

THE APOSTLE’S CREED III
2Corinthians 5:17-21; John 8:48-59; Ephesians 4:9; 1Peter 3:18-19
2024-11-24

We’re into the third week of our series on the Apostles’ Creed. Early Christians saw the need to create an agreed upon statement of what they believed and how they came to believe it. The creed protects us and helps us evaluate truth from heretical belief. We looked at many early heretical beliefs which our forefathers addressed and repudiated. Much of what Paul wrote in his letters is a defense (apology) against heresies—and of course the heretical works are not included in the Bible, so we get Paul’s one way conversation which forms what we believe.

Last week we looked at the first statement of the Creed: “I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth. We focused on the Father as Creator, and were pretty astounded that was all that was said about Him in the Creed. Today, we’ll focus on the bulk of the Creed, the part that considers Jesus. So, let’s get going by repeating the Creed together:

1. I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator (maker) of the heavens and earth.
2. And in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord;
3. who was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary;
4. He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead and buried; He descended into hell
5. on the third day He was raised (rose) from the dead;
6. He ascended into the heavens (heaven), and sits at the right hand of God the Father almighty;
7. from where (whence) He will come to judge the living (quick) and the dead.
8. I believe in the Holy Spirit (Ghost);
9. in the holy catholic church; the communion of saints;
10. the forgiveness of sins;
11. the resurrection of the flesh (body)
12. and eternal life (the life everlasting).

In the first message on the Creed I mentioned that it was really written because of Jesus. He is no more important (nor less important) than the Father or the Holy Spirit, yet He is the theological/spiritual lightning rod. All the venom from the world gets directed to Him. Jews can’t come to grips with the fact that His presence as God seemed to contradict their understanding of God from the Shema: Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One. So, they didn’t believe the Messiah could be fully divine (as in equal with God). Moreover, the Messiah would have surely freed them from the shackles of Rome. Muslims look at Jesus as a prophet—but a failed prophet because He died—and not THE prophet. Just to show you that Jesus is still the object of attack, listen to this letter in the Highlander from November 7th, entitled, “There are other versions of Jesus”. We never seem to come to the end of people trying to define who God is according to their own gospel rather than according to what God says about Himself.

Jesus revealed God to us. He underscored God’s love for people. He emphasized God’s desire to save them from their misdeeds (sins) and establish a peaceful divine reign that would put all other rulers and temporal powers to shame. He emphasized God’s willingness to forgive,

but also people's need to confess their faults and turn toward the good. He urged people to love God with their whole being and their neighbors as themselves. In their encounters with Jesus, many followers believed that they had encountered not just another prophet that God had sent, but that in Jesus they had experienced God's actual presence on earth. All four of the Gospel writers affirmed this, summed so beautifully by John: "In Jesus, the Word of God—who was in the beginning with God and indeed was God (John 1:1) took flesh and dwelt among us." (John 1:14)

Jesus provides us with some of our most basic beliefs about God: care for the marginalized and outcast, deep compassion and a willingness to forgive (qualities that are noticeably absent in our world today), the refusal to adopt strategies of violence and revenge, and a desire that all people should live in community and be at peace with each other. We believe these things to be true of God because we've been seen at work in Jesus' life.

We also believe that, in/through Jesus, God was on a mission. God was redeeming the world from its fallenness into sin, reconciling the world and strengthening its relationship with God—not different from what had been previously. God was always in relentless pursuit of us, regardless of our waywardness (remember the example of Hagar last week—she called Him the God who sees me). But in Jesus, something radically different occurs. God actually enters His creation, fragile & suffering, even willing to die at our hands—all to reconcile us to God—2 Corinthians 5:17-21

