

Apostles Creed – He Died, and Was Buried (He Descended Into Hell)

We saw last time that Jesus suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified. Jesus died as a substitute for us, by tasting innocent death on behalf of those who deserve a guilty death.

Here the creed tells us something that might seem very obvious, but it is important to understand. Jesus actually died and was actually buried. Some forms of the creed add the word “He descended into Hades”, which we'll talk about in a moment, but it is connected to Christ's actual death and burial.

The burial of Jesus is sometimes called the truths of Easter Saturday.

First, the burial is proof that Jesus actually died. Paul includes it in his definition of the gospel: For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, ⁴and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures, ⁵and that He was seen by Cephas, then by the twelve. (1 Corinthians 15:3–5). The proof that Jesus rose is that He was seen by witnesses; the proof that He died is that He was buried.

This might seem obvious and needless to say, but not so. One of the perennial objections to the Resurrection is to claim that Jesus did not actually die on the cross: He merely swooned or fainted. The theory goes that Jesus, because of His physical sufferings and blood loss through scourging and crucifixion, merely looked like He was dead. Primitive people like the Romans and Jews couldn't tell the difference between death and fainting, and so assumed He was dead. They took Him down from the cross, put Him in the tomb, where the cool air rather woke him up. He then got up, rolled the stone away, and appeared to people, telling them that He had risen from the dead.

Now there are so many problems with this theory, we could fill a lever arch file with them. First, Romans were expert in crucifixion and war, and knew the difference between fainting and death. One of the reasons for the plunged spear into the side up to the heart was to make extra certain. And then we're to believe that the Jewish men and women embalming him hours after the crucifixion would not have noticed that he was still warm, was still breathing, still had a pulse. And then when they wrapped him in shroud, and added spices and airtight gummy resins, that this would have not suffocated him? Finally, we must believe that he got up on wounded feet, single-handedly rolled away the stone, secured a change of clothes, and despite having been crucified 48 hours prior, managed to seem healthy, victorious, and restored. My question is: if you can believe that, you clearly have no trouble with faith, so why not simply believe something more plausible: that Jesus actually rose from the dead?

To most people, the burial is proof enough that Jesus was truly dead. You embalm and entomb people who are dead.

Second, the burial symbolises that our sins are put away. Burial has the image of things being put underground, or entombed, sealed off, out of sight and no longer with us. The Bible tells us that we were united with Christ in His death. And the burial means that Jesus had died, and if we are united with Him, then whatever died with Him is gone forever.

For that reason, Paul connects the underground nature of burial with the immersion of baptism. ⁴ Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. (Romans 6:4)

knowing this, that our old man was crucified with *Him*, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin. (Romans 6:6)

¹²buried with Him in baptism, in which you also were raised with *Him* through faith in the working of God, who

raised Him from the dead. (Colossians 2:12)

To be baptised is to symbolise a burial, an old life with its sin, and with its penalties that is now gone, killed, and left in the tomb. Everything that died with Jesus on the cross was left in the tomb. He brought none of it with Him. To be buried with Him is to leave behind our old ways, our old life, our old desires.

But the third aspect of the burial of Jesus goes to that added phrase, “He descended into hell”. First of all, that was added to the creed in the fourth century, it's not likely part of the original. Second, the word in the original is the Greek Hades, which is not referring to the lake of fire, but to the place of the dead. In Hebrew this is Sheol, the place where both righteous and unrighteous people went at death. This is not the word Gehenna, the lake of fire. Jesus did not go into the lake of fire, and suffer the torments of eternal fire on our behalf. Jesus suffered on the Cross, where He experienced the wrath of God, and said the words “It is Finished” - no more suffering, no more payment, as well as promising the dying criminal next to Him that he would be with Him that very day in Paradise.

However, the Bible does teach in 1 Peter 3:18 that Jesus preached to the spirits in Hell. This does not mean that He was giving unsaved people a second chance. From the context, it appears Jesus was declaring victory over certain imprisoned fallen angels, who for a very particular sin in Noah's time are chained up. During the time between His death and resurrection, Jesus preached victory and condemnation of those spirits who perhaps thought they would soon be liberated by a victorious Satan. It is possible, though not certain, that until this moment, Easter Saturday, the righteous did not go straight into the presence of God, but went to that part of Hades that was not a place of torment, but a place of rest. Jesus calls it Abraham's bosom. If this is correct, then after preaching to the spirits in prison, Jesus led captivity captive, taking the righteous spirits with Him into the very presence of God, the third heaven. Christian theology has sometimes called this “The Harrowing of Hell”, emptying Hades of the righteous. Since His resurrection, believers now go immediately into the presence of God.

