

Suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 12 April 2020

Preacher: Benjamin Wilks

[0 : 00] We're going to read from God's Word now. If you've got a Bible there, perhaps you'd like to turn to Romans chapter 5, and we'll be reading the first 11 verses of Romans chapter 5.

The words will appear on the screen for you as well, if that's more convenient. Romans chapter 5 from verse 1. Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand, and we boast in the hope of the glory of God.

Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance. Perseverance, character. And character, hope.

And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us. You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly.

Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this.

[1 : 27] While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him?

For if, while we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life?

Not only is this so, but we also boast in God, through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation. Well, over the last few months at Covenant Church, we've been considering the Apostles' Creed, looking at little sections once a month, and I thought we would look at the next bit of it today.

This ancient statement of the fundamental truths, it guides our thinking, it summarises the essential doctrines of our faith. And in confessing that we too believe these things, we stand in company with Christians around the world today and down through the ages.

The creed goes like this. I believe in God, the Father Almighty, creator 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.

[2 : 59] He descended into hell. On the third day, he rose again from the dead. He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. And he will come again 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. Now, the resurrection of Jesus that we celebrate every time we join together to worship on the Lord's Day, the resurrection that we are particularly mindful of today on Easter Sunday, the resurrection of our Lord Jesus is essential to our faith.

As one writer puts it, had Jesus not risen but stayed dead, the bottom would drop out of Christianity. However, as we're going through the Creed, we haven't quite got there yet.

We considered Jesus' birth last time that we looked at the Creed, and so this time, we're going to look especially at this line. Suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried.

[4 : 07] In many ways, the resurrection that comes a couple of lines later in the Creed, one of the key functions of the resurrection is that it proves that this earlier line did actually happen, that it did actually achieve what we believe it did.

In many ways, the events of Easter Sunday serve to vindicate and to complete the events of Good Friday. That's not all, and we will think about more effects of Jesus' resurrection when we come on to that, and as we often do, but one key thing is that it vindicates, it proves Good Friday.

So, the Jesus in whom we believe is the one who suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried. Now, up to this point in the Creed, it's all very positive, isn't it?

You've got the God who is both Father and Creator. You've got Jesus, his Son, our Lord, miraculously born. So far, so good. But here in this line, the tone changes.

What happened to this Jesus? He suffered. Some people have questioned why it is that this creed, this summary, why it doesn't contain anything about the events of Jesus' life, kind of skips straight from birth through to the end.

[5 : 29] Now, one answer to that is that it isn't supposed to replace the Gospel accounts. We're supposed to read it alongside Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. It kind of gives us boundary markers or signposts along the way as we read those accounts.

And that's where you go if you want the details of his life. That's one answer. The second is that this word is actually a fair summary of Jesus' life. He suffered.

That's not to say that there weren't good times. He had genuine friendship with his disciples and with Lazarus and with plenty of others. And doubtless, he played and had fun with his parents and his siblings as he grew and so on and so forth.

Not universally suffering, but overall, his life was marked by suffering. It's repeatedly characterized that way in the pages of the New Testament.

In Matthew 8, Jesus answered a teacher of the law who came to him and said, Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go. Jesus answered by saying, Foxes have dens and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head.

[6 : 36] Peter writes in chapter 4 of his first letter that Christ suffered in his body. Now maybe, maybe we're tempted by the idea of a triumphal Jesus.

A Jesus who sort of floated through life, unhindered and unhurt, right through to the end. Maybe we imagine him kind of above those sorts of things, above the petty difficulties of life.

Maybe we imagine him just as he walked atop the water rather than wading through it like you and I must. Maybe we like the idea of that triumphal Jesus because we imagine that this triumphal Jesus will then draw us into that same kind of life that we too will be able to rise above any possible suffering.

Now that picture of the triumphal Jesus, it may well be attractive, but that's not the Jesus of the Bible. That's not the Jesus of this creed. No, no. This Jesus suffered.

And it's that life that we're invited into. A life of suffering. That's what Paul writes to the Romans. If we are children, then we are heirs, heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.

