

Creeds, councils and Christ

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Date: 25 June 2023

Preacher: Daniel Chapallaz

[0 : 00] So, before we get to the years 300 or so AD, we're just going to run through kind of just a very few key dates in the life of the church.

Actually, it's believed he went back to Ephesus in the year 98, and so he died. And that's significant because he's the last of the apostles to die.

So, at that point, it's the apostles that were with the Lord Jesus, they've died. And so, now we're in the kind of post-apostolic age, it's called.

And in the year 110 AD, Ignatius of Antioch died. Why do I note that?

Well, he was an important figure. He was in the early church. He was Bishop of Antioch, which was a large and important city. He wrote many letters to encourage churches and to correct churches as well on false teaching.

[1 : 23] He was arrested for refusing to worship idols, and then he was martyred in Rome. We have another martyr, Justin, who I think is known, some people may know more than me as Justin Martyr, actually.

He died in 165 AD. He was martyred after him and some friends of his refused to deny Jesus as Lord.

And he was quite significant in the early church. He was known as a Christian apologist in the church. So, he was another influential figure in the life of the early church.

In 180 AD, the Apostles' Creed was produced, or around that time anyway. It wasn't produced by the apostles, but has been given the name Apostles' Creed, but not until the year 390, actually. But it was a significant, and still is a significant, creed in the life of the church. Sometimes we say it here on Sunday mornings. It was used to teach new converts the faith and to remind true believers about what they believed.

[2 : 41] In the year 250 AD, so we're skipping forward a little bit, we've got the Decree of Dacius. Emperor Dacius passed a law that said all people must sacrifice to Roman gods.

Many Christians defied the law, which meant that people were arrested and even executed. Even big bishops, like the bishops of Rome, Jerusalem, and Antioch, were executed because of this decree.

So, it was a big thing for Christians in the early years of the church, in the early centuries of the church.

In the year 303 AD, you've got Emperor Diocletian, that might be how you say his name, who passed laws against Christians, more laws against Christians, which said if they remained true to their beliefs, then they lost their own property and possessions.

So, you're a Christian, but if you remain true to your Christian beliefs, you lose your home, you lose your possessions. Christians would be arrested and imprisoned or executed again.

[4 : 05] Churches had their buildings destroyed as a result of this decree, and bishops, again, were imprisoned. But instead of the church weakening, apparently the church grew stronger in this time.

It was a tough, tough decade, really, for Christians and persecution. But things changed, and this is where we'll zoom in and spend our time, really.

As Emperor Constantine took charge, he became Roman Emperor, and he became the first one to convert to Christianity in the year 312.

So, this was good for Christians. Does that move on the screen? Oh, how fun. That's evening entertainment.

So, we're moving into 4th century Christianity. And here is Constantine, the first Christian emperor. I'm sure he looked a bit more alive than that.

[5 : 19] And he, in the year 313, so in 312, he converted to Christianity. In the year 313, he brought forth this Edict of Milan, which kind of reversed things for Christians.

So, here's some text from it. When you see this has been granted to Christians by us, your worship will know that we have also conceded to other religions the right of open and free observance of their worship for the sake of the peace of our times, that each one may have the free opportunity to worship as he pleases.

This regulation is made that we may not seem to detract from any dignity of any religion. In other words, Christians could now worship freely.

A huge, huge change in the Roman Empire. And this caused great changes. So, pagan temples, which were used for worshipping other gods, were used for Christian worship.

Apparently, the pantheon in Rome was. Sundays became days free from work. Christian symbols appeared on coins. And property that had been taken from Christians had been returned.

[6 : 48] So, this was a huge reversal for Christians at that time. Constantine, he was seen as an emperor, but he was also kind of seen as a leader in the church.

Government and church kind of came together in this time. Successes to Constantine made church and state relationships quite strange.

But this was a pretty unique time for the church. And in 324 AD, Constantine conquered the eastern half of the Roman Empire.

And as he did so, he found that the eastern church, he found that they were divided by a doctrinal dispute, which is where we're really going to zoom in on.

So, the big issue was something called Arianism. So, there was a preacher, a very popular preacher in Libya, called Arius.

[7 : 59] And he had views about Jesus which were quite different. He said, Arianism.

And it grew in popularity. He said that the Father alone was God. Logos, Jesus, the Word, was a creature created by God, just as he creates all things.

