

SERMON TRANSCRIPT

10.12.2025 | He descended into Hell | 1 Peter 3:18–22 | Dr. Clark Fobes, Associate Pastor

And as we turn to this all important and often confusing phrase in the Creed, he descended to hell. You can turn your Bibles to 1 Peter chapter 3. That's where we'll anchor ourselves, but we're going to be looking at a couple other passages throughout to help us through this. But 1 Peter 3 has long been believed to be the primary passage upon which this doctrine stands and has been interpreted by. So 1 Peter chapter 3, and we're just going to read a few verses from verses 18 through 22. 1 Peter chapter 3, starting in verse 18. For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirits, in which he went and proclaimed to the spirits in prison because they formerly did not obey when God's patience waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared in which a few that is eight persons were brought safely through water. That which corresponds to this now saves you not as removal of dirt from the body, but as an appeal to God for a good conscience through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God with angels, authorities, and powers having been subjected to him. Amen.

When we talk about Jesus' descent into hell, one of the things that makes me think about are deep abysses and caves. In the ancient Jewish and ancient Near Eastern cosmology, the way they viewed the world, they literally saw the underworld, the place of the dead, as in the depths of the earth. And so the further you went down into these depths, the further you were descending into the steps of hell, so to speak. And so it just makes me think about this natural and fascinating phenomenon of caves. I remember the first time I went, and the only time I've ever been spelunking in a cave. I was in elementary school, believe it or not, on a YMCA summer camp trip. I don't remember where we went, but I just remember the fear and excitement that came with looking at this just dark hole in the ground and repelling into it in the harness and the ropes. And ever since then, I've been fascinated with caves. I watched a documentary on the deepest cave in the known world called the Veronia Cave in Georgia. It's 7,257 feet deep. That's 1.37 miles. And this documentary crew took this eight-day descent and ascent to go into the depths of this cave and explore it and measure it and see what was in there in total darkness, in cramped, tight corridors.

And I think also caves and deep places, while they can be fascinating, they can also be quite unsettling. There's other deep abysses that I really don't like, like the ocean. I still cannot swim to this day because I'm terrified of the ocean. Something about the wide open waters. I mean, we just don't swim here in Ocean Beach as much as people come to California thinking San Francisco's a nice beach city. That's just, I was born and raised here. That's just not something we do. We don't go in the ocean. We don't swim in the deep, dark waters. Cliffs and fissures, anything with deep, dark abysses tend to be unsettling because of that darkness of the unknown. There's something deep and dark in the unknown. It's interesting, it's something that Jules Verne even explores in his famous story, *Journey to the Center of the Earth*, where he explores this father and son's journey into the depths of the core of the earth and what hidden worlds lie there.

And when it comes to this doctrine of Jesus' descent into hell, while we physically don't identify with that, I think there's some similar unsettling nature to this doctrine. It's part of the reason why it's been contested for so long because we don't really know what happens when Jesus descends to the depths of hell. There's an unsettling nature of the unknown of what happens there. Jesus certainly descended more than 1.37 miles into the earth. His soul went somewhere that's often unknown, and so with this doctrine, maybe comes some discomfort as we approach it because of just how foreign and unknown it can be to us. Jesus' descent into hell is an old doctrine. It's often called the harrowing of hell, or the Latin phrase, "descendant ad infernos," which simply meant Jesus' descent into the inferno, like Dante's inferno, or into the underworlds more literally. And so in the original Greek and the Latin, the way this phrase was depicted was a little bit different from our understanding of hell. It wasn't so much hell as it was describing, but rather the underworld, and we'll talk about that in a bit. But this passage of 1 Peter 3, it's not the only scripture of this doctrine, as I mentioned, it is one of the central ones, but this scripture is often heavily debated, contested, even it's been largely confused as to how to interpret it throughout church history.

