* **Read the Creed**
* **SERIES SLIDE**
* When I was 3, 4, and 5 years old…my Dad was the pastor of church in Nashville.
* That church had 2 things that have just about gone extinct for churches these days.
* One, they had a parsonage. That’s where I lived. At the back of the church parking lot in a house that the church owned. My very first memories were in that house.
* That’s the house I came home to after seeing E.T. and Return of the Jedi.
* I can still smell the Crock Pot roast cooking on Sunday mornings…getting ready for Sunday lunch after church.
* I ate cereal and watched Saturday morning cartoons with my brothers on that shag carpet.
* I remember eating popcorn and drinking orange juice with my family while watching The A-Team on a 13” black & white television. Of course, you had to get the rabbit ear antenna positioned just right…maybe with a little aluminum foil attached.
* I rode my big wheel and shot my first basketball on the hoop in that church parking lot.
* There was a lot of life that happened in that little house. It was bustling with the activity of a 4, a 6 , and an 8 year old boy…a young family just starting out.
* But across the parking lot. In between the church and the parsonage…was the opposite. A cemetery.
* That's the other thing that churches don’t really have anymore.
* They used to be pretty common. If you saw a church, you saw a cemetery. And the families who lived and died in that local church family would be buried there.
* I could see the tombstones from my upstairs bedroom window.
* I would ride my big wheel right past them on weekday afternoons.
* I learned cemetery etiquette very early. “Don’t step right in front of the tombstone,” Dad would tell me. “That’s where the people are buried.”
* I know it sounds sort of morbid, but for a lot of reasons, I miss it.
* I mean, this church is located right behind a Gym…not a graveyard.
* Which pretty accurately describes where we are as a culture. We’ve neatly pushed death out of our field of vision. We’ve celebrated youth, and vigor. We’ve grabbed a hold of excitement and pragmatism. And nothing could be less exciting or pragmatic than a cemetery.
* When we think about our bodies…we don’t think about death and decay…we think about what needs to be toned up to look more youthful. Churches seem more naturally connected to gyms now…not cemeteries.
* We’ve largely as a culture, separated the living and the dead.
* I’ve noticed in a few TV shows that my wife and I have been watching recently, that disease, death, and the seemingly natural degeneration of the human body over time have been at the center of not just one episode of the shows…but the whole show is based ON the idea of mortality.
* There are about 4 dramas that we watch regularly. In every single one of them, a main character has cancer. Infertility is in 3 out of 4 of them. Depression and suicide are present in 2 of them. And in 2 of the shows, the central character is ALREADY DEAD and we see their lives through flashbacks.
* And its made me think a lot. Why, relatively suddenly, are the popular shows I’m watching on television putting death back in our faces…through entertainment?
* Is it slowly becoming popular…to weep and mourn death?
* I haven’t yet gotten to the bottom of this entertainment trend…but it has me wondering…will that be a good thing? Where will it lead?
* Is the graveyard making a comeback? Should speaking of and looking at disease and death be more prevalent? And if it is…isn’t that kind of depressing?
* **Title Slide “Descending to the Dead: Why Cemeteries Make the Best Seminaries” – Revelation 1:9-18**
* Today, we’re going to talk about one of the most controversial statements of the Apostles’ Creed. “Jesus descended to the dead. On the Third Day he rose again.”
* Why is that statement in there? And what in the world does it mean?
* You want answers?
* I want the truth.
* YOU CAN’T HANDLE THE TRUTH!
* But the Scripture is gonna give it to us today.
* **Revelation 1:9-18**
* **9 I, John, your brother and partner in the affliction, kingdom, and endurance that are in Jesus, was on the island called Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. 10 I was in the Spirit on the Lord’s day, and I heard a loud voice behind me like a trumpet 11 saying,“Write on a scroll what you see and send it to the seven churches: Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea.”**
* **12 Then I turned to see whose voice it was that spoke to me. When I turned I saw seven golden lampstands, 13 and among the lampstands was one like the Son of Man, dressed in a robe and with a golden sash wrapped around his chest. 14 The hair of his head was white as wool ​— ​white as snow ​— ​and his eyes like a fiery flame. 15 His feet were like fine bronze as it is fired in a furnace, and his voice like the sound of cascading waters. 16 He had seven stars in his right hand; a sharp double-edged sword came from his mouth, and his face was shining like the sun at full strength.**
* **17 When I saw him, I fell at his feet like a dead man. He laid his right hand on me and said, “Don’t be afraid. I am the First and the Last, 18 and the Living One. I was dead, but look ​— ​I am alive forever and ever, and I hold the keys of death and Hades.**
* **Transition:** In the ancient church, this message of Christ holding the keys to death …produced some strange interactions of the living with the dead.
