

Suffered under Pontius Pilate, Was Crucified, Dead and Buried; He Descended into Hell

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- [0 : 00] we believe that he suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried.
- He descended into hell. We believe that he suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and was buried. He descended into hell.
- In just a few short words, the Apostles' Creed summarizes the life and death of Jesus, the entirety of the Gospels in just a few words. I've been minister of this church for over 20 years, and most every Sunday I've preached from one of the Gospels.
- So the Creed here compresses over 20 years of teaching into 13 words. What immediately strikes us about this statement from the Creed is its starkness.
- Up until now, we've talked of the glory of Almighty God, maker of heaven and earth, the supreme majesty of Jesus Christ, our Lord, and as we saw last week from Kirk, the extraordinary conception and ordinary birth of Jesus.
- [1 : 13] Everything speaks of Christ's glorious holiness and his majestic dignity. But in these few words we'd hardly expect to read, he suffered at the hands of a man he created, Pontius Pilate.
- He dies on a cross he created. He's buried in a tomb he created. And he descends into a hell he created. Now we could focus this evening on every aspect of the Creedal statement, but with your forgiveness, I've chosen to focus on the third clause.
- He was buried. We speak much of his suffering and his death, but not so much about his burial. Likewise, I'm not at all sure what to make of the descent of Christ into hell.
- To talk through the various options in detail would take us all evening and probably wouldn't get us anywhere. Besides which, and this is very important, no creed is directly inspired of God.
- None of them carry the same authority as the Bible itself. In other words, it is entirely possible that the writers of the Apostles' Creed were wrong about this. That Christ did not descend into the physical place the Bible calls hell.
- [2 : 39] So with your forgiveness and an admission of cowardice on my part, I've decided that rather for our encouragement, we'll focus our attention on the burial of Jesus, the account of which we've read together from the Gospel according to John.
- The burial of Jesus is not an incidental of the Gospel, something which happened, but which has of little or no significance. We tend to talk about Jesus' death and resurrection, and rightly so, but the burial of Jesus is of such central importance to us as Christians that the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 15 includes it as a fundamental tradition of the faith.
- Jesus died, was buried, rose, and appeared. As we consider together the burial of Jesus, it seems to me that it marks an end to five things.
- An end to death, an end to death, an end to death, an end to life, an end to terror, an end to suffering, and an end to sin.

Now, the purpose of tonight's sermon is entirely encouragement for all of us. So let this clause of the Apostles' Creed, he was buried, fill each one of us here with courage and with hope.

[4 : 03] First of all then, the burial of Jesus is an end to doubt, an end to doubt. As we're going to see, the burial of Jesus has many consequences for what we believe as Christians.

One of the most important is the certainty of the truth of the Bible, the certainty of the truth of the Bible. Is the Bible a book of fables? Is it the clever creation of men who wanted to make a name for themselves?

No, the burial of Jesus assures us that the Bible is true and puts an end to our doubt as to its inspiration and its inerrancy.

The Bible is absolutely true. In Isaiah 53, verse 9, words written 600 years before the burial of Jesus, the prophecies of Isaiah concerning the suffering of Christ and His redeeming death, we read there of Jesus, they made His grave with the wicked and with a rich man in His death.

They made His grave with the wicked and with a rich man in His death. Isaiah prophesies the burial of Jesus in a grave not His own, a grave which belonged to a rich man.

[5 : 23] And we learn later that the grave in which Jesus was buried belonged to Simon of Arimathea, a secret disciple of Jesus, a rich man in Israel.

We also have the prophecies relating to the prophet Jonah. For three days and nights, Jonah was in the belly of that great fish. In Matthew 11, verse 40, long before His death, Jesus said, just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.

Jonah's wild journey in the belly of that great fish was a picture of what would happen to Jesus in His burial. Then we have Jesus' own prophecies concerning His death and burial.

For example, in Mark 10, 34, Jesus predicts His suffering in these words, They will mock Him and spit on Him and flog Him and kill Him and after three days He will rise again.

And then in Mark 14, verse 7, just a few verses later, in the context of the sinful woman who anointed Jesus with perfume, He said, She has done what she could.

[6 : 49] She has anointed my body beforehand for burial. These are just a few verses we could have quoted, but what we have here is a cumulative body of prophecy from the Bible pointing to the burial of Jesus.

Now, by definition, all these prophecies were made before the event. The fact that they were fulfilled and that Jesus was buried shows that the Bible is true.

