

Apostle's Creed: The Life Everlasting

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[0 : 00] Well, good morning, Braemar Baptists. For anyone who doesn't know me, I know I say this every Sunday, so most of you know me, but for anyone who doesn't, my name is Kent Dixon, and it's my privilege to be the lead pastor here.

So next week, we're going to be starting a new sermon series called The Story as we launch into the fall. And between the fall and spring of 2020, week by week, we'll be working our way through Scripture from start to finish, exploring God's story.

So let's watch a clip on that now. So that's a bit about the story. So week by week, we will be going through all of Scripture, and not only here in the adult service as I preach, and we'll actually have guests coming to preach throughout that whole time period as well, but the kids will be going through a story curriculum as well.

So they'll be covering the same kind of topics and the same kind of content that we are, obviously age-appropriate. So we'll, as a church, we'll be going through this content together, so it's pretty exciting.

So then, as Leah mentioned in the announcement, starting on Tuesday, September 10th at 6 p.m., for our first food-for-thought meal.

[1 : 22] And then we're going to be starting Discipleship Explored from 7 to 8.30. And so here's a clip for that. So we'll be exploring the book of Philippians together over the course of eight weeks.

And we'll be gaining a greater appreciation for not just this amazing book itself, but also for the confidence and unity that we share in Christ.

So there's information about that Food for Thought and Discipleship Explored course in the bulletin this morning. And I encourage you to invite friends and family who are also Christians, because that's really what this is about.

The name is not a shock, Discipleship Explored. So it's talking about, just as Paul was speaking to the Philippian church, God is still speaking to us as his people today.

And so the ways that we can share the gospel and deeply explore the gospel together. So we'll be doing that through that course on Tuesday nights. Well, here we are.

[2 : 26] We've been on quite a journey together over the past few months, unpacking the phrases of the Apostles' Creed together, exploring how this creed provides a beautiful summary of our essential core beliefs as Christians.

And this morning, this journey comes to a close. And you'll find an insert in your bulletin this morning that includes the full text of the creed. So I encourage you to put that in the front of your Bible.

Maybe put it up on your fridge, put it up in your office at work, to serve as a reminder and hopefully a source of encouragement for you. So before we continue this morning, let's take a moment to recite the creed together, thinking of these words again, as I've said in previous weeks.

Think of this as your personal declaration of your faith. I believe in God, the Father Almighty, creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord, who suffered, sorry, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried.

[3 : 44] He descended to the dead. On the third day, he rose again. He ascended into heaven. He is seated at the right hand of the Father, and he will come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Holy Catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting.

Amen. Amen. So as we continue our exploration of the creed this morning, we come to the phrase right at the end, the life everlasting.

And I've said several times over the course of our series that the creed forms essentially an X. It begins with our declaration of God as the origin and creator of all things.

Then, not surprisingly, we worked our way through the person and sacrifice of Jesus Christ at the center of our faith declaration, before reflecting on the person and the work of the Holy Spirit, the role of God's people, the church.

[4 : 57] And then the X expands outward again until we arrive ultimately at God's plan. Not only for the redemption and restoration of all creation, including those who recognize and accept Jesus Christ as Lord.

The life everlasting. Wow, what a potentially huge topic, isn't it? And that very simple phrase raises so many questions for us.

When will the world end? How will the world end? Why will it end? What happens next? What will happen to people who believe in Jesus?

What will happen to people who don't? As we've talked about before, much of this we can't know. And aside from being aware that it will happen at some point in the future, not necessarily in our future, immediate future, we shouldn't spend a lot of time figuring or fussing about it.

[6 : 12] Because this is where faith comes in. If we truly believe the things that we say we believe, then we must trust that God's plan for us personally, God's plan for the world, God's plan for all of creation, is at work.

And it is good. When people invest for retirement, one of the first things their financial representative will likely tell them is that investment is a long game.

You've probably heard that before. There will be ups and downs. There will be gains and losses. But ultimately, the final goal should be worth the wait.

People who invest their money need to have patience and faith that the road they have chosen, the portfolio they've chosen, will ultimately play out.

And why do financial advisors give advice and reassurance like this? It's partly from experience with many clients over the years, but I also believe that a good financial representative has become a student of human nature.

[7 : 38] They know that people get nervous, especially when they make a financial investment. They know that human nature means that people are constantly looking for reassurance, that they can trust in the plan, trust that in the end it will all be worth it.

That they will learn to tolerate ups and downs in the shorter term, knowing the end will very likely make it all worthwhile. This analogy may be helpful, but do you recognize the fact that when we invest our hope and trust in God for our future, that there are actually no likelies or hopefulls? By investing and trusting our future in God's hands, our ultimate destiny, my friends, is guaranteed. The life everlasting.

When we hear this phrase, most of us think likely of what? Audience participation time. Life everlasting. That's it.

Right? Is that normally what we think of? So I have a confession to make. For much of my Christian life, I had a somewhat limited concept of the afterlife, of eternity and heaven.

[9 : 15] Do you remember the Philadelphia cream cheese commercials that used to be on TV? Do you remember those? Some of you, not all of you. Some are too young. They depicted what seemed like a pop culture view of heaven.

Do you remember that? Fluffy white clouds, people wearing robes, people eating bagels. Are there bagels in heaven? We don't know. It's not a theological issue we need to wrestle with.

But I always had a sense that my eternal destiny with Christ would look something like that, maybe. Except for the bagels. But I sure like bagels. I would go to heaven when I died.

I would spend the rest of eternity with no tears, no pain, unlimited time to spend with my family and friends in the presence of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

But I also perceived there would be no schedule, no specific duties. I found this concept to be comforting, encouraging, and possibly a bit, I'll be honest, boring.