Martin Luther, the great reformer, while in his commentary of this text, had this to say about 1 Peter chapter 3. A wonderful text is this, and a more obscure passage perhaps than any other in the New Testament, so that I do not know for certain just what Peter means. Now if Martin Luther, the great reformer, said that, I don't expect to get any closer to

him about what this actually means. So maybe this is a fool's errand, but we do have this phrase in our creed, and we confess it as we just did, and so we do have to understand what do we mean when we recite this phrase? Should we even recite it? A lot of modern commentators, most notably Wayne Grudem, whose systematic theology has been probably most widely read through Baptist circles, he argued that this was not original to the original Apostles' Creed, and therefore we should not confess it. A lot of modern versions of the creed don't include Jesus' descent into hell in their confessions, and so the question we have to answer is, first of all, did Jesus actually descend to hell, and what does the creed mean by that? And then secondly, if he did, why did Jesus descend? What was the purpose for his descent? So first let's talk about that question of did Jesus actually descend to hell, and what does the creed mean by that?

So we'll start first with the case for Christ's descent. That'll be your first blank in your notes. The case for Christ's descent. Jesus' descent is actually quite biblical and quite historical. It has been attested throughout church history. In fact what we know is it is original to the creed. One of the things Wayne Grudem argues that it's not original is because it's not really solidified into the confessions of the creeds until about the 8th century AD. There are some versions, early ones that include it, and some that don't. But probably one of our clearest evidence that it was original is that the very first commentary on the apostles' creed came from a man, a church father named Rufinus, who wrote this commentary in 404 AD, and he included a comment on this phrase in the creed. So Rufinus, to include a comment on Jesus' descent to hell means that this was probably already held as authoritative and having been confessed throughout the church history in the years leading up to it.

So regardless of the originality to the creed, the doctrine of Christ's descent was widely attested and confessed and taught throughout church history, almost from the beginning. We have evidence from Justin Martyr, to Irenaeus, to Tertutlian, even to Augustine, who teach on this phrase as early as the 2nd, 3rd, and 4th centuries AD. And so that means regardless of where it stands in the apostles' creed, we have to also ask where does it show up in scripture, which means if we reject the confession in the creed, we also have to reject all the places in scripture where the doctrine is based upon. And there is plenty of biblical evidence for Jesus' descent into hell or Hades throughout scripture.

Ephesians 4 is another main text that we'll be looking at, specifically in verse 9. Paul says, "In saying Jesus ascended, what does it mean but that he also descended into the lower regions of the earth?" Now that's the ESV translation, and if you have the ESV, we have ESVs in our pews, you'll have a footnote there that will say, "Or the lower regions of the earth." And so when the ESV translation says that Jesus descended to the lower regions, comma, the earth, they're actually making an interpretive decision that this is referring to Jesus' descent in the incarnation, that he descended from heaven onto the earth. But the original Greek should actually be read more literally, "Jesus descended to the lower regions of the earth." And this fits quite, this fits a lot more well with the ancient and Eastern cosmology, as we mentioned, that there was an underworld below the earth. It was a lower region of the earth that the dead went to.

Romans 10 verse 7 also mentions this, says that Jesus was in this abyss of the dead. Who will descend into the abyss? That is to bring Christ up from the dead. Revelation 1.18 also mentions that Jesus went to the place of the dead and secured the keys of Hades. "I died and behold I am alive forevermore. I have the keys of death and Hades." And then finally in Acts chapter 2 verse 27, Peter preaches a sermon about Jesus' death and resurrection and he includes a reference to Psalm 16 that says this, "For you will not abandon my soul to Hades or let your holy one see corruption." He's talking there about Jesus who professed to the father that God the father did not abandon Jesus' soul in Hades or let his body decay.

Hades was this place that the dead lived in the underworlds. Hecate was the God of Hades who had the keys to the underworlds and so for all these passages in their mention of the place of the dead, Hades or the underworld, it's playing off of this ancient cosmology that many would have thought of. That it is in the depths below the earth to which the dead went. And in Jesus' descent, he was doing something in either experiencing that same death and going there for some reason. And so scripture seems to be clear that Jesus did in fact accomplish something in going to the underworld on that holy Saturday as we often talk about it when his body was in the grave and his soul went to Hades. And so the creed and scripture seem to be clear that Jesus died, was buried as we confess, descended to hell and rose on the third day, but the creed doesn't really answer for us what Jesus did. And it was something that the church fathers when they wrote this, assumed that the people would know as they confessed Jesus' descent into hell. So it's our job now to ask, well, what does this descent actually mean?