It's true. We notice from 1 Corinthians 15 that in his list of fundamentals of the Christian faith, Paul couches them in terms of in accordance with the Scriptures.

In accordance with the Scriptures. If we are in any doubt as to whether the Bible is true, the burial of Jesus helps to clear our doubt. The prophecies are made beforehand.

They are fulfilled in the burial of Jesus. If Jesus was not buried, if the prophecies were found to be false, it would have serious consequences for our view of the reliability of the Bible.

[8 : 02] But he was buried and the Bible is true. We can therefore rely upon it to be true in every other area of our lives as well.

When the Bible assures us, as we sang in Psalm 102, that God is with the brokenhearted, we can be sure that He will be with us when we're anxious, depressed, or grieving.

When the Bible assures us that faith in Christ is all that is necessary for eternal life and salvation, we can be sure of it. The burial of Jesus provides us with an end to doubt concerning the truth, reliability, and divine inspiration of the Bible.

An end to doubt. Second, the burial of Jesus provides us with an end to life. An end to life. The death of Jesus is a central article of the Christian faith.

The claim that Jesus did not die but only seemed to die would break our faith. If Jesus did not die, there is no forgiveness for the sinner, there is no hope for the desperate, and there is no life for the dead.

[9 : 23] In short, a Christianity where Jesus did not die on the cross is not a Christianity at all. If Jesus did not die upon the cross, there is no sacrifice for our sins before God and we still stand guilty, hopeless, and condemned.

It is of primary importance, therefore, as Christians that we firmly hold to the reality of the death of Christ. For many centuries, skeptics have tried to disprove the death of Jesus, the most famous example of which is the now infamous and disproved swoon theory, swoon hypothesis, that Jesus didn't die on the cross, he simply appeared to die.

In reality, he was in a swoon or a coma. The question becomes for us, how do we know that Jesus really died? Remember, what's at stake here is our salvation.

Our salvation's at stake. We know that Jesus died because he was buried. The soldiers who crucified Jesus knew that he was dead because when they pierced his side, blood and water, plural fluid, poured forth, signs of death.

They were experienced executioners. They knew death when they saw it. Those who took Jesus down from the cross, wrapped him in grave clothes, and buried him in the tomb, also knew he was dead.

[10 : 59] They were more familiar firsthand with death than we are today. The burial of Jesus is the final piece of evidence that Jesus really did die that day on the cross.

The living are not buried, only the dead. The burial of Jesus confirms that Jesus Christ, God's only begotten Son, our Lord, conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, really did die on the cross.

It was no act, no swoon, no fable. Nearly 2,000 years ago, the Son of God, having endured inhumane torture, was crucified and died.

There can be no doubt about it. The burial of Jesus is the confirmation of the end of His life. Now, as Christians, this is of central importance to us.

Because Jesus died on the cross, we can be sure that as our substitute, He has dealt with our sins. He has conquered the devil. He has earned eternal life for all those who have faith in Him.

[12 : 10] Because it's the confirmation of His death, the burial of Jesus is the assurance of our salvation. We can ask the question, how do I know that I'm saved?

How do I know that I'm a Christian? How can I know that my sins have been forgiven and that by faith in Jesus I have eternal life? How can I know? Because Jesus died and was buried.

The end of Jesus' life is the beginning of our faith. The end of Jesus' life is the spark of our assurance. The end of Jesus' life is the engine of our hope.

Jesus really did die and because of that we can enjoy abundant life in and through Him. The Apostles' Creed invites us to say, I believe in the death of Christ because He was buried.

So this article of our creed, He was buried, assures us that our faith in Christ is not in vain. Well, third, He was buried means an end to suffering, an end to suffering.

[13 : 29] The words, He descended into hell have always been problematic for the church. Does this mean that during the three days of His burial, Jesus went down into hell?

Surely not. Since on the cross Jesus said to the dying thief, Today you shall be with me in paradise. Others, like John Calvin, have suggested that this clause is in the wrong place.

That the creed should really read, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, descended into hell, died, and was buried.

The idea is that for those three hours of darkness when God was pouring out His wrath upon Jesus on account of our sin, Jesus was experiencing the pain and torment of hell.

I think this is probably the best option. But another option is presented by the commentator of the Heidelberg Catechism, one of the guys who helped framed it as well, who suggested that the suffering, crucifixion, and death part of this clause refer to the bodily sufferings of Jesus.