[8 : 00] If you want to be heirs, if you want the glory, then you must share in the suffering too. Jesus suffered throughout his life. And that suffering reaches its culmination when he suffered under Pontius Pilate.

The suffering over the course of Jesus' life, it was kind of a foretaste, a forerunner of the suffering that was to come, his death upon the cross. But before we get to that death, why mention Pontius Pilate?

I mean, sure, Mary, Jesus' mother, she gets named, but if you're going to put in another person, why Pilate? The 20th century theologian Karl Barth, he says, Pilate enters the creed like a dog into a nice room.

He doesn't seem like he belongs. He's just coming and messing things up. Why not name Peter or Paul or one of the other apostles if you're going to put another name in? Why Pilate?

Well, I've got at least two reasons why that would be. Firstly, this is history. This isn't a made-up story. The salvation of the world can be dated.

[9 : 11] People were there when it happened. You can look up in the encyclopedia when it is that Pilate lived and died. The Apostles' Creed is not fundamentally a list of concepts, of ideas.

No, at the heart of the creed is a story, a record of events, and the core of our faith is a historical narrative of things that actually happened, and Pilate is part of that.

Maybe in your head, maybe the Easter story and the Christmas story for that matter, maybe to you these are nice stories, part and parcel with Santa Claus and the Easter bunny and so on and so forth.

Nice stories on a par with classic fairy tales or with a good Disney film. A nice story to tell the children. Maybe that's what these stories are to you, but what we say, what the Bible says, what the Apostles' Creed says, this is not just a story.

This is historical fact. This is about real people who lived and died and you can look it up. Number one reason why Pilate's there. This is history.

[10 : 23] Secondly, the mention of Pilate. This points to the fact that Jesus was innocent. Pilate did not believe that Jesus deserved to die.

He declared him to be innocent. Twice he said, I find no basis for a charge against him. The very judge who condemned Jesus to die declared him to be innocent.

It wasn't proper that Jesus would be secretly carried away by the Jews and quietly done away with, though the Jewish authorities played their part in bringing him to Pilate and demanding that he act, pushing him into it.

It was not proper that Jesus be lynched by the mob, though the crowds played their part, shouting, crucify, crucify. Pilate thought that he was being a shrewd governor, giving the people what they wanted, even as he tried to absolve himself of guilt by washing his hands.

Jesus was declared innocent of crime and yet was condemned. Why? Not for his own wrongdoing, but for yours and for mine.

[11 : 37] This judicial murder was permitted by God so that Jesus' unjust condemnation would be in the place of our righteous condemnation.

Jesus suffered under Pontius Pilate. And then, having been condemned to death by Pilate, having been beaten and stripped and flogged, then he was crucified.

Now, crucifixion is one of the slowest and most agonising methods of execution that has ever been devised. Hanging there hour after hour, gasping for breath, ripping your own flesh as you push up to catch a breath and then sink back down in exhaustion.

And Jesus endured it willingly. He went knowingly. He was led, unprotesting, as a lamb to the slaughter. He was crucified.

And the thing about crucifixion is that it's not just about the physical death. It's not just about the physical pain, but it's about the humiliation.

