



*3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Easter*  
*Are you believing the world's fake news?*

## **BREAKING NEWS** THE DEAD REPORTED TO BE ALIVE

When the chief priests had met with the elders and devised a plan, they gave the soldiers a large sum of money, <sup>13</sup> telling them, "You are to say, 'His disciples came during the night and stole him away while we were asleep.' <sup>14</sup> If this report gets to the governor, we will satisfy him and keep you out of trouble." <sup>15</sup> So the soldiers took the money and did as they were instructed. And this story has been widely circulated among the Jews to this very day.

(Matthew 28:8-15a)



### **Main Point**

We are all familiar with the term 'fake news'. What we may not realise, however is that fake news has been around for centuries. What is needed, therefore, is the discernment to differentiate between what is fake and false, from what is real and genuine. The world's fake news will always be at odds with God's news of truth. Once we identify the 'fake news of the world' we must be careful not to allow these lies to penetrate our heart.



### **Intro |**

I'm not the first to use the term 'fake news', and neither was Donald Trump the first to claim what was reported about him was 'fake'.

Now, far be it from me to bring politics into our Sunday message! However, when Matthew reported what happened in the early hours of resurrection day, he shone a spotlight on the corruption of the Jewish leaders when they generated fake news to further their political agenda.

I did some research into fake news this week – specifically how it operates in our world today and how we must be on constant alert to its dangers.

On the Australian Government's eSafety Commission website we learn,

That fake news is fictional news stories made up to support certain agendas.<sup>1</sup>

However, while we are all pretty familiar with the existence of fake news, it can still be very hard to spot.

The only way is to learn what truly happened.

So, let's step back into what was happening in our Gospel reading – and see how powerful fake news can be.

In the early hours of Sunday morning, even as the first female eyewitnesses were rushing to report on Christ's resurrection, the soldiers, however, were rushing in a different direction - taking refuge with the Jewish leaders knowing their very existence was at stake.

When they arrived, they reported to the Jewish elders the truly miraculous events they had experienced.

Now keep in mind, it is still dark, the dawn edition of the *Jerusalem Morning Herald* hadn't even been circulated yet.

But already, talk had hit the town: something truly amazing had occurred last night:

A tomb that everyone knew was completely secured by Roman soldiers, and made impenetrable by a huge stone, now stood empty – and anyone could go and check it out.

They had all felt the earthquake, and already people were reporting that some old saints, who had been buried years ago, had risen out their graves and were walking around town (see Matthew 27:52-53).

The Levites who served in the temple were already telling everyone the humungous temple curtain had been torn in two from top to bottom – a sign which, like the tomb, no one could hide!

'What did it all mean?' people asked.

Are we to believe that this man Jesus, who told us he would rise from the dead, was actually telling the truth? Was he really the Messiah?

Meanwhile, in the confines of the Jewish headquarters, there was a scurry of action.

"We have to do something! We have to stop this rumour!"

So, they contrived a story – fake news we'd call it – a story that was easier to believe than the truth – because they *did not want anyone to hear or believe what really happened*.

They bribed the soldiers to spread fake news, so that people would be prevented from hearing and believing the truth.

That's exactly how fake news operates still today. Those who do not want to believe the truth generate fake news to prevent people from believing the truth.

Why do people create fake news?

Because the truth always confronts our ideologies, our political agendas, and challenges our power and control over the situation.

So, now there were two stories circulating, and every person had to identify which was fake news, and which was the real deal.

Do I believe the news that Jesus was indeed the Messiah, who had risen from the dead?

Or, do I believe the news that the disciples had stolen his body, and hidden it in some undisclosed location?

As the afternoon edition of the *Jerusalem Herald* hit the stands, every heart was wondering: whose report do I believe?

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<sup>1</sup> [Fake news | eSafety Commissioner](https://www.esafety.gov.au/young-people/fake-news): <https://www.esafety.gov.au/young-people/fake-news>

**Point 1 | There is plenty of fake news in the world, not just generated by the media. Fake news is dangerous because it prevents people from hearing and being set free by the truth.**

Today we are faced with the same predicament.

We, too, have to decide what news we will believe.

When we trace the origin of fake news, we end up all the way to the dawn of human history. Yes! The devil is the original generator of fake news.

