



# THE CREED

WHAT WE BELIEVE



## ***I Believe in Jesus*** **The Apostles' Creed - Week 3** **Matthew 16:13-17**

We are continuing our sermon series on the Apostles' Creed, and just to review for those who have been here and maybe help you catch up if you haven't been here the last couple of weeks, a creed is a confession of faith that attempts to summarize Christian doctrine as taught by the Bible. And the Apostles' Creed is the earliest Creed in Church History laying out the most basic of doctrines that would be identified as orthodox Christian teaching. The Apostles' Creed has been used for nearly 2,000 years now as a means for teaching Christian doctrine, memorizing biblical truth, and guarding the Church from false teaching.

So, this sermon series is a little bit different of a series than we typically do here at Grace Road, but should serve to lay out basic Christian doctrine, identify some false teaching in culture, as well as help us see the importance of those doctrines to life.

Today is our third week in the series, so before we jump into the next line of the creed this morning, let me read the text of the Apostles' Creed up to where we've been so far...

I believe in God, the Father Almighty Creator of Heaven and Earth
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So, in our first week we talked about the Christian belief in a transcendent God, almighty in every way, yet that same transcendent God can be known, and not only can we know him, but we can have such an intimate relationship with him that we are adopted by him and thus, can call him our Father.

Last week we looked at the idea of God being the Creator of all things and what that means for us as his creatures, that we have creaturely limits as well as creaturely

dignity. Two things that are tragically denied in our culture, so again, reclaiming this truth is of utmost importance for us today.

Before we read the next line together, let me invite your attention to Matthew 16. Here we are going to see a scene that will introduce our theme this morning.

And as you find your way there, at this point in the gospels, Jesus is in the midst of his earthly ministry, he is traveling around with his disciples teaching, preaching, and performing miracles. And in Matthew 16 they have a confrontation with the Pharisees and Sadducees, two Jewish religious groups, in which they want Jesus to perform more miracles as a means of proving who he claimed to be. Well, Jesus won't do it for them. He knows that no matter what he does, they won't believe.

So, Jesus and his disciples travel a bit further and we pick it up in Matthew 16, verse 13...

**Matthew 16:13-17**

**13** Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" **14** And they said, "Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets." **15** He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" **16** Simon Peter replied, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." **17** And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven.

In this incredibly important moment with his disciples, Jesus asks them, what is everyone saying about the Son of Man, who do they say that he is, but then the more personal and much more important question, Who do you, disciples, say that I am? This question, "Who do you say that Jesus is? Who do you believe Jesus to be?" is the central tenet of the Christian faith, and it is the central focus of the next section of the Apostles' Creed, which goes on to state...

I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord

So, this next section of the creed is all about the Christian view of Jesus. And again, this is obviously very important to the *Christian* faith. This is the longest section of the creed. And the bulk of the section deals with the work of Jesus while this line lays out the person of Jesus. In other words, this line causes the Church, and all those who profess to be Christian, to be clear in who we believe Jesus actually was and is. It forces us to be clear about our Christology, or doctrine of Christ.

And if you remember, one of the first things we said is that creeds and confessions are important for the Church because biblical, orthodox Christianity is not some vague idea of spirituality. Christians believe in propositional truths, which means we also believe

that anything to the contrary of those truths are false. This is true when we talk about God and it is certainly true when we talk about Jesus.

What we want to avoid is a kind of theological minimalism when it comes to Jesus. For example, it is tempting and attractive for some to say, all that matters is that you believe in Jesus. We want to say, yes, that is good, but more specifically, *what* do you believe about Jesus?

ILLUS. - I remember in our previous ministry, a girl and her boyfriend reached out about meeting with me for some counseling, and so we met, and I didn't know them that well so I asked them about their testimonies and their faith, and she explained how she came to faith in Jesus, but then he talked about how he considered Jesus as a good moral teacher but didn't believe he was more than that. So I explained, whatever other help you need in your relationship, your greatest need is to believe in Jesus.

