

I Believe in the Son's Life and Death

SCOTT HOEZEE

People have long noticed a rather odd aspect of the familiar and ancient Apostles' Creed. It never talks about Jesus' ministry. "Born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate." All of Jesus' healings, parables, miracles, teachings, and all the rest are skipped. All we get between his birth and his final suffering is a comma. Well, today on *Groundwork*, we will wonder about that, as well as the aspects of Jesus' life that *are* included in the Apostles' Creed. Stay tuned.

DAVE BAST

From Words of Hope and ReFrame Media, this is *Groundwork*, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Dave Bast.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And I am Scott Hoezee; and Dave, we are in part of a large series, really—a 12-part program, where we are going to cover the entire Apostles' Creed, and we are kind of breaking it up into the three sections of the Creed. So, we already had some programs on the first part of the Creed, on God the Father; and now we are in the middle part of the Creed, on God the Son; and this is our second program in that part of the Creed.

DAVE BAST

Right; *Groundwork* has been around for a while now...something like ten years or so, and we have probably treated most of these areas in greater depth by looking at different parts of scripture, but here in this series, we kind of want to have an overview about what most Christians...almost all Christians...hold in common about God, about Jesus, about the Spirit, and the Church. So, in this particular segment, we are, as you said, focused on the Son; and just to refresh our memories, the Creed says this: I believe in Jesus Christ, his only 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. So, that is what we are looking at.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; and that first line you read, Dave, was in the previous program, where we...I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord...so, we talked about the name of Jesus, the title of Christ, how he is God's Son, what it means he is our Lord. So, that was the program before this one; and now in this one we pick it up with: He was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary. We will think about just those two lines in this first part of this program, Dave. His conception was a miracle of the Holy Spirit, and we begin reading of that miracle that he is going to...his mother will be a virgin, and we begin to get that in Luke 1 already, in the famous annunciation scene to Mary.

DAVE BAST

Right; it goes like this: ²⁶God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, ²⁷to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendent of David. The virgin's name was Mary. ²⁸The angel went to her and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favored. The Lord is with you." ²⁹Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be; ³⁰but the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary. You have found favor with God. ³¹You will conceive and give birth to a Son, and you are to call him Jesus. ³²He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, ³³and he will reign over Jacob's descendants forever. His kingdom will never end.

SCOTT HOEZEE

³⁴“How will this be,” Mary asked the angel, “Since I am a virgin?” ³⁵The angel answered, “The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the Holy One to be born will be called the Son of God.”

So, that is Luke’s version, and then we get a brief thing in Matthew 1. So, it was mentioned that Mary’s betrothed...she is engaged to a man named Joseph...when Joseph finds out that his fiancée is with child and he knows it isn’t from him, he decides to divorce her...to break the engagement. So, an angel comes to him in a dream and says:

^{20b}“Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. ²¹She will give birth to a Son, and you are to give him the name Jesus because he will save his people from their sins.”

In the previous program, we said that that is what Jesus means...

DAVE BAST

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

The Greek form of Joshua...Yeshua...to be a savior.

DAVE BAST

So, as the Church Fathers love to point out, the organ through which Mary conceived Jesus was her ear, and it was by the power of the Holy Spirit, as she, in great humility, acquiesced to this plan of God, without really understanding...you know, how can this happen? We should point out that even though these people lived a long time ago, they knew the facts of life...they knew where babies came from...both Mary and Joseph knew this was highly irregular, to say the least.

SCOTT HOEZEE

But, as the Church has traditionally taught, Jesus was a real human being. He took from Mary a true human nature; as every bit as true as all of us who start out as a microscopic zygote. So, no human man had anything to do with this, but Mary had everything to do with it, because she was his true earthly mother. Of course, some people wonder about this, Dave. In fact, the New York Times columnist, Nicholas Kristof has had a tradition going for about, I don’t know, ten years now. Every year around Christmas he interviews a well-known Christian figure—Jimmy Carter, the pastor Tim Keller...Philip Yancey recently—and he always sort of asks the same question: Can I be a Christian if I don’t believe in the virgin birth? Because Kristof finds that just a little bit difficult to swallow: A virgin birth...do we really need that? And most people say to him: Well, you do kind of need to believe in Jesus’ resurrection from the dead, which is a lot bigger miracle than a virgin birth, so why not believe in it?

