

# **The Apostles' Creed**

**Was Crucified, Died, and Was Buried**

*Selected Texts*

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# Was Crucified, Died, and Was Buried

## Introduction

As we continue our series in *The Apostles' Creed* I would like to examine today what it means to believe that Jesus was crucified, died, and was buried. Please listen as I recite the Apostles' Creed:

*I believe in God the Father Almighty,  
Maker of heaven and earth.*

*I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,  
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,  
and born of the Virgin Mary.  
He suffered under Pontius Pilate,  
**was crucified, died, and was buried;**  
he descended into hell.  
The third day he rose again from the dead.  
He ascended into heaven  
and is seated at the right hand  
of God the Father Almighty.  
From there he will come to judge  
the living and the dead.*

*I believe in the Holy Spirit,  
the holy Catholic Church,  
the communion of saints,  
the forgiveness of sins,  
the resurrection of the body,  
and the life everlasting. Amen.*

The crucifixion of Jesus Christ was the climax of redemptive history, the focal point of God's plan of salvation. God's redeeming work culminated in the cross, where the Lord Jesus Christ bore the sins of his people.

Furthermore, in the crucifixion of Jesus Christ the wickedness of man reached its apex. The execution of the Savior was the vilest expression of evil in human history, the utter depth of man's depravity.

The death of Christ was therefore the supreme revelation of the gracious love of God while also at the same time being the ultimate expression of the sinfulness of man.

Commentator David Thomas wrote:

For thousands of years wickedness had been growing. It had wrought deeds of impiety and crime that had wrung the ages with agony, and often roused the justice of the universe to roll her fiery thunderbolts of retribution through the world. But now it had grown to full maturity; it stands around the cross in such gigantic proportions as had never been seen before; it works an enormity before which the mightiest of its past exploits dwindle into insignificance, and pale into dimness. It crucifies the Lord of life and glory.<sup>1</sup>

## Lesson

Today we come to that part of the Apostles' Creed in which we affirm our faith in Jesus Christ who *was crucified, died, and was buried*.

Let us then examine the crucifixion, death and burial of Jesus Christ.

### I. The Crucifixion of Jesus Christ

First, let's examine the crucifixion of Jesus Christ.

Let's look at the crucifixion of Jesus Christ chronologically by examining the events preceding the crucifixion, the events accompanying the crucifixion, and the events following the crucifixion.

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<sup>1</sup> David Thomas, *The Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1979 [reprint of 1873 edition]), 536.

A. *The Events Preceding the Crucifixion of Jesus Christ*

Notice first, the events preceding the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. Three events preceded the crucifixion of Jesus Christ that are worthy of note.

*First, the Romans whipped Jesus Christ.* Matthew records that Pilate “had Jesus flogged, and handed him over to be crucified” (Matthew 27:26).

Flogging was common among the Romans. All those condemned to crucifixion were first beaten. At the destruction of Jerusalem, for example, the historian Josephus tells us that “the Jews were, in the first place, whipped, and tortured with all sorts of stripes, and then crucified.”<sup>2</sup>

Interestingly, Pilate, who ordered Jesus flogged, did not want him crucified. In response to the Jewish demands that Jesus be crucified, Pilate responded by saying: “Why? What crime has this man committed? I have found in him no grounds for the death penalty. Therefore I will have him punished and then release him” (Luke 23:22).

Pilate saw the unrelenting hatred of the Jews toward Jesus, since, in spite of all his exertions to the contrary, they obstinately demanded the crucifixion of Jesus.

He also knew that if Jesus was crucified he would have to be whipped.

But in ordering the whipping of Jesus Pilate had two objectives in view.

The first objective was to soften the hearts of the hard-hearted Jews. If they saw how terrible Jesus looked after the whipping, perhaps they would relent and no longer demand his crucifixion.

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<sup>2</sup> Herman Witsius, *Sacred Dissertations on the Apostles' Creed*, Vol. II (Glasgow: Khull, Blackie & Co., 1823), 75.

But, in the event that the Jews did not relent, he would have succeeded in the accomplishment of his second objective, namely, the flogging of a condemned criminal before crucifixion.

And so Jesus was brutally scourged. If you saw the movie *The Passion of the Christ* you undoubtedly recall the powerfully moving scourging scene. The Romans tied Jesus to a pole, stripped him naked, and two soldiers whipped Jesus across his back.

The whip's leather thongs was fitted with pieces of bone, lead, or other metal so that as the whip struck Jesus' body it tore open his flesh from his shoulders to his buttocks. Frequently, such a whipping left the victim dead but Jesus obviously survived the whipping.

*Second, the cross was laid upon Jesus.* Again, Matthew records that after the scourging, "as they were going out, they met a man from Cyrene, named Simon, and they forced him to carry the cross" (Matthew 27:32).

