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### ***Apostle's Creed: I Believe In Jesus Christ***

1 Corinthians 15:1-8

Now I would remind you, brothers and sisters, of the good news that I proclaimed to you, which you in turn received, in which also you stand,  
2 through which also you are being saved, if you hold firmly to the message that I proclaimed to you—unless you have come to believe in vain.  
3 For I handed on to you as of first importance what I in turn had received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures,  
4 and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures,  
5 and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve.  
6 Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers and sisters at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have died.  
7 Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles.  
8 Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me.

The Apostle's Creed says this:

I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of Heaven and Earth... and ***in Jesus Christ...***

We have a lot of information about ***Jesus Christ***.

Most of it comes from the 27 books of the New Testament, which were written between 50 and 95 A.D.

These include the four gospels, which all describe the same Jesus, but from four different perspectives.

But the ***earliest books*** of the Bible were actually letters by the apostle Paul, who converted from a Jew named Saul persecuting followers of Jesus, to a preacher of the gospel.

His conversion was probably a year or two after the death of Jesus, in the 30s A.D.

Galatians and Thessalonians are believed to be some of his earliest letters.

We also have writings ***outside the Bible*** that confirm the existence of Jesus of Nazareth.

The Jewish historian Flavius ***Josephus*** wrote a comprehensive history of the Jews for the Romans near the end of the first century and he mentions Jesus many times.

Later a Roman senator and historian named ***Tacitus*** mentions the crucifixion of Jesus by Pontius Pilate in Jerusalem.

Adam Hamilton. *Creed* (Abingdon: Nashville, 2016). pg. 36-37.

We think of ***Jesus Christ*** as being a very unique name, don't we?

Did you know that the 2010 census lists 7 people named Jesus Christ in the United States? Geez, talk about pressure!

What were those parents thinking? Mike Poteet. Adam Hamilton's *Creed: Youth Study Book*, pg. 29

But actually the name Jesus was a very ***common, ordinary name*** in the time of Jesus of Nazareth.

In those days you usually had a first name, then a second one would describe what you did, or the village you lived in.

In the Hebrew and Aramaic (which Jesus spoke) then, Jesus' name was ***Yeshua***.

As of 2008, archeologists had found 71 tombs of men named Yeshua in that area and time. Yeshua, or Jesus, was a common ordinary name.

And it has a very simple meaning: God is salvation.

Mike Poteet. Adam Hamilton's *Creed: Youth Study Book*, pg. 27.

***Christ*** is not Jesus' last name—it's his description.

Christ was the Greek translation of the Hebrew word for Messiah, meaning anointed one.

Prophets, priests, and kings of Israel were often anointed on the head with oil, to signify that they had been chosen, or set apart for their duties by God.

Today we usually anoint to convey God's healing power on someone.

But did you know some are ***anointed as leaders in modern times?***

The kings and queens of England are anointed at their coronations.

In 1953 Queen Elizabeth II had oil poured into a spoon and the Archbishop of Canterbury put his thumb in the oil

and put it on her hands, her neck and on her head in the sign of the cross—  
consecrating her hands, heart and mind to rule on God’s behalf!

Adam Hamilton. *Creed* (Abingdon: Nashville, 2016). pg. 59.

The Creed continues: ***Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord***

From the earliest of times those who followed Jesus  
knew he was more than just a man or a prophet.

He did things ordinary people could not do in his miracles and healings,  
he taught in ways of more authority and depth than anyone before him,  
he had command over creation,  
as seen when he calms the wind and waves for the disciples.

***Son of God*** would have been a common term for the people of Israel.

Their kings were called sons of God. (2 Sam 7:14, 1 Chron 28:6, Psalm 2).

But in the baptism stories of Jesus, something special happens.

The voice from heaven says ***This is my Son, the Beloved*** (Mark 1:10-11, Matt  
3:13-17)

We believe that Jesus Christ is the ***only Son*** of God, our Lord.

The Greek word for ***Lord***, *kyrios*, is found 537 times in the New Testament,  
and it’s the same word that was used to translate

Yahweh in the Old Testament when it was translated into Greek.

