

## **Series Apostles' Creed #5**

### **This Message Jesus Christ ... Suffered Under Pontius Pilate, Was Crucified , Died, and Buried**

#### **Scripture Reading Psalm 22:1-18**

The incarnation of Jesus Christ, which was the previous subject, was only the first of a series of steps which led to His death on the cross of Calvary. The reason why Jesus, the only begotten Son of God the Father, became a man was to shed His blood as the all-sufficient sacrifice for the sins of the human race. Scripture declares that God “did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all” (Romans 8:32). We also read that “God demonstrated his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:7-8).

The Apostles' Creed jumps from Christ's birth to the statement about His sufferings and death, omitting all references to His earthly ministry, teachings, and miracles. Information about the life of Jesus on earth was not unimportant to those who were affirming their faith in a creedal statement. While it was true that the “miracles, wonders, and signs” done by Jesus demonstrated that He was the Messiah and that He had power and authority over evil, the most essential facts on which we build our faith concern His birth, death, and resurrection, the facts which have been distilled into the Creed.

The New Testament puts a lot of emphasis on the death of Jesus. More than a third of the verses in the four gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John) describe the circumstances of Jesus' arrest, trials, sufferings, crucifixion, and death, and much of the rest of the New Testament explains the significance of these events. Jesus' death made it possible for sinful people who were under the wrath of God to be redeemed and reconciled to God. Jesus' death, along with the resurrection, are the greatest events in human history. This is why the Scriptures, as well as the Creed, give a strong emphasize to Jesus' death.

Many commentators think the naming of Pontius Pilate in the Creed is a little strange, and they ask, Why?. Pilate was the Roman governor of Judea at the time of Jesus' trial and execution. Rome was the world power of that era, and Judea was a small and sometimes troublesome region of the empire.

Under the Roman occupation, the Jews had no authority to execute anyone, so after the Jewish religious leaders determined that Jesus was worthy of death, they bound Him, led Him away and handed Him over to Pilate with the request that Jesus be sentenced to death.

Pontius Pilate is mentioned in the Creed for two main reasons. First, he was the one who ordered that Jesus be flogged and then handed over to the Roman soldiers to be crucified. Thus he is associated with the suffering endured by Jesus. The second reason is quite ironic — Pilate was the one who publically attested to the innocence of Jesus before condemning Him. He said three times, “I find no fault in this man. He has done nothing to deserve death” (Luke 23:4, 14, 15, 20, 22), and he tried to set Jesus free (John 19:12). Furthermore, Pilate recognized that the Jews had handed Jesus over to him “out of envy” and jealousy (Matthew 27:18). Even Pilate’s wife “sent him a message: ‘Don’t have anything to do with that innocent man’” (Matthew 27:19).

Yet, in spite of the lack of evidence against Jesus, Pilate agreed to the flogging and the sentence of death by crucifixion. It was politically expedient for him to do so because this is what the Jews wanted and Pilate did not want to antagonize them and stir up civil dissension. Principles of justice as they applied to an innocent person was not his primary concern. Pilate’s symbolic and cynical activity of washing his hands did not excuse him of his guilt in condemning Jesus to death. Neither did the craftiness of the Jewish religious leaders in handing Jesus over to the Roman authorities so that gentiles could do their “dirty work” of execution.

Who was really responsible for the death of Jesus? The Apostle Peter answered this question when he was preaching to the Jews on the day of Pentecost. He said, “This man (referring to Jesus) was handed over to you (the Jews) by God’s set purpose and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men (referring to the Romans) put him to death by nailing him on the cross” (Acts 2:23). Did you catch the explanation about who was responsible for the death of Jesus? His death involved the interplay of divine purpose and human choice.

The ultimate cause of Jesus' death was God! (Peter said that "Jesus was handed over by God's set purpose and foreknowledge.") The death also involved human responsibility ("You Jews, with the help of wicked men, the Romans, put him to death"). God, according to His purpose and plan, influenced what happened; yet everything that happened occurred through the actions of people who were expressing their own human freedom and making their own choices. This interplay between God's sovereignty and human free will is a paradox which is impossible for us to understand but, according to Scripture, it is the method God uses to accomplish His will.