There was once a time when the Son was not. He was the first and greatest of all that God created. So, he's saying Jesus is not eternal and not God, but a creature created by God.

That's what Arianism is. He's trying to understand the Trinity, which is a big concept for our finite human brains to understand.

But Scripture is our guide. And we today, along with many others in this time, believe that Jesus is the eternal Son of God.

[9 : 28] But this false teaching was growing in its influence and its popularity. And so, something kind of had to be done.

There was also another teaching by a guy called Origen, who said there were kind of grades of divinity. So, grades... So, saying that the Father is more than the Son.

The Son is still God, is still eternally God, but he's like less God than the Father is. Many Eastern bishops had accepted Origen's view, actually.

Which is closer to Scripture, but isn't. And Arius disagreed completely. Another key player in all this was a guy called Alexander.

He was Arius' bishop. He was Bishop of Alexandria. Alexander. Bishop of Alexandria. He was unhappy with Origen's view here, as well as Arius' view.

[10 : 42] And he insisted, he was adamant that the Son was fully and truly God, just as the Father was. Which I think we can say an amen to.

And so, all of this led to the calling of a council. A big meeting of bishops and priests and deacons to discuss together what the church believes about Jesus, particularly about Jesus.

And so, it was a big, big moment. And here's a quote from the time, which says, now when they were all assembled, it appeared evident that the proceeding was the work of God.

in as much as men who had been most widely separated, not merely in sentiment, but also personally, and by difference of country, place, and nation, were here brought together and comprised within the walls of a single city, forming, as it were, a vast garland of priests composed of a variety of the choicest flowers.

What a wonderful language. In other words, it was an incredible meeting. People from all over the place, from all sorts of church backgrounds and kind of varying views on Jesus in Scripture came together.

[12 : 21] They came to thrash this out. And it lasted about a month. It was led by Constantine, the emperor. And within this time, they came up with what we call the Nicene Creed.

And we're going to say the Nicene Creed in a bit. It did develop later on. There were some changes that had to be made, but they came up with the Nicene Creed.

A Nicene Creed which rejected Arianism. It was very clear that what Arianism taught was wrong. And the kind of key thing in all of this was a funny word called *homousios*.

You don't have to remember that, but it's a funny word, so I thought I'd share it with this. And it means of the same being or essence as the Father.

And so this is kind of the key bit. This is the key bit in the Nicene Creed, okay? So it says, It says, It's saying Jesus and the Father are both gods.

[14 : 00] They're both divine. and it was a clear rejection of what Arius and his colleagues taught.

After the church worked through, after the Council of Nicaea worked through all this and came up with the Nicene Creed, it also came up with a series of what were called anathemas.

Does anyone know what anathema means? A curse. Yeah, kind of. It's a curse. And they were saying it, they came up with these anathemas to give over people, to declare someone to be outside the church.

If you don't believe what we believe about Jesus here, we're saying you're outside the church. And so if people believed in Arianism, if people believed that Jesus was created and not eternally God, they're declared outside the church.

And so this is what they said. As for those who say there was a time when he, the Logos, Jesus, the Word, was not, and he was not before he was created, and he was created out of nothing or out of another essence or thing, and the Son of God is created or changeable or can alter, the Holy Catholic, Catholic here means universal, and apostolic church, anathematizes those who say such things.

[15 : 42] So those who say things that disagree with what we believe about Jesus, they're out of the church. And so Arius and some of his supporters, they were kind of sent into exile.

They were sent out of the church. So really, what had been going on, I think, was an amazing work of God to bring together a wide variety of people to thrash out together the doctrine of the church, things that we can be thankful for, that God led them in this way.

It was a key time. We're going to think through some questions and some Bible stuff on this kind of topic in a moment in our groups.

But before we do, I'd love us to do two things. Firstly, I'd love us to say the Nicene Creed, and then I'd love us to sing You're the Word of God the Father, which seems appropriate to sing.

So we'll say this creed. We're going to go up to where it says, We believe in the Holy Spirit, because as we'll see next week, there was more disagreement about what the Holy Spirit's role in the Trinity is.

[17 : 05] And so they just had on the end of the Nicene Creed in 325, they just had on the end, We believe in the Holy Spirit. They didn't want to say any more on that bit, but they got the Jesus part sorted.

