

Matthew 28:12

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And when they were assembled with the elders, and had taken counsel, they gave large money unto the soldiers,

Analysis

And when they were assembled with the elders, and had taken counsel, they gave large money unto the soldiers. The chief priests convened a council ('assembled with the elders'—συναχθέντες μετὰ τῶν πρεσβυτέρων/synachthentes meta tōn presbyterōn), the same body that had condemned Jesus (Matthew 26:59). This was the Sanhedrin, Judaism's supreme religious and civil authority, now facing an existential crisis.

'And had taken counsel' (συμβούλιον τε λαβόντες/symboulion te labontes)—they deliberated, strategized, and plotted. Faced with evidence of resurrection, they chose not repentance but damage control. Rather than investigate further or reconsider Jesus's claims, they sought to suppress truth. This illustrates the human heart's capacity for self-deception when truth threatens our interests.

'They gave large money' (ἀργύρια ἱκανὰ ἔδωκαν/argyria hikana edōkan)—a substantial bribe, suggesting the guards were reluctant or fearful. The same leaders who paid Judas to betray Jesus (Matthew 26:14-16) now pay guards to lie about Him. Silver purchased betrayal before crucifixion; silver purchases false testimony after resurrection. The love of money remains a root of evil (1 Timothy 6:10).

The irony is profound: they used money to deny the one Truth that could save them. They paid to propagate a lie rather than freely receive the gospel. This contrasts sharply with the women who gave costly devotion (bringing spices,

risking association with a condemned criminal) and received freely the greatest treasure—news of Christ's victory over death.

Historical Context

The Sanhedrin consisted of 70-71 members: chief priests (Sadducees), elders (wealthy laymen), and scribes (Pharisees). Despite theological differences (Sadducees denied resurrection; Pharisees affirmed it), they united against Jesus. His claims threatened both groups' authority and interpretation of Scripture.

Bribing Roman soldiers (if these were Romans) was serious—Roman military discipline was severe, and accepting bribes could result in execution. The bribe had to be substantial enough to outweigh this risk. If these were temple guards, the bribe still had to overcome their fear of being caught in a lie and their firsthand experience of supernatural power at the tomb.

This incident demonstrates institutional corruption. The Sanhedrin, meant to uphold truth and justice, instead funded falsehood. Religious authority without submission to God becomes a tool of oppression and deception. Jesus had warned of this, calling them 'blind guides' and 'whitewashed tombs' (Matthew 23:16, 27).

Matthew notes this false story persisted 'until this day' (verse 15), indicating it was still being circulated when Matthew wrote (perhaps AD 50-70). Yet the church grew despite this propaganda, suggesting the resurrection's evidence was strong enough to overcome official lies.

Related Passages

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

1 John 4:8 — God is love

Study Questions

1. How does the religious leaders' response to evidence—suppression rather than investigation—warn us against allowing our traditions, reputations, or positions to blind us to truth?
2. What does their use of money to promote lies (rather than freely proclaiming truth) teach us about the fundamental difference between human religion and divine grace?
3. How can we guard against the institutional corruption displayed here, where religious structures meant to serve God instead serve the interests of those in power?

Interlinear Text

καὶ	συναχθέντες	μετὰ	τῶν	πρεσβυτέρων	συμβούλιόν
And	when they were assembled	with	G3588	the elders	counsel
G2532	G4863	G3326		G4245	G4824
τε	λαβόντες	ἀργύρια	ἰκανὰ	ἔδωκαν	τοῖς στρατιώταις
and	had taken	money	large	they gave	unto the soldiers
G5037	G2983	G694	G2425	G1325	G4757

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