

We Believe Part 5

In chapter 8 of Mark's gospel, Jesus and his disciples were north of the Galilee, near Ceasarea Phillippi when Jesus asked this essential question, **"Who do people say I am?"** **The disciples replied, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets."** **"But what about you?"** he asked. **"Who do you say I am?"** Peter answered **"You are the Christ."** **Mark 8:27-29**

I have said it over and over again during this series, that it matters what we believe because what we believe determines how we live and the choices we make. Let me say it again with added emphasis: what we believe about Jesus is the most important decision we will ever make! It matters what we believe and what we believe about Jesus is at the core of our Christian faith. Who do you say he is? Who do we say he is?

We believe Jesus to be not just a man, not just a teacher, but God in flesh. It is not some new doctrine but has been the essence of our faith from the beginning. Over the next few Sundays we are going to be talking about who Jesus is, why we believe as we do and why it matters. We are using one of the ancient creeds as the guide for our study, so what is it the Apostles' Creed says concerning Jesus? Let's read it from the beginning. **"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 sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead."**

This section of the creed is the longest section, perhaps because it is the most important, the most essential. As I said, what we believe concerning Jesus is the most important decision we will ever make. What we believe about Jesus determines whether we are saved or lost, whether we will spend eternity in heaven or in hell. What we believe about Jesus effects our eternal destiny. That's why we are going to spend some time on this section. I want to make sure we understand who Jesus is and why this is of eternal importance.

Let's start by just examining the summary of facts we get from the creed. In his book *Fundamentals of Faith*, Peter Kreeft wrote, **"The creed summarizes the four essential things that God's word tells us about Christ: his name, his origin, his history and his destiny."**

...Peter Kreeft. Let's look at those four essentials.

His name is Jesus (Matthew 1:18-25) . The angel told Joseph in a dream that Mary would give birth to a son and they were to give him the name Jesus, “...because he will save his people from their sins.” The name Jesus is the Greek form of the Hebrew name Yeshua or Joshua which means “**The Lord saves**” or “**God is Savior.**” Jesus’ name reflects who he is. He is Savior and his name tells us something about God. Remember we quoted last Sunday from Hebrews 1. Speaking of Jesus the writer tells us “**The Son is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being...**” **Hebrews 1:3** When we read the name Jesus, we know God is eternally committed to our salvation. His very name, Jesus, tells us he has come to save us from our sins. You can know him as a prophet, as a great moral teacher, as a rabbi, as the founder of Christianity, a great man, a swell guy, but if you don’t know him as Savior you really don’t know him at all. He has come to save you and give you life!

Savior is who he is! At his birth the angel announced to the shepherds, “**Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you: he is Christ the Lord.**” **Luke 2:10-11.** His name reveals his purpose. He has come to save us – from sin, from hell, from the devil, from death. Thank God! It is good news of great joy for all of us. A Savior has been born, Christ the Lord.

The creed refers to him as Jesus Christ. It’s interesting the angel told them he was Christ the Lord. **Christ means “the Anointed One” or “Messiah.”** It is essentially an English version of the Hebrew word for Messiah. Christ is not Jesus’ last name. Think of it more as a title. Jesus the Christ, Jesus the Messiah. It too speaks of his purpose, his mission.

As the name Jesus ties him to the purpose of salvation, the title Christ ties him to a particular history and a covenant. The Jewish people lived in hopeful expectation of the coming of the promised Messiah. They were expecting Messiah to come and establish a political kingdom and rule over his people Israel with justice and righteousness. But Jesus the Christ came with a different agenda, announcing the kingdom of heaven was at hand. He came not to rule over an earthly kingdom, but to establish a heavenly kingdom, to rule over the hearts and lives of all who would come to him. He would secure a covenant by the shedding of his own blood, not with a nation or with one people, but with all who would trust and be saved. As Messiah he fulfilled the role of prophet, priest and king. We will talk more about that in the next couple of weeks.

He is the anointed one. Remember Jesus going to the synagogue in Nazareth at the very

beginning of his public ministry? The scroll of Isaiah the prophet was opened and handed to him and he read these words, **“The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me, because the Lord has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn...”** Isaiah 61:1-2 Everyone in attendance knew that passage was speaking of the Messiah. Jesus handed the scroll back to the attendant and said, **“Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.”** Luke 4:2. Jesus acknowledged publicly that he was Christ, the long awaited Messiah.

