

The Forgotten Witnesses – Matthew 27:45-28:15

Easter Story Pop Quiz

- Who were the first witnesses to the resurrection of Jesus?
- Who were the first ones to declare “He is risen!”?

There are forgotten witnesses & they can teach us a valuable lesson today!

But before I share who they are & what they have to teach us, let me share with you where & when I discovered this!

It was right here, last Sunday, from out of the mouth of a 4th grader!

He read these words of Jesus, in Luke 19, spoken to the Pharisees as they tried to get Him to silence the crowds on that 1st Palm Sunday.

Jesus said - **“I tell you if these were silent, the very stones would cry out.”**

I asked myself, “What did Jesus mean by this & why did He say it?”

As I recalled the story of Jesus’ death & resurrection, it dawned on me that what the Pharisees wanted, eventually happened! **The Hosannas were silenced**

Good Friday brought about a scattered & silent group of followers. So... did Jesus’ words to the Pharisees come true? Did the stones respond & cry out?

Before you start calling me crazy, remember that these were Jesus’ words, not mine. Let’s read this familiar story again & ask that question!

Evidence for these forgotten witnesses:

- 1) When Jesus died, Matt. 27:51 tells us “the earth shook, & the rocks were split.” What would have caused this except that God’s creation was **crying out in response to the death of it’s Creator.** Acts 3:15

Stones may not be able to speak, but they can quake/split & that’s what they did! It’s as if they were declaring, “You have killed the Son of God!”

- 2) In the next verse Matthew declares, “The tombs (which were made by cutting into rock & sealing it w/a stone) were opened & many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised.” The dead came alive!

It’s as if these stone tombs, by opening up, testified to the reality of what Jesus’ “Passion” made possible – **the resurrection of the dead!**

Again the stones/tombs cried out, bearing witness to the truth about Jesus

- 3) Matt. 27:54 declares that when the Centurion & the soldiers that were with him “saw the earthquake and what took place, they were filled with awe and said, ‘Truly this was the Son of God!’”

According to Matthew, the soldiers witnessing this earthquake, stones crying out, **prompted an amazing confession of the true identity of Jesus!**

When Jesus’ disciples/followers were silent, He was not w/out witnesses!

- 4) In vs. 60, Matthew tells us that Jesus’ body was also laid in a tomb, that was cut in the rock, & a great stone was rolled in front of the entrance.

This stone was intended to make a statement – **nobody in & nobody out!**

But that wasn’t enough for the chief priests & the Pharisees, they asked Pilate in verse 64 to order that the tomb be made more secure to guarantee that Jesus’ claims of resurrection would be proved wrong.

Therefore, Pilate ordered, **“Go, make it as secure as you can. So they went & made the tomb secure by sealing the stone and setting a guard!”**

Those who opposed Jesus & His claims, did their best to disprove Him & **keep Him in the grave.** They even tried to use the stone for their own advantage, but the stone would testify to something very different!

Matt. 28:2–“Behold there was a great earthquake, for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven & came & rolled back the stone and sat on it!”

What was intended to be a prison cell for Jesus’ dead body, evidence that His claims were false, became a pedestal for the Angel of the Lord to sit upon and a witness to all declaring that **Jesus Christ is risen!** Matt. 28:6

The stone was rolled away & the rock tomb was empty! These stones bore witness to, and were the forgotten witnesses of, the resurrection of Jesus!

In the silence of Good Friday, with no one to testify to the reality of who this Jesus really is, **the stones truly did cry out and served as His witnesses!**

The lesson for us, is that even though we live in a world that continues to try to silence the truth of who Jesus is, Jesus will never be w/out witnesses. If we don’t do it, the stones will cry out again! But let’s choose to do it instead!

Sermon-based Questions

- 1) How did you do on the Easter Story pop quiz?
- 2) Have you ever learned something, or has God ever revealed a Biblical truth to you through the mouths of young people? What was it?
- 3) What was your initial response to “stones” being the forgotten witness? Did that response change throughout the sermon?
- 4) Of the 4 evidences listed in the sermon, which one stuck out the most to you as being most convincing? Why?
- 5) How do you respond to the statement, “Jesus will not be without witnesses!”? Do you believe this? If so, why is the existence of witnesses so important?
- 6) In what ways have you been more like the disciples on Good Friday, then like these stones testifying to the truths of Jesus Christ?
- 7) What are some practical ways we can start being better witnesses for Jesus Christ?
- 8) Why is the empty grave one of the most powerful witnesses to Jesus Christ there is? Why is the resurrection so important for us?

Verses of the Week

Mark 8:31 *And he began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes and be killed, and after three days rise again.*

Matthew 27:65-66 *Pilate said to them, “You have a guard of soldiers. Go, make it as secure as you can.” So they went and made the tomb secure by sealing the stone and setting a guard.*

Matthew 28:5-6 *But the angel said to the women, “Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. He is not here, for he has risen, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay.*

Luke 24:6-7 *He is not here, but has risen. Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, that the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men and be crucified and on the third day rise.”*

Acts 3:15 *and you killed the Author of life, whom God raised from the dead. To this we are witnesses.*

1 Corinthians 15:3-8 *For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me.*