

Christ Reformation Church

Tillamook, Oregon

You Must be Born Again!

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And in His Son – The Apostles’ Creed, Part 7

November 12, 2023

Sermon Text: 1 Peter 3:18-20

Scripture Reading: 1 Corinthians
10:1-22

Last time we came to this second stanza of the Apostles’ Creed which concerns confession of faith in Jesus Christ. The creed, as you remember, began with “I believe in God...” and, as the Apostle to the Hebrews tells us:

Heb 11:6 And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.

The most fundamental and wicked sin, as we heard from Romans chapter 1, is the sinner’s refusal to acknowledge God or to give Him thanks. To live life as if God were irrelevant when in fact He is our Creator and sustainer, our provider and enlightener of our minds so that we not mere beasts, but bearers of His image.

And so this is the starting point. It cannot be bypassed. Without faith, without believing that He exists and that He is the only fountain of life to be found, it is an absolute impossibility to please Him.

I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth.

But there is more. Faith in God, belief that He exists, is the starting point, but this is just the starting point. We must go on. We must

confess His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

I believe in Jesus Christ, his only begotten Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary. He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried; he descended to hell. The third day he rose again from the dead. He ascended to heaven and is seated at the right hand of God the Father almighty. From there he will come to judge the living and the dead.

If someone were to ask you, “is there any particular phrase/doctrine in this portion of the creed which the world particularly rejects?” what would you answer? I think you would find that there is no single doctrine most commonly rejected, but rather that *the entire confession is mocked and ridiculed*. Men will give lip service to belief in God’s existence, but as soon as the truths declared here are specified – when generality becomes specific – the sinner wants none of it.

It is important to understand that the Christian’s faith is no mere general claim to believe in God. The Christian, the truly regenerate person, speaks of Jesus.

There is a name I love to hear,
I love to sing its worth;
It sounds like music in mine ear,
The sweetest name on earth

I am always suspect of people who claim to be Christians, but who never speak of Jesus. Their religion is all “God.” “*We must look to God. God will help us. Our nation’s only hope is God.*” The Bible does not speak this way. Rather -

Rom 1:1-7 Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, (2) which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy Scriptures, (3) concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh (4) and was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord, (5) through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the

obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all the nations, (6) including you who are called to belong to Jesus Christ, (7) To all those in Rome who are loved by God and called to be saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Confession of faith in all 3 Persons of the Godhead is essential or else a false god results. But the Bible focuses constantly upon Christ. For instance (and this is Jesus Himself speaking in His High Priestly prayer) -

Joh 17:3 And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.

When the Father reveals Himself to us not just in general revelation through creation, but in special revelation – He sends His Son into the world so that Jesus could say, “He who has seen Me has seen the Father.” Eternal life is *knowing* the Father AND the Son.

And therefore, something is amiss with a person who claims to be a

Christian, but who rarely or never speaks the name of Jesus.

Mat 10:22 and you will be hated by all for my name's sake. But the one who endures to the end will be saved.

Act 3:16 And his name—by faith in his name—has made this man strong whom you see and know, and the faith that is through Jesus has given the man this perfect health in the presence of you all.

Php 2:9-11 Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, (10) so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, (11) and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Listen to it once more (we will look again in a moment briefly at the “descended into hell” phrase)...but listen once more and as you do think about this – *that confessing the Person and Work of Christ is to confess a God Who “meddles”*

with man. It is to confess a God Who is not “out there” but Who comes down among us, and I think this is largely why the Name of Jesus Christ is so repugnant to the world:

I believe in Jesus Christ, his only begotten Son, our Lord, who was **conceived** by the Holy Spirit and **born** of the virgin Mary. He **suffered under Pontius Pilate**, was **crucified**, died, and was buried; he descended to hell. The third day **he rose again** from the dead. He ascended to heaven and is seated at the right hand of God the Father almighty. **From there he will come to judge the living and the dead.**

Jesus Christ is God among us. He is Lord not only of heaven, but of Earth. He is King of kings. He declares:

Joh 14:3 And if I go and prepare a place for you, **I will come again** and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also.

To confess Jesus, the Jesus of Scripture, is to confess:

1Th 4:14-17 For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. (15) For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. (16) For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. (17) Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord.

And this:

2Th 1:5-9 This is evidence of the righteous judgment of God, that you may be considered worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are also suffering— (6) since indeed God considers it just to repay with affliction those who afflict you, (7) and to grant relief to you who are afflicted as well as

to us, when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels (8) in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. (9) They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might,

Do you see it? Confessing belief in God generically is one thing (although the creed does far more than give a general belief in God), but to confess “I believe in Jesus Christ” and specifically the Jesus of the Bible, *opens the door to an entire litany of truths that the wicked do not want to think about!* And this certainly contributes to their hatred of the Name Jesus.

