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WHY SHOULD YOU LIE FOR LIARS?

Today's Text: Matt. 28: 11-15

Extracts:

Now while they were going, behold, some of the guard came into the city and reported to the chief priests all the things that had happened. When they had assembled with *the elders and consulted together, they gave a large sum of money to the soldiers, saying, "Tell them, His disciples came at night and stole Him away while we slept. And if this comes to the governor's ears, we will appease him and make you secure."* So they took the money and did as they were instructed, and this saying is commonly reported among the Jews to this day [Matt. 28: 11-15]

According to the Constitution of the United States of America, the president must be a natural-born citizen, at least 35 years old who has lived in the country for 14 years. Official records confirm that President Barack Obama was born in Honolulu, Hawaii, a State in the American Union, on August 4, 1961, and had lived in the US since 1971. Therefore, he was eligible to be the president. But just before and since his election, a group, popularly called, the Birther Movement, sprang up, claiming that Obama was not eligible to be an American President.¹ Therefore, he was an illegitimate president. Even when they have failed in the law courts and have been presented with irrefutable evidence of his American citizenship, they have kept up the lie. Some of the perpetrators are responsible Congressmen and media houses. What they share in common is that they are all among his conservative political opponents.

On the surface, it looks absurd that some people refuse to accept the truth and, instead, continue to defend and spread a lie. It is not a new phenomenon! In this week's Bible text, the soldiers that guarded the tomb of Jesus took bribes from the Jewish leaders to lie that His disciples came to take Him away while they slept. They knew that was a lie and yet they told it. If you look around yourself, you will see so many similar examples. For instance, look at the stereotypes that we hold of others and vice versa. How many of the rumours you receive about friends, family or colleagues are true and why do you spread them to others? Who is behind such lies and why are people helping others to keep up a lie? Why should you lie for liars? In this week's study, we shall confront the phenomenon and learn how to deal with it.

¹ Based on Alex Pereene, "The Birthers: Who Are They and What Do They Want?" July 22, 2009; <http://gawker.com/5320465/the-birthers-who-are-they-and-what-do-they-want>

1. Background: Security guards sleeping on duty?

There is the story of a security guard in Lagos, Nigeria. One morning, as the owner of the business premises that he was guarding drove in, he approached him and said, “Sir, while on duty last night, I dreamed that you travelled and died in a car crash. Sir, I advise that you don’t go out today.” The boss thanked him and drove off. A few hours later, the guard received a letter of dismissal from the Human Resource Department for sleeping on duty!

Security work is a serious matter. The job of security guards is to ward off intruders. If they fail, it is a major dereliction of duty that attracts instant sanctions. Recall, for example, after Herod had killed the apostle, James, the brother of John, he put Peter in prison, hoping to kill him also after the Passover [Acts 12: 1- 19]. To ensure that Peter did not escape, Herod delivered him to four squads of soldiers (i.e., sixteen in all). The soldiers bound Peter with two chains between two soldiers and kept more guards before the main door of the prison to make sure that he did not escape. The night before Peter would be executed, God sent an angel to deliver him out of their hands. The following morning, “there was no small stir among the soldiers about what had become of Peter.” After Herod had investigated the matter, he “commanded that they should be put to death.” Therefore, guard duty is a dangerous job.

For three years prior to the time of the story in today’s Bible text, Jesus had posed a major security risk to both Jewish and Roman authorities. He preached about a new kingdom and Rome did not want any competition to its sovereignty. He preached a new gospel and the Jewish leaders saw the sun setting on their spiritual influence based on the Law of Moses. He preached love and non-violence and had more influence than the Roman governor, Pontius Pilate, and the chief priests. So, they were all united by the common purpose of eliminating a mutual enemy. In spite of the fact that there was no sufficient evidence under Mosaic or Roman law to kill Him, they did just that any way. That should end the ‘madness;’ but it did not!

The day after His crucifixion and death, the chief priests and Pharisees came together and confronted Pilate, saying, “Sir, we remember while He was still alive, how *that deceiver* said, ‘After three days I will rise.’ Therefore, command that the tomb be made secure until the third day, lest His disciples come by night and steal Him away, and say to the people, ‘He has risen from the dead.’ So the last deception will be worse than the first.” Pilate gave consent and authorized them to use their guard to “make it as secure as [they knew] how.” So, they made the tomb secure, “sealing the stone and setting the guard” [Matt. 27: 62-66].

