



The Apostle's Creed

Part 5 – Behold the Lamb

Matthew 27:1-2; 32-60

*Suffered under Pontius Pilate,
Was crucified, died, and was buried;
He descended into Hell*

1. The historic circumstances of Christ's suffering.

The crucifixion of Jesus is not a matter of speculation. It is a heavily attested event. The crucifixion of Jesus is not only recorded in secular records of the day but the preaching of the

apostles and the confession of the church from the very beginning all testify to the event. No one in the first century disputed that Jesus was indeed crucified.

a) Suffered under Pontius Pilate

Vv. 24-26

This clause helps locate the crucifixion of Jesus in its historical context. The circumstantial details surrounding Jesus' crucifixion recorded by the gospel writers are upheld in so-called "secular history" (i.e. Pilate's administration, the role of the Sanhedrin, the physical locations, the crucifixion protocol, etc.). The gospel writers "humanize" Pilate. That is, he is more than a mere detail. He is a real man at war with his own sin. He is a truly tragic figure.

b) He was crucified

Vs. 35 – "And when they had crucified him..."

- Crucifixion was a terribly humiliating way to die. Matthew captures some of this humiliation in his account. Jesus was jeered at by his fellow Jews. He was taunted by thieves. His clothing was gambled away by soldiers. His claim to be the Son of God was cruelly mocked by onlookers. And of course, there were the unimaginable physical tortures of the cross; a death reserved for criminals.

c) He died

Vs. 50 – "And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice and yielded up his spirit."

- Jesus subjected himself to death. That is, he underwent the full experience of death even to the extent of the separation of body and spirit.

d) He was buried

Vv. 59-60 – "And Joseph took the body and wrapped it in a clean linen shroud and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had cut in the rock. And he rolled a great stone to the entrance of the tomb and went away."

e) He descended into Hell

Vs. 46 – "My God, my God! Why have you forsaken me?"

- As Jesus hung on the cross he experienced what earlier generations called "the harrowing of Hell." That is he experienced the wrath of God reserved for the condemned. He experienced

the abandonment of the Father's mercy that is a distinctive feature of Hell. It is true that some have taken the descent clause to mean that Jesus "went to Hell" and was tortured there. It's the belief that the atonement was not accomplished on the cross but had to be accomplished in Hell. This is a heresy. Another view is that Jesus went to "the place of the dead" (Sheol) and liberated the Old Testament saints there. I do not find that argument convincing. What is clear from the record of the crucifixion is that Jesus experienced the judgment of Hell as he suffered and died. The words "he descended into Hell" (*the descent clause*) is an appropriate way to capture the fullness of what Jesus experienced on the cross.

- "See here the price of your redemption: God must hate his own sinless Son, the joy of his eternal heart, so that he may love you justly. The Father must become the enemy of the Son, the avenging angel who slaughters the firstborn Son in the dark Egyptian night of his captivity." – Michael Horton

2. The redemptive purpose of Christ's suffering.

That Jesus was crucified is an historical fact. But it is not merely history. Jesus' suffering and death were for the purpose of redeeming God's people.

a) Substitution (*Propitiation*)

Romans 3:25; 1 John 2:2; Hebrews 2:17

- The Apostle's Creed affirms that Jesus "suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried; He descended into Hell." This section of the Creed is meant to sum up the totality of Jesus' sacrifice for sinners. Every religion concocted in the mind of man has, at its heart, a moral code; a hierarchy of behaviors or spiritual techniques which, if achieved or practiced properly will usher the practitioner into a state of salvation. Only Christianity offers sinners what they truly need: a Substitute.
- God's wrath over sin was poured out on Jesus to save us from the wrath we deserved. The entire sacrificial system prescribed for Israel was meant to underscore the need of sinners for a substitute.

b) Reconciliation

Romans 5:9-11

- Sinners need to be reconciled with God. He is holy and just and therefore cannot merely look past sin. God made peace with sinners through the sacrifice of His Son. "We are not wise to play down God's hostility against us sinners" (J.I. Packer).
- In his dying, Jesus makes God's enemies his friends. He presents us to God in such a way that we may be accepted.

c) Redemption

Romans 3:24; Revelation 5:9

- To be redeemed means that we have been purchased. Through his suffering and death Jesus purchased his people from bondage and misery by the payment of the required price.

d) Victory

Colossians 2:13-15

- The cross was God's victory over all the hostile powers of the universe that had kept us out of God's favor.