[14 : 45] And the descended into hell part corresponds to the spiritual sufferings of Jesus. So this idea gets around that awkward and wrong idea of Jesus physically descending into hell.

It's probably far closer to the understanding of John Calvin and the Reformed Church. Or it could just be, as I said earlier, the Apostles' Creed is just plain wrong at this point.

It's not inspired in the same way as the Bible is. But we can take our picks as to what it means as long as we don't believe that for those three days while He was in the tomb, Jesus was actually in hell because He just plain wasn't.

On the cross, Jesus cried out, it is finished. It is finished. The work of redemption and salvation is complete.

His sacrifice on the cross was more than sufficient to take all our sins away and give eternal life to all His people. If Jesus had to go to hell after the cross, then His cry of it is finished was not true.

[16 : 00] there was more for Him to do and there wasn't. So, what is the truth about His burial? I want to suggest that among all the other things we're talking about, it was an end to His suffering, an end to His suffering.

It was rest for Jesus after His suffering, crucifixion, and death. It was God who set down the principle of work and rest.

He took six days to create the universe and rested on the seventh. In the same way, the burial of Jesus, the three days He spent in that grave, were His Sabbath rest.

rest. He was crucified on the Friday, was in the tomb on the Saturday, that's the Jewish Sabbath, and rose from the grave on the Sunday.

So, for that Saturday Sabbath, Jesus was resting from the work of redemption in which He had engaged of suffering, being crucified, and dying.

[17 : 09] God rested from His work of creation on the Sabbath. Jesus rested from His work of redemption or recreation on the Sabbath.

The word Sabbath means rest, and Jesus was resting in the grave. It became for Him a house of healing, a house of recuperation.

Never will He suffer in the same way again. His work of bearing our sin and the penalty of our death is over, and for those three days He rests in that tomb.

Again, this article of the Creed, He was buried, reminds us, the redeeming work of Jesus is complete. When He cried out on the cross, it is finished, it is finished, He was telling the truth.

He has won forgiveness, hope, and eternal life for all who will believe in Him. Fourth, the burial of Jesus is an end to terror, an end to terror.

[18 : 22] For many people, graveyards are scary places, not because we're superstitious and believe in ghosts, but because graveyards remind us of our own mortality, that we all too must die.

The 16th century German reformer, Zacharias Ursinus, now that's a funky name, he was one of the authors of the Heidelberg Catechism, and he's the guy who wrote a commentary on the Heidelberg Catechism, and I love the way in which he describes the burial of Christ and how it takes away the terror of the grave.

Listen, listen to Ursinus' words. Jesus was buried that we might not be terrified in view of the grave, but might know that He has sanctified our graves by His own burial, so that they are no longer graves to us, but chambers and resting places in which we may quietly and restfully repose until we are again raised to life.

He has sanctified our graves by His own burial, so that they are no longer graves to us, but chambers and resting places. Again, of Christ's burial, the famous English preacher Charles Spurgeon said, Our Lord died and condescended to be buried, to sweeten the grave for His people, to sweeten the grave for His people.

Last week in our evening service, referring to Christ's birth, Kirk quoted the church father, Gregory Nazianzus, who said, That which Christ has not assumed, that which Christ does not become, perhaps that which He has not assumed, He has not healed.

[20 : 25] And the point was that by taking a human nature by virtue of His incarnation, Christ has made salvation certain for us, that which He did not assume, He has not healed.

He took upon Himself a human nature, He has healed the human nature Himself. By extension, by virtue of His being buried, Christ has healed the grave for His people.

That which He has not assumed, He has not healed. He has healed the grave for His people by being buried. To use Spurgeon's words, He has sweetened it.

Or to use the language of the commentary in the catechism, He has sanctified it. The grave for us is no longer a place of terror. It's been healed by Christ's burial.

He's been there before us, He's sweetened it for us, He has sanctified it for us. We can now stand in a graveyard and rather than be afraid, think of all those Christians who are buried there, who are enjoying the same rest Christ Himself experienced for those three days.

[21 : 40] For us and for them, the grave is no longer a place of terror, but a place of rest. For our bodies, according to our own shorter catechism, still united to Christ, wait until He raises them again to perfection.

Last summer, I was on a holiday in my home village of Golspey in the north of Scotland, and there's a peen in the village which juts out into the North Sea from which, as a child, my friends and I used to jump off and dive into the cold waters of the North Sea.