So we're going to say this. It's a few slides, and then we'll sing that song. So, together, We believe in one God, God, the Father, the Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all that is seen and unseen.

We believe in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, light from light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one being with the Father.

through Him, all things were made for us men and for our salvation. He came down from heaven.

By the power of the Holy Spirit, He became incarnate of the Virgin Mary and was made man.

For our sake, He was crucified under Pontius Pilate. He suffered death and was buried. On the third day, He rose again, in accordance with the Scriptures.

[18 : 24] He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and His kingdom will have no end.

We believe in the Holy Spirit. So let's, when we get the music sorted, let's stand and sing. Let's stand and sing.

Let's stand and sing. Every star and every planet has been fashioned by your hand.

For creation holds together by the power of your voice. Let the skies prepare your glory, let the land and seas rejoice.

You're the author of creation, you're the Lord of every man. And your cry of love rings out across the land.

[19 : 58] Let the gates of angels, let the sea and save the lost. And exchange the joy of heaven for the anguish of the cross.

With a prayer you fled the hungry, with a word you stilled the sea. Yet how silently you suffered, let the guilty made no free.

You're the author of creation, you're the Lord of every man. And your cry of love rings out across the land.

And your cry of love rings out across the land. You're the origin of the night. As engaged in all the grave And ascended into heaven Meeting mountains in your way Now you stand before the Father Interceding for your own From each tribe and son and nation You are leading sinners' home You are the altar of creation You are the Lord of every land And your cry of love returns across the land There we go

There we are Although Arianism I guess doesn't exist Maybe by name in the same way today It still kind of does So I was thinking about what Jehovah Witnesses believe For instance about the Lord Jesus And just a quick Google search Came up with Jehovah's Witnesses believe That Jesus was created by Jehovah as the Archangel Michael Before the physical world existed And is a lesser God Lesser though mighty God Small g as well Jehovah's Witnesses believe That when Jesus was born on earth He was a mere human And not God in the flesh It sounds very similar to Arianism to me And there will be others That may believe similar things About the Lord Jesus

[22 : 55] And so to get us looking in the Bible together We've got two questions And your group will have one of the two So there should be a slip of paper around where your group is And the first one If someone tells us that Jesus was a created being Rather than of the same being as God How do these and maybe some other scriptures you know Help you answer against this And the same for if Jesus isn't eternal So slightly different things Similarities between the questions But if Jesus was a created being And not absolutely divine Or if Jesus isn't eternally God Very similar things But slight difference I think So have a chat in your groups Maybe probably for ten minutes I think we could probably keep going for a while We'll see If we run out of steam before ten minutes

Then we can come together Have a chat in your groups I'll join this little group at the front And maybe one or two others might Shamar do you want to come join us at the front maybe?

Hopefully we've had helpful discussions In terms of the top one Which group?

Which group? We over here covered that And the front two That makes sense That makes logical sense If I put the front two Is that one?

Any feedback on that question? If someone tells us Jesus was a created being Rather than of the same being as God If someone tells us he's any lesser than God That he doesn't share equality with God How do these and maybe other scriptures That came to your mind Help you to answer against this?

[25 : 05] Mark Is it on?

I don't know We can hear you anyway For the sake of the recording There's some sort of sound coming from it Carry on Sorry Mark He is the creator himself He's the agent of all the Of what we got Yeah Great As I was saying to this group I don't know if this is true In Jehovah's Witnesses But it's certainly true in Aaronism About Jesus created Like the first creation And then everything else So Definitely Jesus was involved in creation He was there at the beginning But if someone said Well Jesus was created first

Then everything else If we Just to push us even further along the line How How would Would you just be more confused?

Does that make any sense? What I just said So People So Mark was saying And very rightly and helpfully Saying that That creation Came through The Lord Jesus Is that right What you were saying?

And It's there at the beginning But some might say God the Father Created Christ First And then the rest Of creation Just pushing us A bit deeper How How would these passages Help then?

[27 : 12] Do these passages Say that He was God? Something else Created Jesus And Jesus Didn't create all things Some Yeah Can you use the Roving mic When you I mean You probably don't need To repeat that David But Any Any other Feedback From that question?

