

The Apostle's Creed

Sunday Morning Fellowship 2018

"He descended into hell"

Lesson Summaries & NOTES

Sunday, June 3

WEEK 1 = “There is not enough evidence” view

- There are 4 main approaches/methods of thought toward the “*he descended into hell*” phrase found in the Apostle’s Creed:
 - “There is not enough evidence” view = believers in this “camp” argue that since the Bible doesn’t DIRECTLY say this phrase from the Apostle’s Creed word for word, it is false/or there is not enough evidence to verbally support it.
 - Lutheran view
 - Catholic view
 - Reformed/Presbyterian view
- The “*he descended into hell*” phrase is one of the most difficult phrases to get through in the Apostle’s Creed. It has been an issue for hundreds of years. It isn’t simply a “*modern*” or “*present-day*” issue.
- We addressed Romans 14:22-23, stating that we must never recite anything that *goes against our conscience* – we must **articulate our faith** BOLDLY & as MATTER OF FACT. **In response** to someone saying “*there isn’t enough evidence*” Jesus descended into hell, there were **4 considerations** we addressed, keeping in mind a response to such a statement:
 - **First**, just because the Bible doesn’t directly say it, does NOT mean it doesn’t teach on something. EX: Trinity & abortion. Both these words aren’t found in Scripture, yet Scripture teaches on them! (Matthew 3, Mark 1, Luke 3, Psalm 139, Jeremiah 1:1-5)
 - **Second**, heaven and hell are real places. These are the only TWO places Scripture mentions regarding our eternal whereabouts.
 - **Third**, depending on the CONTEXT, hell can have different meanings:
 - Sheol (OT) & Hades (NT) = common name for “*the grave*” – focusing on where our BODIES are placed after death.

- hell = focusing on what happens to our SOULS after death – awaiting eternal punishment for unrepentant sin & evil.
 - Jesus did directly say in **Matthew 12:40** = “*For 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.*”
- **Fourth**, we must keep in mind the chronological progression of Jesus' humiliation & exaltation. Many **deny** that Jesus went to hell because of what he tells the thief on the cross in **Luke 23** = “*Today, you will be with me in Paradise.*” However, remember, Jesus' spirit isn't bound to time like his body, or our bodies are. When the thief on the cross died, he didn't have to wait for 42+ days for Jesus to show up in his physical, human, exalted & ascended state in heaven. Time doesn't exist in eternity, so in actuality, Jesus would have already been there, even though his present body hadn't arrived yet. Jesus told Mary in **John 20** after he rose: “*Do not cling to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father.*”
- **In summary**, we must admit that something happened to Jesus' body & spirit before he rose – we cannot deny this phrase or act like it is irrelevant. As **Colossians 1:18** reminded us, Jesus is the “*head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent.*”
- Christ, being the ultimate substitute for our sin – as a PART of his sacrifice, experienced DEATH AND remained under death for a time to show the finality of death and what our sin causes.

Sunday, June 10

WEEK 2 = The Lutheran & Roman Catholic views

Main source text: 1 Peter 3:18-20

- **Lutheran's believe:** When Jesus died, he descended to the actual hell, where the wicked dwell, and declared victory over death BY PREACHING to those who weren't saved during the times of Noah, thus, giving them ONE LAST CHANCE to believe. He preached (*proclaimed*), not witnessed – so he could then take their spirits to heaven when he personally ascended from earth 42-43 days later.
 - We countered by asking why only a select few would be given a second chance? When has God ever shown favoritism (**Romans 2:11**)?
 - The “*spirits in prison*” was Peter's way of coining unbelievers – people who are spiritually DEAD before Christ comes into their hearts, *they are perpetual prisoners!*

