, His sovereignty, His faithfulness, at some level we blaspheme Him, yet sincere confession will bring about forgiveness. That's different than blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, and that's what was going on here with these men. Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is rejecting Christ having full knowledge of who He is. To consciously, deliberately choose to reject Jesus Christ in the full light of divine revelation, having complete understanding of His deity, having undeniable and irrefutable evidence of His glorious person, this is an unforgivable sin. This is blasphemy against the Holy Spirit.

This was the heart of the warning found in Hebrews 2:3-4 where the writer tells us, "How shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation? After it was at the first spoken through the Lord, it was confirmed to us by those who heard, God also bearing witness with them, both by signs and wonders and by various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit according to His own will." What more was Jesus supposed to have done? With full revelation these men rejected the truth. With all that they knew about God's glorious deliverance of their ancestors, and Jesus' miraculous works in their midst, and now the resurrection, they still remained in their Judaism, committed to their self-righteous system of works righteousness, hypocrites to the very end.

We come back to the text and we see that this was the condition of the hard-hearted blasphemers. Rather than believe in the resurrection and all that that implied, which was validated by the soldiers' testimony, what did they do? Verses 12-13 say, "And when they had assembled with the elders and counseled together, they gave a large sum of money to the soldiers, and said, 'You are to say, *His disciples came by night and stole Him away while we were asleep.*'" Now folks, this is laughable, given the true condition of the disciples. The disciples didn't steal the body, they were cowering in some hidden room in Jerusalem. In fact, they didn't even fully believe in the resurrection, so why in the world would they try to fabricate one? All along they were anticipating the messianic kingdom. You will recall that they were arguing about which one of them would be the greatest in the kingdom. They weren't thinking of a death, burial and resurrection. They were too busy jockeying for position, as we would say. In fact, when the women came to them and reported what had happened in Luke 24:11 we read that when they heard the words they thought it was "nonsense, and they would not believe them." The propaganda the Jewish leaders had concocted had no basis in fact or probability. The disciples weren't thinking of a resurrection,

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and of course this just gives further evidence to the veracity of the resurrection. Moreover, I have to laugh, other people didn't say to the soldiers, "How do you know that the disciples came and stole the body if you were asleep?" Can you imagine going in to a court of law and telling a judge that? "What happened here?" "Well, we were scared to death and we became unconscious," or even if they said they were asleep, "and the disciples came and stole the body." Ludicrous! Sin is irrational. When you see people doing crazy things in sin, don't try to understand them. Sin is irrational.

Out of fear that news would spread like a brush fire and thus threaten their power base, the cover-up is set into motion. This is not unlike modern politicians that find themselves in some kind of trouble and they start spinning events to protect their political constituency. They bribed the soldiers to lie, offering in return protection from Pilate. They told them, "And if this should come to the governor's ears, we will win him over and keep you out of trouble." You need to remember that Pilate was afraid of further Jewish insurrection. He was afraid that the Jews would once again report him to Caesar, and he was certainly not going to cause any more trouble with them. He wanted to get this whole Jesus mess behind him and get it over with. In verse 15 it says that, "And they took the money and did as they had been instructed."

Now of course this was a great deal for soldiers. Imagine the turn of events here. First they are thinking their heads are going to roll, but now, not only are they going to remain alive, but they're going to get paid. They are going to make money. All they had to do was deny the truth. Sound familiar? If you want to make money, all you need to do is deny the truth. This is the same scenario that is played out every Sunday in thousands of pulpits throughout the world. The enemy says "I'll make you wealthy, I'll give you money, in exchange for compromise. If you will spin the truth, just water it down."

In verse 15 it says, "...and this story was widely spread among the Jews, and is to this day." Obviously the Jews used the soldiers to ignite the brush fire of deception. Undoubtedly they used other methods as well. They may have written things, they may have spread the word to their people. They used every other imaginable means to fan the flame of lies. Matthew says that they were doing that "to this day." Matthew's Gospel was written some thirty years after this event, in A.D. 63. What he was referring to is that even thirty years later this is still the story. I might add that this is still the most popular explanation used today to deny the resurrection of Jesus Christ, especially in liberal "Christian" circles. The liberal "Christians" are really the modern-day Pharisees.

