

THE APOSTLES' CREED

Study 4: The Death, Resurrection & Reign of Jesus

He suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried;

He descended to hell.

The third day he rose again from the dead.

He ascended to 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.

- ❖ **Discussion Question:** How does one get to heaven?
- ❖ **Discussion Question:** Was there any other way for God to save human beings other than by sending his Son to die in our place?

One of man's greatest struggles is believing that there is only one way to heaven. We would like to believe that there are many roads that lead us to heaven, but the reality is that if there were many options then why did Jesus come from heaven to earth, live a perfect life and then die a murderer's death by being crucified?

Religion is man's attempt to get to heaven, but Christianity is God coming from heaven to redeem mankind from their sin and to establish relationship through the reconciliation of Christ's death and resurrection.

Based on this section of the Apostles' Creed, we need to examine why Jesus had to suffer, be crucified and ultimately killed?

"The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, 'Look! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!'" (John 1:29)

What did John the Baptist mean when he referred to Jesus as "The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world"?

❖ **Discussion Question:** How was sin taken care of in the Old Testament?

“If any of the common people sin by violating one of the LORD’s commands, but they don’t realize it, they are still guilty. When they become aware of their sin, they must bring as an offering for their sin a female goat with no defects. They must lay a hand on the head of the sin offering and slaughter it at the place where burnt offerings are slaughtered. Then the priest will dip his finger in the blood and put it on the horns of the altar for burnt offerings. He will pour out the rest of the blood at the base of the altar. Then he must remove all the goat’s fat, just as he does with the fat of the peace offering. He will burn the fat on the altar, and it will be a pleasing aroma to the LORD. Through this process, the priest will purify the people, making them right with the LORD, and they will be forgiven. If the people bring a sheep as their sin offering, it must be a female with no defects.”

(Leviticus 4:27-32)

“In fact, according to the law of Moses, nearly everything was purified with blood. For without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness.” (Hebrews 9:22)

“For you know that God paid a ransom to save you from the empty life you inherited from your ancestors. And the ransom he paid was not mere gold or silver. It was the precious blood of Christ, the sinless, spotless Lamb of God.” (1 Peter 1:18-19)

“From then on Jesus began to tell his disciples plainly that it was necessary for him to go to Jerusalem, and that he would suffer many terrible things at the hands of the elders, the leading priests, and the teachers of religious law. He would be killed, but on the third day he would be raised from the dead.” (Matthew 16:21)

“My Father! If it is possible, let this cup of suffering be taken away from me. Yet I want your will, not mine.”
(Matthew 26:39)

What was in the cup that Jesus was referring to?

God's wrath on sin and Jesus willingly drank it.

"But it was the LORD's good plan to crush him and cause him grief. Yet when his life is made an offering for sin, he will have many descendants. He will enjoy a long life, and the LORD's good plan will prosper in his hands."

(Isaiah 53:10)

"The Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all."

(Isaiah 53:6)

The Death of Jesus

❖ **Discussion Question:** Why did Jesus die on the cross?

"If someone has committed a crime worthy of death and is executed and hung on a tree, the body must not remain hanging from the tree overnight. You must bury the body that same day, for anyone who is hung is cursed in the sight of God. In this way, you will prevent the defilement of the land the LORD your God is giving you as your special possession." (Deuteronomy 21:22-23)

“But those who depend on the law to make them right with God are under his curse, for the Scriptures say, ‘Cursed is everyone who does not observe and obey all the commands that are written in God’s Book of the Law.’ So it is clear that no one can be made right with God by trying to keep the law. For the Scriptures say, ‘It is through faith that a righteous person has life.’ This way of faith is very different from the way of law, which says, ‘It is through obeying the law that a person has life.’ But Christ has rescued us from the curse pronounced by the law. When he was hung on the cross, he took upon himself the curse for our wrongdoing. For it is written in the Scriptures, ‘Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree.’ Through Christ Jesus, God has blessed the Gentiles with the same blessing he promised to Abraham, so that we who are believers might receive the promised Holy Spirit through faith.” (Galatians 3:10-14)

Wayne Grudem adds:

“A criminal who was crucified was essentially forced to inflict upon himself a very slow death by suffocation. When the criminal’s arms were outstretched and fastened by nails to the cross, he had to support most of the weight of his body with his arms. The chest cavity would be pulled upward and outward, making it difficult to exhale in order to be able to draw a fresh breath. But when the victim’s longing for oxygen became unbearable, he would have to push himself up with his feet, thus giving more natural support to the weight of his body, releasing some of the weight from his arms, enabling his chest cavity to contract more normally. The criminal’s back, which had been torn open repeatedly by a previous flogging, would scrape against the wooden cross with each breath.”¹

¹ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 572

Matthew writes:

“At noon, darkness fell across the whole land until three o’clock. At about three o’clock, Jesus called out with a loud voice, *‘Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?’* which means ‘My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?’ Some of the bystanders misunderstood and thought he was calling for the prophet Elijah. One of them ran and filled a sponge with sour wine, holding it up to him on a reed stick so he could drink. But the rest said, ‘Wait! Let’s see whether Elijah comes to save him.’ Then Jesus shouted out again, and he released his spirit. At that moment the curtain in the sanctuary of the Temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. The earth shook, rocks split apart, and tombs opened. The bodies of many godly men and women who had died were raised from the dead. They left the cemetery after Jesus’ resurrection, went into the holy city of Jerusalem, and appeared to many people. The Roman officer and the other soldiers at the crucifixion were terrified by the earthquake and all that had happened. They said, “This man truly was the Son of God!”
(Matthew 27:45-54)

Again, Grudem adds:

"A 'vicar' is someone who stands in the place of another or who represents another. Christ's death was therefor 'vicarious' because he stood in our place and represented us. As our representative, he took the penalty that we deserve."²

Christ's death met the four needs that we have as sinners:

- ❖ We deserve to die as the penalty for sin.
- ❖ We deserve to bear God's wrath against sin.
- ❖ We are separated from God by our sins.
- ❖ We are in bondage to sin and to the kingdom of Satan.

These needs are met by Christ's death in the following ways:

- ❖ **Sacrifice:** To pay the penalty of death that we deserved because of our sins, Christ died as a sacrifice for us. "He has appeared once for all at the end of the age to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself." (Hebrews 9:26)

² Grudem, 579

- ❖ **Propitiation:** To remove us from the wrath of God that we deserved, Christ died as a propitiation for our sins. “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 4:10)
- ❖ **Reconciliation:** To overcome our separation from God, we needed someone to provide reconciliation and thereby bring us back into fellowship with God. Paul says that God “through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; this is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself.” (2 Corinthians 5:18-19)
- ❖ **Redemption:** Because we as sinners are in bondage to sin and to Satan, we need someone to provide redemption and thereby ‘redeem’ us out of that bondage. A ransom is the price paid to redeem someone from bondage or captivity. Jesus said of himself, “For the Son of man also came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” (Mark 10:45)
- ❖ **Discussion Question:** Did Christ descend into hell?

Grudem writes:

“A murky background lies behind much of the history of the phrase itself. Its origins, where they can be found, are far from praiseworthy... It is surprising to find that the phrase ‘he descended into hell’ was not found in any of the early versions of the Creed until it appeared in one of two versions from Rufinus in A.D. 390. Then it was not included again in any version of the Creed until A.D. 650. Moreover, Rufinus, the only person who included it before A.D. 650, did not think it meant that Christ descended into hell, but understood the phrase simply to mean that Christ was ‘buried.’”³

Bad theology takes one passage and builds on it even though it is not able to be supported by other passages in scripture. Does this mean we just overlook the obscure passages in the Bible?

No, but what it does mean is it's not a good idea to base the foundation of your faith upon something that may not be able to be fully supported.

³ Grudem, 586

Grudem writes:

“Christ in his death experienced the same things believers in this present age experience when they die: his dead body remained on earth and was buried (as ours will be), but his spirit (or soul) passed immediately into the presence of God in heaven (just as ours will). Then on the first Easter morning, Christ spirit was reunited with his body and he was raised from the dead-just as Christians who have died will (when Christ returns) be reunited to their bodies and raised in their perfect resurrection bodies to new life.”⁴

The Resurrection of Jesus

In John’s gospel, we read:

“Mary was standing outside the tomb crying, and as she wept, she stooped and looked in. She saw two white-robed angels, one sitting at the head and the other at the foot of the place where the body of Jesus had been

⁴ Grudem, 593

lying. "Dear woman, why are you crying?" the angels asked her.