The historian Artemidorus says, "The man who is about to be nailed to the cross, in the first place carries it."<sup>3</sup> The Romans forced their victims to carry the cross to add to their shame and disgrace.

Jesus apparently was too weak to carry his own cross so the Romans grabbed Simon from Cyrene and forced him to carry Jesus' cross to Golgotha. We should not think that this was an act of kindness on the part of the Roman soldiers toward Jesus. It was in fact an act of cruelty because they did not wish to see Jesus die along the way, but rather wanted to see him suffer and die on the cross.

*And third, Jesus was stripped of his clothing.* Matthew says that "when they had crucified him, they divided up his clothes by casting lots" (Matthew 27:35).

In the movie *The Passion of the Christ* Jesus still has a loin cloth on, probably to ensure an "R" rating rather than an "X" rating. However, this is almost certainly historically inaccurate, for as

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<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 78.

Matthew says and Artemidorus confirms, “They were crucified naked.”<sup>4</sup>

Imagine the pain inflicted on Jesus when his blood-soaked garments were pulled off his torn back. And then imagine the indignity of having to die naked.

These, then, were the events preceding the crucifixion of Jesus Christ.

### *B. The Events Accompanying the Crucifixion of Jesus Christ*

Now, notice the events accompanying the crucifixion of Jesus Christ.

Commentators vary regarding the exact circumstances but the following is most likely. At Golgotha, the cross was placed on the ground. Jesus then had to lie face-up on the cross. His hands were fixed to the cross, most likely with rope and nails which were inserted in Jesus' wrist.

Then the cross (with Jesus now attached to it) was lifted up and fixed to the upright-beam. There was often a small stool on the upright beam so that the victim could partially sit while hanging. This stool was there to prolong the suffering of the victim.

Finally, Jesus' feet were nailed to the upright-beam.

### *C. The Events Following the Crucifixion of Jesus Christ*

Finally, let's note two events following the crucifixion of Jesus Christ.

*First, Jesus was guarded.* Matthew tells us that “when they had crucified him, they divided up his clothes by casting lots. And sitting down, they kept watch over him there” (Matthew 27:35-36).

The Romans placed a guard at the site of crucifixions because they did not want the body (alive or dead) to be stolen. They

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<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 79.

did not want friends or family members removing the victims from the cross before they had died.

*And second, Jesus was mocked.* Luke says: “The people stood watching, and the rulers even sneered at him. They said, ‘He saved others; let him save himself if he is the Christ of God, the Chosen One.’ The soldiers also came up and mocked him. They offered him wine vinegar and said, ‘If you are the king of the Jews, save yourself’” (23:35-36).

People who were crucified were considered to be cursed and the lowest of the low. And so it is not surprising to read that Jesus was mocked while hanging on the cross.

After all of this, Jesus died.

## **II. The Death of Jesus Christ**

This brings us now to examine the death of Jesus Christ.

Death came to crucified victims sooner or later. Their painful death was sometimes the result of a loss of blood.

At other times they died because of hunger or thirst.

They also died because of suffocation.

Sometimes, their death was the result of meat-eating dogs or vultures.

In order to hasten death, the Romans would break the legs of the victims or thrust spears into them or even burn them.

However they died, we need to remember that it was a vicious, cruel, excruciating death. (By the way, the word “excruciating” comes from the word “cross”).

As Jesus hung on the cross, it became very difficult to breath after a while. Even with the little stool on the upright-beam, his body still sagged and caused him difficulty in breathing. After some time, because of the sagging weight, Jesus’ arms dislocated from their shoulder sockets. Messianic Psalm 22 seems to suggest this, where the Psalmist said, “I am poured out like water, and *all my bones are out of joint*” (22:14). Of course, this made rising up to catch his breath even more difficult. Finally, though, Jesus died.

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Now, some have suggested that Jesus did not die physically. He merely swooned or fainted. But let me remind you that the Roman soldiers were a professional execution team. They knew a dead body when they saw one. The apostle John tells us in John 19:31-33: “Because the Jews did not want the bodies left on the crosses during the Sabbath, they asked Pilate to have the legs broken and the bodies taken down. The soldiers therefore came and broke the legs of the first man who had been crucified with Jesus, and then those of the other. But when they came to Jesus and found that he was already dead, they did not break his legs.” This is an important piece of observational evidence.

But the Holy Spirit, in his marvelous providence in producing the Scriptures, made sure that a critical piece of evidence pertaining to the death of Jesus was given to us in the next verse. The apostle John, writing by the influence of the Holy Spirit, says, “Instead, one of the soldiers pierced Jesus’ side with a spear, bringing a sudden flow of blood and water” (John 19:34).

Now, medical experts disagree on what was pierced. There are two common theories about what happened.