Crucifixion was the Roman form of execution reserved for enemies of the state and the vilest of criminals. It was used by the Romans during a 400 year period of time beginning about 80 BC. However, the mode of Jesus' death was predicted in the time of David, about 1000 BC. It is time now for our Scripture reading. Let's read responsively.

Read Psalm 22:1-18

In this Psalm, one verse (v16) mentioned the piercing of hands and feet. Several other verses in Psalm 22 mention aspects of the suffering of crucifixion, for example, "I am poured out like water and all my bones are out of joint," and "I can count all my bones; people stare and gloat over me." These words anticipated the manner of Jesus' death.

There are other Old Testament statements and pictures which anticipate the death of Jesus Christ. One of the pictures is described in Numbers 21. As the Israelites traveled in the desert on their way to the promised land, many of them were bitten by poisonous snakes. When the people cried out to Moses for help, he made a bronze snake and put it on a pole in the center of the camp where bite victims could see it. We are informed that all those who looked at the pole in faith were healed. Jesus referred to this incident when He was speaking to Nicodemus about His death. He said, "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life" (John 3:14-15). The allusion to the manner of His death is obvious.

There are other parts of Psalm 22 which also closely relate to the crucifixion of Jesus. Shortly before He “gave up His spirit,” “Jesus cried out in a loud voice, ‘Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?’” (Matt 27:46). These are the words which are in verse 1 of Psalm 22, “My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?” Jesus voiced these words because there was a period of time while He was on the cross when the Father had to turn away from Him; indeed, the Father literally had to sever the eternal relationship which the Father and Son enjoyed.

We cannot begin to understand what this separation meant to either the Father or the Son, although we can understand why it was necessary. It was necessary because of the nature of God and the sinfulness of humanity. The holiness of God is the most outstanding attribute of God. It is this quality of holiness which alienated people from God after the disobedience of Adam and Eve in the Garden in Eden. Because of their sin, they were no longer the pure, untarnished, sanctified individuals that they were created to be, and God, because of His holiness, could no longer abide with them.

There was not only the loss of spiritual connection with God, but the human race was placed under condemnation and judgment for not being the kind of people they were supposed to be. God had such a hatred of sin and unrighteousness that He promised to pour out His wrath on ungodly and wicked sinners (Rom 1:17-18). Just like the attribute of holiness, the attribute of wrath against sin is an integral part of the nature of God.

So as Jesus hung on the cross, He experienced the burdens of eternity in two ways — on the one hand there was the absolute holiness of the Father who had sent Him into the world and, on the other hand, there was the weight of the sins of the world which He had assumed. As God in flesh, Jesus was identified with the holiness of the Father. Yet, as the One who identified with sinful humanity and bore the sins of the world, Jesus was under the judgment of the Father. For a period of time while Jesus was on the cross, the wrath of the Father was directed toward Him.

As physical creatures, we identify with the physical sufferings of Jesus. We picture in our minds the agonies of the flogging, the crown of thorns, the punctures in hands and feet by nails, the slow suffocation. We must not minimize the physical sufferings of Jesus. However, the real suffering of Jesus was emotional and spiritual. His greatest pain was His separation from the Father, and His isolation as the sin bearer of the world.

The Apostle Paul said “God made Him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God II Cor 5:21

Jesus Christ did not die because of His own personal sin. He, as the sinless One, died for the benefit of people. He sacrificed Himself for others, and died the death that each sinner deserves to die. As Scripture states, He “gave himself for our sins to rescue us from the present evil age , according to the will of our God and Father” (Galatians 1:4).

There is also a sense in which Jesus died for the benefit of God. Christ’s death gave God a satisfactory basis for extending mercy to us. God offers salvation to us, not because we deserve it or because He decides to simply overlook sin, but because Christ’s death satisfied the Father’s demand of justice. There were divine requirements which had to be met. It is important that we understand God’s method of justice and our justification.

Scripture explains that death is the consequence and penalty for sin. The Scriptures state unequivocally that “the wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23) and “A man reaps what he sows. The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction” (Galatians 6:7-8). Fortunately, in the plan of God, Jesus took our place in the judgment.

