

The Apostles Creed

by
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Chapter 1

As an introduction to our study of this great proclamation in the Christian faith, we will prayerfully review the familiar word of the beloved 91st Psalm.

He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the Lord, He is my refuge and my fortress: my God; in him will I trust. Surely he shall deliver thee from the snare of the fowler, and from the noisome pestilence. He shall cover thee with his feathers, and under his wings shall thou trust: his truth shall be thy shield and buckler. Thou shalt not be afraid for the terror by night; nor for the arrow that flieth by day; nor for the pestilence that walketh in darkness; nor for the destruction that wasteth at noonday. A thousand shall fall at thy side, and ten thousand at thy right hand; but it shall not come nigh thee. Only with thine eyes shalt thou behold and see the reward of the wicked. Because thou hast made the Lord, which is my refuge, even the Most High, thy habitation; there shall no evil befall thee, neither shall any plague come nigh thy dwelling. For he shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways. They shall bear thee up in their hands, lest thou dash thy foot against a stone. Thou shalt tread upon the lion and adder: the young lion and the dragon shalt thou trample under feet. Because he hath set his love upon me, therefore will I deliver him: I will set him on high, because he hath known my name. He shall call upon me, and I will answer him: I will be with him in trouble; I will deliver him, and honor him. With long life will I satisfy him, and show him my salvation (Psalm 91).

This Psalm speaking of the power of Almighty God which upholds and keeps and sustains His people, leads naturally into the first article of faith recorded in the Apostles Creed. "I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth."

We can only become Christians by faith in the Almighty God, and by receiving from Him what He has prepared for us in Christ Jesus.

Christians are commonly expected to hold fast that which is good and right and true. To be sure, there are things that are bad and wrong and false, but as Christians, motivated by our faith in God, we receive His promises. He accepts us, He makes us His children, members of the household of God. "To as many as received Him, He gave power to become the children of God, even to them that believe on His name." When we believe in Him certain changes take place in us and certain results appear. Now the things that are good and right and true become the things we find desirable to us. This change in us must always begin with faith. Without faith a human being wants the things that please himself, not that which is good and right and true.

All human beings are warped in their thinking and their desires, in one way or another. God comes to them and offers them His mercy and His forgiveness.

Forgiveness is something we as Christians have experienced and rejoice in. However, forgiveness is not the basis of this study. We are considering the verities which we surely believe. The church has cherished throughout its history a certain statement of faith proclaiming that which we and which Christendom confidently believes. This is known as the Apostles Creed.

The Apostles Creed was not written by anyone of the early apostles. It is not recorded in any of the books of the Bible. No one has ever claimed to know the authorship of this document. As a matter of fact, by common consent, it is accepted by Bible students everywhere that the Apostles Creed is a condensed statement of what the apostles actually believed and taught and preached.

As we meditate upon the first Article of the Apostles Creed, we realize why the words must come first, above everything else in our thinking. The belief in the reality of God gives meaning and substance to our Christian faith. This goes much deeper than merely believing that there is a God. This in itself does not make a man a Christian, yet no one can be a Christian without believing this. Apparently there were several kindred versions of the Creed written and copied and sent out to the congregations of the early church.

The distinctive characteristic of a Christian is his faith. We read in God's Word that a man must believe that God is, and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him. We read further that many people in the world who believe that there is a God have not heard the Christian gospel. We are told in the Bible that "the fool hath said in his heart, there is no God." Such a statement leaves no doubt in anyone's mind that everyone but a fool knows there is a God. "The heavens declare the glory of God and the firmament showeth His handiwork." We need only go out and look at the stars. We need only look into a flower. We need only think of mountains and sea and sky. We need only think of ourselves, the way we are constituted – for a man is fearfully and wonderfully made – to have some idea of the power and wisdom of God. It is only the beginning of intelligence to believe that God is. Belief in God is the part that distinguishes a man from one who has no sense, who is a fool. To believe that "God is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him" is the thing that leads us in the Christian direction. We believe not only in the fact of His existence, but also that He is Almighty. For He created the world and sustains it by His power.

To believe in God as a father is like believing in a person, a friend. It is like believing in a doctor or a merchant. When we say, "I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth," we confess, we announce, and profess with confidence, our trust in Him. We are saying that He made this world, that He created heaven and earth. When we believe deep down in our soul that God created this earth, we also believe that He who is the Creator is able to keep it. This encourages us to believe that no matter how confusing things appear at times, we can accept with confidence the fact that God can overrule in the affairs of men.

We read in the Old Testament that God looked at that which He had created and saw that it was very good. It is this God whom we can trust, no matter what happens. Trusting God completely, includes putting our lives and our future into His hands.