DAVE BAST

Yes, exactly; or the incarnation; because really, what the virgin birth points to is the reality of the incarnation, which is to say God, in the second Person of the Trinity...God the Son...actually became a real human being. As you said, Scott, he inherited his human nature from his mother, and it was completely human. It wasn’t some kind of charade; it wasn’t some kind of super-humanity; he wasn’t something totally other than us. The only way he differed from us is in not being sinful by nature...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

Not having that stain of original sin.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; you know, those are some of the big reasons why we do think this is a very important doctrine, and as we just heard from Luke and Matthew, it is quite well established biblically that this is what happened; but it shows us a number of things. Right; you just said, Dave, it shows us that he is a human, but the miracle of the Holy Spirit kept him free from the stain of sin. Now, some people might know that our Roman Catholic brothers and sisters have added an extra firewall. If you have ever heard of the *immaculate conception*, that is not referring to Jesus' conception. The Catholic Church has taught that when *Mary* was conceived, somehow God performed a miracle so that Mary didn't have any original sin either, and that is a further firewall to keep Jesus from getting any; but Protestant traditions don't believe that is necessary. We think that the Holy Spirit's involvement was enough to make sure Jesus had a true human nature, *but* was free from sin. So, that is a major...but, also that he is one of us, even so...

DAVE BAST

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And that is important. He has to share our humanity if he is going to take our punishment, which we will get to in this program, too.

DAVE BAST

Right; because only a man...a true human...could pay for human sin...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

But he also has to be God in order to have the infinite strength and goodness and perfection to make this sacrifice. So, it kind of all comes together in this idea that Jesus really was God and really was human, but without an earthly father; and as you said, if you can believe the bigger miracle that God became flesh, and that God rose from the dead, why would you quibble at something like a virgin becoming pregnant in this wonderful Holy Spirit fashion?

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; and I think it shows us one more thing, Dave, that we can note, and that is that it shows how determined God was to save us. God knew that we were never going to get saved from the inside of just humanity. We were too fallen; we keep making our situation worse; it is like we are in a deep hole and we keep digging it deeper. A miracle was needed from the outside to jumpstart salvation, and that is what he did; he gave us this miracle child, conceived by the Holy Spirit, and born of the virgin Mary.

DAVE BAST

Right; so only a human being should save humanity, and only a divine being *could* save humanity, and Jesus is both. We will look next at what he had to do in order for that salvation to happen.

Segment 2

SCOTT HOEZEE

I am Scott Hoezee, along with Dave Bast, and you are listening to *Groundwork*, and this program focusing on part of the middle part of the Apostles' Creed. We just looked at the lines in the Apostles' Creed about how Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary. Next up is: He suffered under Pontius Pilate, but we want to, first, Dave, take up the question that we asked at the intro part of this program: Why does the Creed skip Jesus' public ministry? How hard would it have been to at least mention the public ministry of Jesus, which takes up a big part of all four Gospels? In fact, some years ago in my catechism class, I said, you know, if you had to come up with a line...a short, pithy line, to add to the Apostles' Creed to

cover the ministry, what would it be? And here is what they came up with. What if the Creed sounded like this: He was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary. Through miracles and sermons, he proclaimed the nearness of the kingdom of God. He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, etc, etc. So, it wouldn't be that hard to add a line, but there is nothing there.

DAVE BAST

Yes, right; it is especially interesting that omission when you think of the fact that, for most non-Christians, it is Jesus' public ministry that really attracts them...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

That really appeals to them. You know, how many times have you heard people say: Oh, I love Jesus' teaching. I love...

SCOTT HOEZEE

All the parables, yes.

DAVE BAST

And the love that he showed, but all this doctrinal stuff, you know, spare me from that. And yet, the Creed skips the teaching and the miracles and the beautiful love of Jesus as he expressed it in people's lives, and it goes right to the cross, really: Suffered under Pontius Pilate, that is what it is pointing to.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; so, what is up with that? Well, it doesn't mean the ministry of Jesus is unimportant. In fact, God put his stamp of approval on all that Jesus said, did, taught...all the miracles...all the parables...when he raised him from the dead. So, of course, the ministry is important; but, right; the Creed does fast-forward us right to Pontius Pilate, which Dave, leads to another interesting question: Of all the people in the Bible, there are only two other than Jesus mentioned in the Creed: Jesus' mother Mary...that makes sense...and *Pontius Pilate*?!

DAVE BAST

Yes, right; how would you like to be that guy? The guy who is singled out, really, in infamy, not in fame, for all of history because of his role in sentencing Jesus to death, even though he didn't want to; because if you remember the story, and look at all the details, the one thing that Pontius Pilate did at the trial of Jesus was declare Jesus' innocence.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

He even, in Matthew's Gospel, washed his hands, literally, as if to say: I want nothing to do with this; and yet, out of weakness, out of cowardice, out of fear that he might get in trouble with his boss, Caesar, he nevertheless condemned this innocent man to death.

