

Apostle's Creed: Suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead and buried

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[0 : 00] God of grace, thank you for hearing our prayers this morning and for answering them according to your will. Amen.

Well, good morning, Braymar Baptist. Oh, it's Florence. So looking out on this group, welcome to kids who are here, to parents who are visiting, older parents.

Welcome. It's good to see everyone here this morning. So for anyone who may not know me, my name is Kent Dixon and it is my privilege to be the lead pastor here.

Happy Father's Day. So a little over a month ago, we celebrated Mother's Day. We recognize that special days like this can be complicated. And really, Father's Day is no different.

On Father's Day, hopefully Dad gets a break at the barbecue. He gets a chance on being on the receiving end of a nice steak or a burger. So hopefully that's a blessing you receive today.

[1 : 07] And moms, if you haven't thought that ahead, now's your time. So maybe Dad received a new tie. That's not really a thing anymore, iPad. Maybe Dad received a new tie, a nice driver to enhance his golf game.

A new power tool he didn't receive under the tree at Christmas. It can still be a time when we celebrate dads and the positive impact and influence they have.

Or still have in our lives. But just as with Mother's Day, today can be a reminder of loss. Can't it? The loss of a spouse, a parent. For me, it's the loss of a parent. A sibling. Perhaps someone in your life is gone before their time.

And they were a parent. You were an aunt or an uncle and you reflect on that. But this morning, I'd like to take a moment to put some of those things aside as much as possible. So this morning, men of Braemar, we are grateful for you.

[2 : 11] We celebrate you as a unique and special part of our congregation. You are leaders and mentors, encouragers and supporters. We love you and we appreciate you for who you are and all that you mean to us.

All right. Kids can go now, I think. Okay, so just a round of applause for the gentlemen here this morning. Right.

So this morning, we're continuing in our series on the Apostles' Creed. And this is perhaps, here's an awkward transition. This is perhaps the most somber phrase of the entire Creed.

Suffered under Pontius Pilate. Let's say it together, actually. Suffered under Pontius Pilate. Was crucified, dead, and buried. He descended into hell.

And so if you were wondering why we were awkwardly singing Easterish songs this morning, this is what we were leading into. So don't think for a second that I didn't wrestle with the fact that this phrase, yikes, landed on Father's Day.

[3 : 26] It's a day when many of us are in the mood to celebrate and reflect with joy on our dads. And yet, here we find ourselves in our series.

We had Christmas in June last Sunday. And today, we're essentially having Easter in June, as we reflect on this phrase today.

During our Easter series this year, we reflected on the last words or phrases of Jesus from the cross. And during that series, we explored some of the very difficult and painful realities of the crucifixion and Jesus' suffering.

And much of that may still be somewhat fresh in our minds. So I want to explore this concept from a different perspective today.

To begin with, why is it important that the Apostles' Creed specifically names Pontius Pilate?

[4 : 30] This image that you see here, I'd never seen this before, so I was fascinated to find it. This image you see here is a sculptor's representation of Pontius Pilate.

So while this is not a photograph or a painting, and we know the time inherently involved, the cost involved in commissioning a sculptor to do something like that, there's generally the idea that there would be some embellishment.

That they would be making their subject look possibly better than they actually did in real life. But this does give us a sense of what he might have looked like.

This is a fair, reasonable idea. So throughout history, just as some individuals have been notable for the great things they did, famous inventors, scientists, authors, artists, other notable figures, other figures in history stand out for the crimes or other atrocities they may have committed in pursuit of their own goals.

And I'm sure when I say that, names pop into your head. And depending on what part of the world you come from, those names may be different. Pontius Pilate, let's be honest, is somewhat unremarkable as historical figures go, other than for one critical fact.

[6 : 09] He is the man who condemned Jesus Christ, an innocent man to trial and death by crucifixion.

So whether someone recognizes Jesus Christ as the Son of God or not, they will likely acknowledge that his teaching and actions were revolutionary and that he certainly left his mark on human history.

So as the man who is well known for having put that man to death, Pontius Pilate certainly left his mark on history as well.

Who was Pontius Pilate? Pontius Pilate, or simply Pilate, as we most often refer to him, was the fifth Roman prefect of the Roman province of Judea.

So the term prefect is a title given to the leader of an administrative area or region. The English word prefect that we have, that we hear, comes from the Latin word praefectus, which means put in front or in charge.

[7 : 30] At the time of Christ, the Roman province of Judea would have been considered less important. And areas like that were usually entrusted to military men or former military men who would otherwise only have governed smaller parts of larger provinces.

So we have to wonder, was Pilate a military leader who was somehow past his prime? Or had he been assigned to this post in Judea as some kind of punishment?

Was this the Siberia of the Middle East? He was sent here as a punishment. Pilate's role as the prefect of Judea was not a prime posting in any sense of the word.

But after Jesus had been arrested and tried by Jewish religious leaders, the Sanhedrin, the next step was to bring him before the local Roman political leader for formal trial and sentencing.