I think it's first helpful to even just understand what is the nature of Jesus' descent, what hell so to speak did Jesus go to? There's three different views predominantly to try to explain what's going on in the creed and where Jesus went when he descended to hell. And most of the confusion and the debate centers on how we define that term for hell. The first one that when people reject this doctrine of Jesus' descent into hell, the first way they read this is that hell is simply shale. It's the ancient word for the grave or the dead or death. Jesus was simply, his body was simply in the grave for those three days upon his death on the cross.

As much as this tries to explain what happened physically, while we don't know what happened spiritually with Jesus' spirits, I think the problem with this view is that it oversimplifies something that the church fathers were trying to explain and it makes redundant something that's already clear in the apostles' creed. You look at, you can kind of look even up at the banners. Right before this line, we're told, we confess that Jesus was crucified, dead, died, and was buried. Right? After this, we confess that he rose again from the dead. And so if this line, he descended to hell, is simply a repetition of that, well then we get a superfluous three times that's repeated, Jesus was simply in the grave. It would read something like this, he was crucified, dead, was buried, he descended to the grave, the third day he rose from the grave. And for a creed that's only 75 words in the original Greek and Latin, it seems kind of silly for the church fathers to repeat three times just to get a point across. They were very intentional with choosing these 75 words to communicate a robust central doctrine of the Christian faith in a short amount of space. And so I think they intended something more than simply just saying Jesus' body was in the grave or he died.

The second view is to see hell as literally hell, the place of eternal separation from God and eternal punishment under God's wrath. Part of the question that some other commentators have, if we read this as literally the hell, God's place of torment and wrath and hell, which where the dead will be, the unrepentant will be at the end of days in the judgment of the dead and revelation, then how could Jesus go there if that's still a future place waiting for us? But also, why would Jesus have to continue to experience the wrath of God after the cross when he already said on the cross, it is finished? It would make it seem as if Jesus was still paying penalty or under the wrath of God even though the work on the cross was done.

And reading it this way, John Calvin, the other reformer, he said, well, if this is hell, it's a figurative hell. It's not literal. It didn't literally descend, but rather Jesus did not descend to hell, but hell in a sense ascended to him on the cross. And so something that John Calvin was famous for saying was that Jesus' descent to hell was simply just experiencing the full wrath of God upon the cross. But again, this would place the events out of order. As we confess Jesus died, was crucified, died, and buried, to say he descended to hell simply as figurative would revert back chronologically to the crucifixion. So it can't be that. And so the most likely way we should read this is hell as the place of Hades, the underworld where the dead go as we're awaiting the future new heavens and new earth and the future hell of God's wrath.

Hades was the location of the dead. We know throughout scripture that both the righteous and the unrighteous went to the underworlds. While the unrighteous went to this place of Hades, the righteous went to Abraham's bosom, awaiting their final judgments. And so this is the most common view in affirming this doctrine that Jesus went to the place of the dead in the underworlds. So then the question remains, if that's where Jesus went, why did he go there? If he didn't go to more fully experience God's wrath than hell, if he didn't go to simply just be dead in the grave, what was Jesus accomplishing on that holy Saturday when he descended to Hades to the place of the dead where the dead were?

