

TUESDAY 26 April 2022 "Truth or Distortion" (Matt. 27:62-28:10)

Good morning my "Walking with Jesus" friends,

Remembering is powerful, isn't it? Remembering is key to learning? But remembering clearly takes effort, for too easily we embellish or change the reality of what happened as we remember. *In our day that's happening quite a bit as many different people want to change the historical record of almost everything, or spin and distort the truth of what they report.* Yesterday I left you walking along with the disciples heading back to their home region, the Galilee, from the historic Passover weekend during which Jesus had been crucified and buried. But Jesus had arose from the dead and appeared to these men at least twice... physically, bodily, and spoken with them! *I believe these men were beginning to feel the burden of remembering and recording with accuracy their experiences with Jesus... not just for their generation but for all time, including OUR Time!* I'm sure glad, aren't you?

Matthew, evidently had a passion for accuracy, perhaps learned in the importance of accurate record keeping in his tax collecting business. Seems to me he also had a passion about hypocrisy and corruption, maybe because that too was his lifestyle when a tax collector. It may have even been during that week in Jerusalem after Easter Sunday, while in hiding from anyone who might try to arrest Jesus' closest followers, that Matthew may have recorded **'the great cover up'**! In all the Bible Matthew is the only one who mentions it, and I find it in the last chapter of his record we today call the Gospel of Matthew, the first book of the New Testament. Matthew explains that the day after Jesus was crucified, **"...the chief priests and Pharisees went to Pilate."** (Matt. 27:62) Pilate was the Roman Governor over the region which included Jerusalem. I'm sure you remember the Jewish religious leaders had brought Jesus to Pilate that Friday morning, after their long night of shameful abuse, demanding that Pilate condemn him to death. But after interrogation Pilate could find no criminal case against Jesus, certainly nothing worthy of death. But in the end, fearing an insurrection, Pilate succumbed to the pressure and handed Jesus over to the crowd to be crucified.

When this horrific, illegal, corruption of leadership act was accomplished and Jesus' dead body was buried, still the religious leaders weren't satisfied, and in this Saturday visit to Pilate they demanded a security detail be placed at the tomb site. Again, Pilate agreed and even said to them **"Go and make the tomb as secure as you know how."** (Matt. 27:65) And so a seal was placed over that huge rock blocking the entrance to the tomb, so that any movement of the rock would break the seal and those responsible would be held accountable. *For many highly influential, high ranking, important people in Jerusalem, comfortable in their pride, arrogance and affluence, it was very important dead Jesus remained dead... forever!* They had too much to lose with Jesus' call for truthful, God honoring living!

As Matthew walked along with the other disciples that day, heading back to Galilee, I wonder if he reflected deeply on how he once had been part of that corruption and hypocrisy, as a deceitful tax collector. I assume it likely was his ambition to eventually become a 'chief tax collector' like Zacchaeus. However, as Matthew reflected on his many months 'walking the roads with Jesus', and all the changes he had seen in his life and the lives of so many hundreds of people, when they turned away from the hold of darkness on their lives and turned to Jesus to live in the light of HIS truth, oh my... what a contrast in life! *Living free from the bondage of hypocrisy, deceitfulness, truth distortion, pride, manipulation is such a glorious deliverance, isn't it my friends?* Matthew was living it and was determined to NOT get sucked back into it. But he was also determined to shed the light of truth on the lies being spun in Jerusalem about what actually happened with Jesus!

So, Matthew wrote in great detail that on that resurrection morning ***"There was a violent earthquake, for an angel of the Lord came down from heaven and going to the tomb, rolled back the stone, and sat on it. His appearance was like lightning... the guards were so afraid of him that they shook and became like dead men..."*** (Matt. 28:2-4) Now Matthew was not an eyewitness to this, but he also wrote that the women who had come to the tomb that morning spoke with that angel who invited them to look inside the empty tomb. I'm confident Matthew heard the story directly from them, later that Easter Sunday. I've often wondered if Matthew, over the years, ever met one of those guards who told him the truth of that morning? Finally, we also know that the Holy Spirit of God guided all writers of the Bible to write what God knew is truth and wanted humanity to know. I find that in 2 Peter 1:20,21; 2 Tim. 3:15.