* Kind of like a kindergartener riding his big wheel through a cemetery.
* The church would meet for prayer in tombs.
* They would raise the bodies of martyred saints in the air and parade them around the streets like trophies.
* At funerals, they would sing praise songs over the bodies of the dead.
* And this was all very shocking to their Pagan neighbors. Roman law stated that the dead had to be buried miles away from the city so that the living would not be contaminated. But Xians placed the dead right at the center of their public gatherings.
* Early church buildings were erected over the top of the burial places of martyrs.
* In fact, around 300 AD, we find some of the earliest Xian art produced on the walls of the catacombs under the streets of Rome.
* When new Xians were preparing for their baptism, they would gather in the tombs and catacombs and receive theological training.
* Its funny. **Cemeteries were the first Seminaries.**
* **He descended to the dead.**
* **On the third day he rose again;**
* I would argue that the entire creed is a kind of descent to the dead…and then an upturn back to the heavens….and these 2 lines are the turning point…right in the center.
* You know, you start with God the Father and Jesus the Son creating…and then there is descent from the heavens to the earth, then into suffering and death, and burial…then…TO THE DEAD. And on the third day…things begin to turn around, with resurrection.
* And the creed ends with the CHURCH RISEN, alive and LIVING FOREVER.
* The creed ends with empty church cemeteries.
* So what does it mean that Christ descended to the dead… and why is that important?
* **1) Jesus’ descent to the dead means we aren’t fearful or defensive.** 
  + If you were unfamiliar with the Creed before we started this series, likely, the statement that you were the least sure about was “He descended to the dead”.
  + Did Jesus go to hell?
  + What does that mean?
  + Well first, let me answer that…and then…I’ll tell you why it matters.
  + **V 17-18**
  + First, notice that the resurrected Jesus says that appears to John as he writes Revelation says that he “holds the keys” to death and Hades.
  + So, what is Hades?
  + Well, Hades is the Greek word that means “the place of the dead”. And to understand this, we’re probably going to have to shed some of our late modern pop-xianity beliefs about what happens when people die.
  + First of all, hell doesn’t exist yet.
  + **Rev 20:13-14**
  + These verses show that death and Hades will one day be emptied into the lake of fire, which is most of our concepts of hell. But right now…Hell doesn’t even exist.
  + But we generally tend to think, once someone dies, they are immediately burning in Eternal Conscious Torment for eternity.
  + That’s not what the Bible says, though.
  + The Scripture points to this place called “Sheol” in Hebrew or “Hades” in Greek. And in Sheol, there are these 2 sort of sections.
  + One is an unrighteous section, and the other is a righteous section, reserved for those whose faith is in YHWH to save them.
  + **Luke 16:22-23**
  + Jesus refers to this when he tells the parable of Lazarus and the rich man.
  + He is not, at this point, introducing a new doctrine, but he is using the common Jewish understanding of where people go when they die.
  + Essentially, Jesus is pointing out here that those associated with Abraham, who by faith trusted in God’s promise to save, will be in some benevolent sort of section of Sheol, while those who trusted in themselves, and worshipped other gods, will be in some not-so-pleasant section of Sheol.
  + If you read the OT, you will find a litany of verses that mention Sheol.
  + When Christ died on the cross, he did not go to hell. Because Hell doesn’t exist yet.
  + **Eph 4:9 & Matt 12:40**
  + From what the Scriptures tell us, Jesus descended to the place of the dead, Hades, Sheol.
  + Why? What did he do there?
  + **1 Peter 3:18-19**
  + Peter says that he went to make proclamation to the spirits in prison, or those in the unrighteous compartment of Sheol, that what he had accomplished in his death on the cross was now complete. He went to tell them that he now held the keys to death and Hades…that though Satan and the demons and rulers of evil THOUGHT they had irrevocably brought the curse of death to humanity, Jesus went to say “Gimme those keys, suckers”. I’m changing the game.
  + Now, it seems to be, based on some more biblical evidence, that Jesus at that point brought all those who had trusted by faith in God for their salvation (folks like you can read about in Hebrews 11), that Jesus raised them up to some place of waiting that is completely separate from Sheol.
  + **Luke 23:42-43**
  + Because he says to the thief on the cross just before he dies, “Today, you will be with me in paradise”.