But there is another side to this coin. For the believer, for Christ’s people, confessing this Jesus who came down and walked among us as the God-man, and who is coming again personally, bodily, in great glory to vindicate His people and to judge the wicked – this is our great comfort and hope.

He Descended into Hell (or “to” Hell)

We saw last time that the Bible nowhere teaches that Jesus, after being crucified and buried, went into hell and preached to the spirits of the wicked there, or that somehow He went there to release the Old Testament saints from a kind of holding place and led them into heaven.

The Scripture which is often connected with such ideas is this one:

1Pe 3:18-20 For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit, (19) ***in which he went and proclaimed to the spirits in prison,*** (20) because they formerly did not obey, when God's patience waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through water.

We know, for example, that the rich man in the account of the rich man and Lazarus, nor Lazarus himself nor Abraham, were in any kind of “limbo” or “purgatory” from which one day they would be “sprung.” We do know that one Day when Christ comes in judgment, this will happen:

Rev 20:11-15 Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. From his presence earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them. (12) And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done. (13) And the sea gave up the dead who were in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them, and they were judged, each one of them, according to what they had done. (14) Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. (15) And if anyone's name was not found

written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

The false notions of “limbo” and “purgatory” are both places where the spirits of the dead supposedly go until such time as they are released. These two fictional places in other words are not said to be eternal abodes.

What the Bible does say about the wicked who die is that they are immediately in torment in Hades, like the Rich Man, but that one Day when Christ judges all, the wicked will be raised *bodily* and then cast into the biblical name for hell, *the lake of fire*. This is the eternal state of all who have rejected Christ.

What, then, does Peter mean when he talks about Jesus preaching to the spirits in prison? This is a difficult passage and there have been numbers of explanations suggested, but I believe this is the correct one:

Jesus was made alive by the Holy Spirit, and it was in this Holy Spirit (or by this Holy Spirit) that, in the

days of Noah, He preached to those who were disobedient and refused to believe the Word of God preached by Noah, empowered and inspired by the Holy Spirit. Those sinful people's spirits went to Hades (prison) when they perished in the flood, where they are imprisoned until the Day when Christ comes in judgment and they are cast into the Lake of Fire.

In other words, the wicked who refused to heed Christ's warnings given through the preaching of Noah, are pictures of the wicked of all ages who disregard the patience of God and mock the preaching of His Word. They are all in prison. In Hades. No one ever goes to them and preaches to give them a second chance. There is no second chance for anyone who departs this life without Christ. They had their chance, just as the Rich Man had his chance.

There are other Scriptures which use this same idea of the Spirit of God preaching/warning:

Neh 9:20 You gave **your good**

Spirit to instruct them and did not withhold your manna from their mouth and gave them water for their thirst.

Neh 9:30 Many years you bore with them and **warned them by your Spirit through your prophets.** Yet they would not give ear. Therefore you gave them into the hand of the peoples of the lands.

Act 7:51 "You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, **you always resist the Holy Spirit.** As your fathers did, so do you.

And we have here this very same idea of Christ, by the Holy Spirit through His servants like Noah and the OT prophets, preaching His warnings to the wicked in this world. The vast majority of whom reject His Word and end in Hades/prison, awaiting the final judgment.

Alexander Nisbet was a minister in Scotland who lived from 1623 – 1669. He wrote in his commentary

on 1 Peter:

“The sum of this is that since there are many souls of men and women to whom Christ did once by His Spirit, in the ministry of Noah and others of His servants, make plain the way to life and salvation, who are now imprisoned in Hell for evermore, because of their slighting so much patience and pains as the Lord did show them, especially during the time of Noah’s preparing of the Ark, wherein only a few escaped destruction by the flood; therefore *it concerns those who have the gospel more clearly preached to them to give obedience to it, no matter what they might suffer [for doing so in this present life].*

Learn then 1) The second Person of the blessed Trinity has been exercising His mediatory office *long before His incarnation*; and by His Spirit, speaking through His servants, has been publicly inviting sinners to repentance and faith in Himself, and 2) When the Word of Christ is plainly preached by the ministry of His servants, then

Christ Himself comes to them, to bestow Himself and fellowship with Him by His Spirit, upon those who receive His Word; and to deal with others in wrath as if they had rejected Him in His own Person, for though Christ did not preach in Person to the old world (of Noah’s day), yet of Him it is here said that *by His Spirit He went and preached.* 3) It pleases the Lord to invite to repentance and make offers of His grace to *many who will never obey His counsel nor embrace His offers, so that He makes His grace more manifest when He saves His elect, and that He might take away all excuse from those who willfully disobey His Word and reject His offers. There are spirits and souls who once had Christ preached to them who are now in prison.*

4) The souls of men and women do not go to non-existence, nor die as their bodies die; but as soon as they are separated from the body they must either go immediately to the place of blessedness or else to this place of their everlasting imprisonment.

