

## Fake News and Good News – Matthew 28: 11 – 15



We frequently hear the expression “fake news”, these days, often in connection with some false rumour that has been spread on the Internet. Untrue stories, however, have been circulated as fact for centuries, long before the invention of the computer. The final chapter of St Matthew’s Gospel gives us a blatant example.

The chief priests and elders who had persuaded Pilate to crucify Jesus were faced with a massive problem. The tomb where He had been placed was empty. His body had disappeared. How could they account for this? Certainly not by admitting that maybe, just maybe, Jesus had been raised from the dead, as He had said He would be. If they, the very men who had engineered His execution, had done that, they would have lost what respect they had with both Pilate and the people. They would probably have lost their jobs too.

They had to find another explanation for what had happened. So they paid the guards, probably members of the Temple guard rather than Roman soldiers, to say that the disciples of Jesus had taken His body while they were asleep. This was the best story they could come up with, but it was full of holes.

To begin with, for a guard to admit that he has been asleep whilst on duty is a terrible confession to make. It would normally be punished extremely harshly, possibly by the death penalty. These guards, however, were allowed to get away with it. What is more, their story is highly implausible. Could the disciples really have been so quiet that they managed not to awaken at least one of the guards, particularly when they were rolling away the great stone with which the tomb had been sealed? And why on earth would they want to steal the dead body of Jesus anyway?

No, the guards' tale doesn't hold water. It was fake news, cooked up in desperation by the chief priests and elders who just couldn't admit the possibility that Jesus was alive again. On the other hand, the disciples had truly good news to share: that Jesus had been raised from the dead and had broken the power of sin and death for ever. That was their message to the people in Jerusalem a few weeks later, on the Day of Pentecost.

**A prayer:**

*Thine be the glory, risen, conquering Son,  
Endless is the victory thou o'er death hast won. AMEN*

*Rev John Barnett*