Jesus was not just ***a*** Lord, he was ***The*** Lord. Adam Hamilton. *Creed* (Abingdon:  
Nashville, 2016). pg. 66.

The church didn’t make ***formal decisions*** about the humanity and divinity of  
Jesus until the year 325 at the Council of Nicea,

but from the earliest letters and books of the New Testament,  
we see the ideas were there—

remember the opening of the Gospel of John?

Doesn’t it describe Jesus as one with the Creator?

*In the beginning was the Word...*

***Jesus himself*** speaks of being the Son of the Father God  
throughout the Gospel of John,

and he even seems to know this at age twelve,

when he tells his parents he was in his Father’s house, in Luke 2:49!

The Apostle's Creed of the second century *doesn't explain* the Trinity, or the full humanity and divinity of Jesus, but it does point to those ideas, which were more fully developed in the fourth and fifth centuries.

***Was conceived by the Holy Spirit, Born of the Virgin Mary***

Over the years some people have asked me if you have to believe in the Virgin birth. My answer is what you *have* to believe is Jesus is Lord and Savior, And I'd argue, that believing in the virgin birth is a powerful way to understand what we call the ***Incarnation***—the fact that God became flesh in Jesus—and Jesus was ***Emmanuel***, God with us. The virgin birth is only mentioned in Matthew and Luke, but I think it helps us understand Jesus as the only Son of God. Jesus' birth was special. It was ***God coming to be one of us***.

***Suffered under Pontius Pilate***—this we know from the Gospels, and other outside historical sources from the time. And it happened around 30 A.D.

***Was crucified, dead, and buried.***

We know this from all the gospels, from Paul's letters, and even historians outside the scriptures. Jesus really did die on the cross, and he was buried in a tomb.

***He descended into hell.***

Wait a minute—what? Where did Jesus go? Why is this in the Creed? Some denominations leave this phrase out, others have translated the ancient creed as *he descended to the dead*.

The early ideas of death at the time of Jesus were ***different than our ideas*** of heaven and hell today. They were very concerned with what happened to the people who died before the time of Jesus.

Adam Hamilton, in his book *Creed*, talks about the ancient understanding of death.

Death was a realm known as *Sheol or Hades*, under the earth.  
 And in that realm were two places—  
**Paradise** for the righteous, and **Gehenna**, for the unrighteous.  
 Adam Hamilton. *Creed* (Abingdon: Nashville, 2016). pg. 70-71.

Jesus even mentions this realm in his *parable of the rich man and Lazarus* in Luke 16:19-31.

Lazarus was a poor beggar, and there was a rich man who refused to help him. After they died, the rich man went to Gehenna, a place of torment, and he looked across to Paradise where Abraham and Lazarus were, and Abraham reminded the rich man he had received his good things in life, and refused to help others. That is why he is in torment, while Lazarus is comforted, and a great chasm exists between them.

Jesus mentions **Paradise** on the cross in Luke 23:43, when he tells a thief next to him, “*Today you will be with me in Paradise*”.

It was believed that the people in Gehenna and Paradise were **awaiting final judgment** by God, when those in Paradise would receive their eternal heavenly bodies, and the others would go to eternal torment. Adam Hamilton. *Creed* (Abingdon: Nashville, 2016). pg.70-71.

**Today when people die**, we often think of the cloud of witnesses from Hebrews (Heb 12), of nothing, not even death, separating us from the love of Christ (Romans 8), or the resurrection of the dead mentioned in Paul’s letters (1 Cor 15)—and we associate our death with an immediate departure to heaven, not a waiting area.

And yet, we also believe **that is not the final ending**—because Jesus is coming again, and he will judge all humanity and redeem all creation. There will be a **new heaven and earth**, as it says in Revelation 21.

The bottom line is this: it’s a **mystery**. When we talk of heaven and hell Presbyterians err on the side of humbly admitting **we don’t have all the answers**,

and we're a tad *skeptical* of those who say they do!

So why say Jesus *descended into hell*?

Well, it reflects the early church's idea that *no realm* in heaven, earth, or under the earth, is beyond Jesus' love and redemption.