So, God used their evil actions as a divine apologetic, as further evidence to confirm the resurrection. The great Puritan John Trapp of the 17th century underscored this very thought when he said, "God would have the point of the resurrection well proved, for our better settlement, in so weighty a matter. The priests were unworthy to hear of it by an angel; they shall hear of it therefore by the profane soldiers, who came in to them much affrighted, and thunder-struck...Now the confession of an adversary is held in law to be the most certain demonstration of the truth that can be." The divine apologetic is right here in this story of the great clandestine conspiracy, the cover-up.

I believe there is a second truth in this amazing, and quite frankly, ridiculous cover-up. That is the severity of Israel's apostasy. Sadly, the great lengths to which these religious imposters went to deny the person and the work of Christ underscores the abyss of wickedness that was now their abode. The darkness covered their minds, their heart, all that they were. I believe here God paints the final scene on the canvas of Israelite apostasy, because these men were the representatives of Israel. There can be no denial of the hardness of their hearts. Think of this: Jesus now conquered death. He rose from the dead. And what was their response? To deny it. To cover it up. To hush it. And here we see the severity of

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Israel's apostasy, which resulted in the divine judgment that is described in Romans 11:25. There the apostle Paul speaks of "...a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in." Indeed, most Jews to this day remain under the sentence of God's judicial hardening, due to their rejection of Christ. I say most, certainly not all. There will always be a believing remnant, as Isaiah said in chapter 6. There will always be the stump of the terebinth or oak, there will always be a holy seed that will remain in the stump. But most of them are still blind to the reality of who Jesus was and who He is. Paul went on to say that the hardening will continue "until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in."

In other words, until that final Gentile soul that has been elected to salvation is saved in this Church Age, when that time comes to fruition, then there is going to be a period where this hardening will begin to dissipate and the Jews will begin to understand the reality of who Christ is. As we read Scripture we see that the fullness of the Gentiles will come in when God comes and snatches away His Church in the rapture and then He turns His attention once again to His covenantal people in the time of the tribulation, Daniel's 70th week.

In Romans 11:26 Paul tells us that "and thus all Israel will be saved." What a blessed hope for all who have been appointed to salvation, those of Israel and those of the Church. But there is a veil over their eyes because of their apostasy to this day. Because of their astounding rejection of Jesus—Paul speaks of this in 2 Corinthians 3:13-16—he says, "We are not as Moses, who used to put a veil over his face that the sons of Israel might not look intently at the end of what was fading away. But their minds were hardened; for until this very day at the reading of the old covenant the same veil remains unlifted, because it is removed in Christ. But to this day whenever Moses is read, a veil lies over their heart; but whenever a man turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away."

Remember that Moses veiled himself in Exodus 34 to shield the Israelites from the blinding light of the glory of God when he came off the mountain. He had been in the presence of that glory and that blinding light was reflecting off of him. He covered himself. He had been in the presence of the Shekinah glory of God. The picture here that Paul is speaking of, part of this whole basis of understanding Israel's current rejection of Christ, is simply this: the glory of the old covenant, the mosaic covenant, would fade in the face of the even more permanent glory of the new covenant of grace. The covenant of grace that was ratified by Jesus Christ through His death, that was affirmed by the Father through His resurrection and that is appropriated by the Holy Spirit through our faith in Jesus as Lord and Savior. Because of their arrogant commitment to establish their own self-righteousness, their own righteousness through keeping the law, Paul says that a veil was put over their heart. This is a veil that can only be lifted when one turns to the Lord Jesus in saving faith.

Only then can one see the depths of their sin. When we come to faith in Christ, it's at that point that the marvelous provisions of the gospel can make sense to us and become the song of our heart and the theme of our thoughts. It's at that point that we see the glory of God in the face of Christ. The veil is removed. I would encourage anyone who does not believe in Christ and refuses to walk faithfully with Him that you need to turn to Him. You need to place your faith in Him. You need to trust in Him. As you do so, that veil will be lifted. As you plead for undeserved mercy, you will begin to see the reality of Christ and you will become a new creation in Him.

This is precisely what happened later in the life of that Pharisee of Pharisees, Saul, who became Paul. You remember when the blazing glory of God enveloped him on the road to Damascus. In Acts 22 God has him come to Ananias and he says that "The God of our fathers has appointed you to know his will, and to

see the Righteous One, and to hear an utterance from His mouth.” What a precious thought. God removed that veil through the power of His saving and sovereign grace. And later on Paul would write, “But we all, with unveiled face beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit” (2 Corinthians 3:18.)

