

“The Rest of the Story Is Our Story”
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Back in 1976 a radio program began called “The Rest of the Story” featuring Paul Harvey. On this show he told little known stories which would have intriguing twists. He would tell of such things as the father of two boys in the late 1800’s who bought for his sons a helicopter-type of flying toy, and his sons, when they received it, loved it and played with it a lot and watched it fly! The rest of the story is that these two brothers had the last name of Wright— they were the Wright brothers who flew the first airplane. “And now you have heard, the rest of the story”. Paul Harvey also once told a story about a Boston preacher named S.D. Gordon who came to his pulpit one day with a dirty, rusty bird cage. Rev. Gordon told of running into a dirty, grubby boy of about 10 years who was carrying this bird cage with several birds in it. The preacher asked him what he was doing, and the boy said he was going to play with the birds. “And then what?” , asked the preacher. The boy answered probably give them to a cat to eat. The preacher asked him, “How much for the bird cage and birds?” The boy said you don’t want these birds— they are small, and they don’t even sing! The preacher persisted— “how much?” “Two dollars.” “Deal!” The preacher took the bird cage into an alley, and opened the door, and let each of the birds fly out to freedom. Then Paul Harvey started telling the rest of the story of another event which Rev. Gordon told which seemed unrelated at first to this event with the bird cage. Wouldn’t you like to hear it? I will tell it after a while. But first let me address a very important “rest of the story”, which I think is the most important for the Christian.

READ Matthew 28:11-20 (p. 34)

CONTEXT: We are tantalized by such stories, and as we come to the end of the gospel of Matthew we feel the same way. Last week we discussed and considered carefully the account of the women coming to the tomb, an earthquake happens and an angel of the Lord comes down and moves the stone in front of the tomb and sits on it. The guards at the tomb tremble with fear and become as dead men. After receiving the angel's message, the women run to tell the disciples what they saw and heard when they meet Jesus. He tells them to go and tell His brothers He has risen and they are to go to Galilee— there they will see Him. Now we will get to know the rest of the story.

READ vv 11-15. “The irony of the soldier’s explanation for the empty tomb is not only that it makes little sense, but also that the deception that the religious leaders want told reveals that they themselves, not Jesus, are the real deceivers/imposters! Cf. 27:63-64.” This story makes little sense because, if we consider it carefully, we find ourselves puzzled by how the guards would know it was the disciples who stole the body *if the guards were sleeping*! Moreover, the idea that the disciples stole the body— which was alive in Justin Martyr’s time around 150 AD (*Dialogue* 108)— makes no sense as to why would the disciples then risk their lives proclaiming what they *knew* to be a lie. We find sometimes in history that truth is stranger than fiction! E.g., why did Nazi Germany declare war on the U.S. after Pearl Harbor— they did not have to do so, and it did not make sense; also, for them to over-stretch themselves in WWII to attack Russia— Operation Barbarossa— with whom they had made a non-aggression pact. It seems the Jewish leaders, who call Jesus an imposter in 27:63, are themselves the impostors.

A brief word on the historicity of the guard at the tomb, which is only found in Matthew. W.D. Davies and Dale Allison in their huge three-volume

commentary (*Matthew*, vol. 3, p. 653) don't believe it is historical, nor does Raymond Brown in his important work *The Death of the Messiah* (vol. 2, pp. 1311-1312). It is doubted that the Jewish religious leaders would have known of Jesus' prediction to His disciples of His death and resurrection and the other gospels don't mention such a guard, who would by their presence have made it awkward for the women to get in to anoint Jesus' body. In response, the Jewish religious leaders did have access to Jesus' teaching to His inner circle, namely through Judas. While the disciples may have been slow, out of love for Him, on absorbing the teaching that He would be crucified and raised, Jesus' opponents would have grasped this quickly and have wanted to avoid any possible post-death interference from Jesus. And the women who came to the tomb may not have known a guard was there, especially since the Jewish religious leaders approach Pilate a day after Jesus' burial (27:62). It is likely, to me, that the reason the other three gospels don't include this account of the guard at the tomb is because these other gospels did not have, as Matthew did, a mostly Jewish audience which would have been familiar with the Jewish argument of the disciples stealing Jesus' body (28:13-15). Also, if this guard at the tomb story were only made up, it would be expected for the guard to be posted when Jesus is buried, not the next day. Donald Hagner, in his commentary on Matthew (vol. 2, p. 863) notes that, "The security of tombs was important enough to have become the subject of a Roman imperial edict between 50 B.C. and A.D. 50". This piece of evidence should be carefully considered, as it could well have been on Pilate's mind. Don Carson (*Matthew*, p. 585) and R.T. France (*Matthew*, pp. 409-410) argue for historicity, and I agree.

