



ELIZABETHTOWN  
CHURCH OF THE BRETHREN

PRACTICING PEACE, SERVICE AND OPENNESS TO ALL

*Moonshot,  
An elaborate conspiracy*

Matthew 27.62–66; 28.11–15

By Pastor Greg Davidson Laszakovits

Message from August 4, 2019

777 South Mount Joy Street  
Elizabethtown, Pennsylvania 17022  
717-367-1000  
[www.etowncob.org](http://www.etowncob.org)



## LET'S GET LUNAR! INTRO TO CONSPIRACIES

Did you know that about 5% of the population believes that the lunar landing was staged by NASA and the US government to win the space race with Russia and refuse to admit failure? Conspiracy theorists ask questions like: *Why can't we see any stars in the photos? Why is the flag moving if no atmosphere? Why did the astronauts leave footprints, but the landing vehicle leave no marks?*

Okay, fair questions I think. For the record, you can't see the stars because the brightness of the sun blocks them out, the lunar module didn't leave marks because the pads were smooth, and they put wires in the flag so it would stand up straight.

Conspiracy theories have really taken off with the information age and the ability for nearly *anyone* to share and forward *anything*. In fact, spinning conspiracy theories is an industry unto itself these days. Everybody between the ages of 12–25 knows who this guy is: Shane Dawson. Vloggers like Shane Dawson spin conspiracy theories in what I perceive as a tongue-in-cheek way. This guy started as an actor, comedian and musician before he realized the money was in conspiracy. But I'm not sure that all 22.1 million of his YouTube subscribers view it the same way. He is now a professional "YouTuber" and doing quite well as his \$12 million net worth would testify.

And he's not the only one out there. The genius of today's conspiracy theorists/entertainers like Dawson is that they spin things with their own sense of irony, insouciance, and even humor. It goes something like this.

**GDL:** Now I'm not saying that Josh Tindall and Billy Joel are the same person, but let's just look at a few things here.

**JT:** Wait, what?

**GDL:** Just think about it a minute...The person we know as Josh Tindall plays piano like a genius. The person we know as Billy Joel also plays piano like a genius.

**JT:** *Sing us a song you're the piano man, sing us a song tonight...*

2

**GDL:** Both the man we know as Josh and the man we know as Joel (both J names with four letters by the way) are married. To blond women.

**JT:** *I am an innocent man, oh yes I am. OR Uptown Girl, OR She's always a woman*

**GDL:** Both "coincidentally" frequently sing about religion.

**JT:** *Come out Virginia don't let me wait, you Catholic girls start much too late, aw but sooner or later it comes down to fate...*

**GDL:** Just 10 days ago, Billy Joel played July 26 at Camden Yard in Baltimore. At 7:54 pm and 8:59 pm on that very same day July 26, Josh Tindall posted live footage of a concert he was performing.

**JT:** *You may be right, I may be crazy. But it just may be a lunatic you're looking for.*

**GDL:** Now just to be clear. This Billy Tindall, Joshy Joel, or whatever we want to call him is doing a great job here for us at Etown CoB so I don't really care about this elaborate ruse. But at this rate, I really feel like he's going to crash and burn leading this double life.

**JT:** *I don't need you to worry for me cause I'm alright. I don't want you to tell me it's time to come home. I don't care what you say any more this is my life. (OR Only the good die young)*

**GDL:** This all seemed a little too coincidental, so I dug a little deeper. Now we know Billy Joel sings about Pennsylvania. But did you know that the birth certificate of this so-called Josh shows that he was born in Easton. If you don't know your PA geography, Easton and Allentown are both in the Lehigh Valley less than 20 minutes away from each other.

**JT:** *Now we're living here in a Allentown, and their closing all the factories down...*

So there it is folks. I'm not saying Pastor Joel is Billy Josh, but who's to say that he isn't?

## WHY DO WE LOVE CONSPIRACY THEORIES?

MICK WEST BOOK

---

**That was a good fun. But scholars have put serious work into studying why we fall for conspiracy theories.** They help us order the world. Conspiracy theories often pop up when people feel like things are beyond their control. They confirm our biases when we are faced with uncomfortable truths. They help us explain the otherwise unexplainable. “No way JFK could’ve been brought down by a lone gunman.” And if one tends to spread rumors and be suspicious of others’ motives, then one tends to think that others must be doing the same. Would it surprise us to know that conspiracy theories are as old as the Bible?