A quick reminder: “I believe in ...Jesus Christ His Only Son our Lord.; who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary...” Remember we said the creed summarizes the four essentials concerning Jesus: His name, his origin, his history and his destiny.

Jesus’ origin is described for us in this phrase “His Only Son.” When we talk about Jesus being God’s son, we automatically think of our own experience of parent and child. One existed before the other. But when we talk about God as Father and Jesus as His Only Son, we are speaking of a unique mystery and part of our problem is we don’t have adequate language to express or explain the mystery but the church has been trying since the beginning.

We believe in the divinity of Christ. He is both wholly God and wholly man. It is a mystery. Two natures, neither diminished or changed by the other, but two natures together in one person. A later creed, the Nicene Creed tried to explain the essence of Jesus’ nature with this language. **“[I believe] in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God; Begotten of his Father before all worlds, God of God, Light of Light, Very God of very God; Begotten not made; Being of one substance with the Father...”**

We say we believe in One God, eternally existent in three persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. There was never a time when Jesus the Son did not exist. **Jesus’ nature as fully God and fully man is expressed in the phrase, “conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary.”** We say Jesus had two natures, not half God and half human, but wholly God (conceived by the Holy Spirit) and wholly man (born of the Virgin Mary). We will talk more about this in the coming weeks, but the point of the creed is to remind us of the divinity and the humanity of Jesus Christ. Our belief that He is God sets us apart from all other religions. Buddhists don’t

believe Buddha was God. Muslims don't believe Muhammad was God, but we believe Jesus was and is God and man!

Remember John's gospel declares, **"In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning."** John 1:1-2. The Word was God. Jesus is God manifested in flesh, revealed to us as the Only begotten Son, fully God and fully man.

Jesus' history, his life is summed up in the creed. "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 sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty..."

His name, his life, his purpose is found here. He suffered under Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried because he was the Savior! His life, his purpose is not in his ethical teachings, not in his inspiring life, although those things are good, but his purpose is found in his sacrificial death. Jesus said He came to give his life "as a ransom for many." He came to save us from our sins the angel said. His sinless life made him the perfect, sinless sacrifice to atone for our sins. He died and was buried. The phrase, "he descended into hell" is not referring to the place of eternal torment, but means he descended to the place of the dead. It is meant to show that he literally, physically died and was buried. But then...but then, the bible declares and the creed states, the third day he rose again from the dead! He died and rose again providing victory for us over sin and death.

Peter Kreeft writes, "On Calvary, Christian and non-Christian cease to have common ground. If Jesus were only a great man, then he was not even a great man, but a wicked or foolish man because he claimed to be God. If Jesus did not rise from the dead, thereby proving his divine power, then there has never been a greater failure than Jesus Christ: misunderstood by his disciples, crucified as a common criminal, betrayed by his friend, denied by the one he made leader, even abandoned by God ('My God, my God why have You forsaken me?'). But... After descending to earth, to death and to the grave...he rose again from the dead. Here is the good news, the capstone on the great story of salvation, the winning stroke in the battle. Christ's Resurrection, of course proves his claim to be God; but it also wins our salvation, our eternal life. That is the central point of every sermon in Acts." **"The good news that set the world afire was not 'love your neighbor' or 'God is one' or even 'God is good' – these great truths wise**

men already knew – but the incredible news that God had become a man, died to save us from sin, and rose to save us from death.” ...Peter Kreeft

He rose from the dead and then ascended into heaven to rule and reign at the right hand of God. His bodily ascension validates and completes our redemption as Jesus the Great High Priest presents his own blood to the Father as the offering that atones for and covers over our sins. And now he is at the right hand of the Father, with power and authority, making intercession for us.

That is the good news. That is the point, the purpose behind his life. Jesus came to save us from our sins and from death. He came so we might have life and have it abundantly and eternally. He came so that all who believe in him and receive him, to all that call upon his name, can become the sons and daughters of God! He came so you wouldn't have to live in shame and sin and guilt over your past and defeat. He came so you wouldn't have to spend eternity apart from God. He came so you could have abundant, eternal life. He came for you!