Well, I didn't see them for awhile, until one day I bumped into the girl and she said that after that meeting she was really mad at me because I told her boyfriend that he needs to believe in Jesus because he is not a Christian. So, I explained, he said that he thought of Jesus as a good moral teacher but not the Son of God, that is not the profession of a Christian!

The idea that Jesus is a good moral teacher worth listening to but not worshipping is a common view of our culture. And instead of being discipled or informed by Scripture, or by creeds and confessions that try to summarize biblical teaching, many in our culture are more discipled by other things.<sup>1</sup> Things like:

**Film:** Whether that is Mel Gibson's *The Passion of Christ* or more recently *The Chosen*, or something else, we might be tempted to gather our entire belief and understanding about Jesus from media. And as good as it is when they get it right, there is still only so much that can be portrayed on film. We might be able to get a better picture of his humanity for example, but how can we portray his deity, his eternality, his role as king over the kingdom on screen?

Or we are discipled by **consumerism**. Little trinkets like a Jesus bobblehead or T-shirts that read "Jesus is my Homeboy" reveal our culture's christology but also might influence the way we see Jesus.

Or we may be discipled by **politics**. Jesus has been claimed by both the right and the left to advance their particular causes, but, of course, neither are able to fully portray and resemble a full understanding of Jesus and what it means to follow him. And if we aren't careful our Christology will begin to look more political than biblical.

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<sup>1</sup> For more on this, see "The Deity of Christ Today," Stephen Nichols in *The Deity of Christ*.

Or we might be discipled or influenced by other modern presentations of Jesus, that sound new and intriguing, but in reality are really just ancient heresies with new names and proponents.

For example, a theologian named John Hick was and is a major proponent of the idea that Jesus was not a literal person, but is instead a metaphor. Jesus is not a person, but an idea, which promotes the embodiment of divine love. And because that is the case, the idea of Jesus can be found in all religions. Well, that is obviously not Christianity, that is pluralism. And it certainly isn't new.

Or another example might be a man named Richard Rohr, who has held a lot of influence being promoted by Oprah, Rob Bell, Bono, and Michael Gungor.<sup>2</sup> Rohr, who is a Catholic priest, teaches that Jesus and Christ are two separate entities. That Christ is "universal" while Jesus was "limited." This leads to a belief in what he calls the "Universal Christ" or "Cosmic Christ" which teaches that Christ is a process that continues throughout all time and in all places. Well, this is similar to pantheism, that God is in all things and people. And the desire to separate Jesus from Christ was a move made by Gnostics in the second century and was condemned as heresy by Christian leaders, such as Irenaeus. And between then and Rohr, the idea of separating Jesus and Christ was and is the teaching of Christian Science, the very group that built this building.

So all of that to say, cultivating and defending a biblical Christology is of utmost importance for us and is an ever-present battle in our world full of false Jesuses.

And again, a false understanding of Jesus is common *outside* of Christianity, but, unfortunately, even many *within* the Church have a very minimal or vague Christology. In fact, a recent poll showed that 30% of professed evangelicals in America believe that Jesus was a great teacher, but he was not God.<sup>3</sup>

But we want to declare as Christians that Jesus is far more! But then the issue is what do we mean when we say that Jesus is more? What do we really believe about Jesus? As Jesus asked his disciples, who do you say that I am?

Again creeds were meant to promote Biblical doctrine while combating false teaching and the Apostles' Creed does just that. And in this next section much is said about Jesus but this morning we are only going to look at the next line, where it **specifically highlights three main truths by giving three titles of Jesus: Jesus is the "Christ," the "Son" of God, and "Lord."**

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<sup>2</sup> For more on a biblical critique of Rohr and his teachings, see "Everything is Christ - Other Muddled Messages from Richard Rohr,"

<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/reviews/universal-christ-richard-rohr/>.

<sup>3</sup> "The State of Theology," <https://thestateoftheology.com>.