There's two predominant ways we can answer this question from scripture. The first one is that Jesus descended to free captive souls. This is our second point. Jesus' descent to hell or to Hades was that he might free captive souls. Another point of confusion and contention over this doctrine and especially in 1 Peter 3 is what is the nature of Jesus preaching to these spirits in prison? We get this in 1 Peter 3, verse 19, if you look there again. We're told that Jesus went and proclaimed to the spirits in prison. The word for proclaimed could literally be preached. It's the same word that's used to preach the good news of the gospel. And in fact, Peter also uses this very similar language just a few verses later in 1 Peter 4, verse 6. You look there, just a little bit further along in your Bibles, Peter says, "For this is why the gospel was preached, even to those who are dead, that though judged in the flesh the way people are, they might live in the spirit the way God does." And so there's a lot of questions of what the heck does Peter mean when he says Jesus preached to

the spirits in prison. What does he mean when he preached to those who have already died and been judged and passed away?

Again, some really, there's a lot of discomfort around this because it seems that out of these texts can rise a lot of alternative and even heretical beliefs about Jesus' descent to hell. This is another reason why many people choose to reject this from the creed. From these verses and from this confession in the Creed stem the heresies of universalism. Some people take this to say that Jesus went and preached to those who already passed away to give them a second chance at believing in the gospel, a second chance gospel, or even quite literally to save all those who went into hell. This is a common view of those that try to erase the doctrine of hell. Most notably Rob Bell in our modern era wrote that book *Love Wins* about 15 years ago now where he tried to argue that Jesus and God go to those who are in the dead who are already passed to save them after death.

The second chance gospel also is something that people have said where Jesus doesn't let anyone perish without another chance at believing the gospel after they die and meet their maker so to speak. But to believe in either of these is to go against the entirety of the rest of the biblical canon where we know that for those who are unrepentant upon death they do go to the place of the dead where they will be judged by God for their sins. We know that for those that do not repent for their sins we just confess as we will take communion that there is no absolution of their sin. There is no atonement for their sin. There's no second chance after death. There's no universalism and if so if that's the case then everything we're doing is in vain. Why would we even preach and believe in a Christ to save us from our sins if eventually God's gonna save anyone anyways. So it cannot absolutely cannot be that.

Probably more prominent, the more prominent heresy that stems from these verses and this confession and the creed is that of purgatory. One that the Catholic Church believes that upon death those who have not fully atoned for their own sins or made penance they go to this holding place called purgatory where they pay penance for their sins, they await God's final judgments and so in the Roman Catholic's minds Jesus preaching to the dead is a sign of purgatory. But if neither of these are true biblically, if neither of these heresies can be attested with the rest of the biblical canon we have to answer then what does Peter actually mean when Jesus preaches to the dead.

And I think the most clear way to understand this is that in Jesus preaching to the dead first he was fulfilling the promises to those who believed in the Messiah to come. He was preaching to those that believed under the old covenant that God would really save them and yet had not yet seen the Messiah come. And so in Jesus preaching he was either freeing these captive souls who were captive in death or he was proclaiming the new life that they now had because Jesus the Messiah had indeed come. In first Peter chapter four verse six if you notice the context or the way that Peter words this, he doesn't say that Jesus preached to all those who were dead and who were judged in the flesh for their sins. He says that Jesus preached to those who are dead though judged in the flesh the way people are. So already he's giving two different categories. He's saying there's people which is all people and then there's those that Jesus preached the gospel to.

Well this is subset of those Jesus preached the gospel to are those that do believe in Christ or formerly did believe in the Messiah to come and yet they were judged the way all people are in that they received death just like all people do. Peter goes on to say that Jesus preached so that they might live in the spirit the way God does. See Peter's focus on Jesus preaching to the dead here is not to save those that didn't believe and then who went on to die but rather to proclaim the completion or fulfillment of God's promises of the Messiah to those who believe in that before Christ coming. Hebrews tells us about all these people in what's known as the Hall of Faith. We hear about Abraham and Sarah. We hear about all the judges that came before. We hear about all the people that were people of faith in the Old Testament which the writer of Hebrews says in chapter 11 verse 39 and 40.