  + So, if you ask me, “where do you go when you die?”, if your trust is in Christ…I will tell you, “you go wherever Christ is” You are hidden in him. Paul said to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord.
  + And if your faith is not in Christ for salvation, you go this unrighteous compartment of Sheol…awaiting final judgment when Hades will be poured into the lake of fire.
  + The truth is, the Bible doesn’t spend a whole lot of effort answering the question “Where do we go the moment we die?”
  + IT spends a lot of pages answering the question “Where will we spend FOREVER?”
  + And it spends a lot of pages answering the question, “What should I do with my life right now.”
* **Back to 1)**
  + So lets talk about what believing this doctrine that Jesus descended to the dead should spark in us.
  + Primarily, it should tell us that the church is not a defensive people.
  + No, we’re on offense.
  + **Rev 1:13-16**
  + I mean, did you see the way Jesus is described in the passage we read in Revelation.
  + The one who showed up in Hades and took the keys to death…and proclaimed to the evil spirits “You haven’t won.” Death will not be the final chapter for my people…
  + I mean…he’s on offense isn’t he?
  + He’s not protecting himself from a bully devil…he’s proclaiming his victory. His face is shining like the Sun. A sword is coming from his mouth. His voice sounds like crashing waves. His eyes are like fire.
  + The fact that Jesus descended to the dead in power…on our behalf should not create in us a fear of death…or a trepidation of what any evil can do to us…no.
  + Like the early church, we should be confident. Non-anxious. Sure people who will not despair no matter what.
  + The Psalms say that the righteous do not fear bad news…you know why? Because Jesus showed up in Hades and said, “Not today, Devil, not EVER!”
  + **Matt 16:16-19a (end at first “heaven”)**
  + When Peter confesses to Jesus that he believes Jesus is the Son of the LIVING God….note the word LIVING.
  + Jesus tells Peter that he, and by extension, the church will now have the keys to the Kingdom of Heaven.
  + Meaning that when we trust Jesus as our savior, we become attached to the LIVING God. And we get access to the Kingdom of Heaven…which is opposite the unrighteous Sheol.
  + And look how Jesus talks about Hades. He says its “gates” will not overpower the church.
  + Now, are gates offensive or defensive?
  + They are defensive. They are used to keep out intruders.
  + See, its not Death and Hades that is on the offense against the church. No. Because Jesus has rightly acquired the keys to Hades, it is now the church that is pushing back against death.
* **Back to 1)**
  + We are not a defensive people. We’re at war with death…and in fact, the victory has already been decided by Jesus victory on the cross.
  + Let’s get real practical for a second.
  + The book of Revelation, in fact the vast majority of the New Testament is written to a church that is being persecuted. They are being killed. Tortured.
  + Yet, they met and prayed among those dead.
  + They paraded their dead martyrs through the streets, not as a political statement demanding their rights…but as a testimony…that Jesus had transformed the way they saw death.
  + No longer was it something they could be threatened by, now, death was a moment to celebrate that Jesus had won the victory over death.
  + So, lets talk about us, today.
  + You are being sold a story today, largely because it makes money and builds up political loyalties. The story is that you, as a Christian in America, are a persecuted minority. That the big bad secular world is holding you down. Keeping you from being a Christian in public. And you should be sick and tired of it. You should elect someone who will fight for your rights. We are a people that need to defend ourselves. Put those liberal seculars in their place. Will your children be safe in the progressive future? Do something about it!
  + While, I agree, that there are some religious liberty issues politically that we should be concerned with…this defensive, us against them posture is NOT where Scripture leads us.
  + We already have our defender in Christ.
  + He has already proclaimed to the evil powers…that they will not win.
  + So, we shouldn’t shrink back in fear and put up gates to defend ourselves against human enemies…
  + …rather, since our Savior descended to the dead and made a victorious proclamation…we should be looking for wherever the lie of sin and death is invading the world…and we should, by the power of Christ in us, make the same proclamation…with our words and actions.
  + If the church is not a defensive people, but an offensive one…it means we don’t sit back until threatened and then defend ourselves…
  + …it means we charge into our neighborhood, our campus, our workplace…and we look for people mourning.
  + We look for the co-worker who just found out they have cancer…and we walk with them, telling them the truth that Jesus has made death simply a gateway to life.
  + We look for our classmate that is hurting from sexual brokenness, the pain and let down of the lie that casual hook-ups don’t mean anything…and we comfort them with genuine friendship…and we make the proclamation that where evil lies have been believed…that there is a better, more beautiful truth that can shine into that darkness.