### **CONSPIRACY INSURANCE, MATTHEW 27.62–66**

---

*The next day, that is, after the day of Preparation, the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered before Pilate and said, ‘Sir, we remember what that impostor [Jesus] said while he was still alive, “After three days I will rise again.” Therefore command that the tomb be made secure until the third day; otherwise his disciples may go and steal him away, and tell the people, “He has been raised from the dead,” and the last deception would be worse than the first.’ Pilate said to them, ‘You have a guard of soldiers; go, make it as secure as you can.’ So they went with the guard and made the tomb secure by sealing the stone.*

Jesus’ opponents had their conspiracy theory ready to go even before anything had happened! They didn’t want things to go beyond their control, undo their previously held beliefs, and were ready to explain the unexplainable. And that’s what its about right?

In our world today, these theories go all the way from the funny to the serious. There’s the moon landing conspiracy that floats around there, and the silliness of the flat earthers, Bigfoot, Area 51. But also the dead serious conspiracy theories that do real harm. Vaccination untruths are right now putting vulnerable populations in danger, for example.

# 4

Far right conspiracy theorists like Alex Jones whip up fervor—this is the guy who claims the horrific Sandy Hook shooting is all a conspiracy by the government. Jones also admitted in a court of law that he is an entertainer, or “Performance Artist” as his lawyer put it. Jones, and others who spin even more dangerously paranoid theories, have led the FBI to label fringe conspiracy theories as a domestic terrorist threat.

History shows us the danger in these theories. From the Salem Witch Trials, to racist rumors that led and lead to lynchings, to Anti-Semite conspiracies that aided in the Holocaust they have been used to manipulate, sway public opinion, incite murder.

And we must speak plainly when we hear these theories. When someone claims that our first and only black president was not born in the US and is not an American citizen, in spite of all the evidence that says otherwise, that is the most transparent of thinly-veiled racism, and cannot be tolerated.

Now I want to play out the rest of the story in Matthew to look where all of this conspiracy talk went.

## **MATTHEW 28.11–15**

---

*While they (the Marys) were going, some of the guard went into the city and told the chief priests everything that had happened. After the priests had assembled with the elders, they devised a plan to give a large sum of money to the soldiers, telling them, ‘You must say, “His disciples came by night and stole him away while we were asleep.” If this comes to the governor’s ears, we will satisfy him and keep you out of trouble.’ So they took the money and did as they were directed.*

Did you catch that? The guys who were just worried about the followers of Jesus creating a conspiracy are now creating a conspiracy?! Their plan was to bribe the soldiers guarding the tomb to say they fell asleep on the job. And they also promised they would cover for them with their boss if he found out about it.

And we see what people are inclined to do when faced with an uncomfortable truth. And we also see how conspiracy theories work. We are drawn to things that we want to believe.

[In fairness, this isn't just the powers who do this. We do it every day. We pretend that familial dysfunction isn't really there. We ignore the physical symptoms that we'd rather not talk to the doctor about for fear of a diagnosis we don't want to hear. We disregard the disappointing numbers on the report at work. We distort the facts when they don't fit our reality; or at least the reality we want to project. They aren't lies, schemes and fabrications of Biblical proportion, but we play a part.]

The same scholars who study conspiracy theories say that to battle our inclination to conspiracies we need to do three things: 1) always be open to additional information, even information that doesn't fit our assumptions. 2) We must be open to the option that there is a simple answer—Occam's razor. 3) And we should acknowledge that there may be more than one way the information fits.

### **CONFESSION. YES, IT IS ALL A CONSPIRACY**

---

And now, what do we do with this Jesus resurrection story. Now, I know what some of you are thinking, because the thought crosses my mind too. What if the whole Jesus resurrection thing is a conspiracy? What if someone did steal his body? To which I would say this: I'm open to new information; but honestly I'm not really all that concerned whether or not a body was risen, stolen, or evaporated. Because that is not the rock upon which my faith rests. You know what, come to think of it, my faith rests on an entirely different conspiracy to act in harmony towards a common end. And it is this...

A conspiracy of grace that says God loves me, you, and everyone.

It's a conspiracy of love over hate. It is a conspiracy of peace-making that breaks the chain of violence in enemy love.

6 It's a conspiracy of justice in the face of injustice. A conspiracy of the first will be last, and the last will be first. A conspiracy that proudly proclaims the down-trodden, meek, and mourning have a special place in God's heart.

A conspiracy that rejects the notion that some have God's favor, while others are on the outside looking in. It is a conspiracy that welcomes everybody regardless who you are or where you come from.

It is a conspiracy that says God's Reign is and will be, and that God is at work right here, right now, even with people like you and me.