He says all these though commended through their faith did not receive what was promised since God had provided something better for us that apart from us what he means is New Testament believers, New Covenant believers, they should not be made perfect. The writer of Hebrews is making clear that all of those under the Old Covenant that believed in Christ or believed in the Messiah to come trusted in God and faith that he would save they were waiting for this future promise and God was waiting until the completion of time when the Messiah did come to bring about the fulfillment of those promises to them so that they would experience the fulfillment of all those promises along with the

church after Christ's death and resurrection. And so these are the souls of those that were captive in death so to speak which Jesus freed in his preaching to the believers that passed before. I think this is one way that we can read Ephesians chapter 4 in Jesus' descent. He was preaching the freedom that the cross brought and the life resurrection that was now available for all the Old Testament saints that came before and Ephesians chapter 4 verse 8 Paul says when he sent it on high he led a host of captives and he gave gifts to men.

So one of the ways we can read this is that these were the captives to death the Old Testament believers that Jesus is now preaching freedom to. Now that's a lot to try to handle a lot of theology to try to understand the best way I can try to describe this to you is through a childhood game. I remember a childhood game I used to play called prison tag or jail tag. Any young ones in here know that game? Any little ones in the room? You guys know what jail tag is? Maybe that's a dated game. Thank you one youth kid, thank you. Jail tag was a form of tag where you would split up into multiple teams sometimes two, sometimes four, doesn't matter. And unlike normal tag we just run and try to tag people and they're out. If you run and tag someone who's in your territory they're captured and they have to go to your bases prison and they have to sit there and just kind of watch the game sitting on the sidelines.

Now I was never a fast kid and so I would often get tagged and sent to jail within the first like 30 seconds of the game or I would just kind of hide out in the back and say like I'll just guard the prison I'm not going to do anything actively. And I remember one time this happened I tried to be brave, tried to be bold, go into the enemy territory, got tagged, got captured within 30 seconds and so you know a young kid you got to just kind of wait there by the sidelines for the rest of the game. You're seeing everyone else have fun and you're wondering when is it going to be my turn to enjoy that? But there was always this one hope that one of the bigger or stronger kids on your team or faster kids could run into the enemy base and run to the jail and tag everyone to free them. And if that person ran in and freed all the kids you basically got a free pass to walk back to your territory. And there'd always be this smug victory march like haha yeah we get to play again now we're going to win this game. All it took was one person, one strong person to run into enemy territory and free everyone out of prison and lead this victory parade back to their side of the game.

That's essentially what Jesus did in descending to the dead. Jesus ran into enemy territory, the bigger, stronger, faster person. He conquered the enemy territory. He tagged all the Old Testament believers who had been waiting on the sidelines waiting for the promises to be received and Jesus essentially said come and follow me and led them in this victory march out of the underworld, out of the dead into his presence with God in paradise in heaven. That's the first thing that I think Jesus accomplished in his descent to the dead. He freed Old Testament believers whose souls were captive to dead and showed them that the promises were now fulfilled. It was this long time promise that God made that they would receive everything God promised to them and Jesus was saying all that is now fulfilled come and enjoy the kingdom of God, the promises of life, the salvation God gave to you. And he led them in this victory parade out of the dead.

That brings us to our third and last point, really the second reason why Jesus descended to hell and that's he descended and resurrected to declare his victory. He descended and he resurrected so he might declare his victory. And there's a couple things that he did in this victory. In freeing captive souls, he also proclaimed and declared his victory over any opposing powers that were against him, whether they were opposing powers of evil or even opposing powers of other saints, Jesus or other non-saints of the disobedience. Jesus declared this victory over the unbelieving dead and 1 Peter continues to, we continue to look at this in 1 Peter. One of the questions we have to answer is who were the formerly disobedient in Noah's day that 1 Peter chapter three tells Jesus preached to. These are not the Old Testament believers who had faith, these are the disobedient people that were against God and his promises. We're told in 1 Peter chapter three verse 20, these are the people that formerly did not obey when God's patience waited in the days of Noah while the ark was being prepared. Those are the people that Jesus went to preach to. And so his preaching to these people could not have been the same as the preaching of the gospel to the Old Testament believers.

