

The Apostles' Creed

Part 7

Crucified, Dead, Buried, Descended into Hell
Galatians 3:13; 1 Peter 3:18; Mark 15:46; Isaiah 53:6

With Study Questions

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Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree”) (Galatians 3:13).

For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit (1 Peter 3:18).

Then he bought fine linen, took Him down, and wrapped Him in the linen. And he laid Him in a tomb which had been hewn out of the rock, and rolled a stone against the door of the tomb (Mark 15:46).

All we like sheep have gone astray; We have turned, every one, to his own way; And the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all (Isaiah 53:6).

This morning we will examine the portion of the Apostles' Creed which addresses the crucifixion of Christ...His death, burial and descending to hell.

Introduction

When reading difficult or highly academic literature I find myself longing for the phrase “in short” or “to sum up” followed by the author’s main point restated in just a few easy words. I am comforted when I read Peter’s confession that the epistles of Paul contain “**things hard to understand**” (1 Peter 3:16).

Perhaps it was for that reason that Paul confesses that he “**did not come with excellence of speech**” (1 Corinthians 2:1), something that might not have come easy for Paul. A man of his intellectual caliber might have

found it easier to speak at a lofty level. In the context of Paul dispensing with lofty speech, he makes one of his “in short...to sum up” statements.

And he makes this statement in such a way as to imply that everything else he has said or written can be viewed as relatively meaningless in light of this...as if he is giving his readers the freedom, or a command, to (at least for the moment) disregard everything else – like an emergency room doctor who, seeing the patient flat-line, casts aside all instruments and monitors in order to shock the near death victim back into the land of living. What are Paul’s words?

For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified (1 Corinthians 2:2).

It’s been said of this portion of the Apostles’ Creed:

Here we reach the real heart – the heart of the heart, we may say – of Christianity; for if the incarnation is its shrine, the Atonement is certainly its holy of holies.¹

If the Apostles’ Creed gives an accurate summary of the central principles of the Christian faith, the statements we read here – crucified, dead, buried, descended into hell, along with the resurrection and ascension – form the center of the center.

Crucified

It was during the highly focused contemplation of His own crucifixion that Jesus confesses that His soul was “**exceedingly sorrowful, even to death**” (Matthew 26:38). The pondering of this event brought Jesus, body and soul, into a place of “**agony...His sweat became like great drops of blood falling to the ground**” (Luke 22:43, 44).

Just what was it that caused the King of kings and the Lord of glory such consternation? Was it the nails, the thorns, the scourging, the pierced side or even some death devoid of consciousness – an annihilation? Was Jesus coming short in His fear? Was He fearful where other men were

¹Packer, J. I. (1996, c1994). *Growing in Christ*. Originally published: I want to be a Christian. Wheaton, Ill. : Tyndale House Publishers, c1977.; Includes index. (52). Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books.

courageous? Certainly there were other men who had faced crucifixions without this level of dread! John Calvin's comments are this would almost sound irreverent if they weren't accurate and clarifying to the matter – revealing the deeper matter:

For that mortal sweat could only have proceeded from fearful and unusual horror. If any person, in the present day, were to sweat blood, and in such a quantity that the drops should fall to the ground, it would be reckoned an astonishing miracle; and if this happened to any man through fear of death, we would say that he had a cowardly and effeminate mind.²

Many men suffered under Pilate. To say that the disquieted heart of Christ was due to Pilate and his band of thugs is to miss the proverbial point. As we saw in our study of Jesus and Pilate last week, Jesus has almost a dismissive attitude toward Pilate – acknowledging that Pilate would have no power whatsoever except it was given him “**from above**” (John 19:11).

And it would be that which would come “**from above**” that filled the heart of Jesus with such trepidation – for the crucifixion is not so much the nails as it is the curse – a curse associated with hanging on a tree.

If a man has committed a sin deserving of death, and he is put to death, and you hang him on a tree,²³ his body shall not remain overnight on the tree, but you shall surely bury him that day, so that you do not defile the land which the Lord your God is giving you as an inheritance; for he who is hanged is accursed of God (Deuteronomy 21:22, 23).

Our sin, which is deserving of death, makes us objects of God's wrath. But God, in His great love for us, sent His Son to be crucified...

Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree”) (Galatians 3:13).

²Calvin, J. (1998). *Calvin's Commentaries: The Harmony of the Gospels : Calvin's Commentary on Matthew, Mark, and Luke* (electronic ed.). Logos Library System; Calvin's Commentaries. Albany, OR: Ages Software.

The sorrow of soul and great drops of blood did not proceed from thoughts of Pilate, Herod, nails or thorns, but the imminent cup of God's wrath which Jesus was about to drink.

Hell is often made light of. I recently saw a sticker with the words, *Will They Serve Beer in Hell?* To those who would think little of the curse of God, consider the countenance of Christ at the prospect of undergoing its application. Perhaps it was this that the apostles saw, causing them to run with fear.

I don't like flying and I especially don't like turbulence, but I realize it is a natural part of the flight. But when I hear a sound or feel a bump and notice the flight attendants looking at each other with 'what in the world was that' expressions on their faces, my flight becomes intensely un-enjoyable.

