

## **We Believe Part 10**

After a break of sorts for Advent and the new year, we are returning to our series of messages on the Apostle's Creed. This ancient creed summarizes the bedrock of the Christian faith. Since it has been a while, let's recite the Creed together.

**I believe in God the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, and in Jesus Christ His only Son our Lord; who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried; He descended into hell; the third day He rose again from the dead; He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of God the Father Almighty; He will come again to judge the living and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy, apostolic church; the communion of saints; the forgiveness of sins; the resurrection of the body; and the life everlasting. Amen.**

This is the core of our beliefs. But it is not enough to simply recite a creed. Christianity is about more than giving assent to creeds or dogma, it is about salvation and the new life found through faith in Christ. It is about living out our faith, truly being obedient and faithful followers of the Lord Jesus Christ.

We've just come through Advent where we focused on the birth of Jesus and who the bible says he is. We believe as we stated in the creed that Jesus was uniquely conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary. He was conceived and born without the stain of sin, fully God and yet fully man. This morning as we examine further the Apostle's Creed I want us to look at the section that declares Jesus "suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried..." What does that tell us about Jesus and why he had to die?

First off, notice that the creed fixes Jesus in history, in real time. Christianity is not based upon some mythological figure. Jesus was born while Caesar Augustus was Emperor of Rome and while Quirinius was governor of Syria. He was crucified while Pontius Pilate was the Roman prefect or provincial governor of Judea under the Roman Emperor Tiberius. All of this is historical fact. Christianity says something happened in history that effects all of us yet today.

Notice the creed says Jesus suffered under Pilate, was crucified, then died and was buried. I want us to think about the nature of that suffering for a moment. When we think of Jesus suffering under Pontius Pilate, we think of the beating Jesus received, the thirty nine lashes with a brutal cat of nine tails. But it wasn't only the physical beating that brought suffering to Jesus.

Think about it for a moment. The religious leaders, the chief priests and teachers had Jesus arrested and questioned him. **“Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed One?” Jesus said, “I am. And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven.” Mark 14:62.** That was all they needed to hear. It was reference to a Messianic passage from Daniel they recognized. They accused Jesus of blasphemy, a crime punishable by death. Because the Jews lived under Roman rule and could not execute anyone, they took Jesus to Pilate, the Roman prefect.

Pilate questions Jesus, but notice what Mark 15 tells us. Pilate said to Jesus, “aren’t you going to answer? See how many things they are accusing you of?” The Jewish leaders were just looking for something that would click with Pilate so he would have to execute him. Pilate didn’t care about their Jewish laws or theology or a religious charge of blasphemy. He would care about a man leading a political insurrection, but it was obvious to him Jesus wasn’t a terrorist looking to overthrow Rome. Look at the insight Pilate had. Mark 15 tells us, **Pilate knew “it was out of envy that the chief priests had handed Jesus over to him.” Mark 15:10**

Pilate was thinking, “Jesus has done more in three years than you guys have done in a lifetime. He has healed the sick and raised the dead and brought hope to people while you guys were sitting around trying to keep your jobs.” Jesus was innocent and yet he is being accused by the religious leaders out of envy and jealousy. Even though he knew their evil motives, Pilate gave in to their demands and had Jesus beaten and whipped and then put to death on the cross.

Have you ever had someone so jealous of you that they falsely accused you – to hurt you, get you fired, to get someone to reject you, to make themselves look better than you? You bear the pain and the hurt, suffering even though you know you are innocent. This is part of how Jesus suffered under Pontius Pilate. Falsely accused. Jesus understands your pain when you have been betrayed and wounded by someone’s jealousy and envy.

Jesus hears Pilate tell the leaders and the people, “I find no basis for a charge against this man.” But they continued to accuse him. Someone says “He started in Galilee and has come all the way here stirring up trouble.” Pilate decides to send Jesus to Herod Antipas because he had jurisdiction over the Galilee. Herod gets nothing out of Jesus, mocks and beats him and then sends him back to Pilate. Pilate again tells the leaders and the people, **“I have examined him in your presence and have found no basis for your charges against him. Neither has Herod,**

**for he sent him back to us; as you can see, he has done nothing to deserve death. Therefore I will punish him and then release him.” Luke 23:14-17.** Pilate has repeatedly told them he knew Jesus was innocent. Finally, Pilate took water and washed his hands in front of the crowd and told them, “I am innocent of this man’s blood.” Matthew 27:24. Nevertheless, he sentenced Jesus to death, had him flogged and then crucified.