I think what most commentators think is that these people God was preaching to or Jesus was preaching to in his descent were those who disobeyed, died and were still living in disobedience in the underworlds. And so Jesus preaching to them was not a preaching of freedom, but it was actually a preaching of his victory over them and their subsequent judgments. There's also a question of who these spirits in prison were. Were they only just those in the days of Noah? That's what some commentators believe. They believe that the spirits in prison were those that literally just those who

disobeyed during Noah's day. Something that could have been in Genesis six, the events that precipitate the flood when the, we're told this weird passage that the sons of God mates with the daughters of men and create this offspring race. So it could have been those spirits or those people that were in prison and it's possible that that was the one group Jesus was focusing on. But it'd be kind of strange for Jesus to go and preach to only one group of the dead who are disobedience and not the rest. In fact, most often when Noah and the flood and even those who are disobedient in Noah's time is used in scripture, it's almost always used to be paradigmatic or representative of all those that disobeyed before. All those that disobeyed in Noah's time are also all those that disobeyed in all times.

Jesus uses this when he talks about the floods sweeping in and taking away those who disobeyed during Noah's time in the gospels. But even Peter, just a little bit later in his second letter, he uses the same language to talk about God's judgments over those that disobey. In 2 Peter 2, verse 4 to 5, Peter says, "For if God did not spare angels when they sinned but cast them into hell and committed them to chains of gloomy darkness to be kept until the judgments, if he did not spare the ancient worlds but preserve Noah, a herald of righteousness, with seven others when he brought a flood upon the world of the ungodly." He's using this category of God's judgments in Noah's days to be paradigmatic, representative of God's judgment over all those that would not believe.

And so I think what Peter's doing in using Jesus preaching to them, he's actually saying Jesus preached to all who disobeyed, to all who disobeyed in the past, contrasting to all those that trusted in God. And he was proclaiming a judgment upon them that just as the cross and resurrection was a final verdict for the Old Testament believers who trusted in God of freedom, so also the cross and resurrection was a final verdict for all those that came before and did not trust in God. They would continue to receive the full wrath of God in hell. But there's still question, there's still debate over what this word spirit means. And you can see why 1 Peter 3 Martin Luther said, "I have no idea what it means."

There's all these different debates of the different words. The last thing we have to answer is what did Peter mean when Jesus preached to the spirits in prison? Because the way that we've just taken it, we've just explained, I've just explained, if you're following still, is that the spirits of those who are in prison are the spirits of the dead people that disobeyed God. But all throughout scripture, this word for spirit never really refers, the specific word for spirit never really refers to human spirits or human souls. There's a different word that's usually soul or life, suke. This is a different word of spirit, the same one that's used of the Holy Spirit. This word is most often used, especially in conjunction with evil or demonic spirits, of those spirits that are of Satan's domain or realm. It says, Paul says in Colossians, "The spirits and the powers and principalities of the world and of the air." It's all those spiritual dark forces that oppose God and his plans.

So another way that I think we can read and interpret 1 Peter 3 and end Jesus' descent to hell is that he went to proclaim his victory over all those opposing spirits that both came before, that existed during Jesus' life on earth, and that continue to exist in God's world and dwelling place, even as we looked at all the way back in this first sermon in the apostles' Creed on God the Father. And that's because at the end of this passage in verse 22 of chapter 3, we're told that Jesus Christ has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God with angels, authorities, and powers having been subjected to him. And we'll look at this more next week in the ascension of Christ, but in Jesus' ascension, he was also placing all other powers and authorities below his feet.

And that may also point to what Paul was saying in Ephesians 4 verse 8. We're told that he led a host of captives. Well, those captives may have been the dark forces and powers in the earth that Jesus was subjecting under his own authority and power. And so if this is the case, Jesus' proclamation in his descent into hell was to go to the realm of Satan and his spirits and essentially say, "I've defeated you once and for all." All of the opposing spirits in the world, both now and to come, had been defeated in the cross, and Jesus' proclamation of victory and descending to hell was one to proclaim them and tell them that they have no more dominion or dwelling place where God's people reign.