As we contemplate the severity of Israel’s apostasy, it forces us also to think more closely about the issue of man’s depravity. Think about this. Earlier, these religious leaders had mocked the Lord while He hung on the cross. In Matthew 27:40-41 it says, “You who are going to destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save Yourself! If You are the Son of God, come down from the cross.” Now, dear friends, He has done something far more supernatural. He has risen from the dead, as He promised. What do you think their response would have been? One of repentance, one of belief? Scripture affirms that later on some of them did, but later, not here and now. You must understand that no miracle alone, even in the time when the Lord was alive, ever softened a man’s heart to overcome unbelief. It’s only the regenerating power of the Spirit of God that somehow breathes life into the corpse of one who is spiritually dead. People apart from Christ are spiritually dead, Ephesians 2:1 tells us.

Unbelief is a moral problem, not an intellectual problem. It’s not a matter of understanding or knowing the facts. It’s a matter of believing them and embracing them with all your heart, and letting those truths become the power that drives your attitudes and your will. In fact, in Matthew 13 in Jesus’ parable of the sower, you will recall that it was not the seed of the gospel that was the problem, nor was it the sower of the seed that was the problem. The problem was the condition of the soil, symbolic of one’s heart. We studied the four kinds of hearts described in that parable. There was the impervious heart, the impressionable heart, the indifferent heart and the impoverished heart as I called them.

The first was the impervious heart. He talked about the seed that was sown in the hard soil at the side of the road. This is the rock hard soil of human deception. This is analogous to those chief priests, the religious apostate leaders. Their hearts were impervious to the truth. They would hear the gospel, they would see the truth of who Christ was, and the truth was met with granite indifference. It was utter nonsense to them. We’ve shared the gospel with people like that. They look at you as if you have three heads. They think it is utterly ridiculous. What was the problem? The seed? The sower? No, it was the soil.

The second soil was the rocky, shallow topsoil. That was the type common in Israel. A little topsoil, maybe an inch or two, and then a layer of limestone. This would be the impressionable heart. This is the kind of person where the seed goes in and they immediately respond to the gospel quickly and with great enthusiasm. It appears to grow quickly. People look like they are growing in the faith and maybe pretend they are, without even realizing it. This accounts for the vast majority of people in modern evangelicalism. For example, you might hear, “1,000 people came to Christ at this rally.” But there’s a big difference between professing Christ and possessing Him. The problem there is that there is no real conviction of sin. They have never been deeply wounded by the law. There’s no brokenness of heart. They don’t see how they have offended a holy God. There’s no desire for undeserved mercy or grace. There is a shallow conversion, typically driven by some emotional response to a watered-down gospel message. I believe many of these people place their faith in their newly invented smiley-faced Jesus who desperately wants to give them success, or a purpose driven life. But he’s really powerless to do so unless they repeat some prayer or something.

Then there was the third soil where the seed fell among the thorns. That was the indifferent heart, as I would call it. The gospel seed falls upon this heart of a would-be professing believer and is choked out by thorns that symbolize four things: worry of the world, deceitfulness of riches, pleasures of life and desires (lusts) for other things. In other words, the Gospel comes to a person and they're indifferent, apathetic, disinterested, unmoved, unresponsive to spiritual things, they can take them or leave them. I see this many times with people that are on the periphery of the church. They'll serve Christ if it's convenient, but frankly it's a very low priority. They have many other competing loyalties.

Then there was that final, good soil that Jesus described, which I would call the impoverished heart, one that is needy and broken and humble and contrite. It's exhausted and spiritually bankrupt. "This is the man," Jesus said, "who hears the word and understands it; who indeed bears fruit, and brings forth, some a hundredfold, some sixty, and some thirty." There's an important lesson here. The sower sows the seed of the gospel, the seed that God created, even like physical seeds that we plant. We don't have to come along and recreate them, nor can we even replicate them. The point is, don't tinker with the gospel seed. It's fine as it is. It's ridiculous to try to invent some hybrid gospel seed that will penetrate every soil, that will grow in every type of soil, that will bear fruit in everybody's life. Can you imagine someone making such a claim down at the local garden store? "We've got a seed here that will grow right in concrete. We've got a seed here that will penetrate weeds, you don't have to worry about it." That's ridiculous. And yet that's the prevailing mindset of contemporary evangelicalism, that somehow we must alter the seed.