Examine how many security levels were put in place: the tomb was secured, the stone was sealed and guards were put there. The seal was the seal of Caesar, meaning that no person could break it without the authority of Caesar. Do you

think that the disciples of Jesus that were scattered during His arrest in the Garden of Gethsemane on Thursday night, who did not know where Jesus was buried (except Joseph of Arimathea, Nicodemus and Mary Magdalene) would dare come near that tomb? So, the chances of the disciples breaking through to steal the body of Jesus were zero! Let us follow the story:

- a) *The truth is that Jesus actually rose from the dead and the guards knew it!*

On resurrection morning, there was “a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven,” and rolled back the stone from the door of the tomb and sat on it. We are told that the angel’s countenance was like lightning and his clothing was as white as snow. The guards saw everything happen and they “shook for fear of [the angel], and became like dead men” [Matt. 28: 1-4]

The King of kings did not need Caesar’s permission to break the seal! The seal needed to be removed so that witnesses could look into the empty tomb. That explains the earthquake when the resurrection power of God struck the tomb where the body of Jesus had lain. The guards did not sleep on duty and they saw it all. You can be sure that it was not only Mary Magdalene and other disciples (later) that looked inside the empty tomb that day. Rumours spread like wide fire and many curious onlookers also saw everything and gave wings to the news. Therefore, the guards themselves *knew* that Jesus had in deed risen from the dead or, at least, His body could not have been stolen by His disciples.

- b) *Yet they took bribes to lie!*

How should the guards report their failure without getting themselves into trouble? One option would be to exhibit the boldness and faith of the centurion and the guards at the foot of the cross who, after they had seen the earthquakes and other things that had happened feared greatly and exclaimed, “Truly this was the Son of God!” [Matt. 27: 34]. It takes faith to choose such an option, like the thief on the right side of Jesus who said to the dying Jesus on the cross, “Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom.” Jesus replied him, “Assuredly, I say to you, *today* you will be with Me in Paradise” [Lk 23: 42-43].

To their credit, the guards told the Jewish leaders the truth in that “some of the guard came into the city and reported to the chief priests *all the things that had happened*” [Matt. 28: 11]. The Jewish leaders consulted together and “gave a large sum of money to the soldiers” to change their story. They slept on duty and the disciples of Jesus came at night to steal Him away. Should the Roman governor want to punish them for dereliction of

duty, the Jewish leaders would appease him and make the guards secure [vv. 12-14].

The guards could have exercised another option at that stage by refusing the bribe and insisting on maintaining the truth, no matter the cost to their lives. However, bribery and corruption appeared to be pervasive among Roman soldiers and administrators in Judea at the time. For example, when soldiers came to John the Baptist by the River Jordan and asked him what they should do to be saved, he replied them, “Do not intimidate anyone, or accuse falsely, *and be content with your wages*” [Lk 3: 14]. In another example, when Paul was on trial before Governor Felix in Caesarea, he kept Paul in custody for two years hoping “*that money would be given him by Paul, that he might release him*. Therefore, he sent for him more often and conversed with him” [Acts 24: 26-27].

Understandably, the guards took the money “*and did as they were instructed*.” By doing so, they helped the Jewish leaders to maintain a lie that Jesus had actually not risen, that His disciples stole Him away while the guards slept [Matt. 28: 13]. The guards lied for liars.

Before we start judging them, let us examine what we ourselves do.

2. Ways in which we lie for liars!

The best thing to do is to tell it like it is at all times. That way, you do what is right, please God and please yourself. See the man born blind that Jesus had restored his sight. The Jewish leaders had determined that anyone who confessed that Jesus was the Christ would be put out of the synagogue [Jn 9: 22]. So, witnesses to the healing, including the young man’s parents, were not bold enough to openly admit it. But the young man took on the Pharisees and other leaders. He boldly admitted that Jesus is a prophet [v. 17]. When they challenged him to give God the glory (because they claimed to know that Jesus was a sinner), the man responded audaciously, “Whether He is a sinner or not I do not know. One thing I know, that I was blind, now I see” [vv. 24-25].