Maybe you know what it’s like to be falsely accused and betrayed. Maybe you’ve had someone accuse you, knowing you were innocent, or maybe you were fired even though the boss knew you were innocent, then they wash their hands of the whole thing, thinking somehow that will let them off the hook or make things right. You’ve been the victim of injustice and you are hurting. You’re resentful and bitter over what happened to you, over what they did to you. Jesus understands. He knew the ultimate injustice. He wasn’t just innocent of the crimes for which he was accused, he was innocent of all sin! He never sinned and yet he is condemned to death and while hanging on the cross he asks the Father to forgive those who have sinned against him because they didn’t realize what they were doing. What a lesson in forgiveness. Jesus understands what you are going through if you’ve been unjustly or falsely accused and he can give you the grace you need to forgive and show mercy.

Understand, you are bitter because you were innocent of that particular offense, but you aren’t innocent. You, me, we are all guilty of something and Jesus bore the penalty of our sins and our guilt in his own flesh when he died on the cross. He died unjustly so we could be justified.

Betrayed by one of his disciples. Out of jealousy and envy he is handed over to Pilate. Out of political expediency he is passed to Herod and then sent back. Out of betrayal and injustice he is sentenced to death by Pilate even though Pilate knew he was innocent. Jesus understands the depths of betrayal. He understands the depth of human cruelty and callousness and hypocrisy.

The creed says Jesus suffered under Pontius Pilate. Indeed he did. Then Jesus was crucified, died and was buried. We’ve already said this event was fixed in time and in history. We know Jesus lived and we know he died. The question that hangs over us is why? Why did Jesus die? For what purpose? We could never tell the whole story of salvation and redemption. All we offer is a simplistic attempt from a heart overwhelmed by grace, but first and foremost,

**Christ died for us and for our sins. “Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures.”**

**1 Corinthians 15:3.** There are a number of ways to try to understand what Jesus did for us on the cross, but in a sense our salvation remains something of a mystery. It’s beyond our comprehension but thank God we can receive it by faith and be forever changed by it. Christ died for us and for our sins!

The bible says the soul that sins must die. We have all sinned and the sentencing guidelines demand death, but instead of our death, Jesus took our place and died for us and for our sins. And not only for our sins. John the Baptist said, **“Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” John 1:29.** He is the sacrificial Lamb of God that died as a substitute for sinners. The sins of the world – your sins and my sins were all laid upon him and he died, bearing our sins and the penalty for those sins.

We say it easily and often don’t we? That Christ died for our sins. But he really did. This man who was both God and man actually, literally died for you and for me. Literally, physically, died, just like we all will die some day. That’s why the creed says he died, was buried, and descended to the dead. The writers wanted to affirm that he really, actually, physically did die and he died for you and for me! He died so we wouldn’t have to die in our sins and spend eternity in hell, apart from God and his goodness and mercy and love. Why did Jesus die? For what purpose? He died for us and for our sins.

Another reason or purpose: **Christ died to ransom us.** Jesus himself said, **“The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many.” Mark 10:45.** We know what ransom is – it’s the price paid to purchase and secure someone’s freedom. Our focus is not so much on who gets the payment but upon the fact that Jesus’ own life was the payment. **He gave himself and his own life as the ransom payment for us!**

But from what did Jesus ransom us? He ransomed us from the judgement of God because of our sin. We were under a penalty of death and he paid the full penalty and price with his life. He ransomed us from condemnation. We weren’t only condemned, we lived under that condemnation. But the bible says, **“There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.” Romans 8:1.** We were held captive by sin and guilt and shame and he ransomed us. He freely gave his life. No one took it from him but he gave his life for us. That’s why he suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried – to pay the ransom for

us so we could be free.

