

Series: A Timeless Creed for a Timely Faith

Sermon: I Believe In Jesus Christ

Text: Romans 10:5-13

Introduction: Acts 16:29-34

- A. Story of the Philippian jailer – asked the most important question – “What must I do to be saved.” (health, wholeness)
- B. Paul’s answer – simple and direct – Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ...”
- C. Romans 10 – a confession of faith.
 - 1. Confess with your mouth – “Jesus is Lord.”
 - 2. Believe in your heart – God raised him from the dead.
- D. This confession is the heart of the Creed, the center of your Christian faith, and the dividing line between your faith and every other religion.
 - 1. Most Jews and many Muslims would agree with the first article of the Creed.
 - 2. When you say “I believe in Jesus Christ His Only Son our Lord.”, you are echoing the very first confession of faith – “Kyrios Christos” (NT times – “Kyrios Kaiser” – “Caesar is Lord”)
 - 3. You are identifying yourself as a Christian and associating yourself with all those followers of Christ throughout the ages (communion of the saints)
- E. But what kind of Christian are you?
 - 1. When someone is a “good” Christians, what does that mean? Or a “bad” Christian?
 - 2. Misconceptions about what it means:
 - a. Born in the USA
 - b. Born to Christian parents-heritage.
 - c. Christian by default-Christianity seems more reasonable than other religions.
 - d. Because you attend some sort of Christian church.
 - e. Being a “do-gooder”
 - f. Denominational loyalist. (“I’ve been a _____ all my life.”)
- F. John Wesley – 1741 – Oxford – “The Almost Christian-radical difference between **nominal** (in name only) and **real** Christianity. This sermon challenged the Anglican establishment. _ Wesley was convinced there weren’t too many “real” Christians at Oxford.

1. Nominal Christianity: avoids evil, does good, uses the means of grace, sincere – Wesley’s own testimony – **John Wesley’s Sermons** “But here it will probably be inquired, Is it possible that any man living should go so far as this and nevertheless be only ‘almost a Christian’? I did go thus far for many years, as many of this place can testify; using diligence to eschew all evil, and to have a conscience void of offence; redeeming the time, buying up every opportunity of doing all good to all men; constantly and carefully using all the public and all the private means of grace; endeavoring after a steady seriousness of behavior at all times and in all places. And God is my record, before whom I stand, doing all this in sincerity; having a real design to serve God, a hearty desire to do his will in all things, to please him who had called me to ‘fight the good fight’, and to ‘lay hold of eternal life’. Yet my own conscience beareth me witness in the Holy Ghost that all this time I was but ‘almost a Christian’.” – nominal Christians have “a form of godliness, but denying its power.” (2 Tim.3:5)
 2. “Altogether” Christian: loves God, loves neighbor, faith that results in repentance, forgiveness, works of piety, works of mercy.
- G. This begs the question, “Am I an ‘Almost Christian’ or am I an ‘altogether Christian’?” (You don’t have to be “all together” to be an “altogether Christian” – the Christian life is a journey, not a destination).
- H. The Apostles’ Creed is decidedly Trinitarian. This article of the Creed which deals with the person and work of Christ is absolutely foundational. All theology rises or falls on our concept of him. What you and I believe about Christ is the continental divide between truth and error. We will examine this section of the Creed over the next two weeks.
- I. What are we confessing when we say “I believe in Jesus Christ?” (It really does matter!)

HIS NAME

- A. When we affirm this second article in the Creed we are declaring that Jesus is completely unique.
1. Gives our religion its distinctive shape and flavor.
 2. Faith in Christ is an act of obedience.
- B. Jesus
1. Yeshua – Joshua – “Jehovah saves!”
 2. Anticipates his earthly purpose.
 3. “Jesus” was a common name—points to his humanity—he was a man among men.

4. The naming of Jesus was directed by the angel of the Lord (Matt.1:21) His name was a prophecy of his mission.

C. Christ- messiah-Anointed One.

1. Jesus was the fulfillment of the O.T. prophecy and expectancy of a deliverer from the line of David.
2. OT – 3 kinds of people anointed by God.
 - a. Prophets – bring God to humankind
 - b. Priests – bring men and woman to God.
 - c. King – lead, guide, and direct the people of God in the ways of God.
3. We are declaring with Peter, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” (Matt. 16:16ff)

D. His Only Son.

1. The Nicene Creed emphasizes Jesus as the “only begotten” son of God. Emphasizes his divinity in relationship with the Father.
2. We are children of God by virtue of creation, but we are not “begotten” or conceived.” We are creature, not creator, Jesus is creator, not creature. He and the Father are one.
3. William Barclay’s observations (**The Apostles’ Creed for Every man**).
 - a. Jesus’ relationship with the Father is not in any sense “achieved”, it is personal – a man cannot “become” the son of his father. That’s why we are said to be “adopted” into the family of God.
 - b. There is a paradox of equality and subordination.
 - c. The son has certain privileges: special knowledge of the Father; revelation; in him was life; judgment.
 - d. he has certain responsibilities; sent to do the Father’s will; live in obedience to God. No wonder he agonized in Gethsemane-intense struggle between the human and the divine.