Well, last year, I happened to be standing at the end of that pier with two of my sons and a bunch of local boys who were looking into the sea and thinking to themselves, they were nervous about going in and I wanted, you know, I wanted to relive my childhood.

It's my midlife crisis thing, you know. So, I took off my t-shirt and I said, you're all a bunch of Jesses and I jumped in. It's only a 15-foot drop into cold water but once I was in, I looked up at those still standing on the pier.

Although my teeth were absolutely chattering and I was Baltic cold, I said to them, come on in, the water's lovely. And soon, they were all jumping in.

[23 : 08] I knew that the only way to get rid of the nervousness of others was to do it first myself. It is a very poor illustration of this truth of Scripture but the best way to get rid of the terror of the grave for us was for Jesus to have done it first himself.

He's been buried both to sweeten and sanctify his grave, the grave for us. His burial is an end of terror for us.

And then the last thing the burial of Christ means is an end to sin, an end to sin. The burial of Jesus, for all it may seem incidental and small, is an incredibly important truth, especially for the Apostle Paul in his discussion of the Christian life in the book of Romans.

Now, we tend to think of the book of Romans as a defense of the doctrine of justification by faith alone in Christ alone. And that it is.

But it's so much more. Romans details for us how we are both to survive and thrive as Christians. In Romans 6, having dealt with the central themes of justification and life through the righteousness and sacrifice of Jesus Christ, apart from our own obedience to the law, he shows how this understanding of Christian salvation and this alone will produce Christians who are truly striving after holiness and righteousness.

[24 : 54] Justification by faith alone and that alone produces Christians who are truly striving after holiness and righteousness. He begins Romans 6 with this famous statement, What then shall we say?

Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? But it's in verse 4 we find the burial of Jesus mentioned. There he writes, We were buried, therefore, with him by baptism into death in order that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.

We were buried, therefore, with him by baptism into death in order that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. Paul is using here the burial of Jesus as a picture of what happens to us when we become Christians.

it's as if we go to join Jesus in the grave. And our spiritual bodies are lying beside his physical body in the tomb.

But what comes out of the tomb on the third day isn't the spiritual body which we used to have, which was dominated by sin, but by that which is characterized by Paul as being newness of life.

[26 : 21] That's the body that comes from the tomb on the third day. Newness of life. The person we once were, dominated by sin and lust, is dead and buried with Jesus in the tomb.

what comes forth on the day of resurrection is new. Sin no longer has dominion over us. Paul later says in verse 6, we know that our old self was crucified with Him, Jesus, in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing so that we might no longer be enslaved to sin.

To quote Ursinus, that commentator on the Heidelberg Catechism, Christ was buried so that we, being spiritually dead, may rest from sin.

We, being spiritually dead, may rest from sin. If you ask the question, where's the old me? The old me, before I became a Christian, where is He?

The old me, which was completely enslaved by my sinful desires and dominated by my greedy lusts. Paul wants to answer, it's in the tomb of Jesus.

[27 : 39] It's still there. What rose from that tomb is the new Christian who is now free to rest from the enslavement and domination of sin to live in the glorious liberty of the sons and daughters of God.

You see, Paul is using the burial of Jesus as an image of how we are new creations in Christ and that in Jesus we must walk in newness of life according to the spirit of holiness and not according to the old ways, the domination and enslavement of sin.

If this sermon on the burial of Jesus is designed as an encouragement, it encourages us to stop going back into the tomb in which our old self is buried, to stop indulging in sin, rather to walk in newness of life, to pursue holiness, Christlikeness and love, to live the resurrection life of the Christian and not the dead life of the non-Christian.

So we have an end to doubt, an end to life, an end to suffering, an end to terror and an end to sin.

Buried is just one word in the Apostles' Creed but encapsulated within that word is the entirety of the gospel, the entire reason that we're here as Christians this evening and hold tight the hope of eternal life in our hearts.

[29 : 18] I know that some people quite like to spend time in graveyards. I don't really. The only time I ever go to the graveyard is to visit the grave of my late father to stand there blethering to him and telling him all the news.

But whether we do or don't like visiting graveyards, it is good that on a frequent basis we visit the grave of Jesus.

because there in that empty tomb in which he once was buried but from which he has risen is all our hope and all our encouragement through faith in him.

Amen. our head is