Again, the first title in the creed for Jesus is that he is the Christ. This is done by referring to Jesus as Jesus Christ. Important to understand, Christ is not Jesus' last name, but a title that Jesus holds. And it is an important title, so our first point this morning is that...

## **I. Christianity declares that Jesus is the Promised Savior.**

The title "Christ" means the "Anointed One." It is a reference to the promised Messiah we read about in the Old Testament. The story of Scripture is about God's people rebelling against him, facing the consequences for their sin, but God in his mercy and grace promising to redeem them. This is true of Adam and Eve exiled from the garden of Eden and it was true of Israel exiled from Canaan. God made the promise over and over again to bring Someone who would crush the head of the serpent and lead his people back to the promised land from slavery and exile.

And this Deliverer, would be identified as the anointed One, the reference made by the title "Messiah." And the symbol of anointing comes from the Old Testament where anointing someone's head with oil was the symbolic gesture of being set apart for service. It was a divine calling. This was particularly true of the kings in the Old Testament. For example, we read about this with Saul, Israel's first earthly king...

### **1 Samuel 10:1**

Then Samuel took a flask of oil and poured it on his head and kissed him and said, "Has not the Lord anointed you to be prince over his people Israel? And you shall reign over the people of the Lord and you will save them from the hand of their surrounding enemies. And this shall be the sign to you that the Lord has anointed you to be prince over his heritage.

Again, Samuel the priest, pours oil on Saul's head, setting him apart for service.

So, in the Old Testament, we hear promise after promise from God himself and through his prophets that a Rescuer would come and redeem us from the effects of our sin. But as the Old Testament ends, the Anointed One, the promised Messiah never shows up.

But then as we step into the New Testament, we read about the life and ministry of Jesus of Nazareth. And we see and hear some important truths about Jesus. Jesus, like the anointed ones of old, was anointed by oil, though not by a priest but by the broken vessels of women who hear of him and believe that he is the Messiah, or the "Christ."

### **Luke 7:37-38**

**37** And behold, a woman of the city, who was a sinner, when she learned that he was reclining at table in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster flask of ointment,  
**38** and standing behind him at his feet, weeping, she began to wet his feet with her

tears and wiped them with the hair of her head and kissed his feet and anointed them with the ointment.

So, again here is this woman who hears about Jesus, finds him, and with tears in her eyes, anoints him, and in so doing says, you are the One we have been waiting for.

And then we see Jesus go to the cross, die, buried, resurrect from the dead, and ascend into heaven. The disciples then tasked with telling the world about the good news, that the Promised Messiah came in the person of Jesus, and though he was anointed by real, actual oil, more importantly he was anointed with the Holy Spirit.

**Acts 10:37-38**

**37** you yourselves know what happened throughout all Judea, beginning from Galilee after the baptism that John proclaimed: **38** how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power. He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him.

Again, Christianity declares that Jesus is the Promised Savior. Which is important also for our understanding of the Bible. All of the Bible is about Jesus. Not just the New Testament, but the Old Testament as well. All of it speaks of Jesus.

So, this idea that Jesus is the Christ separates Christianity from Judaism. Jesus was and is the promised Messiah, the One who would rescue his people.

But second...

**II. Christianity declares that Jesus is God in the flesh.**

The creed states, "I believe in Jesus Christ, his Son," that is, the Son of God. The Bible teaches that Jesus is the second person of the Godhead, the second person of the Trinity, and we are going to talk more about the Trinity in a few weeks when we get to the line about the Holy Spirit, but know that the Son of God in Scripture is not a lesser god than the Father.

As John says at the start of his gospel in John 1...

**John 1:1, 14**

**1** In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God... **14** And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

Understand, that Jesus, as God in the flesh, is not God Jr. or some kind of Demi-god or partial god, but fully God.

Just as the idea of Jesus as the Promised Messiah separates us from Judaism, the idea that Jesus is God in the flesh separates us from other groups that teach that Jesus was a created being, like Jehovah's Witness, for example.