- [12 : 59] See, Rome almost never crucified her own citizens. Crucifixion was a death reserved for slaves and foreigners and disgraced soldiers and latterly for Christians.
- Why? Because crucifixion isn't only about killing someone. It's about a public disgrace. Much as in former days in our own country, wrongdoers would be punished by being placed in the stocks to be spat upon and worse by the community.
- Or as the heads of those who'd been executed were displayed on the city walls. The state declares its triumph and it humiliates the defeated enemy, the criminal.
- And in a culture of honour and shame, then the pain of the soul, the humiliation, it can be far worse than the pain of the body, even to the point of death.
- Jesus was humiliated. Perhaps you're familiar with his words on the cross from Psalm 22. My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?
- [14 : 09] That's the first line of the psalm and that is a terrible thing that Jesus is enduring and that he is conscious of. But as the first line of the psalm, we're not supposed to stop there.
- That first line is supposed to cause us to bring to mind the rest of the psalm. And most of us are probably not as familiar with the 22nd psalm as we are with the 23rd.
- But here, Jesus intends his heroes to consider the whole thing. Verses 6 and 7. I am a worm and not a man, scorned by everyone, despised by the people.
- All who see me mock me. They hurl insults, shaking their heads. The humiliation of the cross.
- It is such that the only good man who ever lived. The one who is the Son of Man, the one who is the Son of God, the one who is in truth, both Lord and Christ.
- [15 : 11] He is, in the estimation of the onlookers, and perhaps even in how he feels himself, he is a worm and not a man, scorned by everyone.
- Jesus was crucified. He was humiliated, cast out of human community, rejected by God, rejected by the world, a fate worse than death.
- Paul summarizes the situation in his letter to the Philippians. Christ Jesus, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage.
- Rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness, and being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross.
- Even death on a cross. Jesus suffered the physical agony of the cross. He suffered the crushing humiliation of crucifixion, and furthermore, he endured the curse.
- [16 : 20] Deuteronomy 21 says, anyone who is hung on a pole is under God's curse. Or in older language that's maybe more familiar to some of you, cursed is everyone that hangeth on a tree.
- And in Galatians, Paul explicitly connects this to Jesus' death on the cross, saying, Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us.
- For it is written, cursed is everyone who is hung on a pole. Jesus did not merely die. He died in this particular way.
- He died suffering humiliation. He died under a judicial sentence of death, and crucially, he died under the curse of God. He died becoming a curse for us in order that the curse would be lifted from us.
- This is the gospel. This is the good news of Easter. This is our reason for rejoicing. This is why we sing. This is why we call it Good Friday.

[17 : 30] This is what we celebrate on Easter Sunday. We rejoice because we are forgiven. We celebrate because Jesus took our punishment.

You and me, we deserve to be cursed by God. God. Because we've all of us fallen short of his standards. We've all of us lived the way that we want to live, not the way that he teaches us to live.

Every human being who's ever lived has let down other people. We've been selfish and greedy and angry and impatient and unloving towards others.

Every human being save one. We all of us deserve to be cursed by God, but the only man who doesn't deserve it took that curse that we don't have to.

And all of this is according to plan. This is what God had in mind. Jesus, Jesus counted the cost and he considered it worthwhile.

[18 : 34] He knew the pain he would endure. He knew the humiliation he would suffer. He knew the curse he would be under and he went. such was the extent of his love.

In Romans chapter 8, the Apostle Paul writes that God did not spare his own son but gave him up for us all. That's the extent of the love that we read about earlier in chapter 5 of this letter, that God demonstrates his own love for us in this.

While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. that is the extent of God's love. God's justice is maintained because the punishment due for sin is poured out is borne by him in my place.

And God's love is demonstrated as he willingly goes. Jim Packer says this miscarriage of human justice was the doing of divine justice.

Jesus was unjustly condemned by Pilate and yet it was the means of God's justice. God's justice is maintained. God's mercy is shown because we who deserve this anger and condemnation do not receive it.

[19 : 49] God's love is demonstrated because he died that we need not. This is the good news that we celebrate at Easter. This is the amazing reality of the gospel, the core of the Christian faith.

This is why Easter means hope. Hope that we don't have to die because Jesus died in our place. Hope that we can look forward to eternity in God's presence, not under his curse because the curse has been taken from us.

These are the essential truths that define our faith. Our trust rests on Jesus Christ, the one who suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried.

Let's pray. Lord Jesus, we quickly lose sight of what it cost you to go to the cross, to live a life marked with suffering, to suffer to the point of death and not merely death, but death on a cross with all of the humiliation and the disgrace as you endured God's curse for us.

Lord Jesus, may we not take that lightly. Grant that we might see what you have done for us, that we might rejoice in what you have won for us.

[21 : 24] This Easter Sunday and always. Amen. Amen.