**Christ died to show the extent of God's love for sinners.** I'm tired of hearing people argue you can't "hate the sin and still love the sinner". Yes you can. I hate the sin in all of us! Sin is what separates us from God. Sin is what placed us under the just and eternal wrath of God. I hate the sin in me but I still love myself. No, I hate sin. If I don't hate the sin, then it means I ignore the incredible price that was paid – the unbelievable extent God went to in order to show us his love and provide salvation. No, I can say I hate the sin because sin required the death of Christ on the cross to atone for that sin, but I can say God loves the sinner because the bible says so. **“One will scarcely die for a righteous person – though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die – but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” Romans 5:7-8.** And Jesus said, **“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.” John 3:16.**

God hated the sin but loved sinners! He loved you and me and the whole world so much he sent Jesus to die in our place. If you think God doesn't love you because of your sins, your past, your present, you are wrong! If you think you are unworthy of such love and mercy and grace, you are right! You aren't worthy. None of us are. How could we be worthy? But that's the point. While we were still sinners, while we were unworthy, Christ died for us! It is the mystery of salvation and grace. The bible says, **“In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace.” Ephesians 1:7.** Our sins, trespasses, failures and mistakes have been forgiven by the riches of his grace! Why did Jesus die? For what purpose?

**Christ died to reconcile and bring us to God.** Think of the story of the prodigal son, away from his father and from home. We were like that. We were all prodigals a long way from home and from our Heavenly Father. We weren't just away from him, by our actions and our sin we were enemies of God, against him and his plans for our life. But look at this: **“In Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them.” 2 Corinthians 5:19.** To be reconciled means to settle the differences, the dispute, to stop being enemies and settle the judgement between parties. Remember Jesus said if your brother or someone has something against you, leave your gift at the altar and go be reconciled to your

brother. (Mat. 5:23). The idea is you've done something wrong and you need to go make it right so your brother's judgement against you can be removed, but you are to take the first step to make things right. The offending party takes the initiative to make things right with the one you've offended. But in our case, we were the offenders. We sinned and became enemies of God. We should have taken the initiative to make things right, but remember the passage from Romans 5, **"While we were still sinners, Christ died for us."** **Romans 5:8** In Christ, God took the initiative. He did what we could not do to provide reconciliation and he did it while we were still sinners.

And that's not all, Peter says, **"Christ also suffered once for sin, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God."** **1 Peter 3:18**. He reconciled us to himself. If we will accept that and receive his forgiveness and grace our sins will be forgiven and he will bring us to God. We were made to be with him. We were made to enjoy the presence of God forever but sin got us tossed out of the Garden of Eden and out of God's presence. But through the suffering of Christ and his death upon the cross he made it possible for us to be brought home to God. The prodigals, the wayward children can finally come home and be with our Heavenly Father.

Are you tired of being alone, away from the love of your heavenly Father, struggling with the shame of sin? Jesus made it possible for you to come home. Jesus said, "Come to me, all who are weary and I will give you rest." He died so you could finally be at home and at rest in the Father's house and in his love.

Why did Jesus suffer under Pontius Pilate, be crucified, die and be buried? How much time do you have? In his book *The Passion of Jesus Christ*, author and pastor John Piper lists fifty reasons Jesus suffered and died. Let me read just a few: To absorb the wrath of God, to please his Heavenly Father, to show his own love for us, to cancel the legal demands of the law against us, to provide the basis for our justification, to take away our condemnation, to make us holy and blameless before God, to give us a clear conscience, to give us access to the throne of God, to free us from the slavery of sin and the fear of death, to enable us to live an overcoming life, to disarm the rulers, power and authorities, to secure our resurrection from the dead. The list can go on and on. The point is, he did all of this for you and for me! Just one more:

**Christ died to give us eternal life.** We quoted earlier, **"For God so loved the world**

**that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.” John 3:16.** Was it worth it? All that suffering Jesus endured? Was it worth it, the pain, the death and burial? You would have to ask Jesus but because he did, someday we can ask him!

Jesus died so we can have eternal life and be with him forever. What do we do to receive that eternal life? Believe in him! Jesus said, **“Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.” John 3:36.** He offers us eternal life. We were created in God’s image and God lives forever and he intends that we live forever. We will somewhere, either eternally away from God in hell, or forever with him in heaven. That choice is up to each one of us.

“Christ suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried. He descended to the dead, on the third day he rose again. He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again to judge the living and the dead.” And what will you do at that judgement? After all he has suffered and done to provide salvation for you, how will you explain that you ignored or scorned or refused his salvation? He has come that you might have life now and eternal life in his presence then and forever. The choice is yours.