As we read in Luke 23, when he learns the details of where Jesus had been teaching, Pilate defers to the judgment of a higher authority, Herod Antipas, the ruler of the entire region of Galilee and Perea.

[8 : 58] This Herod, Herod Antipas, was the same man who had been responsible for the execution of John the Baptist's Jesus cousin.

This Herod was also the son of Herod the Great, who had ruled during the time when Jesus was born. The man who had children slaughtered trying to find Jesus.

So we see here that there was quite a connection between Jesus Christ and this family of Roman rulers, this specific family.

The Bible says in Luke 23, verses 8 to 12, When Herod saw Jesus, he was greatly pleased, because for a long time he had been wanting to see him.

From what he had heard about him, he hoped to see him perform a sign of some sort or a miracle. He plied him with many questions, but Jesus gave no answer.

[10 : 05] The chief priests and the teachers of the law were standing there vehemently accusing him. Then Herod and his soldiers ridiculed and mocked him.

Dressed him in an elegant robe, they sent him back to Pilate. That day Herod and Pilate became friends.

Before this, they had been enemies. So we're left wondering here somewhat, why did Herod return Jesus to Pilate for sentencing?

Jesus was a known criminal, in quotations. By many people. He was a rebel. He was a troublemaker. Herod had a great opportunity here to close the loop that had been started by his father.

But instead, he sent him back to Pilate. And as we read, they had been enemies in the past. So why would Herod give Pilate the honor of presiding over the final sentence of Jesus?

[11 : 12] Or was it maybe that Herod knew the risk to his own career of potentially defying the Jewish leaders and releasing Jesus?

That's the one I wonder. Was he actually making a sly political move and setting Pilate up? Did Pilate perceive this as a favor that Herod was doing for him that would win him favor with the locals?

We may never know. But we do know how the story unfolds from here. Pilate found no evidence or justification for Jesus to be executed.

And yet, he bowed to public opinion and pressure. In his decision that day, Pilate doomed himself to becoming an infamous figure in human history.

He forever became the man who killed Jesus. Pilate, Pilate, Pilate, and Jesus to be executed. Or at the very least, he stepped out of the way. When he could have been the voice of reason and justice for an innocent man.

[12 : 29] I've always found it fascinating that the one voice of reason in the whole situation was Pilate's wife. Who's only mentioned in one verse.

The Bible says in Matthew 27, 19. While Pilate was sitting on the judge's seat, his wife sent him this message. Don't have anything to do with that innocent man, Jesus.

For I have suffered a great deal today in a dream because of him. We don't know at what point in Jesus' arrest, trial, and conviction that this dream that Pilate's wife had happened.

But she was likely very aware that her husband had sent soldiers to arrest Jesus. Or that he was in the process of debating and deliberating his innocence or guilt.

But it's significant that this dream seems to have served as a further testimony that Jesus was innocent. And that by sentencing him to death, Pilate would be complicit in one of the greatest crimes in human history.

[13 : 44] This portion of our phrase this morning from the Apostles' Creed is significant in so many ways.

It begins by linking an historical Jesus. A man who lived, breathed, and walked on the earth to Pontius Pilate, another historical figure.

As we explored last week, it's critical and central to our faith that we recognize the humanity of Jesus Christ. That he was born as a baby and experienced the breadth and depth of human joy and human pain.

Anything less than recognizing the full humanity of Jesus gives us an incomplete picture. And only a partial understanding of who he was and who he is.

The reality of his humanity is summarized in our phrase this morning. And also the finality of it.

[15 : 01] The man Jesus was betrayed and arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane. He was brought before the Jewish religious leaders and Pilate, who essentially declared an innocent man to be guilty and allowed him to be executed.

The man Jesus was beaten and carried his cross to the hill the Greeks called Golgotha. The place the Hebrews called the Skull.

That most of us know as Calvary. According to the Gospel of Mark, Jesus endured the torment and agony of the cross from approximately nine in the morning until about three in the afternoon before he died.

Through all of the Gospel accounts, we are given almost an hour-by-hour account of Jesus' arrest, trial, crucifixion, burial, and resurrection.

And while we'll continue to explore the reality of Jesus' divinity and how that ultimately plays out in Scripture and how it continues to play out in our lives, for now, we'll focus primarily on his humanity.

[16 : 28] Historical accounts are clear that the historical Jesus really died. His body was taken away by his friend and follower, Joseph of Arimathea.

Len and I were talking this morning, and I don't remember how we made the connection, but he and I were both involved in a big Easter production called Love According to John. And if you've lived in Edmonton for any length of time and you're a Christian, you've probably seen it, been in it.

Huge production at the Jubilee Auditorium that went 41 years before they finally called it a day. But when I was a kid, I was actually, I played a role, and I was in the scene where they take Jesus' body at night to put it into the tomb.

And wow. I have a friend who was also in that scene with me, and she'll still remark periodically how moved I was as a child. She said, you were weeping. And I said, yeah, it was pretty real.

And so it's that day that we talk about. The Bible says in Mark 15, 42 to 47, it was preparation day.