And I think this means for us too, for New Testament believers, that regardless of what dark forces or spiritual powers we may see or experience or fear in the world, whether you believe them or not, we have the assurance and promise that Jesus is already victorious over them. You know, I'm reading this book called Strange Rights. It's a book by a New York Times journalist that looks at this new post-secular religion that's emerging. One where in a post-Christian world, in a post-secular world, people are turning more to religious beliefs, but these religious beliefs, she says, are a remixing of all

that's come before. It's a mixing up of heretical Christian doctrines, but especially, she notes, there's a large rise in witchcraft, Wiccan, and magical sorcery and divination. One of the numbers she uses is that there are actually more witches and people practicing Wiccan in the US today than there are Jehovah's Witnesses. Now, you wouldn't know it because we see Jehovah's more knocking door to door, but those that practice or supposedly practice dark magic, witchcraft, and so on and so forth are greater than Jehovah's Witnesses. I think a lot of the reason why there's this rise in the allure or fascination with magic or the dark arts is because we've realized secularism doesn't answer questions about spirituality for us. As much as atheism and secularism has brought answers scientifically, they cannot answer the question of what is the purpose of life. What is the meaning behind all the things that we experience in life? How do we explain evil and death? And so people are turning to these dark arts, in a sense, to try to make sense or even have power over things that they fear in the world.

But if Jesus went to hell and preached over and against all those dark forces and spiritual powers, then none of those things have a place or have any power or dominion in God's dwelling place. Now, while some of us may fear literal spirit worlds here, I think we should pay attention to that as something the secular West has often rejected. Most of us probably aren't going to go and dabble with witchcraft after this. Most of us probably are not going to go back and think that we need to go to astrology or Wiccan or any of these spiritual practices to deal with the spirit worlds. But I do think most of us experience some form of darkness in our lives every day or every week or on the regular.

See there's a darkness that we can experience even in our city. Some have said that there's a darkness in our city that we can see, we can feel spiritually if you just pay attention to it. There's a darkness when you go out on our street corners and see how drug use and homelessness has pervaded our population. It's not just a societal problem. Oftentimes I feel that there's a spiritual issue beneath the surface there. There's a darkness that comes for those of us that have experienced abuse or evil, especially when it's hidden behind a mask of wealth and power. There tends to be a spiritual darkness we can feel there. There's a dark force that we see and experience and mourn over that can drive a mother to kill her family and then hang herself as we saw in the news this week. See these things that we experience, they have a darkness spiritually to them. So how do we make sense of those things?

How do we think about the world when we experience these dark moments and dark places where sometimes it feels like Jesus doesn't have dominion there. Darkness is still reigning in lives and addiction, even if it's in mental health that we struggle with that is out of our control or addictive sins and behavior patterns. See I think most of us will experience a darkness of that sort. When Jesus descends to hell and proclaims his victory over the spirits in prison, over the opposing powers against God, he also proclaims a victory over any darkness that we experience in the world. See Jesus' descent to hell means that there is a victory that we can hold in us, that we can walk with, where as much as we may face darkness in the world and wonder where is God in that situation, as much as it may feel like there's a dark force at work, we have to be reminded that if Jesus descended to hell, proclaimed victory, and he rose out of that, then Jesus' power is stronger than any darkness we face.

Jesus is a power that can overcome any darkness as difficult and oppressive as it feels in the world. Just because we may not see triumph or see Jesus overcome in those very moments, we know that one day, as Peter says, all angels, authorities, powers, demons, and authorities, those things that Paul says in Romans can never separate us from God's love. All those will also be under Jesus' feet on the final day because he ascended on high and defeated those powers. So we need not fear the opposing powers of the worlds. And last but not least, in Jesus' descent and his resurrection, Jesus proclaims his victory over death.