One theory says that the spear pierced Jesus’ heart, and the blood from the heart mingled with the fluid from the pericardial sac to produce the “sudden flow of blood and water.”<sup>5</sup>

A second theory postulates that, by contrast, the fluid from the pericardial sac could not so readily escape from the body by such a wound; it would fill up the chest cavity, filling the space around the lung and then ooze into the lung itself through the wound the spear made. In tests performed on cadavers, it has been shown that where a chest has been severely injured but without penetration, hemorrhagic fluid, up to four pints of it, gathers between the pleura lining the rib cage and the lining of the lung. This separates, the clearer serum at the top, the deep red layer at the bot-

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<sup>5</sup> Pierre Barbet, *A Doctor at Calvary: the Passion of our Lord Jesus Christ as Described by a Surgeon* (Doubleday, 1953); W. D. Edwards, W. J. Gabel, F. E. Hosmer, *Journal of the American Medical Association* 255, 1986, 1455-1463.



tom. If the chest cavity were then pierced at the bottom, both layers would flow out.<sup>6</sup>

Now, however the medical experts work this out, the point that the Holy Spirit wants to emphasize through John is that Jesus' death is beyond a shadow of doubt.

Jesus was physically dead on the cross.

### III. The Burial of Jesus Christ

Finally, let's examine the burial of Jesus Christ.

Pilate released Jesus to Joseph of Arimathea for burial. We read in Matthew 27:57-60: "As evening approached, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who had himself become a disciple of Jesus. Going to Pilate, he asked for Jesus' body, and Pilate ordered that it be given to him. Joseph took the body, wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, and placed it in his own new tomb that he had cut out of the rock. He rolled a big stone in front of the entrance to the tomb and went away."

Now, I would like you to notice several things about the burial of Jesus Christ.

*First, Jesus was buried in a borrowed tomb.* Jesus' life was a life of poverty. He was born in a stable and laid in a manger not his own. While he walked about this earth he said that he owned no home, "no place to lay his head" (Matthew 8:20). And so, even in death, he was placed in tomb not his own.

*Second, the tomb itself was hewn out of rock.* This is an important point because the Jewish authorities later alleged that Jesus' disciples had come and stolen the body away. Since there was a Roman guard at the entrance, the presumption was that the disciples burrowed a secret passage to get Jesus out. But since the tomb was cut out of rock, it would have been impossible to work so quickly to release Jesus without being caught.

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<sup>6</sup> A. F. Sava, *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 19, 1960, 343-346.

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*Third, the tomb was new.* That is, no one else had been laid to rest in this tomb. This is also significant because no one could imply that somehow another person was raised in place of Jesus Christ. It had never been used before.

*And fourth, Jesus was wrapped in cloths and placed in the tomb.* In actual fact, all the wrapping and gummy spices used to prepare Jesus' body for burial was a mixture of myrrh and aloes, weighing about seventy-five pounds (John 19:39)!

Jesus had linen first wrapped around his head, and then a separate linen was wrapped around the rest of his body.

And so Jesus was buried. Many witnessed the crucifixion of the cross. And many saw him die on the cross. Now, our Lord was laid to rest in Joseph's tomb.

This all happened on what is known as Good Friday. His disciples mourned the crucifixion, death and burial of their Master. It would have been the greatest tragedy of the world, were it not for the resurrection just three days later!

In the meanwhile, the Apostles' Creed says that Jesus *descended into hell*—but more about that next time!

### Conclusion

So, what are we to learn from the crucifixion, death and burial of Jesus Christ?

*First, Jesus Christ's crucifixion, death and burial are profitable for our instruction.* Knowing the details gives us a clear assurance that Jesus really died on that cross. This also gives us assurance about the accuracy of the details concerning the resurrection of Christ.

*Second, Jesus Christ's crucifixion, death and burial are profitable for our consolation.* We are to be consoled by the fact that by his death Jesus abolished our sins. According to Scripture, by suffering and dying on a tree (Deuteronomy 21:22-23), Jesus endured the curse of God. And we know that he endured that curse on our behalf.

Furthermore, Jesus' death is a consolation in terms of our justification. He died to pay for our sins. His burial is a picture of our sins being buried. And because of his death we are declared not guilty before God.

*And third, Jesus Christ's crucifixion, death and burial are profitable for our admonition.* The Heidelberg Catechism puts it well: "Through Christ's death our old selves are crucified, put to death, and buried with him, so that the evil desires of the flesh may no longer rule us, but that instead we may dedicate ourselves as an offering of gratitude to him."<sup>7</sup>

Our goal in life is to glorify God, to dedicate ourselves as an offering of gratitude to him. The reason we do this because of Christ's crucifixion, death and burial on our behalf. And the ability to do this comes from the Holy Spirit dwelling in us and helping us to live for Christ.

May God help each one of us to do just that. Amen.

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<sup>7</sup> Q. 43.



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