That is why Jesus called him the father of lies (John 8:44). He lies and deceives God's people, to lead them away from God's truth, because he knows that only God's truth will set them free (John 8:32).

His strategy is always to distort, twist or blatantly lie against God's truth, because if he can deceive us into believing his lies, he will gain authority over us (2 Timothy 2:26).

Knowing the danger of fake news, Paul instructed the believers at Corinth to be alert in identifying it.

Of course, Paul didn't call it 'fake news', rather he called it thoughts, arguments, imaginations or ideologies, which distort or twist God's truth making it sound like the truth, when in reality it is a lie.

**Point 2 | The only way to deal with fake news is to first identify it as a lie against God's truth. Then we must confront every thought or argument which sets against God's truth and bring it into obedience with Christ.**

But here is what makes fake news so dangerous.

If we start believing the lie, we can get swept up and carried along with the lie, and it literally takes us captive (see 2 Timothy 2:26).

In the verse we read earlier, Paul explained that there is only one way to deal with 'fake news' – and that is to confront the devil's lies by challenging them with the word of God.

That is how Jesus handled the fake news the devil tried on him in the wilderness. When the devil taunted him with "If you are the son of God, then ..." Jesus responded by saying "It is written ..."

In like manner when Paul heard that 'fake news' had infiltrated his churches, he told them to demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, so that they could intentionally take captive every thought bringing it into obedience to Christ (2 Corinthians 10:5).

That gives us important work to do in our thought life.

Rather than allow false, impure, dishonourable or ungodly thoughts to hang around in our minds, we are told to fix our thoughts on "whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things." (Philippians 4:18)

Although this is hard for us to do, it is a vital characteristic of how our prayer life is to be shaped. We see this clearly not only in today's psalm but many others.

Although he admits to be overcome by distress, sorry and anguish (v3), immediately he calls on the name of the Lord (v4) and reminds himself of God's goodness, graciousness and rest (v5-7)

So when thoughts of discouragement, despair and anxiety hit our minds, we don't allow ourselves to slip into the muddy marsh of despondency.

Or when thoughts of giving up, giving in overwhelm us we declare with our mouth "I will sacrifice a thank offering to you, my Lord."

**Application | It is our responsibility to keep our thoughts in line with God's truth, and aggressively confront thoughts and arguments which contradict God's word, so God's truth reigns in our heart and mind.**

Finally, this brings us to Peter's letter. He writes,

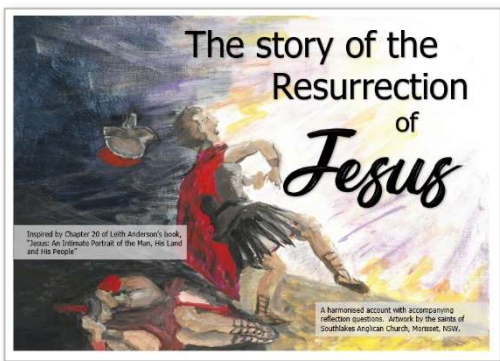
**13** Therefore, with minds that are alert and fully sober, set your hope on the grace to be brought to you when Jesus Christ is revealed at his coming. **14** As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. **15** But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; **16** for it is written: "Be holy, because I am holy."

In modern day language, he's saying a little like what the eSafety Commission is saying, "It's everyone's responsibility to identify and report fake news. A collective effort to prevent the spread of fake news can help to keep your community feeling safe, capable of identifying fake news and clear about what the truth is."<sup>2</sup>

Let each of us be determined to not only identify fake news, but as Jesus taught us to do, confront it with God's Word so our lives are shaped by the freedom that only God's truth enables.

## *Easter to Pentecost Devotional*

Last year we produced "The story of the Resurrection" which we used as a devotional for the season of Easter to Pentecost Sunday. You may download a copy of the book from the Church's website or watch the story in video form at:



[www.southlakes.org.au/wayofresurrection](http://www.southlakes.org.au/wayofresurrection) page.

To reduce the cost of printing, please ask the Church office if you would like a printed copy of this devotional.

<sup>2</sup> [Fake news | eSafety Commissioner](https://www.esafety.gov.au/young-people/fake-news): <https://www.esafety.gov.au/young-people/fake-news>