Scripture states that “When we were God’s enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son” (Romans 5:10) and, in another passage, “God was pleased .... through him to reconcile to himself all things, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross .... And although once you were alienated from God and were his enemies .... As shown by your evil behavior, yet now he has reconciled you by Christ’s physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation” (Colossians 1:19-22).

The death of Jesus Christ was the means whereby Almighty God made it possible for sinful people to be reconciled to Him without compromising His holy opposition to sin. The Father “sent his only begotten Son into the world .... to save the world” (John 3:16-17). If Jesus Christ had not sacrificed Himself on behalf of sinful people, God could not have provided salvation without compromising His divine law of righteousness. From God’s point of view, all humans are naturally unjust. The death of Jesus Christ made it possible for God to justify the unjust. To be “justified” means to be “made acceptable to God.”

The sacrificial death of the holy, righteous Son of God made it possible for God to forgive sin. What His divine law of righteousness and justice demanded, His love provided. It would be foolish for the sinner to face the heavenly Judge on his or her own merits, because the sinner has none, but pardon for sin is possible if a suitable substitute can be found to pay the penalty. Jesus offered Himself as the sinner's substitute on the cross at Calvary. When He assumed responsibility for the sins of every sinner who has ever lived or will live, the wrath of God against sin was poured out on Him. Thus God was just in all His actions; that is, His righteous divine standards were upheld, and He was by Himself the Justifier of sinners.

The Apostle Paul stated the results of our reconciliation this way: "In love, He (the Father) predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will ... In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace that he lavished on us" (Ephesians 1:5-7). Sinners are accepted by the Father in Christ, and only in Christ. Because of the sacrifice of Jesus, sinners are no more alienated and separated from God.

How should we respond to the crucifixion of Jesus Christ? The first response is belief. This is not belief in the fact of Christ's death. Even His executioners recognized that it happened; otherwise they would not have given permission for His burial. Rather, belief in Christ's death means belief in its purpose. The purpose is succinctly stated in the words: "Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures" (I Corinthians 15:3). A believer must recognize that Christ's death was for his or her sins.

A second response is assurance. Consider these words of the Apostle Paul: "What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all, how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. .... Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?" Paul answers his questions with this concluding thought: "I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

A third response should be allegiance and devoted service to God. If God the Father loved us enough to have a plan for our redemption and reconciliation, and if He loved us enough to send His only Son to carry out the plan, and the Son loved us enough to die for us, how can we ignore them? Or fail to make them the priorities of our lives here on earth?

As we end this message, I want to read and comment on a few verses from the end of Psalm 22. The last part of Psalm 22 describes the results of the crucifixion. Verse 24 describes how the Father responded to His Son on the cross: "He has not despised or distained the suffering of the afflicted one; he has not hidden his face from him but has listened to his cry for help." The last two verses describe the outcome of the crucifixion: "Posterity will serve him; future generations will be told about the Lord. They will proclaim his righteousness to a people yet unborn." These verses state that we are responsible as members of our generation to serve the Lord and tell others of the Lord.

Then the very last phrase. It speaks of completed action "He has done it." The last words of Jesus on the cross were "it is finished." Jesus released His life knowing that everything essential for salvation had been completed. Praise the Lord, we are the spiritual benefactors.

End

Some additional information:

“Godly wrath is not like human wrath. The wrath of God is the steady, unrelenting, unremitting, uncompromising antagonism to evil in all its forms and manifestations.” John Stott The wrath of God is the only response we can expect from a holy, righteous, just God against all that is unjust, untrue, and impure.

Man is alienated from God by sin, and God is alienated from man by wrath. It is by the substitutionary death of Christ that sin is overcome and wrath is averted, so that God can look on man without displeasure and man can look on God without fear. David Wells

Deuteronomy 21 declares that everyone who hangs on a tree is under God’s curse. The hanging on a tree symbolized divine judgment and rejection. Because of this verse, the Jews consider the idea of a crucified Messiah extremely distasteful. Yet the curse by God is exactly the point. It is the curse which makes the death of Jesus Christ meaningful. The Apostle Paul wrote, “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us, for it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree’” (Galatians 3:13). Death by crucifixion is theologically significant.