E. Our Lord. (Kurios, Adoni)

1. To call Jesus “Lord” is to recognize him as God. (“Lord” – Adoni” is the most common name for God in the Old Testament – “LORD” was substituted by the scribes who wrote the OT manuscripts for the name “Yahweh”)
2. “Lord” also speaks of our relationship with Christ. He’s worthy of; obedience, faith, allegiance, love, service, worship.

HIS BIRTH.

A. Conceived by the Holy Spirit.

1. Unique birth. – no human father.

2. Assures his divinity.
3. Connection between creation and Jesus' conception. "Hovering" and "Overshadowing" "The same H.S. who was active in creation, giving it life from God, also was active in the world's salvation, 'overshadowing' a young Jewish maiden and impregnating her with life from above. In both cases the same divine love was at work. God's creation always serves as a signpost pointing us toward God; it is a means of reconciliation because what comes from God leads back to Him again" (Michael Bauman, **The Creed**, pp. 35-36)

B. Born of the Virgin Mary.

1. The virgin birth has taken quite a hit in recent years. Jesus Seminar (Marcus Borg & John Dominic Crossan) – illegitimate son of Joseph & Mary; product of Mary being raped by a Roman soldier – these ideas are made up out of thin air.
2. Even evangelical scholar William Barclay doesn't believe the virgin birth is a necessary article of faith.
3. Why I believe the virgin birth.
 - a. Start with the resurrection. A God who could pull that off could surely cause a virgin to conceive without any other human agency.
 - b. What questions does it raise? – miracles, Jesus' divinity, truth of the Bible, Jesus would need salvation, atonement not accomplished, we are still in our sins.
4. The virgin birth assures both the full humanity and full divinity of Christ.
 - a. This is a mystery to us. It was to Mary and Joseph too.
 - b. Christ was like us in every way, except he did not sin.
5. What about Mary? Honor her, respect her, but do not worship her. She was a chosen woman – a vessel – not a goddess.

HIS PASSION

- A. He suffered – Isa. 53:3-10
- B. Under Pontius Pilate-anchors Christ's passion in history. The facts of Christ's life, death, and resurrection are grounded in historical reality – not some flight of fantasy.
- C. Crucified – horrible form of death, designed to produce the most extreme humiliation, agony, and pain.
- D. Dead – Jesus really died. (Not a swoon, or a coma)
 1. The wages of sin is death – our sin required his death.
 2. He chose to die for us. He could have escaped but he didn't.

3. His death made atonement for sin. It paid the penalty for our sins.

E. Buried – that’s what you do with dead bodies.

F. He descended into hell.

a. We Protestants don’t like this phrase.

b. What does it mean? Many people are confused, for they understand hell to be the place of eternal punishment for sin. Does it mean that that’s where Jesus went? No, it is declaring that he went to what the Hebrews refer to Sheol, or what the Greeks referred to as Hades, which literally means “the land of the dead” or “the place of the departed spirits.” If the New Testament wishes to express the place of punishment, it uses the word Gehenna, which literally refers to the Valley of Hinnom outside Jerusalem. It was the valley that in the ancient days those who worshiped the pagan god Moloch, the fire god, had burned their children as an offering to this false deity. It ultimately became the official rubbish dump, the public incinerator of Jerusalem. It smoldered continuously and, in it, loathsome species of worm bred and multiplied. That terrible valley, a kind of valley of destruction, stood as the popular idea of hell.

These two words are quite different.

When The Apostles’ Creed declares that Jesus “...descended into hell...” it is trying to make a very clear statement that Jesus literally died. In fact, it is a double statement, for already it says He was “crucified, dead, and buried.” If that were not enough, it goes on to say that He descended into the place of the departed spirits, not to the place of final eternal punishment. The Early church wanted to make very clear that Jesus really died. There were those who, for various reasons, held to what is known as the “swoon theory.” These held that Jesus didn’t really die. He fainted, but the coolness of the tomb revived Him. Part of His work on the cross was to die. That’s the main reason for this double statement of both His death and His descent into hell.

CONCLUSION: Do you believe in Jesus Christ, God’s only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried; who descended into hell? How can you **not** believe in a God who loves you like that?! So, what kind of Christians are you? Are you an “almost” Christian or an “altogether” Christian? Let us pray.