Regardless of how we take the descent to hell, regardless of how we interpret 1 Peter 3 and the very different ways that it could be taken of Jesus' proclamation in Hades, there is one thing that is undeniably certain in the Apostles' Creed, and it's undeniably certain in Scripture, is that in Jesus' descent into the dead, in his experience of death, not just in body but also in soul in the underworlds, and his subsequent resurrection, he proclaims his victory over death. That's something that both 1 Peter 3 and 6 emphasize when they talk about the life in the spirit, the life in the spirit that Jesus brought that he both proclaims and he also lives by because as he experiences death, his descent and resurrection ultimately point to his victory over all death. Means that Jesus experienced fully death in the purest sense of the term.

And I think sometimes we forget that Jesus' death wasn't just a biological one. It wasn't just that Jesus died and was buried in the grave and just kind of sat there dormant for three days where he was just unconscious and then eventually God said, "Okay, time to wake up." And Jesus just reanimated his body. Jesus' soul experienced death. He went to the place of the dead to fully experience and conquer death so that now Jesus has conquered all three realms of the spirit world or the ancient cosmology of the Jews. He conquers heaven when he ascends on high. He conquered earth when he was crucified and defeated sins and even conquered the underworld in descending to hell so that as Philippians chapter 2 verse 10, that all confess Jesus as Lord both over the earth, in the earth and under the earth as Paul says there in Philippians 2 because Jesus conquered all three realms.

So that means there is no place that we go in this world whether physically or spiritually that Jesus is not victorious over. There is no place, no arena, no spiritual or emotional place, no physical place that we go that Jesus has not conquered and said the victory is his. And so regardless of what death we experience, whether that's death of a family member or even the death that we feel when death is at work in the world, death being at work in the form of illness, death at work when we struggle emotionally or mentally or with dark thoughts, death when we face suffering be it physical or spiritual or emotional, whatever death we may face, there is no arena of that death that Jesus has not conquered. And so as much as we walk into the unknown at times, as much as we may fear the unknown of what happens, Jesus has already gone before us. He's already experienced the fullness of that death so that we're simply just walking in his footsteps. It's as if Jesus descended into a dark cave, he placed some lights there and he found a way out and for all those that trust in Christ or job is simply to follow him there where he's gone before and he has made a way out out of the depths of darkness and death. And again, this kind of makes me think about my kids because especially my youngest, she's at this age where she's really afraid of the dark.

Every night, whether she has to use the bathroom or go get ready for bed, you know, we're not savages, we don't leave the lights on all the time, we're trying to save money and so we'll leave the lights off in the hallway and in the bathroom and literally every time she goes to the bathroom to get ready or use the bathroom at night, she runs it over there, she gets scared and runs back, says, "Daddy, can you turn on the lights for me?" And you know, it's cute the first couple times but by like the 20th, 30th, 50th, 70th, 100th time, I started just wondering like, you've done this like 300,000 times, you know where everything is, every time I turn the lights on, there's never any bad guys, so why are you still afraid? You know exactly how to get to the bathroom, you know exactly what you need to do, you know even where the light switches, you can do it yourself. But magically, when daddy comes, turns on the lights and goes with her, everything's fine and she's happy and fine again, nothing scary.

And I kind of think about us with God like that in a sense. Whether we are walking into unknown situations, we're walking into suffering that feels like death or even we're facing death square on, there's so often this uncertainty we feel where we're afraid of the unknown. We look at that and we look to God and we say, "God, turn the lights on, shed some light on this situation, show us what's happening here in this dark place, this abyss of my life or this experience of death because I don't think I can go there." And in God's compassion as a father, at the very beginning of the creed that we confessed, he says, "I'll go before you and I'll shed light in dark places." When Jesus descended to hell, he was literally going before us into death.

He was shining a light in the darkness so that whatever darkness we face, whatever unknown or uncertainty that befalls us or we face in life, and eventually when we do face death, as uncertain as it may be, it doesn't have to be unsettling because we have a savior that went before us. He went deeply into the depths of death, but he rose victorious from the grave and illumined the path for all who trust in him to follow so that in the resurrection we now confess there is a new hope in Christ, that death does not have the final say and that no death or darkness that we experience or befalls us in this life can go unsettled, can go it alone on our own because we have a Christ that went before.