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, it is a strange thing...Moses, Abraham, the Apostle Paul doesn't get mentioned in the Creed...he wrote half the New Testament...not the Apostle Peter, just Mary and Pilate; but, there is no definitive theory as to exactly why they decided to put Pilate in, but the suffering part under Pilate, I think is the key.

So, let's just review this, Dave. Remember this part of Matthew 27. It is the longest passage, so we will skip around a little bit.

¹¹Meanwhile, Jesus stood before the governor; and the governor asked him, "Are you the King of the Jews?" "You have said so," Jesus replied. ¹²When he was accused by the chief priest and the elders, he gave no

answer. ¹³Then Pilate asked him, “Don’t you hear the testimony they are bringing against you?” ¹⁴But Jesus made no reply, not even to a single charge, to the great amazement of the governor. ¹⁵Now it was the governor’s custom at the festival to release a prisoner chosen by the crowd. ¹⁶At that time, they had a well-known prisoner, whose name was Jesus Barabbas. ¹⁷So when the crowd had gathered, Pilate asked them, “Which do you want me to release to you? Jesus Barabbas or Jesus, who is called the Messiah?” ^{21b} “Barabbas,” they answered. ²²“What shall I do with Jesus, who is called the Messiah?” Pilate asked. They said, “Crucify him!” ²³“Why? What crime has he committed?” asked Pilate. But they shouted all the louder, “Crucify him!” ²⁶So he released Barabbas to them, and had Jesus flogged, and handed him over to be crucified.

DAVE BAST

So, there is this literal suffering under Pilate. He ordered him to be beaten...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes.

DAVE BAST

To be whipped...his back laid open with the lash, and then nailed to a cross and executed. I also think, Scott, there is something profoundly moving...and maybe one of the reasons why the Creed just condenses all of Jesus’ life into that one word *suffered* is because of the pathos, you know. In a sense, Jesus’ whole life was suffering.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes.

DAVE BAST

If you think of what he gave up in surrendering... There is a famous passage from Philippians 2, where it says that he didn’t consider equality with God something to just hang onto, but he gave it up and emptied himself and took the form of a servant; that was suffering. He was deprived of the glory that was due to him; and then, through his whole life, to be mocked, to be ridiculed, to be denied, to be rejected, and finally, crucified.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And here it is all condensed and boiled down for us. Here is Jesus, the most innocent, perfect, holy human being who ever lived, being accused of all these terrible things; and you know, Jesus had integrity; he had a real beating heart. Those false accusations had sting. So he suffered, but he did it for us; and Dave, there is that passage in Isaiah, right?

^{53:4}Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering, yet we considered him stricken by God, and afflicted.

⁵But he was pierced for our transgressions. He was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him... ^{6b}the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

So, that was what was going on with Pilate, but as you say, in a way, his whole life.

DAVE BAST

Yes, absolutely; you think of the old gospel hymn: Man of sorrows, what a name, for the Son of God who came. Yes, he knew sorrow, he knew suffering, he knew grief, and it was all for our sake, according to Isaiah 53, that famous passage, Scott, that you just read.

So, this is the heart of what we believe about Jesus. It is the heart of what we confess in the Apostles’ Creed—that he really was crucified, that he undertook all this pain, not because he had to, not because he was a sinner, but for our sake.

SCOTT HOEZEE

You know, some...I think it was my friend Neal Plantinga who said once that in a way, the cross...as horrible as the cross is...it was sort of just the exclamation point...the exclamation mark...on his whole life. To think that Jesus...all of the garbage of human history descended on him: All the atrocities of the Babylonian Empire; the carnage of very single war or genocide; the horrors of people like Hitler and Stalin and Pol Pot; the destruction of innocent life; the senseless deaths of children; all of it came crashing down on him, and as we will say in a minute, Dave, when we move on to the part about his crucifixion, he only partially died from his physical wounds on the cross...

DAVE BAST

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

This spiritual suffering must have crushed him utterly.

DAVE BAST

You know, and no wonder. You think back to that scene in the Garden his last night, really, before the crucifixion: Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me. I mean, he knew what was coming. He knew what he had undertaken, and what it was going to cost. This is not just a guy being scared of dying, this is Jesus, the Savior of the world, facing the true horror of all of that evil coming onto his shoulders, finally, and bearing it before God.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And what a gift it is to us. I mean, this isn't just theology or academic theology; this is the good news for us, right? There is another old hymn, you know: *I* crucified you; *mine* was the sorrow that he bore, too. So, this is the Good News of the Gospel for all of us of what Jesus did for us; but, Dave, in just a minute we will move on in the Creed, pondering that crucifixion, and also that interesting line about his descent into hell. We will take that up in just a moment.