Jesus is not a created being, but the One through whom all things were created and are now sustained.

**Colossians 1:15-17**

**15** He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. **16** For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. **17** And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together.

**Heb. 1:1-3**

**1** Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, **2** but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. **3** He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power.

A question that is often asked about Christianity is why Jesus had to come and save us. Why wasn't there any other way? There is a lot to that answer, but one aspect of it is that in our sin, in our spiritual death, we need to be re-created, thus, only the one who truly creates can re-create.

Christianity declares and believes that Jesus is God in the flesh.

But third, according to our line this morning in the creed...

**III. Christianity declares that Jesus is King over all.**

Again, "I believe in Jesus Christ, his Son, our Lord." With the title of Lord, we believe Jesus is King. And again this is important to the story of the Bible. Because that Messiah that was promised, was described as a king who would reign over a kingdom.

2 Samuel 7 God comes to David and makes a promise to him, what we call the Davidic Covenant, that from his line, a king would ascend the throne and his reign would last forever. There would be end to his kingdom.

**2 Samuel 7:12-13**

**12** When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. **13** He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever.

This is why when Jesus comes on the scene in the gospels, his first recorded words of public teaching were to “Repent for the kingdom of God is at hand.” Well, why could he declare that the kingdom of God is here? Because the king is here.

Understand, Christians not only respect Jesus, Christians submit and follow Jesus. We see Jesus not only as our Savior, but as our King. Which means, we humble ourselves before him. We honor him. We exalt him. We joyfully submit to him because he is a good king and his reign is life-giving.

So beware the attitude that the Christian can trust in Jesus as his or her Savior but not view him as their king. It is not appropriate to care only about how Jesus impacts your life in the future while not caring about what Jesus says about your life now. No, we see Jesus as Savior and Lord. He is our King.

## **CHALLENGE**

Now, much more could be seen from those titles of Jesus than we have time for, but it is important for us to recognize as we state this line of creed, it challenges us in a few ways. It makes a few calls on us.

### **1. Call to believe**

It is a call to believe that Jesus is the Son of God, the promised Deliverer who through his life, death, and resurrection has begun to reverse the effects of the fall and will one day come again and consummate that work for all eternity. It is a call to believe that you and I are in need of a Savior and only Jesus can be the Savior that we need. It is a call to believe Jesus is the reigning King today and will reign for all eternity. We offer you the same good news as the apostles did throughout the life of the early church, most succinctly summed up in an answer to the question of what must I do to be saved...

#### **Acts 16:31**

**31** And they said, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household.”

If you’ve never trusted in Christ, there is nothing for you to do but repent and believe. Turn from your sin, and by faith trust in the person and work of Christ on your behalf to put you in right relationship with God.

### **2. Call to defend**

ILLUS. Some of you might have heard of one of the church fathers named Athanasius - lived in 4th century, most well-known for defending the teaching of the deity of Jesus at the Council of Nicaea against the Arians (taught that Jesus was a created being). There was significant turmoil over this doctrine for about 30 years and the Arians held a lot of power, even political power. Athanasius was exiled and recalled by the emperor five



different times. He hid from assassins and lived in the desert because of his passionate belief that Jesus is the Son of God and Lord. We might ask, Why would he suffer like that for a *doctrine*? Because the truth about Jesus is that important.

And the question for us is, are we that willing to defend the biblical teaching of Jesus? If social media is any indicator, we seem far more interested in debating and defending peripheral issues to the gospel than the central tenets of the gospel, namely the person and work of Christ. There are many issues that we might consider second or third tier issues that we can agree to disagree on, but the person of Jesus is not one of those.

What Jesus did is important because of who Jesus is. The work of Christ was possible because of the person of Christ. To manipulate or outright deny the person of Jesus is to manipulate or deny the work of Jesus.

Again, this is central to our faith. We should be ready to defend the biblical teaching of Jesus.