[17 : 45] That is the day before the Sabbath. So as evening approached, Joseph of Arimathea, a prominent member of the council, who was himself waiting for the kingdom of God, went boldly to Pilate and asked for Jesus' body.

Pilate was surprised to hear that he was already dead. Summoning the centurion, he asked him if Jesus had already died. When he learned from the centurion that it was so, he gave the body to Joseph.

So Joseph bought some linen cloth, took down the body, wrapped it in the linen, and placed it in the tomb cut out of rock. Then he rolled a stone against the entrance of the tomb.

Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joseph saw where he was laid. Why is it important that Jesus died and was buried?

A human death is the final event that marks a human life. For someone to have lived, they need, for someone to die, they need to have truly lived and have been buried.

[19 : 07] But did you catch the first part? They must have truly lived. The human process of birth, life, and death is familiar to us.

And it's also familiar to God through Jesus Christ. But here we recognize an important and critical difference between the death of Jesus and our own.

My friends, our expiry date, at least for now, is final. Chance of death, 100%.

And we well know that Jesus' death, while final from the mortal perspective, was not final from an eternal one.

But we'll explore that further in the weeks ahead. Have you ever wondered, where did Jesus go when he died?

[20 : 12] Here's a big theological question. I remember wondering this when I was a kid. Where did Jesus go when he died?

Scripture's not clear about that, really. And I don't believe that it's helpful for us to get drawn into any great debate about it. Because it's actually the events, I think we'll all agree, that happen three days later that are pretty important.

So, how can we view that final part of the phrase from the Apostles' Creed we're considering this morning that says he descended into hell?

I've had lots of people say to me over the years, and I've wrestled with it, how did Jesus, a man with no sin, go to a place we know waits for people of unrepentant sin?

A people who turn away from forgiveness. who won't recognize it, who won't accept it. And this is another phrase from the Creed, as you can imagine, that causes concern for people.

[21 : 21] How can it be that Jesus, the one who conquered death at the grave, the man who knew no sin, somehow went to hell? So, having wrestled with that myself, I dug into that more this week.

Did Jesus really, literally go to hell as we understand it? You'll be relieved, and hopefully not surprised.

The short answer is no. That's not what the Bible teaches. So, where did this potentially confusing idea, and this wording come from?

the Bible authors were more accurate, not surprisingly, in their use of words than some of our Bible translations or creed writers have been.

And in the Apostles' Creed, you may also somehow, sometimes, hear the words descended to the dead rather than descended into hell. And when those words are used, it's actually a more correct translation.

[22 : 26] The confusion comes in the fact that after the wording of the Apostles' Creed was established, the English word hell for us came to become, came to have a very specific meaning.

And that meaning came to relate to the place, the final resting place, the final judgment, the final condemnation.

And there seems to be no biblical evidence that anyone has gone to or will go to hell, the literal place, as we understand it when we hear that word, until after Jesus' second coming.

The other Greek word used for the abode of the dead, the place where the dead are, is hadas, from which we get the English word and he guesses, Hades, right?

This is the region of the dead, as it was understood. And so before Jesus' ascension, before he conquered death, the spirits of all people went to that place, hadas.

[23 : 41] Scripture seems to suggest that it's into this region that Jesus entered upon his crucifixion. and he came out again, but that's a teaser.

After the final judgment of God, Revelation 20 verse 14 tells us that death and Hades, hadas, itself will be cast into hell, destroyed, eliminated.

therefore, the long answer is yes, Jesus descended into Hades by definition, but not into hell, as we would understand it.

So why is that even included in the creed? The intention, again, you won't be surprised, is to be very clear that Jesus died a literal human death.

and through his resurrection, Jesus defeated death and the power that it had and previously had over all people.

[24 : 54] Amen? This morning, as we've reflected on the suffering, crucifixion, death, and burial of Jesus, I hope we can all be encouraged, as we are at Easter, that this is only part of the amazing story of what Jesus Christ has done for us.

He has conquered death and given us the eternal hope of eternal life for everyone who calls him Lord.

Is Jesus the Lord of your life and the conqueror of your death this morning? If that's not something that you can confidently say yes to this morning, please come and see me because I'd love to talk with you more about making Jesus the Lord of your life.

And if you've accepted Jesus into your life, but haven't yet considered what happens next, haven't yet considered baptism, please come and see me about that too, because I want to help you make that amazing transformation happen in your life.

Let's pray. Father God, through Jesus you won the victory. Jesus claimed that victory over death for us and restored a relationship that we can have with you, not just today as we remember Father's Day, but you are the perfect Father every day, all the time, forgiving, loving, caring.

[26 : 45] God, and so Father, today we thank you for what you've done. We thank you for the sacrifice of your son that we recognize not just at Easter, but this morning as well.

And so Father, as we begin to close our service this morning, I pray that you would encourage dads, encourage those who miss their dads, and give us strength to be the dads that you have called us to be to our children.

We pray these things in the name of your Son, Jesus Christ. Amen.