It would be wise for all men to develop a more competent grasp of the wrath of God that we might, 1) as Christians have an elevated view of our Savior's grace, or 2) if an unbeliever, that in a holy and godly fear, we might seek to lay hold of our only hope for deliverance from that which caused the bravest Man to have such anguish.

There is a natural arrogance in man from which we all need deliverance. This man/me-centered philosophy of life is prevailing in our culture and we are witnessing the familial, political and ecclesiastical fallout of its curse. Men will by nature seek to press God to the side and off the edge.

The wicked in his proud countenance does not seek *God*; God is in none of his thoughts (Psalm 10:4).

It is the double heart that speaks:

With our tongue we will prevail; Our lips *are* our own; Who is lord over us (Psalm 12:4)?

But Jesus was keenly aware of omnipresence of His Father – and that includes the presence of His wrath:

Who knows the power of Your anger? For as the fear of You, so is Your wrath. ¹² So teach us to number our days, That we may gain a heart of wisdom (Psalm 90:11, 12).

Who can stand before His indignation? And who can endure the fierceness of His anger? His fury is poured out like fire, And the rocks are thrown down by Him (Nahum 1:6).

Dead and Buried

When we read of the death and burial of Christ in the Apostles' Creed, we are made aware of the church's biblical conviction that Jesus, as a Man, truly died.

For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit (1 Peter 3:18).

Death can be a lonely and fearful path. It is the one event in life where those who love you most cannot join you – nor can they do anything to deliver you. But there is one who has tasted death in our place and promises that He has prepared a place for us that where He is, we may be also (John 14:2, 3).

It's been said:

For "Christ leads me through no darker rooms/Than he went through before." Having tasted death himself, he can support us while we taste it, and carry us through the great change to share the life beyond death into which he himself has passed. Death without Christ is "the king of terrors," but death with Christ loses the "sting," the power to hurt, which it otherwise would have.³

In His burial we also see a fulfillment of prophecy – it was of Christ's atoning work that Paul wrote was all "**according to the Scriptures**"

³Packer, J. I. (1996, c1994). *Growing in Christ*. Originally published: I want to be a Christian. Wheaton, Ill. : Tyndale House Publishers, c1977.; Includes index. (55). Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books.

(1 Corinthians 15:4). The prophecy is found in Isaiah 53:9, **“And they made His grace with the wicked – But with the rich at His death.”** This is fulfilled through the actions of Joseph of Arimathea (Luke 23:51-53).

Descended into Hell

Perhaps the most controversial statement in the creed is found in the notion that Jesus descended into Hell – a clause that did not establish itself in the Creed till the fourth century.⁴ And many versions will not use the word Hell but *Hades* corresponding to the Hebrew *Sheol* which is a broader word simply meaning death or grave. To say Jesus died then descended to the dead may be a bit redundant. I am of the opinion that Jesus descending into Hell is perhaps the most profound statement in the creed, it not all of Scripture if understood correctly.

It might be best to avoid the speculation that always accompanies the questions around where Jesus was what Jesus was doing after the crucifixion and before the resurrection. When I read that Jesus descended into Hell, I do not read it as if He were merely visiting a dreadful place and some sort of uncomfortable tourist. I agree with Witsius holding the position that Jesus descended into Hell when he “wrestled with the dreadful agonies.”⁵

Jesus descended into Hell by taking upon Himself the Hell that you and I deserved.

who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness – by whose stripes you were healed (1 Peter 2:24).

The atoning price paid by Jesus was that that Lord would lay “on Him the iniquity of us all” (Isaiah 53:6). The wrath of God which justly falls upon sinners fell upon Jesus, thus granting those who trust in Him peace with God.

⁴Packer, J. I. (1996, c1994). *Growing in Christ*. Originally published: I want to be a Christian. Wheaton, Ill. : Tyndale House Publishers, c1977.; Includes index. (56). Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books.

⁵ Herman Witsius, *The Apostles' Creed* (Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing), Vol. II, p. 147.

It is in this context that we see the often misused expression “God is love” (1 John 4:8). For John goes on to explain in the next two verses:

In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. ¹⁰ In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son *to be* the propitiation for our sins (1 John 4: 9, 10).

To propitiate means to appease the just wrath of God. Jesus was crucified; He died, was buried and took our Hell that we might ever live with Him in His Heaven.

In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace (Ephesians 1:7).

Questions for Study

1. According to 1 Corinthians 2:2, what did the Apostle Paul view as the central focus of His ministry and the Christian faith (pages 2, 3)?
2. How did Jesus respond in His contemplation of the cross (pages 3, 4)?
3. What do you think was causing Jesus to have this response? Discuss the quote by John Calvin (pages 3, 4).
4. What was the significance of Jesus hanging on a tree (pages 4, 5)?
5. What can all men learn by examining Jesus' reaction to the wrath of God (pages 5, 6)?
6. How can Christians take comfort in the death of Christ (page 5)?
7. In what respect did Jesus descend into hell (pages 7, 8)?
8. Define propitiation. What does this mean to you personally (page 8)?