READ vv 16-17. "The reaction of the disciples to Jesus is just what one would expect: belief mixed with hesitation. Cf. 14:31." The verb for "doubt", found only here and 14:31 in the NT, in our NRSV translation probably carries

with it more the idea of hesitation. READ 14:31 where the idea seems to be more one of hesitation by Peter who was struggling trying to walk on water. Such a reaction by the disciples— some believing, some struggling to believe that the crucified Jesus was resurrected— seems quite expected. Have you ever hesitated in your faith? E.g., in our Addressing the Skeptics class this week we were talking about there are times we doubt as Christians, I know I can struggle with that at times. There are times when I am preparing for a funeral and it makes me to think— now, why is it that I believe Christianity to be true? And I review the reasons I believe God exists and Jesus has been raised from the dead— such as the witness of the disciples and the birth of Christianity.

READ vv 18-20. “Jesus, Himself as the possessor of all authority (cf. Daniel 7:14), commands His followers. The core of this command is to make disciples, which involves going, baptizing, and teaching.” The verb “make disciples” (one word in the original language) implies someone is a learner. That is the “business” of the Church— to make learners. But I submit to you that the Church has done a very poor job of this. E.g., I recall hearing about churches that take people into membership by having them come down during the last hymn, and these people who join are unknown the pastors. And afterwards there is little follow-up. How do we make learners, make disciples? We go, we baptize them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and we teach them to obey Christ’s commands. I love that last phrase especially. We don’t just teach new believers what Jesus said and commanded. We teach them *to obey* Jesus’ commands. Beloved, I am convinced that the best way to do this is through relationships. E.g., Norwood recently posted a video online about how he became a Christian, and a major influence on him was Nathan Platto, who was our youth minister when Norwood was in Junior High. Nathan really helped shape and challenge Norwood’s faith, and really encouraged Norwood as a brother in the Lord. A

really neat result of that is that basically a little over 10 years later Nathan and Lindsey Platto came all the way over from Georgia for his and Tiffany's wedding this past January! What Jesus is calling us to do is to make disciples, make learners, and this is done through investing ourselves in relationships. In whom are you investing yourself for the gospel? The good news is that Jesus is with us every step of the way with this process.

“One should note that Matthew ends his gospel in a way similar to its beginning, as an inclusio, where ‘all nations’ shows Jesus to be a ‘son of Abraham’ (1:1) and “I am with you always” reveals Jesus is Immanuel (1:25). For the ancient Jewish Christian, this was precious.

“Where is evidence of the rest of the story in your life and my life?” We recall earlier I spoke about Paul Harvey's rest of the story on Rev. S.D. Gordon and buying the old, rusty bird cage and letting the birds go. He then went on to say that Jesus and Satan had a conversation. Satan boasted that in the Garden of Eden he had trapped the people on earth in his cage. Jesus asked what are you going to do with them. Satan said he was going to play with them, mess with them, get them to get married and then divorce, to hate each other and throw bombs at one another. “And then what?”, asked Jesus. Satan replied he would condemn them and kill them. Jesus then asked how much for those he, Satan, had trapped. Satan replied, “You don't want them. They will hate you, spit in your face, and put nails in you. You really don't want them!” Jesus said, “How much?” Satan said, “All your tears and all your blood.” So Jesus agreed. And He took the cage, and He opened the door, so the people could go free. Beloved, if Jesus has in effect opened the door so people could get out of the cages of Satan's control, and our lives are to be committed to the rest of the story of sharing the gospel and making disciples so people can experience this freedom from sin and

death, then I ask: where is evidence of the rest of the story in your life and my life? Are we making disciples today, and this week?