Unfortunately, truth is bitter and even more bitter to tell! As a result, we do in our daily interactions with others carry out lying assignments for others (or ourselves) with or without knowing it. A few examples will drive the point home:

a) *We may lie to cover up the truth*

We may be trying to help ourselves or others, especially those we love. Therefore, we help to bury the truth by telling a lie so often until it becomes the “truth.” For example, some people make false or exaggerated claims on their curricula vitae (résumés) about their qualifications and experience. Some parents whose children are in jail may tell others their children are in college! Sometimes, we spread falsehood about others so as

to make us better than they are. In all such cases, we are trying to lie to cover up the truth.

A good Biblical example was Potiphar's wife. She was the one that tried to seduce Joseph who was at the time a servant to her husband. Joseph "was handsome in form and appearance" and "his master's wife cast longing eyes on Joseph" to sleep with her [**Gen. 39: 6-7**]. Joseph refused because of his fear of the Lord [**vv. 8-9**]. She persisted and the young man also persisted in refusing. Then, one day, when there was no one else in the house, she took hold of Joseph and, in trying to escape, he left his garment in her hands. She first called in the men of the house (gathering witnesses) and told them, "See, he has brought in to us a Hebrew to mock us. He came in to me to lie with me, and I cried out with a loud voice. And it happened when he heard that I lifted my voice and cried out, that he left his garment with me and fled outside." When her husband returned, she told him the same story. [**vv. 11-18**]. With credible witnesses to back up her story, Joseph was thrown into jail for an offence he did not commit! Mrs Potiphar had lied to cover up the truth of his innocence.

b) *We may tell half-truths to cover up a lie*

Some people are very comfortable using the little knowledge they have about others to weave a big lie. Or they may reveal a little more than they know in order to help others to maintain a lie. For example, when you challenge some people's tall tales, you will receive answers, such as, "We attend the same church; in fact, s(he) sits by me;" "We went to the same college; in fact, we stayed in the same dorm for several years!" Such claims may well be true but they are in no way helpful in unraveling the lie under investigation. How many parents do you know that say bad things about their children killed in gang warfare?

Look at the witnesses during the trial of Jesus.. One of them said, "This fellow said, 'I am able to destroy the temple of God and to build it in three days'" [**Matt. 26: 61**]. That is a half-truth. What Jesus actually said was "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up," and He was "speaking of the temple of His body" [**Jn 2: 18-21**]. The half-truth served the purpose of covering up the false accusation against Jesus during His trial.

c) *We may lie to cover up a lie*

Maybe out of fear or greed or the desire to be politically correct, we may wind up lying so as to cover up ours or other people's lies. For example, no politician can misappropriate public funds without the active assistance of civil servants. The personal assistants of top leaders in the church,

government or sports caught in sexual scandals were aware all along of the matter but chose to look elsewhere or even cover up their bosses' tracks.

Ananias and Sapphira were presumably a loving couple. The man sold a piece of land and kept part of the proceeds, "*his wife also being aware of it.*" Ananias brought the sum to Peter the apostle, claiming that that was the total sum for the land. That was a lie because the Holy Spirit revealed it to Peter. About three hours later, his wife came in, not knowing what had happened to her husband. Peter asked her, "Tell me whether you sold the land for so much." She lied and said, "Yes, for so much." Peter replied, "How is it that you have agreed together to test the Spirit of the Lord?" Of course, she died instantly, just as her husband had done earlier [Acts 5: 1-10].

From the forgoing, we can conclude that *you cannot lie for or against others unless you love or benefit from it.* The guards at the tomb of Jesus knew the truth of Christ's resurrection. Yet, for the love of money, they sold their consciences and lied about it. They lied for liars. The only danger is that *all liars* will go to hell [Rev. 21: 8, 27]. So, what is your excuse?

3. Conclusion: Why should you go to hell for Satan?

When the Jewish leaders questioned the divinity of Jesus, He told them, "You are of your father *the devil*, and the desires of your father you want to do.... because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he *is a liar and the father of it*" [Jn 8: 44]. Two of the seven abominable sins before God are "a lying tongue" and "a false witness who speaks lies" [Prov. 6:17, 19]. So, if you find yourself addicted to lying, try out the following:

- See it as a bad habit that must be broken. Make it a New Year resolution that you must keep!
- If you find yourself in a situation to lie, ask yourself the question, "Do I want to go to hell for Satan?" If your answer is "No!", then you will not lie.
- If you are not sure that what you are about to say is true, simply shut up! At least, that is safer than lying.

Why should you go to hell for Satan or his agents? It is not worth it.