

## “The God Conspiracy”

Scripture: Matthew 27:62-28:20

Graphics: guards, tomb, conspiracy, bribes

Big Truth: The resurrection of Jesus was God’s conspiracy against death. As the guards and religious leaders tried to create their own conspiracy, God had the final say, for eternity. Because of the God Conspiracy, your own death is not the end of your story. You can’t buy it with a bribe or pay any fee to earn it. You simply accept the truth of it, as proven by the conspiracies that were attempted when Jesus rose from the dead.

Focus Phrase: The resurrection of Jesus was God’s not-so-secret plan to put an end to death.

### 1. Introduction

- A. Do you want to know what I think are weird? Conspiracy theories.
  - i. There’ve been countless conspiracy theories offered up over the history of the world. And so many of them are bizarre!
  - ii. The thing about conspiracy THEORIES is that they can’t be proven true. That’s why they’re just theories. Most of them are outrageous to the rational and discerning mind, but we are drawn to them.
  - iii. We’ve had some doozies over the years. Now, I’m not foolish enough, today of all days, to talk about some of the current conspiracy theories about political figures or diseases. We’ll save those for the dinner table.
  - iv. I’m talking about the enduring conspiracy theories like: that the moon landing in the 1960s was faked, or that the FBI had a hand in JFK’s assassination.
  - v. Two of my favorite conspiracy theories are that the Earth really is flat, and that government-controlled Area 51 in New Mexico is full of aliens that have crash landed on said flat Earth and were captured by the military.
- B. Now, there’s a very real difference between a conspiracy THEORY and an actual CONSPIRACY. There’ve been just as many bonafide conspiracies as there’ve been conspiracy theories in the history of the world.
- C. Dictionary.com tells us that a **conspiracy** is defined as *a secret plan by a group to do something unlawful or harmful*. A conspiracy theory is just something we THINK a group is secretly planning, but without proof.
- D. And the difference between a conspiracy theory and an actual conspiracy is the difference between the Easter bunny and the resurrection of Jesus Christ on the first Easter morning.
- E. The former is a fun story about an egg-launching rabbit. The latter is the ultimate truth about a God’s plan to defeat death through the sacrifice of His only Son...who died on a Roman cross and then walked out of His own grave under His own power! Can I get an AMEN!

- F. But, as we'll read from Matthew's gospel account of the resurrection of Jesus this morning, there was something hinkey going on, which Urban Dictionary says is *something as yet undefinable that's wrong, out of place; not quite right*.
- G. On the morning Jesus rose from the dead, there was something so RIGHT happening. But, there was also a hinkey conspiracy theory that began about Jesus' resurrection, which was a secret plan to undermine God's plan.
- H. BUT (do you want to hear some Good News?), God's conspiracy was not secret, not a theory, and it was only harmful against death itself. God's Conspiracy was that death would be put to death, for Jesus, and for us.
- I. Let's pray and then we can open our bibles to Matthew 28.
- J. PRAY! (Jesus, You are Lord...)**
- K. Here's how the first Easter Sunday went down...verse 1...

## 2. Scripture

### A. READ Matthew 28:1-10

- i. The story of Jesus' resurrection is found in all four gospel - Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. It's THE central focus of the entire New Testament, and, I would argue, the entire Bible. All followers of Jesus need to know this.
- ii. Each of the gospel writers, addressing different groups of believers, included different details. When taken as a whole, we know for sure the resurrection of Jesus took place on the third day after the death of Jesus.
- iii. Jesus was crucified - murdered - by being hung on Roman cross on Friday. That Friday evening, a prominent businessman named Joseph of Arimathea took Jesus' body down from the cross and hastily placed the body in the tomb that he was saving for himself someday.
- iv. Then, a large stone was rolled over the entrance to that borrowed tomb.
- v. The women who'd been at the Cross got to the tomb that morning, survived an earthquake, which rolled the stone away, and then an angel appeared.
- vi. I love the fact that Matthew tells us that the appearance of the angel caused the big strong tough Roman guards to shake with fear and become like dead men. I assume that means they fainted or something. Nonetheless, they had a traumatic experience that would forever change their lives!
- vii. But, see, the detail that there were guards at the tomb is unique to Matthew's gospel. In fact, we read a curious verse (verse 4) that says, "For fear of him the guards shook and became like dead men." In other accounts, the women arrived at the tomb and there was no mention of guards. So how did the guards come to be at the tomb?
- viii. In Matthew 27:62-66, we read this, which answers that question, "The next day, that is, after the day of Preparation, the chief priests and the Pharisees

gathered before Pilate and said, “Sir, we remember what that impostor said while he was still alive, ‘After three days I will rise again.’ Therefore command the tomb to be made secure until the third day; otherwise, his disciples may go and steal him away and tell the people, ‘He has been raised from the dead,’ and the last deception would be worse than the first.” Pilate said to them, “You have a guard of soldiers; go, make it as secure as you can.” So they went with the guard and made the tomb secure by sealing the stone.”