So, to the specific statements about Jesus: **And in Jesus Christ, His only Son our Lord.** Even to this day, people from different faith backgrounds play games with this. Jehovah's Witnesses refer to Jesus as "a" son of God rather than "the Son" of God. You need look no further than John 10:30: "I and the Father are one." It was very clear what Jesus was saying, because the Jews immediately picked up stones to stone Him—"a mere man claiming to be God". You could go to His discussion about who He was in John 8:48-59: "I tell you the truth, before Abraham was born, I am." It's the same language that God spoke to Moses about when Moses asked God who Moses should say He was: "Tell them 'I AM' sent you." Again, the Jews picked up stones to stone Him. Every "**I Am**" **statement is the same**...the bread of life, the way, truth and life, the good shepherd, the door, the gate, the resurrection and the life, the vine, the light of the world. From these passages it's evident He's not just THE SON but also Lord as the disciples called Him—i.e. God.

"**Who was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary**". Luke lays this out very clearly in the familiar Christmas story. It's also confirmed in Isaiah 7:14: "The virgin will give birth to a son and will call him Immanuel—meaning God with us." We've got people teaching in seminaries who don't believe in the Virgin Birth. This is one of those central pieces where we walk by faith and not by sight. Mary's response to the angel's announcement is clearly

one of astonishment, as is Joseph's response, but he too listens to the angel who appeared to him in a dream. Yet there's much more to this than the basic belief of this truth. It had to be this way.

If Jesus were totally human, there was no possibility that He could take our sins upon Himself, for in that case, He too, would be a sinner—possessing a sinful nature. But, if He was totally God, then there was no way He could identify with our sin nature and human suffering. So, Jesus is perfectly 100% human and 100% God. A mystery for sure; nonetheless true. Again I say, Jesus had to be this way.

“He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead and buried; He descended into hell” This statement locks Jesus in time and location. This was a real historical event chronicling how He died. The Gospels all give the account of how Jesus died. Surprisingly, they don't give any explanation of crucifixion, the reason being that it was so common at that time that no explanation was necessary. But that wasn't always the case. Psalm 22 describes the death of Jesus written 700 years before it ever happened—a time when crucifixion was unknown—yet another confirmation of God's transcendence of time with his prophet, David, speaking into the future.

Jesus was also dead. This is in the creed because so many, Jews among them, insisted He never died; His death was faked. At the end of Matthew a tale was concocted saying Jesus' body was stolen—not under Roman guards it was not. Any guard failing to fulfill his duty would be killed. The disciples were too emotionally messed to even conceive of anything like that—and why would they? He was already in a tomb. What would moving Him accomplish. He was dead. John spoke intentionally of the spear into Jesus' side to confirm His death. Blood & plasma poured out separately—a sure sign even today of death. As for any theory that He recovered and escaped Himself, whoever said that didn't have a clue about how badly, how brutally He was beaten. Couldn't happen.

He descended into hell. More recently this was changed to “He descended to the dead.” As early as the third century, Christians affirmed that between His death and resurrection, Jesus went to hell (to the dead) to rescue the virtuous people of ancient Israel and take them to heaven with Him—a postmortem rescue mission. Jews before Jesus' birth looked forward to the coming Messiah. Those of us living after Jesus' resurrection have the actual event to draw on. Because Christ entered (even hell), we can be sure no place is so dark as to be utterly apart from God's love. But the Scriptures are vague—1 Peter 3: 18-22, Ephesians 4:9 “preaching to the spirits in prison”.

On the third day He rose from the dead. Jesus appeared after His death on the road to Emmaus, to the disciples without Thomas, then one week later with Thomas, to Paul on the road to Damascus, to James and then to over 500 people over a period of forty days. From those

appearances we can rest assured the resurrection is a verified reality, quite apart from what we already know in our hearts. Death was undone with Jesus; death was left behind Him.

He ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty. This image also offers comfort. At whatever level of decision making there is in the universe, Christ is present—the same One who came into our world even to the cross because of His love for us. Emmanuel—God is with us in Jesus. The Messiah that the Jews are waiting for will actually return for a second time to judge the living and the dead. It is good news insofar as when we face our judge, we will not face a stranger! Try to talk these things over this week. Let's go to the table.