Ruth Yeah Just for the sake Of those Yeah It was just Very briefly That When you were Pushing that Thought further I was just thinking That Colossians 1 Says he was Before all things As well So even Before things Were created He Was before them Yeah I mean We were just Reading Philippians In our group And it says Christ Jesus Who being in the Very nature God Did not consider Equality with God So Paul's suggesting Saying to us He is equal With God He is God He's God In very His very nature Yeah Other three groups Someone tells you That Jesus Isn't eternal How was your Discussions Back there?

We were The top one Oh were you Oh were you The top one? Yeah Ah Cool So it must be The middle two Groups then I mean We did We did look At those Verses Which John fairly Clearly Teaches That Jesus Was eternal And John One In the Beginning Was the Word And the Word Was God And the Word Was with God And the Word Was God Which I Think the JWs Translate As a God Which is Not what It says Yeah But we Actually Looked To some Other Passages As well The Philippians One You've Already Mentioned In Colossians One But there's Also Hebrews One One One To Eight Which Talks About the Son Being Well Being In very Nature God There's Hebrews Thirteen Eight I think It is Jesus Christ The same Yesterday Today And Forever And we Also Looked At Isaiah Six Sorry

Isaiah Nine Verse Six Which Actually Bears On both Questions Can you Read That It says For unto Us a Child is Born To us A son Is Given And the Government Will be On his Shoulders And he Will be Called Wonderful Counselor Mighty God Everlasting Father Notice the Everlasting Father The Prince Of peace Of the increase Of his government And peace There will be no end That's Really Helpful Verse To Remind Us Of Yeah Thank You Thank You Any Any Other Comments From Groups Roger David Hang on Hang on Mike's Coming Mike's Coming I love a Good Point I love a Good Passage Is Micah Five Micah Five Out of Bethlehem Of The Clans Of Ephrata Will be One born Who's Going For Everlasting

The word Everlasting Could be Translated For Maternity Yeah Thank You Christmas Passages How How well Do they Help us Like Yeah Verses We all Know As well And Verses People See On Christmas Cards Telling Us That Jesus Is God That He's Eternally God That's Exciting Thank You Thank You Any Other Comments Or Even Questions I Mean We're Dealing With Some Big Stuff I Can't Promise To Answer Them But I Said You Mentioned The Name Of The Heretics I Think It's Worth Mentioning The Name Of Athanasius So I Think It was The Great Defender Of Orthodoxy At The Council Of Nicaea And Basically Persuaded All the Others Yes Athanasius Was Influential And Went On To Be Even

[31 : 49] More Influential Between The Council Of Nicaea And The Council Of I Think It's Chalcedon In 381 Yeah Thanks Thanks Shout Out Shout Out To Athanasius Aaron You Have The Mic Yeah No Don't Worry I've Lost My Thought Okay That's Fine That's Fine Our Sema Has A Question Thank You Oh Jeroem I Didn't Even Notice!

Jeroem Sorry Jeroem First Then Then I Just Wondered What People Make Of Romans 9 Is There Something Romans 9 In My Version It Says To Them Belong The Patriarchs And From Their Race According To The Flesh Is The Christ Who Is God Over All Blessed That Would At An Initial Glance Seem Like A Very Straightforward Text But Is There Something That Can Happen With The Commas Or What Verse Is That Romans 9 5 Romans 9 Verse 5 It Says Who Is God Overall Yeah Just After Mentioning Christ So A Kind Of Natural Reading Of That Is He Saying Christ Is God Overall Sticks With That Or Put Commas In Different Places I Mean Maybe They Do Yeah That Would Be Interesting To Look Up Does Anyone Know?

No We'll Do Some Homework Sorry I Can't Hear That's A Good Point Only That I Thought Yeah We Were Saying That Often It's God They Say Our God It's Worth I Guess Checking What Translation Someone's Reading Yeah My Question Was Sort Of Answered By Jerome So Thank You Jerome Well I Was Just Wondering How Jehovah Witness Can Say That Jesus Is Not God How Do They Explain That To Their Followers Or I Just Wanted To Understand Part Of It Is The Bible They Used And Faulty Translation Really Yeah Oh