"Because they have taken away my Lord," she replied, "and I don't know where they have put him." She turned to leave and saw someone standing there. It was Jesus, but she didn't recognize him. "Dear woman, why are you crying?" Jesus asked her. "Who are you looking for?"

She thought he was the gardener. "Sir," she said, "if you have taken him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will go and get him." "Mary!" Jesus said. She turned to him and cried out, "Rabboni!" (which is Hebrew for "Teacher"). "Don't cling to me," Jesus said, "for I haven't yet ascended to the Father. But go find my brothers and tell them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'" Mary Magdalene found the disciples and told them, "I have seen the Lord!" Then she gave them his message." (John 20:11-18)

What if Jesus didn't raise from the dead?

The apostle Paul writes:

"For if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ has not been raised either. And if Christ has not been raised, then all our preaching is useless, and your faith is useless. And we apostles would all be lying about God—for we have said that God raised Christ from the grave. But that can't be true if there is no resurrection of the dead. And if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ has not been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, then your faith is useless and you are still guilty of your sins. In that case, all who have died believing in Christ are lost! And if our hope in Christ is only for this life, we are more to be pitied than anyone in the world."
(1 Corinthians 15:14-19)

The cornerstone of the Christian faith is built upon the fact that Jesus is God and He came from heaven to earth to be crucified for our sins, shed His blood, die and raise from the grave on the third day.

David Guzik writes:

"If there is no principle resurrection, then Jesus did not rise from the dead. If Jesus did not rise from the dead, then death has power over Him and has defeated Him. If death has power over Jesus, He is not God. If Jesus is not God, He cannot offer a complete sacrifice for sins. If Jesus cannot offer a complete sacrifice for sins, my sins are not completely paid for before God. If my sins are not completely paid for before God, then I am still in my sins! If Jesus is not risen, He is unable to save."

"If there is no principle of resurrection, then the whole Christian life is a pitiful joke! If we don't have something beyond this life to look forward to, why hassle with the problems being a Christian? It is true that knowing Jesus and loving Jesus can make this life better. But sometimes it will make life worse. We can appreciate some of the hardship Paul lived with, when we understand what he means when he writes, If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable. Paul thought, "with all I have endured for Jesus Christ, if there is not a resurrection and a heavenly reward beyond this life, I am

a fool to be pitied." Can we, in our super-comfortable age, say the same thing? Trapp says Paul can write this "Because none out of hell ever suffered more than the saints have done."

The Ascension of Jesus Christ

In the book of Acts, we read:

"So when the apostles were with Jesus, they kept asking him, "Lord, has the time come for you to free Israel and restore our kingdom?" He replied, "The Father alone has the authority to set those dates and times, and they are not for you to know. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. And you will be my witnesses, telling people about me everywhere—in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." After saying this, he was taken up into a cloud while they were watching, and they could no longer see him. As they strained to see him rising into heaven, two white-robed men suddenly stood among them. "Men of Galilee," they said, "why are you standing here staring into heaven? Jesus has been taken from you into heaven,

but someday he will return from heaven in the same way you saw him go!" (Acts 1:6-11)

Why did Jesus ascend this way?

He certainly could have simply "vanished" to the Father's presence in a secret sort of way. But with the ascension, Jesus wanted His followers to know that He was gone for good, as opposed to the way He appeared and reappeared during the forty days after the resurrection.

The angels quickly pointed out that He would return in the manner in which he ascended, but imagine the confusion that was setting in as they watched him leave?

The Holy Spirit had not yet come so their understanding was still limited to what their finite minds could grasp, which wasn't much.

"It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him to you." (John 16:7)

The Return of Jesus Christ

So you, too, must keep watch! For you don't know what day your Lord is coming. Understand this: If a homeowner knew exactly when a burglar was coming, he would keep watch and not permit his house to be broken into. You also must be ready all the time, for the Son of Man will come when least expected. (Matthew 24:42-44)

It is by design that we cannot know the day or time in which Jesus will return, but we can know for sure that He is returning. This keeps us on our toes. Every generation has believed that Jesus will return in their lifetime and the same holds true today. So we continue to love Jesus and love people right up to either our last breathe or when Jesus returns.

"Men of Galilee," they said, "why are you standing here staring into heaven? Jesus has been taken from you into heaven, but someday he will return from heaven in the same way you saw him go!" (Acts 1:11)

If you desire to have a better understanding of eschatology then I'd recommend the book *Systematic Theology* by Wayne Grudem.