5) Of all the sins that men and women commit who have the way of salvation preached to them, this is of the highest nature and the chief cause of their damnation, that they will not be persuaded to accept the offers of God's grace and mercy in Christ, will not obey the sweet directions of His Word, will not follow the motions and strivings of His Spirit with them in which course they continue." [1&2 Peter, Alexander Nisbet, Geneva Series of Commentaries, Banner of Truth]

The Incredible Hard-Heartedness of the Sinner

Let's think a bit further about the hardness of the sinful human heart as seen in those disobedient ones now in prison to whom Christ preached through Noah.

There are negative examples in Scripture as well as positive ones. Hebrews 11 for example point us to the faith of many of the saints who have gone before us – Abraham, Sarah, Moses, and more. But negatively we also have warning

examples:

- Remember Lot's wife
- Esau
- The wicked people to whom Noah preached
- *And the Israelites*, to whom Hebrews also points us:

Heb 3:15-19 As it is said, "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion." (16) For who were those who heard and yet rebelled? Was it not all those who left Egypt led by Moses? (17) And with whom was he provoked for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the wilderness? (18) And to whom did he swear that they would not enter his rest, but to those who were disobedient? (19) So we see that they were unable to enter because of unbelief.

And again from the Apostle Paul –

1Co 10:1-11 For I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, (2) and all were baptized into Moses in

the cloud and in the sea, (3) and all ate the same spiritual food, (4) and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual Rock that followed them, and the Rock was Christ.

(5) Nevertheless, with most of them God was not pleased, for they were overthrown in the wilderness.

(6) Now these things took place as examples for us, that we might not desire evil as they did. (7) Do not be idolaters as some of them were; as it is written, “The people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play.” (8) We must not indulge in sexual immorality as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in a single day. (9) We must not put Christ to the test, as some of them did and were destroyed by serpents, (10) nor grumble, as some of them did and were destroyed by the Destroyer. (11) **Now these things happened to them as an example, but they were written down for our instruction, on whom the end of the ages has come.**

The majority – the vast, vast majority of the Israelites who came out of Egypt, who witnessed God’s mighty hand in the plagues, in wiping out Pharaoh, in parting the Red Sea, in thundering at Mt Sinai, who ate the manna and meat in the wilderness and drank from the Rock and more – the majority (all except three, perished in the wilderness and never saw the Promised Land.

Why?

Because of unbelief. Because they hardened their hearts against the Lord. Because they chose idols instead of Christ. These last two Scriptures soberly warn US that what happened to them will happen to us unless we are born again and actually DO what we profess – *I believe in the Jesus Christ His only begotten Son...*

People fear terminal diseases. We fear cancer. We fear plagues. We fear growing old. We fear an entire litany of things – *but if we are not delivered from our sin, if the Lord does not kill me – the old man – and make me a new creation, I will*

NOT fear God,

Mat 10:28 And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell.

Do you realize what this thing called unbelief is? It is the bondage of sin that blinds us and holds us enslaved. It is so powerful that the sinner is DEAD to God so that even if the Lord parts the Red Sea and we walk across, even if He demolishes the walls of Jericho before our eyes, even if He makes the sun stand still, *we will not see Him nor hear Him, nor obey Him.* YOU and I were born into this world in that very bondage and death. It is the most terrible disease mankind will ever know. It is ALWAYS eternally terminal, ending in eternal death in hell.

Unless...

Christ sets us free. Are you free? Are you able to hear His voice and see His glory? Have you been born again? Has the old YOU been put to death and a new creation raised

up? Or are you the same old man or woman you have always been? THIS is what these Scriptures are warning us about. *These things are written for YOUR instruction and warning. These words are the Spirit of Christ preaching to YOU.*

Heb 2:1-3 Therefore we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it. (2) For since the message declared by angels proved to be reliable, and every transgression or disobedience received a just retribution, (3) how shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation? It was declared at first by the Lord, and it was attested to us by those who heard,