- ix. The irony of this whole scene is that the Jewish religious leaders, who wanted Jesus dead, were so concerned that the disciples would steal His body and claim he was alive, that they wanted Roman soldiers to guard the tomb. Pontius Pilate, the one who ordered Jesus to be crucified for the Jews, agreed and sent soldiers to guard the tomb.
- x. But Jesus really WAS dead, that He really DID rise from the dead, and that no soldier or religious leader could do a thing about it.
- xi. It’s also ironic that those religious leaders were so concerned that the disciples would come up with a conspiracy theory, that they went to great lengths to prevent the disciples from creating one of their own.
- xii. So, the soldiers are passed out, and the angel said to the women, “Do not be afraid! You’re looking for Jesus.” And then, here’s the point, **“He’s not here, for he has been raised from the dead!”**
- xiii. The center of all human history took place that morning, as the women went to mourn for their friend and teacher...as the guards were passed out on the ground from terror...WOW!
- xiv. The angel then told the women to, “GO, tell the disciples that Jesus was alive! Go, tell them to go to Galilee to meet Jesus”...the place where Jesus had done so much of his earthly ministry before he was crucified.
- xv. So the women left the tomb with fear and great joy and ran to the disciples. It also sounds like they just left the guards just lying on the ground, passed out or dead or whatever they were. That’s cold!
- xvi. And while the women were going, they ran into none other than the Risen Jesus himself! “Greetings! Do not be afraid!” (everyone keeps saying that!) Go to Galilee and I’ll meet you there!”
- xvii. End of story right? Jesus is alive! We’re heading to Galilee! Life’s good.
- xviii. Well...not quite. Apparently, the guards woke up...and they just had to tell someone. Let’s pick up what happened next in verse 11...

## **B. READ Matthew 28:11-15**

- i. The plot thickens! This is better than a Hollywood thriller!

- ii. The guards went to the religious leaders, and said, (panicked), “There was an earthquake...and some women came...and an angel show up all glowing...and, um, well...we fainted, so we don’t know what happened next. Sorry.”
- iii. This then sent the religious leaders into a panic and yhe only thing they could do was to bribe the soldiers to lie and create a conspiracy theory that would try to hide the fact that Jesus was indeed alive. Imagine that!
- iv. The guards were sent to the tomb to prevent the disciples from stealing the body, which the disciples DIDN’T do, and NOW they were being paid off to lie and say that’s exactly what the disciples did.
- v. This is a scandal of epic proportions! The biggest lie in the history of the world...the universe! And yet, it proves it’s all true!

### 3. Application

- A. That day began with Jesus dead in the tomb being guarded by Roman soldiers and sealed by a huge stone. That day ended with Jesus alive, the women and disciples filled with fear and great joy...and the soldiers being paid to lie about what happened in order to cover it up. You can’t make this up!
- B. But see, the thing about conspiracy theories is that they’re built around lies and misdirection, just like this one about Jesus’ body being stolen by the disciples. It was false, we know. It was drummed up to undermine the truth that Jesus was indeed alive - a secret plan by a group to do something unlawful or harmful.
- C. BUT, and here’s the whole point for this morning, God had His very own conspiracy going on...His very own scandal! And it’s amazing for us!
- D. The religious leaders and guards were foolish enough to think that they could outsmart - out-conspiracy - the God of the Universe! They thought they could create a plan that would never be disproven...and that it would damage the disciples, their witness, and their lives. And they thought that this lie would finish Jesus off and the world would move on.
- E. HA! HA!! OH! Were they ever wrong! Church...THEY WERE SO WRONG! They couldn’t have BEEN more WRONG! Alleluia! He is Risen Indeed!
- F. God’s conspiracy was not against the soldiers or against the disciples or you or me. **God’s not-so-secret plan was 100% to defeat death itself!**
- G. See, God loved those soldiers. God loved those religious leaders. God loved the women and disciples. God loves YOU! Do you know that? He does!
- H. Do you know what God does NOT love? God does NOT love death. In fact, Jesus’ sacrifice and burial is ONLY so that God could raise him again to new life and show the world FOREVER that DEATH HAS BEEN DEFEATED by his resurrection!

- I. God's Conspiracy is against death itself! And it's TRUE.
- J. So...what does that mean for you and me today?
- K. The world has and will continue to come up with wild theories about what happened to Jesus, and, as Matthew wrote in verse 15, "...and this story is still told...to this day."
- L. Will you embrace the world's theories and lies about who God is and who you are to Him? Even though they have never held water and never will?
- M. Or will you let God's resurrection conspiracy against death change everything about your life? Will you follow Jesus into an everlasting future, because, through Jesus, death has been defeated?
- N. On this Easter morning...choose life! Choose Jesus! Choose the body of Christ to walk with you and help you grow!
- O. The scandal of Easter is not that something happened to the Jesus' body. The scandal of Easter is that God loves YOU and ME and was willing to bring Jesus back from the dead to PROVE it!
- P. And if God is willing to sacrifice His Son just so that He can prove His love for you, then you KNOW he'll walk with you as you follow Him in this new life he's given you...
- Q. In Matthew 28:16-20, we read this, "Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. When they saw him, they worshiped him, but they doubted. And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age."
- R. God's conspiracy defeats death itself in your life, like it did for Jesus, and his offer of new life comes with a promise to always be with you...as you live the life of a disciple. Praise be to God!

#### 4. Conclusion

- A. In a world of conspiracy theories, half-truths, lies, and all the things that seek to destroy us, God's conspiracy against death is true! Death is defeated!
- B. What matters is the fact that Jesus rose from the dead on Easter morning and then sent His disciples out into the world to tell others about Him...his love... his forgiveness...his purpose.
- C. Go, live God's purpose - God's conspiracy - for you. It's not death...but LIFE! Resurrection life!
- D. Happy Easter, church! **He is Risen! He is Risen Indeed!**
- E. Let's pray...