This is Exciting Time! just the the famous um quote from revelation that um it says where is it um verse a i am the alpha and the omega says the lord god who is who was and who is to come the almighty and as you go down jesus says himself do not be afraid i am the first and the last and the alpha and the omega is is everything from beginning to end there is no nothing outside of that so that kind of definitively says jesus quotes and it's written you know um god says uh one and the same first and the last thanks yeah really really helpful verse to yeah point us to um any any last

comment or question before we wrap up sorry thanks we were discussing that revelation text as well and one of the things i think was striking is that john falls down as if dead kind of in in an act of worship and utter roar and in other places when he goes to worship angels they say please get up don't worship you know so and there are other places i can't remember where in the scripture where it clearly says christ is worshipped yeah yeah and um i mean a little bit different but similar in in our home group on wednesday we were looking at exodus 3 and the burning bush and moses going up to it and having to take off his sandals his holy ground and um like that that reverence towards god and john shows that as he falls down on his knees before before the living lord jesus who is god doesn't he and um you've got isaiah as well when he's confronted with the glory of god he woe is me i don't know if he falls to his knees i can't remember but um it's a similar similar reactions isn't it um to almighty god um yeah helpful thank you um just to just to move on a little bit after uh the council of nicea uh in 325 um and to tee up something for us uh next week uh that everything wasn't quite sorted with the council of nicea and the uh nicene creed so you've got a a bit of a battle going on between the nicenes as they were calling it people of the nicene creed position and people of the uh the originists who believed very clearly that the father and the son were two distinct persons so so there's a a little bit of battle a little bit of difference uh going on um between these two two sides um so that the nicene's believing jesus yeah absolutely is it's the same being with the father that word homousios um uh but the originists um saying that they're also the father and son are two distinct persons they are both god but they're two distinct persons um so that adds something else uh to the whole discussions that were going on then and so um the the originist party were forming kind of the eastern view the eastern church's view and the the nice scenes were forming kind of the western view um but athanasius uh as steve mentioned um was a kind of key player in in bringing the two

sides together um when um constantine the emperor died his two sons had the empire divided between them uh so constantine in the west who favored the nicenes and and constantius uh the very imaginative names all coming out of constantine um in the east who favored the area uh the um origins um you're you're you're awake that's good um and so athanasius was was a key part in all their discussions and um his place was kind of taken up by a new generation uh of nicene theologians who kind of arose from uh this time um so you've got basil of caesarea gregory of nissa who was basil's brother and gregory of nazian nazian says something like that um who met uh basil uh met the bottom gregory um whilst they were studying in the capital city of uh cappadocia and they became really good friends and apparently they were described as kind of the jonathan and david of the patristic age um basil the top one uh was known as a great preacher when he was appointed as a bishop he spent a lot of time uh after the the the nicene uh nicea council of nicea he spent a lot of time preaching and writing on the holy spirit uh he argued for the full deity as in the spirit being fully god's because this this became a debate that came out of the discussions on on the lord jesus and so basil uh we'll we'll think a little bit more about him next week when we think about the holy spirit um gregory of nazianzus preached five theological or orations five sermons in other words uh which refuted arianism and summed up the nicene doctrine and these these sermons were really influential they attracted huge numbers to his church um and uh that you can even buy them in book form today i i had the privilege of reading them when i was old kill but they were hard hard reads um the the the influence of these three men brought about a final union between the nicene party and the originist party and the problem was centered around two greek words so this is where it all kind of comes together um so you you've got you've got the people that that believe yeah jesus is of the same being as the father and you've got people that believe yeah that's right but there's there's that also two distinct persons so how do you bring that all together well two words the first word is usia uh which means the the one nature being or essence of god which father and son fully share and eat and equally share making them one god in other words the father and the son are both god um that that the the the bold bits my words my interpretation um and then you've got the other word which is hypostasis which means the particular and distinct form in which the divine nature exists in father and son making them two distinct persons in other words the father and the son are two distinct persons and what basil and the two gregories were helping the church to understand

[42 : 36] well actually we can believe both of these things we can believe firstly that the father and son are both god they are both god but they are also two distinct persons and that's what what basil and the gregories helped us uh help the church this time and and continue to help us to understand um truth about about the son and the father they are both gods uh and they are two distinct persons

but both god um and that helps us as we we understand uh the trinity from what the the bible shows us um once the debate was settled on christ they they could then properly uh debate the uh holy spirit but we'll we'll save that for next week um we've done plenty this evening um thank you uh hopefully hopefully it's been a helpful time for us all um maybe could one or two people lead us in a prayer of praise to our our triune gods um and then we'll we'll sing uh and pray a final prayer um yeah let's do that um thank you