Matthew made it clear those guards did not run for their lives, but some went to the chief priests and Pharisees who had hired them and reported the facts of that resurrection morning. *But deception and pride were unwilling to bow before Jesus* and Matthew writes: ***"When the chief priests had met with the elders and devised a plan, they gave the soldiers a large sum of money, telling them, 'You are to say, 'His disciples came during the night and stole him away while we were asleep. If this report gets to the Governor [Pilate] we will satisfy him and keep you out of trouble.' So, the soldiers took the money and did as they were instructed. And this story has been widely circulated among the Jews to this day."*** (Matt. 28:12-15)

May I ask, my friends, have you ever been caught up in a 'cover up', an intentional deception intended to hide the truth, an effort to distort reality? How did it affect you? Perhaps you've even been instructed by your employer, or worse your parents, to lie about something and live in deception. It's an ugly, confusing, painful place to be, isn't it? *Have you found that in order to sustain a deception, even more lies must be told?* Of course, in our day, 2000 years later, not many people believe that old myth, rather many other myths have arisen and of course the all-powerful... simply outright refusal to consider the possibility of the resurrection and refusal to attempt any explanation. Flat rejection doesn't need explanation, does it?

Only a few years later, perhaps on this very same road, another passionate Jewish man was traveling, also with a group of men determined that truth about Jesus be known. This man was named Saul Paulus, one of the chief Pharisees. He'd seen and heard Jesus speak many times. He was convinced Jesus must be stopped at all costs, and had voted with enthusiasm, for Jesus' death! *He had demanded these apostle followers of Jesus be held accountable, beaten, imprisoned, for insisting Jesus was alive, and he'd actually overseen the stoning death of one of these prominent Jesus followers in Jerusalem named Stephen!* (Acts 7) On this day, several years after Matthew was on this road, Saul and his guards were on their way to Damascus, Syria, intent on finding and arresting any, who like Matthew, insisted on continuing to proclaim Jesus as resurrected and alive. Dr. Luke reports what happened in Acts 9. ***"...suddenly a light from heaven flashed around Saul. He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, 'Saul, Saul, why do you persecute Me?' 'Who are you Lord?' Saul asked? 'I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. Now get up and go into the city and you will be told what you must do!"*** (Acts 9:3-6)

Saul was temporarily blinded in that encounter with the Risen Jesus, and after being led into Damascus a follower of Jesus named Ananias came to find him. Jesus had appeared in a vision to Ananias and said ***"Go to the house of Judas on Straight Street and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is praying... This man is My chosen instrument to carry My name before Gentiles and their kings, and before the people of Israel..."*** (Acts 9:10-16) And my friends, perhaps you know the encounter between these two men did happen, and Saul, the Pharisee, placed his full faith and trust in Jesus Christ to be his Savior. The blindness left him, and he was raised up by God to take the truth of the resurrection of Jesus, as Matthew had written it, to the entire Roman Empire! Later, Saul changed his name to Paul and became known as the fearless Apostle Paul, the author of 13 books of the New Testament! In fact, Paul wrote to the Christians in Corinth: ***"I want to remind you of the Gospel I preached to you and on which you take your stand. By this Gospel you are saved... For what I received [from Jesus] I passed on to you as of first importance: Jesus Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, He was buried, and He was raised from the dead on the third day..."*** (1 Corinthians 15:1-4)

Two men determined that truth prevail down through all time, in all countries, call us today to NOT allow history to be distorted or rewritten. Matthew and Paul call us to stand firm on the truth of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, the only Savior of the world! Are you standing firm today my friends? Is your life transformed by that great resurrection truth? Here's a great celebration song to help us remember!

Today's Scripture is Matthew 27:62-28:10.