Friends, Jesus never altered His message to make it less offensive. He didn't come to the religious leaders there at the end of His life at the passion week and say, "Let's back up here. I know a lot of you don't believe I'm the Son of God and the King of the Jews. Let me back off that a little bit. I just want you to know that I love all of you. I just want us to all get along. I'd like to take a few moments and heal some of you. I want you to be successful – I know a lot of you are poor. I want to show you how you can get rich. I want to show you how you can become wealthy. I know a lot of you struggle with poor self-esteem, and I just want you to know that I want to give you the esteem that you deserve. I want you to feel successful. I want you to learn how to think positively. I certainly don't want to offend anybody. I'll tell you what, people. Bring out the instruments. Let's have a party!"

Jesus never did that. And yet you see in contemporary evangelicalism a commitment to reinvent Christianity and the gospel to fashion Christianity and church services in a way that makes believers feel comfortable but never convicted. That's the problem. The assumption is that anyone will respond to the truth if it is just presented properly. Oh really? What more was Jesus supposed to have done? He rose from the dead, now let's top that one. Look at the response. Dear friends, we must understand that man is utterly unable to embrace spiritual truth savingly on his own.

Again, look at the response of the religious elite of Israel. Not even the resurrection from the dead changed their hearts. Why? Because they are "spiritually dead" Ephesians 2:1 tells us. Because unbelievers "love darkness rather than light, for their deeds are evil," says John 3:19. And in 2 Corinthians 4:4 Paul says, "And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, in whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds (referring to Satan blinding a person's mind or ability to reason) of the unbelieving, that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God." 1 Corinthians 2:14 says that "a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised." He has no capacity to grasp the truth, apply it to his heart and live consistently with it. He

cannot do it on his own. Yet sadly thousands of churches are constantly trying to reinvent ministry to reach the lost, to create some hybrid gospel seed.

I was talking with some people who were describing a new church in the area. One of the pastors said they are really trying to reach young people and the unchurched, and frankly those people who hate church. As he talked it was obvious that they see people in the world that need Christ as consumers. And so if they are consumers, we want to give them what they want. So what do they want? How do you know? You take an opinion poll. You do survey groups. You solicit marketing firms, as they had done, to create a marketing analysis and plan. You know the rest of the story. What do the unsaved people want? They want a rock concert, loud music, they want to be entertained and wear whatever they want with no restrictions, they want coffee and food in a coffee house type of atmosphere. They want humor, they want little stories—I would call them superficial spiritual anecdotes—certainly no doctrine, no Bible teaching, no exposition of the text. They want to make sure that they jettison anything that smacks of historical orthodox Christianity. “We don’t want any of that stuff. We want a party atmosphere. “

It reminds me of what Paul said would happen in 2 Timothy 4:3-4, that the day is coming, and I believe that day is here, when “(they) will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they...accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires, and...turn away their ears from the truth and...turn aside to myths.” Paul called this, in 2 Corinthians 4:2, “walking in craftiness and adulterating the word of God.” Craftiness is an interesting word in the original language. It refers to trickery or deception, deceit. He was saying that this is what the charlatans were doing back at Corinth. This new stuff that we see today, this isn’t new. It’s the same old stuff repackaged. That’s what they were doing back then. Paul was saying that the gospel was merely a product they were trying to sell. What you try to do is package the product in a way that you can get the consumer to buy it. After all, that’s how you make money off it. In 2 Corinthians 2:17 he accused the charlatans of “peddling the word of God.”

Again, Paul says in 2 Corinthians 4:2 that they were “adulterating the word of God.” Adulterating, or *doloo* in the original language, denotes mixing inferior ingredients into something, like gold or wine. We see that in some of the extra-biblical Greek literature. It’s corrupting or contaminating something with an inferior ingredient. That’s what they were doing to the gospel. That’s what’s happening today—the gospel itself is not good enough because it’s too offensive. Beloved, there is nothing wrong with the seed of the gospel. Paul said that the gospel is the power of God unto salvation. There’s no need to reinvent some special method of sowing the seed to guarantee it will germinate. Evangelists, as you and I would be, never need to alter the seed. What we have to do is prepare the soil. That’s what we do. We prepare the soil and we let the Spirit of God to cause that seed to penetrate where it will. He will cause it to germinate.