Our evidence for that is not strong enough to make it an article of faith. But what we can say is this: even in the time of His burial, Jesus was victorious. You and I look at death and cannot imagine any victory when we are put in a casket and lowered into the ground. For Christ, it was a moment of victory. Truly dead, but about to return to life. Depositing our sin and death in the tomb, to leave them there forever. And even in that time, victorious in Hades, victorious over His enemies, the captain of our souls leading us on to glory.

There in the ground His body lay,
Light of the world by darkness slain:
Then bursting forth in glorious day
Up from the grave He rose again!
And as He stands in victory
Sin's curse has lost its grip on me,
For I am His and He is mine –
Bought with the precious blood of Christ.

The Third Day He Rose Again

The third day He arose again from the dead.

The creed confesses the same man whom was condemned by Pontius Pilate and physically buried, came to life again on the third day. That is a remarkable claim, and in some ways, it is Christianity's central claim. It is not that the Resurrection is the ultimate or most important doctrine, but the

Resurrection of Jesus is the central claim that we make that our faith is true.

In fact, Paul makes it clear in 1 Corinthians 15 that if Jesus didn't rise then there is no Christian Gospel. But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ is not risen. 14And if Christ is not risen, then our preaching *is* empty and your faith *is* also empty.

There is no Christian message to preach without the Resurrection.

In the same place, Paul says that if the Resurrection didn't take place, then the apostles are liars, and the New Testament is a fraud.

1 Corinthians 15:15 Yes, and we are found false witnesses of God, because we have testified of God that He raised up Christ, whom He did not raise up -- if in fact the dead do not rise.

Further, if there is no Resurrection, then there is no salvation, no forgiveness of sins and eternal life to anyone who trust in Christ.

1 Corinthians 15:16-17 For if *the* dead do not rise, then Christ is not risen. 17And if Christ is not risen, your faith *is* futile; you are still in your sins!

Finally, what that amounts to is this: maybe other religions can do without a Resurrection, but Christianity rises and falls on it. If Christ has not risen, Christians have no hope .

1 Corinthians 15:18-19 Then also those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. 19 If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable.

Why does so much hinge on the Resurrection?

First, Jesus staked all His claims on the Resurrection. He claimed to be the Messiah. He claimed to be the Son of God. "So the Jews answered and said to Him, "What sign do You show to us, since You do these things?" Jesus answered and said to them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up."

When asked by the Pharisees for a sign, Jesus says, But He answered and said to them, "An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. "For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. (Mat 12:39-40)

If the Resurrection did not happen, then Jesus was wrong about Himself. That means He is no longer a good man, or a prophet. He was a failed prophet, or perhaps a madman, and not someone we should pray to and sing to.

Second, it signified whether His work on the Cross was successful or not. The Bible tells us that the wages of sin is death. In other words, whenever man dies, he is reflecting the fact that he is of the line of Adam, and justly a recipient of death. Now If Jesus Christ had remained in the grave, we would have no reason to think He was any different from any other man. We would conclude that though He was killed, yet the fact that He remained in death proved him to be a true son of Adam, experiencing the wages of sin – death. Of course, if this is true, then Jesus Christ could not be a substitute for us. So if Jesus did not rise from the dead, then Jesus died for his own sins, and can be nobody's Saviour. But 1 Timothy 3:16 tells us: "Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of godliness: God was manifested in the flesh, vindicated by the Spirit, seen by angels, proclaimed among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up in glory. (1Ti 3:16)

Vindicated by the Spirit. His resurrection was His vindication. God raising Him from the dead was God's stamp of approval on His life. He had not died for His own sins. He had not become a partaker of the sins of the world. He had simply been a sin-bearer, without becoming a sinner. Thus, God raised Him up, vindicating Him as sinless, and His death as a successful atonement. We need not wonder if the death of Christ succeeded in providing redemption, the fact that Jesus was raised from the dead says it all.

Third, the resurrection proved that Jesus is the exclusive way to Heaven. Anyone can make religious claims, claim that their god and their way is the true way.

But if one of those religions makes this claim: God, at a particular time and place, became man, and that man proved He was God by rising from the dead. If that religion has eyewitness proof that the man who claimed to be God rose from the dead, then there truly is only one way to God, and it is that way. Paul told the Athenians that God overlooked all the polytheism and false religion for a time. "Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent, "because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead." (Act 17:30-31) The resurrection means what we call particularism.

In other words, the Resurrection tells us if Jesus is who He said He was, if what He did on the Cross was what we think it was, and if therefore He truly is the way, the truth, and the life. And therefore it tells us if eternal life is real, both beginning here and continuing past death, whether our bodies will be resurrected, and whether sin and death have been defeated.

But the central message of nearly every sermon in the book of Acts was: Jesus is risen, He is risen indeed. This is what we confess, when we confess, the third day he rose again from the dead.