[10 : 28] You may be surprised, or you might not be surprised, by how many Christians perceive our eternal destiny to be simply that.

I believe it's a very common way of looking at the afterlife for more Christians than you might think. We die, we go to heaven to be with God, and that's it.

And I'm not knocking that idea at all. It's partial theology, and it's good theology. But realistically, doesn't it sound better than working at a job you may not like for 40 to 50 years? Or root canals? Or paying car insurance? The topic of the afterlife in heaven is a huge, huge one. And I want to take more time to look at it with you in detail at some point. But what if I told you that there's more to it than simply that?

[11 : 45] A new heaven and a new earth. Do you recognize that phrase? The Bible says in Revelation 21, verses 1 to 4, let's read this together.

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea.

I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride, beautifully dressed for her husband.

And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, Look, God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them.

They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes.

[12 : 45] There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away. Do you hear the words in this passage?

A new heaven and a new earth, because the first heaven and earth have passed away. The holy city coming down out of heaven from God.

God's dwelling place is now among the people. He will dwell with them. God himself will be with them and will be their God.

The Bible is clear on this. When Christians die, we will be with God and with Jesus and with other Christians who have gone before.

But heaven is not our ultimate destination. It's not our final address. Eschatology, the theology of the end times, not surprisingly, Christians debate it all the time.

[14 : 07] we divide ourselves into pre- and post-millennialists. Some theologians say that heaven is not literally up.

People argue over whether or not we will have physical bodies in heaven. And I'm sure you can think of lots of other conversations you've had. As theologian N.T. Wright says, at no point in the whole book, that's Acts, does anyone ever speak or even sound as though they're going to speak of those who follow Jesus following him into heaven.

Nobody says, well, he's gone on before and we'll go and join him. And for very good reason. When the New Testament speaks of God's kingdom, sorry, speaks of God's kingdom, it never, ever refers to heaven pure and simple.

It always refers to God's kingdom coming on earth as Jesus prayed, as in heaven. Jesus himself taught us to pray that.

Wright suggests that we have slipped into the easygoing language of the kingdom of heaven in a sense of God's kingdom being heaven.

[15 : 31] heaven. But the early church never spoke like that. Wright continues in saying, the earth was never seen as merely a training ground for heaven.

But that heaven and earth were always designed to overlap and interlock. And that one day, as the book of Revelation makes clear, one day they will do so fully and forever.

as the new Jerusalem comes down from heaven to earth. The Bible is not clear whether we'll have physical bodies or not when we die in Christ.

But Scripture is abundantly clear that those who die in Christ will return to be with him. The Bible says in Ecclesiastes 12.7, let's read this together, and the dust returns to the ground it came from and the Spirit returns to God who gave it.

As he hung on the cross, Jesus promised the dying robber that he would be with him that same day. Paul also says in 2 Corinthians 5, verses 1, 2, and 8, let's read this together.

[16 : 58] For we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands.

Meanwhile, we groan, longing to be clothed instead in our heavenly dwelling. We are confident, I say, and would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord.

Paul also says in Philippians 1, 1, 21 to 23, I'm jumping around here, sorry, for me to live is Christ and to die is gain.

For I am to go, if I am to go on living, sorry, in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me. Yet what shall I choose?

I do not know. I am torn between the two. I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far.

[18:03] As Christians, when we die and go to be with the Lord, this is not our final reward, but it's a place of time and rest and peace as we wait for the return of Christ, the resurrection of everyone, final judgment, and then our resurrection bodies.

The Bible says in Revelation 6, 9 to 11, and I'll read this for us, when he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God and the testimony they had maintained.

They called out in a loud voice, How long, sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?

Then each of them was given a white robe, and they were told to wait a little longer, until the full number of their fellow servants, their brothers and sisters were killed just as they had been.

So we see here a time of rest for those who have died, or who have been martyred in Christ's name, but also a time of waiting, and of God's patience.

[19:38] Do you remember a few weeks ago when we looked at God's judgment, and we talked about God's loving patience, as he waits.

He waits to give as many people as possible the opportunity to turn to him before Jesus returns.

The Bible doesn't say a great deal about this intermediate state, the interval between this life and the fullness of God's promises.

promises. It focuses more on the hope of the believer coming in the return of Christ. It's at the return of Christ that the life...

So what if our ultimate destiny, as Scripture seems to clearly suggest, is not a place somehow removed from the earth as we know it, living out the rest of eternity in some sort of heavenly bodies, but life in fully restored new bodies, as God always intended for them to be, living on an earth that is familiar and yet somehow wondrously and miraculously different.

Our hope in Christ is not simply immortal souls, my friends, but restored bodies. Imagine the beauty and wonder of all that it means to be human, but without disease and sadness and pain and loss.

[21:27] Imagine the beauty and wonder of all that the earth has to offer, without decay and waste and depletion and extinction.

For me, that is a much more complete picture of what God has in store for us in our life everlasting, our final destination, his final plan for us.

Amen? But without a doubt, the greatest part of this final plan that will make our world gloriously different from the world that we know, God will be there.

That's God's ultimate plan. Not only the restoration of all of creation, but the fully restored relationship of what God's plan of redemption has always been driving for.

God wants to live with his people. The redemption, the restoration, the renewed relationship, the life everlasting that we've been talking about this morning, was only made possible through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ through his great sacrifice.

[23:07] And as we celebrate communion together this morning, we recognize that sacrifice. We approach this table together, as I've said before, not as a Braemar Baptist church table, but as the Lord's table to which he calls us to freely come.

So let's take a moment of quiet reflection before we come to the table together. Thank you. Thank you.