You must understand that the soil of men’s hearts must be broken up by the plow of conviction, the conviction of sin. The subsoil of the soul must feel the anguish of impending judgment as the blades of the law of God must get down deep and begin to tear up the hard ground of self-righteousness, pride and unbelief. Sinners must be made to understand that the weeds in their life must be thoroughly burned. The thorns of iniquity must be uprooted. The rocks of pride must be pulverized or removed, and then that will leave the soft, fallow ground of humility. That’s what we do in preaching and living out the gospel. We prepare the hearts of people. And frankly, gospel preaching that only scratches the surface of the hard ground will never prepare the heart to receive the seed of grace. It’ll never happen. It will cause a lot of people to get excited and say “Yes, let’s follow Jesus. Where do I sign up for this?” But it will never produce the fruits of holiness. It is sad to think of so many people who think they are saved but they’re

not. Those who someday, as Jesus said, will say “Lord, Lord, didn’t we do all these religious things?” But He’ll say “Depart from Me, you worker of iniquity, I never knew you.”

A man can never be saved from sin until he is first convinced, yea horrified, of his sin. And that’s at the very heart of the gospel. The conscience must be disturbed by the power of the Spirit, Paul says, “through the foolishness of preaching.” I ask you, if the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead could not cause men to believe, how on earth do you expect some seeker sensitive carnival contrived by a marketing firm to do that very thing? It’s ridiculous. Beloved, no one has ever come to salvation because of human ingenuity or human persuasion. Salvation is a sovereign act of a holy God. Only He can break through the impenetrable hardness of a heart. What the Holy Spirit does is use His Word as an instrument of salvation.

What must we do? We must proclaim the Word with clarity. I want people to understand very clearly what they are choosing to reject. We must proclaim it with boldness and with love, and allow the Word of God, by the power of the Spirit, to activate the conscience. That’s why Paul’s preaching was admittedly offensive. He said it alienated most people. In 1 Corinthians 1:23 it was “to Jews a stumbling block and to Gentiles foolishness.”

Dear friends, with great confidence we preach the unadulterated Word of God. No tricks, no gimmicks. No Elvis impersonators, no power teams, no karate demonstrations. No Hollywood actors that have supposedly come to Christ and are going to tell you how things turned them around. The Lord never did any of that. I rejoice, knowing that “faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ” in Romans 10:17. Rest assured that God in His sovereign grace will cause the gospel seed to germinate, even in the hardest heart, of those that He has chosen to be saved.

Do you know what’s great? This is exactly what happened to many of these chief priests and leaders of Israel who had concocted this scheme. Do you realize that? Later on, somehow, the seed got in there by the power of God. That’s why we can rejoice in the power of saving grace as we read Acts 6:7, “And the word of God kept on spreading (after all of this); and the number of the disciples continued to increase greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were becoming obedient to the faith.” How in the world did that happen? By the power of the Spirit of God!

Friends, don’t give up on your loved ones. Don’t give up on your neighbors. Keep praying for them, keep living the life and keep unleashing the gospel on them. Write them cards. Send them letters. Look for opportunities to plant a little seed in the middle of a conversation. You don’t have to come up with some great gimmick. We don’t have to come up with some gimmick here at the church to somehow get people to believe. That’s God’s deal. Certainly we do everything we can to be winsome, to present the truth with clarity, with boldness, with love. But we relax in the great sovereignty of God and watch what He does as He penetrates hearts that are utterly dead and blind and veiled because of their unbelief. We’re going to see that happen with many people before we die, and certainly some day even the hard-hearted Israelis are going to see that.

With everything that’s going on, as we see the drum roll begin and the curtains get ready to be opened on the final days of history, it’s so comforting for me to know that if the Lord were to come today, and the great tribulation were to begin to occur over the next several years, it’s so comforting to know that many of those people—certainly not all, many will die during the tribulation—but many will come to a saving knowledge of Christ. They’ll be able to sing with us “Great Is Thy Faithfulness, Oh Worship the King.”

Resurrection Blindness Matthew 28:11-15

Isn't that a wonderful thought? I pray for comfort to your hearts even as we look at this colossal cover-up of the resurrection, to see that God even used that to prove its very veracity.

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