We've covered three of those four essentials of the faith we said the creed summarizes for us: His name, his origin, his history, but there is one more: His destiny. You see, the story is not over yet. The creed is not simply stating or summarizing what was, but it reminds us of what is yet to come. Christians have always been filled with hope and expectancy. That's because we know what lies ahead. We are looking to the future because: **Jesus' destiny involves all of us: "He shall come to judge the quick and the dead."**

Don't panic about the "judge" part of that phrase just yet. Focus on the first three words, "He shall come!" Jesus is going to come again. For everyone that has placed their faith in Christ and your sins are forgiven, that is good news. Jesus is coming. He said in John 14 not to let your heart be troubled. Don't fear. He was going to prepare a place for us and then he would return to take us home so we could be with him forever. He shall come is a promise we long to see fulfilled.

But he shall come also to judge the quick, meaning the living and the dead. He is seated in power and glory and authority at the Father's right hand and he will come again in power and glory to judge the living and the dead. Notice, the first time he came was to save us. He came to provide salvation for all who would turn to him in repentance and faith. He has extended his mercy to us, giving us opportunity to be saved because he is not willing that any should perish but that all come to repentance. However, the next time he comes it will be to judge. The bible

says, **“This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels. He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power on the day he comes to be glorified in his holy people and to be marveled at among all those who have believed.”** 2 Thessalonians 1:7-10

Judgement is coming, someday for all, the living and the dead. It is speaking of the day of resurrection. We don't know when, we don't know the day or the hour, but we know Jesus is coming again and we know when he does, there will not be time for making amends, for repenting and calling upon him. The time for repentance is now. Today. But you don't have to fear that day of judgement. The good news is, for all who have believed and called upon him, the judgement of our sins has already happened. If you have made Jesus Christ the Savior and Lord of your life and you are living for him, you have no reason to fear his coming. Your sins have been forgiven. The judgement, the verdict is – you are declared innocent through the blood and atoning sacrifice of Christ on the cross. We don't fear his coming, instead, we look forward to it. It means our redemption, our deliverance is at hand.

I said at the beginning, it all comes down to what you believe about Jesus. Jesus himself said, **“Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him.”** John 3:36. John remembered what Jesus said and in 1 John he states, **“He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life.”** 1 John 5:12.

That's how simple and true it is. If you've got Jesus, you've got life. Without him, even if you are breathing, you are dead. You can't escape this. You can't escape your need of Jesus to be your Savior and Lord and you can't escape the judgement that is to come.

The creed says “We believe in Jesus Christ His Only Son Our Lord.” I've spent all this time talking about the importance of each line, each word, each phrase, but it comes down to this: **Is Jesus your Savior and Lord?** You see, he didn't just die on the cross to atone for our sins, but that we would make him the Lord of our lives. We surrender our very life to him and follow him in obedience. He becomes Lord and master, owner, manager, friend, director of our lives. The bible reminds us, “we are not our own for we've been bought with a price, the price of Jesus' own flesh and blood.” He gave his life for us and now it's time for us to surrender our

lives to him. He who has the Son has life. He who believes in and upon Jesus as Savior and Lord, you have life – life as it was meant to be lived.

John's gospel tells us of something that happened after Jesus' resurrection that perhaps sums up for us what I've been trying to say. Jesus had appeared to the disciples after the resurrection in John 20. The disciples saw him and believed and were overjoyed, all but Thomas. He was not there when Jesus appeared to them. When the other disciples told Thomas they had seen the risen, living Lord, he said, "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe it." The bible says **"A week later his disciples were in the house again and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, 'Peace be with you!' Then he said to Thomas, 'Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe.' Thomas said to him, 'My Lord and my God!' John 20:25-28**

"My Lord and My God." That's the response called for from each of us. Are you ready to surrender your life to him and make him the Savior and Lord of your life? You believe he is the Christ, God in flesh. You believe he died for you, he died to save you, rose again, ascended to heaven and is coming again some day. Are you ready to say as Thomas did, "My Lord and My God." Make him the Savior and Lord of your life today!

We believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of Heaven and Earth, and in Jesus Christ His Only Son Our Lord.