



### Who were the first eyewitnesses of Jesus' resurrection?

This isn't a question someone came up and asked me personally. It's one I heard Pastor Chuck Swindoll, a Christian Bible teacher, ask on his daily program Insight for Living that was being aired over the Christian radio station I was listening to while driving home.

It's not a question I remember ever hearing before, or even pondering in my mind without being asked.

A good first guess at the answer would be Mary Magdalene who saw what she first thought was the gardener, but who in reality was her risen Lord!

But I figured the correct answer must not be one we'd expect, or he wouldn't have asked the question. Pastor Swindoll went on to read this passage from Matthew chapter 28:

**11 Now while they** [Mary Magdalen and 'the other Mary'] **were on their way, some of the guard** [who had been assigned by the chief priests to keep watch over the tomb lest someone come and steal the body and claim Jesus rose back to life - see Matthew 27:62-66] **came into the city and reported to the chief priests all that had happened. 12 And when they** [the chief priests] **had assembled with the elders and consulted together, they gave a large sum of money to the soldiers, 13 and said, "You are to say, 'His disciples came by night and stole Him away while we were asleep.'** **14 And if this should come to the governor's ears, we will win him over and keep you out of trouble."** **15 And they** [the soldiers who guarded the tomb] **took the money and did as they had been instructed; and this story was widely spread among the Jews, and is to this day.**

Pastor Swindoll then went on to say that the most likely answer to his question would be those guards. Guards who were there when Jesus came out of the tomb - coming right through the stone that had been rolled over the entrance. (Keep in mind the angel who rolled the stone away, didn't do it so Jesus could get out. Jesus was already out! The stone was rolled away, so the people could go in and see for themselves that Jesus was not there!)

The guards' eyewitness account must have been very convincing, because the chief priests didn't even attempt to cast doubt on their story or tell them they must have been dreaming. Instead they gave the guards a bribe and crafted a false story (the first "fake news"?) they thought would satisfy the people.

But it's not real difficult to see that the chief priests' story was indeed "fake news": If the guards were sleeping (as the false story asserts) they could not have seen anyone come and steal the body - much less know who the grave robbers were! Sleeping people make horrible 'witnesses' to anything!

So, what difference does it make that the guards were likely the first? It simply adds to the credibility of the resurrection. Skeptics like to make the case that Jesus' followers wanted Jesus to rise from the grave, so made up the story or dreamt it. But if people who were not followers of Jesus witnessed him actually come out of the tomb alive - and had to be bribed with a 'large sum of money' to change their story - then it has to be true!

And indeed, it is!

Thanks for asking,  
Pastor David

Send your questions to [pastor@livingwordlutheran.net](mailto:pastor@livingwordlutheran.net)