Segment 3

DAVE BAST

You are listening to *Groundwork*, where we are digging into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Dave Bast.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And I am Scott Hoezee; and Dave, you know, the Apostles' Creed is recited virtually the same way in most every church tradition across history and all around the world today wherever it is recited, but there is one exception here and there. There is one little line that some church traditions don't include, and it is: He descended into hell; and if you are ever in one of those churches and you say: He descended into hell, you will find out you are the only one. They have all moved on to: And the third day he rose again from the dead. You will be talking over the top of the resurrection.

DAVE BAST

Or, sometimes they will say: He descended to the dead, which is really saying the same thing as he was buried; but it is a curious line, and really, we should just touch on this, because it is probably not the most important thing in the whole Creed; but in the Middle Ages, there was a widespread belief, based on a rather obscure passage from 1 Peter Chapter 3, that in between the time of his death on the cross and his resurrection on Easter Sunday, Jesus went to Hades or Sheol, as it was known in the Old Testament—the realm of the dead—and released...preached to the spirits that were captive there, and released a number of them; namely the Old Testament saints. So, here is the passage:

¹⁸For Christ also suffered once for our sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body, but made alive in the Spirit. ¹⁹After being made alive, he went and made

proclamation to the imprisoned spirits; ²⁰those who were disobedient long ago when God waited patiently in the days of Noah...and I will just say right here and now on behalf of both of us, we don't exactly know what that means, and nobody does. That has never been really explained clearly.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes...again, that was in 1 Peter 3; but that is that idea that maybe the good...and you get this in the Old Testament. We had a program on *Groundwork* a while back, Dave, where we looked at sort of the changing view of the afterlife in scripture; and in the Old Testament there was this Sheol, which is sort of a holding tank where everybody went when they died...the good, the bad, Abraham, every...and it was kind of a waiting room for the Messiah to come and do a kind of jail break for the good and righteous people, and that seems to be what you get there. We get something similar from Paul in Ephesians 4...a little hint of this. So, this is Ephesians 4:7:

But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it. ⁸This is why it says: "When he ascended on high, he took many captives and gave gifts to his people." ⁹And what does he ascended mean except that he also descended to the lower earthly regions. ¹⁰He who descended is the very one who ascended higher than all the heavens in order to fill the whole universe.

So, this is that led captives in...

DAVE BAST

Yes, he took the saints of the Old Testament up to heaven with him, yes; and actually, we will say a little bit more about this in the next program when we look at Jesus' resurrection; but for now, I think it is also interesting to point out that the Reformers, in particular, Calvin, didn't really buy this medieval idea of the harrowing of hell, as it was called, or the plundering and freeing the captives there; but he described Jesus' descent into hell as something that actually happened on the cross, when Jesus was, for those three terrible hours of darkness, literally abandoned by the Father...my God, my God, why have you forsaken me? We have also looked at that in a previous *Groundwork* program; but it is very true in a sense that Jesus tasted hell for us.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And I think that is the key. Again, there are some church traditions that have just deleted this line altogether because it is kind of murky and the spiritual stuff seems a little bit thin, and so forth; but most have kept it, and I think that is exactly why, what you just said, Dave; it is important to know that Jesus suffered hell so we don't have to. Maybe John Calvin was right. What is hell? It is having no access to God, right? And for just a little while there, Jesus had that experience, where the Father and the Spirit had kind of turned away, and he was alone. That is hell, and he did that for us so that we never have to. So, I think for all of us church traditions who have kept that line in the Creed, that that is why...that that is sort of the caper of all of his suffering; and as we said in the previous part of the program, Dave, Jesus' whole life was suffering, right? And it culminated on the cross. It didn't start that last week. You know, some people have noted that the Gospels...all four of them...have a lot of chapters just on that final week; and so some people have said: Oh, the Gospels are passion narratives with long introductions, but it is not as though the passion only starts on Palm Sunday. It is there all along.

DAVE BAST

Think of the baby in the manger...little Lord Jesus, nowhere to lay his head...a refugee with his parents before he knew how to walk or talk. His whole life, as you said; and this last, final, climactic moment on the cross, when Jesus pays the ultimate price for sin. He dies, and in a sense, goes to hell. I think of a line from the old communion liturgy our church used to use about him being forsaken by God so that we might never be forsaken by him. Jesus has experienced the whole of the penalty, the forsakenness, the lostness that sometimes we feel, and he has done it for us so that ultimately it will never be our future.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Thanks be to God. Thanks for listening and digging deeply into scripture with *Groundwork*. We are your hosts, Scott Hoezee and Dave Bast. Please join us again next time as we will continue our study of the

Apostles' Creed by exploring the scriptures that inform our beliefs about Jesus' resurrection from the dead. Connect with us at groundworkonline.com. It is our website. You can share what *Groundwork* means to you, or give us ideas for future *Groundwork* programs.

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