### **3. Call to worship**

God, the Creator of all things, took on flesh and stepped into our world to rescue us from the mess that we created. Under no obligation, under no outside pressure, Jesus, the second person of the Trinity, bore our sins on the cross that we might live forever with him.

Again, these aren't mere lines of boring orthodoxy or irrelevant doctrines. These are statements that attempt to describe the indescribable and should fuel our worship.

### **TIME OF CONFESSION**

But we also know that in stating that Jesus bears all of these titles, we often view him as far less. For example, we call him Lord but, do we really believe that? Often, we turn our backs on him, we rebel against his word, we are ashamed of him when speaking to others, and in many other ways we fail to live up to the faith we say we profess.

But the good news is that Jesus came to be faithful in all the ways we are faithless. Taking every one of our sins to cross he paid the penalty we deserved but now we find grace and mercy even though we fail him day in and day out.

Nonetheless, it is good and right for us to pause and turn to the Lord and confess the ways in which we've failed to believe as shown by the way we live, and at the same time to turn to the Lord and rest in the grace of the gospel.

So, right now, with heads bowed and eyes closed, let's spend a moment of silent confession, confessing the ways we've failed while also praising the Lord for his grace. Take a moment and then I will pray for us.

## **PRAYER**

### **ASSURANCE OF FORGIVENESS**

Well, before we sing let me remind you once more that if you have trusted in Christ with repentant faith then God's immeasurable grace has been shown to you and you can stand confident in the eternal life promised to you.

In fact, let me read this promise to you from God's word...

#### **1 John 5:13**

I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life.

So, with that in mind, let's stand and respond this morning in worship.

## **VERSES**

Text of first two lines of the Apostles' Creed

Matthew 16:13-17

Text of next line of Apostles' Creed

1 Samuel 10:1

Luke 7:37-38

Acts 10:37-38

John 1:1, 14

Colossians 1:15-17

Hebrews 1:1-3

2 Samuel 7:12-13

Acts 16:31

1 John 5:13

## **SERMON DISCUSSION**

Study Guide with discussion questions are available online.

## **WORKS CITED During the Apostles' Creed Series (This is a Work in Progress)**

**Christian Apologetics by Cornelius Van Til**

This book takes into account the “noetic effects” of sin. That is, sin corrupts our minds and our wills, so that scientific and philosophical proofs alone cannot lead us to God. The need is for the power of the Spirit to overcome the circular reasoning of the secular worldview. This book is a needed addition to the above books because it provides an explanation for how someone becomes savingly convinced of the faith.

**Christless Christianity** by Michael Horton

**To Everyone an Answer**, edited by Beckwith, Craig, and Moreland

This book presents the case for God’s existence, for Christ, and for miracles. It answers philosophical, cultural, and religious challenges to the Christian faith. 20+ authors each write in an area of their specialty in this edited volume.

**The Knowledge of the Holy** by A.W. Tozer

**Orthodoxy** by G.K. Chesterton

**The Reason for God** by Tim Keller

This book answers a number of common philosophical arguments against the existence of God, including the problem of evil. Keller’s intelligent and humble approach is helpful for those who doubt, for those who are skeptical, and for the believers aiming to help both see Jesus more clearly.

**Reasonable Faith** by William Lane Craig

This extensive work builds a case for the Christian faith starting with the existence of God, and then answering the problem of historical knowledge (which is important in proving the resurrection.) From there he explains who Jesus understood Himself to be, followed by an extensive historical proof for the resurrection of Jesus, and refutations of the claims against the resurrection.

**The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self** by Carl Trueman.

This book explains so much of how modern people think of themselves. It expands on the corrupt way of thinking that jettisons the past and strives to find the true self in an unencumbered state of nature as opposed to in glorifying God and enjoying Him forever. This seeking after the self finds its expression in many facets of the sexual revolution, and explains why our culture is the way it is in our day.

**Signature in the Cell** by Steven C. Meyer

**The Deity of Christ** edited by Christopher W. Morgan and Robert A. Peterson