Many believed that Jesus went to the realm of the dead before his resurrection to offer salvation to those who had died before his resurrection.

<http://www.umc.org/news-and-media/did-jesus-descend-into-hell-or-to-the-dead>

Of course we have no proof of it,

but it conveys the idea that Jesus has in fact *conquered all of death*.

In Revelation 1:18 Christ comes saying, *I am the first and the last, the living one, I was dead and now live forever..and I have the keys of Death and Hades.*

The Creed continues....*On the third day he rose again from the dead.*

We believe Jesus was resurrected on the third day.

We read it in all the gospels.

It is the basis of the good news in 1 Corinthians 15 today.

The Bible contains *numerous sightings* of the risen Lord Jesus.

It wasn't just Mary in the garden (Jn 20), or Peter

or the people on the road to Emmaus (Lk 24:13-35).

Jesus appeared to the disciples

in an upper room twice (Mk 16, Luke 24, John 20),

He met them on the beach and cooked dinner for them at the Sea of Galilee (John 21:1-25),

1 Corinthians 15:6 mentions Jesus appearing to more than 500 people!

Finally in Luke 24 and the continuation of that book in Acts 1, we see that

Jesus appears on the Mount of Olives forty days after his resurrection,

and then ascends into heaven. (Luke 24:44-49, Act 1:3-8).

Why?

The Creed continues....*He ascended into heaven,*

*and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty,*

*from whence he shall come to judge the quick (which means living) and the dead.*

Two angels in Acts 1:11 ask those watching his ascension, *why do you stand here looking into the sky? The same Jesus who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven.*

(see also Matt 24:30)

Jesus' disciples seemed to know that ***Jesus would return in glory***, because they ask to sit at his right and left hand in glory (Mk 10:35-45).

***Jesus speaks of his return himself*** in Matthew 24:30-32, and he talks about being a ***judge*** in many parables, like the parable of the ten bridesmaids, the ten talents, and separating the sheep and the goats by those who helped the least of these (Matt 25).

And of course the book of Revelation speaks of Christ's judgment, and the new heaven and earth that come when Christ returns.

We may not fully understand his coming judgment, but we do know it ***will happen***,

and at an ***unknown time***. (Matt 24:36, Mark 13:32)

Again, it is a mystery.

The Jesus section of the Apostle's Creed is pivotal.

As Hamilton says so well, the story of Jesus, who he was and is, that is ***our defining story*** as Christians.

Just as the Exodus is a defining story for the worship and faith of the Jewish people, Jesus' story is our main story. Adam Hamilton. *Creed* (Abingdon: Nashville, 2016). pg.75.

It is the ***hinge*** upon which our faith is built, so it's important to know ***what we believe and why*** about the only Son of God, our Lord.

But we also are called to ***humility*** when it comes to our doctrines about God. None of us has all the answers.

In our Wednesday night Bible study we often say '***that's for the FAQ line***', which refers to what we think might be a long line in heaven for the answers to those ***Frequently Asked Questions*** about faith, and scripture, and life.

When we don't know the answer, and can't seem to understand something—***that's for the FAQ line***.

And, by the way, we often nominate Mark to stand in the line for us!

Adam Hamilton is a bit more eloquent.  
He suggests that our beliefs about Jesus  
can be part of a “**generous orthodoxy**”.  
In other words, the essentials of the faith are often full of ideas  
that we don’t fully understand, and that’s ok.

It’s important to **live like Jesus** when you follow this Creed,  
and have some love, mercy, and grace  
for those who understand it differently. Adam Hamilton. *Creed* (Abingdon: Nashville,  
2016). Pg 69.

He mentions the great theologian **Karl Barth**,  
who wrote 14 volumes about the essentials of Christianity,  
called the Church Dogmatics.  
But when asked if he could summarize it all,  
Barth quoted the lyrics of a favorite childhood hymn:  
“Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so” Adam Hamilton. *Creed*  
(Abingdon: Nashville, 2016). pg. 77.

That sounds like the **Good News** of the Gospel today!  
Can I hear an Amen? Amen.