- Why would Jesus need to come down to Hell to “finish” something else when he said on the Cross, “*It is finished*”?
- **Roman Catholics believe:** After Christ’s death, He went to the “*Limbus partum*”, meaning the “*place of our Fathers*” where OT saints were placed in a holding cell, awaiting the revelation of the gospel preached by Christ. This was a temporary prison, waiting for Jesus to give them access to heaven. These OT saints were kept hidden from God because Jesus had not justified them yet in God’s sight.
 - Noticeable differences from the Lutherans:
 - The name of the place Jesus goes to in hell.
 - The demographic of people there (*not only limited to Noah, but ALL OT saints*).
 - By Jesus going there, access to heaven was granted.
 - These OT saints were kept hidden from God the Father.
 - Jesus didn’t go to declare victory, but it was more of a “*rescue*” mission.
 - We also countered & said that:
 - Nothing is hidden from God
 - This temporary prison is not Paradise as many Catholics believe. If heaven didn’t exist yet, then where did some of the OT saints physically go that were taken by God (Elijah, Enoch)?
- Both views seem to destroy the GRACE of God & are highly more traditional, than Scriptural. As Americans, we are rationalists & love trying to explain everything, but in the end, *we are not privileged to have all the answers*, only God is (**Deuteronomy 29:29**)! If we can’t back up a view Scripturally, then we have an issue. As the theology from the Reformation reminds us, “*sola Scriptura*” = “Scripture alone” as the essence of our faith.

Sunday, June 17

WEEK 3 = Reformed/Presbyterian view

Main source text: Luke 23:44-47 & John 19:30

- **Reformed/Presbyterian view:** This article in the Apostle’s Creed is meant to be taken “*metaphorically*” or “*symbolically*. It refers to the nature and depth of what Christ suffered on the Cross, having the weight of every sinner placed upon him and because of it, the world went dark for 3 hours. This article expresses the epitome of all our Lord’s suffering in His atoning work as our substitute (Venema, Thomas, Berkhof).

- Our WCF, Large Catechism # 50 asks: “In what did Christ’s humiliation consist after His death? Answer: “*It consisted in His being buried and continuing in the state of the dead, and under the power of death till the third day, which has been otherwise expressed in these words: “He descended into hell.”*
- What exactly is the Reformed view saying?
 - First, God the Father obtained Christ’s spirit during his death until the third day. The Bible often teaches that when one goes to Hell, they are abandoned from the presence of the Lord – we see this with the rich man and Lazarus in **Luke 16**. However, in our passage this morning, **in verse 46** – *Christ gives his spirit to God the Father*.
 - Christ didn’t have to die to defeat Satan, he already defeated him in the wilderness temptation. Christ didn’t have to die to defeat demons – he did this plenty of times while he was alive (**Mark 5**). He had to **die to defeat the finality of DEATH**: “*O death where is your victory, or death where is your sting, the sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ*” **1 Corinthians 15:55-57**.
 - Second, Christ did not make a literal descent into Hell, but “the grave”. At the time of his death, *Christ commended His spirit to His Father*, meaning since ALL his work is done, He would be more passive rather than active from the time of His death until he rose from the grave. It seems best to **combine two thoughts**: that Christ suffered the wrenches of hell before His death in Gethsemane and on the Cross **AND** He entered the deepest humiliation of the state of death by remaining under it until he rose on the third day. **As Martin Luther said**, “*Jesus Christ was the greatest sinner on the Cross the world had ever seen*” – and when he spoke, “*It is finished*” – we must **BELIEVE** that & have **assurance** of that, instead of going, “*Yea, but he still needed to go to Hell & do some things...*”
- The **Reformed view is ONLY using Scripture as its source**, unlike the *Lutherans and Catholics who are getting very bizarre beliefs from church tradition*. The Reformed view displays **exemplary humility**. It is looking at this phrase “*he descended into hell*” looking at the **Bible as a whole**, what we call “**Biblical Theology**” to determine its answer. Therefore, I think we, as Presbyterians should respect it and appreciate it – because in the end, we can *trust in the matchless sovereignty of God, rejoicing when we say, “I Believe...”*