  + Listen, if some of our most popular television shows are talking about disease, and death, depression, and heartache…the time IS NOW, for the church to get KNEE deep into that conversation with a Savior who holds the keys to death and Hades.
  + In short, we attack the death and darkness with love. Eyes like fire, face like the sun…and the word of God spilling from our mouths to bring peace into chaos.
  + If this was good news to the Xians who were being beheaded, burned alive and thrown to the lions…it is certainly is good news to the depressed, the lonely, the diseased, and the terminally ill.
  + Like kindergartners on a big wheel, its time to ride into cemetery.
* TRANSITION: Because…
* **2) Jesus’ physical resurrection means we are an optimistic cultivating minority.** 
  + One of the greatest mysteries of human history is how an outcast minority with virtually no wealth, no weapons, and no political power in the middle east 2000 years ago…in the matter of about 300 years…toppled one of the most powerful and violent empires in the history of the world.
  + But that’s what happened.
  + The church of Jesus Christ, outlasted Rome.
  + You know how they did it?
  + Well, one of the chief ways was taking care of the sick and dying.
  + When the plague hit Rome in the 2nd and 3rd centuries, the Romans were abandoning the sick to the streets.
  + They were trying to preserve their own lives by getting rid of the dying. But it was the Christians who took to the streets and brought the dying into their homes…to either nurse them to health…or let them die with dignity.
  + Many times, the Xians would contract the disease themselves and die.
  + The Roman rulers noticed this…and wrote about it.
  + We have historical letters of people who were hostile toward the church writing about how frustrating Xians were because they took care of everyone’s sick.
  + Additionally, during a time that a lot of little girl babies were being thrown out to die by the Romans, because they wanted boys to carry on a family name, the Christians were taking them in and raising them.
  + This love, this physical care for people who were unlike them, expect in their weakness, became the major factor in Xianity winning the day in ancient Rome.
  + **1 Cor 15:3-6**
  + When Jesus resurrected…he wasn’t a floating ghost.
  + He was physically, bodily, resurrected.
  + He didn’t get rid of his earthly shell and become a higher spiritual being.
  + That’s not Xianity.
  + That’s called Gnosticism.
  + It's the belief that the physical is bad, and spiritual is good.
  + So our aim is to get rid of the body and become more spiritual.
  + Just to note: That’s why when someone dies, I don’t say they “passed away”. That phrase has its roots in gnosticism and eastern religion. I say they died. Because that’s what they did.
  + And like that 5 year old among the gravestones outside that church in Nashville, we have the privilege of being unafraid of that word.
  + Here’s what this means.
  + Instead of being a fearful threatened minority of people, who seek to become the majority because in some sense, we think we will be safer...
  + We think if we can get the upper hand politically and become dominant, we can live our lives now the way we want to…we enjoy ourselves… and then eventually, shed this earthly shell and be carried away to spiritual bliss.
  + But listen, that’s Sheol talk.
  + That’s not resurrection talk.
  + Its Gnosticism, not Xianity.
  + **Rev 21:1-2**
  + The way John describes eternity is not spiritual bodies floating up to heaven…its heaven descending to the physical.
  + It's a renewed earth.
  + Its people, with resurrected, renewed bodies together with God…forever.
  + The Kingdom of God is BREAKING into this world…not making it disappear. Its making all things new.
  + The coming Kingdom of God will be RIGHT HERE.
  + **Rev 21:3-4**
  + Its going to look totally different, because all death, all sin, all disease, all lies, all evil will be completely purged from the earth.
  + But, if you want to know where you will spend eternity if your faith is in Christ as your savior…just look around. It will be THIS PHYSICAL WORLD…completely purified and made new.
* **Back to 2)**
  + That means, we don’t live as a pessimistic defensive minority trying to become a majority to make our lives safe now…
  + … we live an optismitic cultivating minority. Unafraid of our lack perceived lack of power…and deeply concerned with the physical AND the spiritual.
  + We’re optimistic because as broken as the world looks…we know that it is not beyond repair. We have a promise that God is going to do it!
  + By cultivating…I mean we’re like farmers. Trying to plant seeds of the coming Kingdom of God everywhere we go. Both spiritually, and physically, we are seeking to show people what God’s kingdom is like.
  + So, I run everything through this grid in my decision making.
  + Will these words, that I’m about to say, tell someone the truth about God?
  + Is the way I’m treating this person, treating them like God desires to make them better?
