

PURE PASSION

AN ATHLETE STUDY

GREATEST COMEBACK OF ALL TIME

Super Bowl LI, February 5th, 2017 between the New England Patriots and the Atlanta Falcons saw the greatest comeback of all-time, especially for a Super Bowl. At the end of the first half, the Patriots finally put points on the board with a 52-yard field goal making the score 21-3.

Things didn't look much better in the 3rd quarter as the Falcons took the score up to 28. At this point in the game, odds-makers gave the Falcons a 99.9% chance of winning. In fact, since 2001, teams trailing by at least 23 points with six to nine minutes left in the 3rd quarter were 0-190. Finally, the Patriots put in their first touchdown with 2:09 in the 3rd. Too little too late is what most of us watching the game thought. What followed defies imagination. Brady brought New England back from the brink with a tied game at the end of regulation—winning with a touchdown in overtime. This comeback brings to mind Yogi Berra's famous saying, "It ain't over till it's over."

Our study of Jesus' Passion Week brought us to the point of Jesus hanging on the cross. Things couldn't have seemed more hopeless for his followers as Jesus finally succumbed to his wounds after just six hours. Most crucified criminals were heaped in a mass grave, but uniquely, a wealthy man retrieved Jesus' body and buried him in his own tomb. Strangely, after three days, that same tomb sat empty. "It ain't over till it's over!"

MATTHEW

28:11-15

MARK



LUKE



JOHN



MATTHEW 28:11-15

¹¹ While they were going, behold, some of the guard went into the city and told the chief priests all that had taken place. ¹² And when they had assembled with the elders and taken counsel, they gave a sufficient sum of money to the soldiers ¹³ and said, "Tell people, 'His disciples came by night and stole him away while we were asleep.'" ¹⁴ And if this comes to the governor's ears, we will satisfy him and keep you out of trouble."

¹⁵ So they took the money and did as they were directed. And this story has been spread among the Jews to this day.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

"Friday's good 'cause Sunday is coming. The women came before the dawn, To find that stone already gone, When they looked inside, the angel said, 'Why you looking for the living among the dead?'"

Each year on Good Friday Christians remember the suffering and death of Jesus. It's a somber reflection of the price paid for sin. Easter, however, is what makes Friday "good," celebrating Christ's resurrection.



DISCUSSION

Describe a time when you told a lie. What happened, did you fess up or get busted? What effect did it have?

ICEBREAKER

1. What did the guards tell the chief priests? (11)

2. How and why did the guards' story get changed? (12-13)

OBSERVATION

3. What impact did this lie have? (15)

4. What do the actions of the chief priests and guards tell you about their hearts?

INTERPRETATION

5. What lies do some people believe about Jesus' resurrection?

6. How does the truth of the resurrection change your perspective about life?

APPLICATION

This study has covered a lot of ground. It's ok if you still have questions about who Jesus is and what he came to do. If you want to know more, talk to your coach today.

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STUDY NOTES SUNDAY'S A COMIN'

Remember at the beginning of the semester when Jesus and the disciples paraded into Jerusalem like conquering kings. While that event was several Weeks ago in our study, it had been mere days for the disciples. A lot happened since that time, but after Jesus died, all hope was lost for his followers. We can't imagine the despair they must have felt. However, Sunday morning changed everything.

Early on Sunday, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to look at the tomb. Suddenly, there was a severe earthquake, for an angel of the Lord descending from heaven came and rolled away the stone and sat on it. His appearance was like lightning, and his clothes were white as snow (Matthew 28:1–3).

I'm not really sure church Easter plays capture this moment well. Usually, a small child plays the angel. Sweetly, they speak in a small nervous voice, "*Do not be afraid; I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here, for he has been raised, just as he said*" (Matthew 28:5–6). Instead of a small child, the angel probably looked more like an NFL linebacker—huge, with biceps like bowling balls. Why do you think the first words out of an angel's mouth is always, "*Do not be afraid*"?

The angel appeared to the women to bring the good news of a risen Messiah. However, another audience there saw this whole thing. After speaking with the Pharisees, Pilate sent a guard force of Roman soldiers to secure Jesus' tomb (Matthew 27:62–66). When the angel appeared these guards were shaken and became like dead men because they were so afraid of him (Matthew 28:4).

GODLY PASSION WINS HEARTS DESPITE THE OPPOSITION

While the women *were going* back to Galilee, *some of the guard* responsible for protecting Jesus' body, *went into the city* to report *all that* "bad" news *that had taken place to the chief priests*. This was a decisive moment for these religious leaders. Up until now, you can at least understand their reluctance to believe on theological grounds (not even Jesus' own followers believed he would rise from the dead) and human nature (they loved their power). Now they have no excuses. They faced the empty tomb and the testimony of eye witnesses who had every reason to keep the body right where it was.

Interestingly, no one questioned anything in the soldiers' report. The religious leaders seemed

to fully accept their story. Think about that. Rather than allowing Jesus' resurrection to challenge their sincere beliefs (that Jesus was a blasphemer), they all went into defense mode. How do we protect our power and position? What else could they have done? They should have confessed their horrible sin and repented before Almighty God, begging for his forgiveness.

But, rather than repent and believe, they dug their heels in. They **assembled with the elders** and **taken council** to form a plan. It started with bribery. **They gave a sufficient sum of money to the soldiers**. It continued with composing a blatant lie to "**tell people, 'His disciples came by night and stole him away while we were asleep.'**" Then the chief priests promised, "**If this comes to the governor's ears, we will satisfy him and keep you out of trouble.**"

GODLY PASSION DEMANDS DECISION

While Christianity took a while to make its mark on the Roman Empire, there were plenty of people in and around Judea that wanted to see it disappear. If you think about it, all they needed was a body.

Are we really expected to believe that a group of tax collectors and fishermen who ran for their lives at Jesus' arrest would be willing to take on a Roman fighting force, break the Roman Seal put on the tomb (punishable by death), and steal the body of a "so called" Messiah in order to preserve a lie? What reason could they possibly have for doing this? Fame? Not likely!

The late Chuck Colson responded to this idea perfectly after meeting Christ in prison for his part in the Watergate scandal of the 70's. He said, "*I know the resurrection is a fact, and Watergate proved it to me. How? Because 12 men testified they had seen Jesus raised from the dead, then they proclaimed that truth for 40 years, never once denying it. Every one was beaten, tortured, stoned and put in prison. They would not have endured that if it weren't true. Watergate embroiled 12 of the most powerful men in the world and they couldn't keep a lie for three weeks. You're telling me 12 apostles could keep a lie for 40 years? Absolutely impossible.*"

The only thing required to stop the spread of Christianity was to produce the body of Jesus. All odds point to the fact that the disciples didn't take it. If Pilate or the religious leaders had it, they would have squashed Christianity from the get go. Following Jesus may cost you everything, like it did for the apostles. However, the tomb is empty and we must all decide what we're going to do about it!