  + Does my schedule reflect someone who is trying to preserve a way of life for myself…or give my life away to show others that God cares about them?
  + How do I treat the sick and dying?
  + How do I treat the poor?
  + How do I treat the bully and the unkind? Like he’s broken and needs love…like he needs God’s kingdom to break in…
  + …or do I treat him like someone I need to put in his place?
  + Rome was toppled not by a pessimistic defensive majority…
  + But by an optimistic cultivating minority.
* **Transition:** …and that brings us to this…
* **3) Jesus’ resurrection is the turning point of the universe. Repentance is our personal turning point.**
  + After pastoring that church in Nashville, my Dad joined the army as a chaplain. We moved to Texas and it was there, 2 years after my last big wheel ride past the church cemetery, that I first decided that I would follow Jesus”
  + But, those gravestones…they stuck with me.
  + I remember the night I prayed with my Mom and Dad, I came to them, mostly afraid of dying.
  + “I don’t want to go to hell”, I said. “I want to be with you guys and my brothers when I die. I want to be with Jesus”.
  + The GRAVITY of seeing death…understanding that people were buried under my feet…and seeing so many folks in the church who weren’t afraid of it, like I was…made a huge difference.
  + Seeing the church, the people of the church, praising God right next to a cemetery…it was a little like a seminary for a 5 year old.
  + It taught me that if you know Jesus, and he knows you…that graveyards aren’t scary anymore.
  + The book of Jonah is one of my favorite OT books.
  + For many reasons, but one is because of the literary word-play, particularly in the first chapter.
  + It almost functions as a sort of descent to the dead…and then resurrection.
  + You should read it later. And just circle everytime in the first 2 chapters that the word “down” is used and then circle everytime you see the word “Arise”.
  + God calls Jonah to Arise, and go to Nineveh, and preach to them to repent. But Jonah, to get away from God, because he feels like a persecuted minority and he doesn’t want good for the people of Nineveh…he goes DOWN to Joppa. He gets on a ship and goes DOWN to the bottom of the Ship. Then in the middle of a storm, he goes DOWN into the chaos of the ocean. Then DOWN into the belly of fish…where he repents.
  + And then, he is spit out onto land. And he ARISES and GOES to Nineveh to preach.
  + Then it happens all over again to the people of Nineveh. They are told to repent…or turn around…and they go DOWN into the ashes and dust…before they ARISE to worship God.
  + Centuries later, when Jesus is talking to the Jewish Pharisees…look what he says
  + **Matt 12:39-41**
  + He says that like Jonah, he will descend into the heart of the earth, and 3 days later will rise.
  + And then he says, The people of Nineveh, the ones that repented at Jonah’s preaching, will condemn them.
  + Because, Jesus says, someone greater than Jonah is here.
  + Jesus wasn’t just swallowed by a fish…he was swallowed up by death. He died, and descended to the dead…and then physically resurrected with a message.
  + Repent. And believe that Jesus is bringing the Kingdom of God.
  + Repent. And make Jesus your Lord.
  + The people of Nineveh repented when a prophet went down in the belly of a fish and them arose to preach good news to them.
  + If they can repent at that, then what keeps you from repenting when God in the flesh, descended to the dead and arose on the third day to proclaim to you, that if you repent…you will be saved from Death and Hades.
* **Back to 3)**
  + The Resurrection was the turning point of the universe.
  + Sin had corrupted everything. Everything was falling apart.
  + But when Jesus resurrected…for the first time…the world had physical hope.
  + And what God has promised…he will do.
  + What Jesus proclaimed to the Dead…his triumph…his victory…new heavens and new earth…it will come to pass.
  + But to be a part of it…you need personal repentance.
  + You have to turn from your own evil…your own sin…your own prideful embrace of THIS LIFE…and let Jesus call the shots.
  + How?
  + By faith.
  + **Mark 1:15 & 2 Cor 5:17**
  + Jesus said, Repent and believe this good news.
  + And you will be attached to him…and the new creation he is bringing.
  + You yourself, will become a sign of NEW CREATION that is coming.
  + If you repent at the sign of Jonah.
  + That Jesus died in your place. Descended to the dead. And resurrected to make all things new.
  + And if your repent…this is the spirit that we now approach life and death.
* **1 Cor 15:54b-58**
* **Death has been swallowed up in victory.**
* **55 Where, death, is your victory?**
* **Where, death, is your sting?**
* **56 The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. 57 But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ!**
* **58 Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, be steadfast, immovable, always excelling in the Lord’s work, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.**
* **Baptism and Lords Supper**