When we consider ourselves, we wish that we were wiser and inwardly disposed to do better than we do. Certainly each one of us is made differently and each one of us feels that there are things within ourselves that need changing. At such times we must place our whole trust and confidence in God who made us. He can make it possible that in some way our lives will turn out to be good. God knows our limitations. He knows our inability to do the things we want to do, and so in mercy He provided a Saviour, who is the remedy for every ill, for every mistake, for every sin that is in us. By the way, when we believe that the world and all its natural processes work according to God's plan, we will certainly accept people, as they are physically constituted, without prejudice as to their appearance.

Sometimes we see people and just wonder why they do not have more sense. Now we would not say that God has made them that way, but rather that God has made a way so that they can change. This will help us not to judge and condemn them. Another big thing that comes to our mind when we say that we believe in God, is the firm belief in His overruling providence at all times and in all places. We are able to trust Him no matter what happens. Not one of us can escape trouble. We have all experienced the loss of a friend or a member of our family in a sudden tragic fashion. At such times we are filled with sorrow and grief and a great question. Naturally some of us are inclined to wonder why did this happen

How can this be in the will of God and in the providence of God? Some people can accept this, but then another question follows, "If we do not believe in God in what will we believe?"

Some of us may shrink from believing that God is in control when an accident happens, and yet none of us would prefer to think that no one was in control. Surely this would be worse. Supposing that one of us has just been in an accident and his car has been wrecked in collision with another car. His heart and mind tries to understand and he may have the feeling that God would not have His hand in this. Ask yourself, "Would I rather think that God did not have His hand in this?" It will not do to say, "If God had His hand in this it would have happened differently." Why not rather say, "God had His hand in it even if I cannot understand it." We need only to trust God. The apostles and the people who understood God as set forth in the Scriptures, trusted Him. Job said, "Yea though He slay me yet will I trust Him."

When we ourselves or our children are hurt and we are asked to trust God to work things out, this is what we must do, just trust Him.

One thing we must keep in mind. God has not promised that this world would be a perfect place to be. He never told us that we would not have trouble, but we read in His Word that He will be with us in the time of trouble. "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee. I will be with thee, I will help thee in the day of trouble."

Trouble will come. "Man is born to trouble as the sparks fly upward." When a man says, "I believe in God," he says, "Even when trouble comes, I believe in God. I believe that God has His hand in it, and that makes a difference." We need not be as totally and completely overcome as we would otherwise be. Now suppose that we did not believe in God and an accident occurred which wrecked our car and caused severe injury. Without a belief in God we would be on our own. The whole world, the whole universe, would seem to be running down the hill, helter skelter, and out of control. Surely this would be much worse. How much better to know that God knows what is happening. His hand is on the controls. We need not say to ourselves, "God made it happen," rather we say, "God allowed this to happen." He lets things happen that are beyond our understanding, but some day He will make it clear to us. What is involved here is the idea that He knows what is going to happen.

Nowhere in the Scriptures do we read of God arbitrarily, malevolently overruling in the lives of people. We often shrink from believing in God in time of trouble or illness or death, and yet how we need to believe in Him at such times. Whom else can we believe in? It will help to get our thoughts in focus when we appreciate the fact that there will be many things which we will not understand. The Apostles never claimed that they understood God. They said that they believed in God, the way a child believes in his parents. If we have children we know how true it is that they often ask for things which we cannot give them. Our children feel very badly when we say no to them. They feel that we do not love them. Sometimes they act as though their hearts were broken. Sometimes they become rebellious as though we meant to do them harm. It does not cross their minds that we may have said no because what they wanted was not good for them. Surely, in a much greater measure, God knows what is best for us.

How good to know that when we say, "I believe in God the Father Almighty," we are saying, "I believe in God who overrules all things and brings His will to pass." In the same way, it is true that when we believe in God, we include in this also that our daily life is open before Him. He knows our every thought, and He who is pure and holy is the light of the world, and in Him there is no darkness at all. He knows our shortcomings and our misdeeds. Thinking about God's holiness, we feel ourselves sinful and unworthy in His sight and worthy of condemnation. We feel that judging us is His prerogative. He made us. He keeps us. He watches over us and should He not set the standards, as it were, and appraise things according to what is right and what is wrong?

When the apostles said, "I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth," they had in mind, "I believe that He is the judge and that in His judging He is right." The very words, Father, Almighty, suggest that we believe in His grace and His kindness and mercy. So much can be said of the

grace of God. When we believe God, we can rejoice that God is merciful and that we can count on His help and care.

In the first place, when we say, "Who made heaven and earth," we admit that the whole world was made by God, and that because He made it, it will be all right. Everything that happens is under God's control and that will make us sober and careful, but in spite of what happens we will never be completely shattered. When we believe in God, no matter how bad things are, or how bad they look, they will not overwhelm us. We know that God's hand is in our affairs and God is good. He watches over things and He will give us a certain confidence even though we have no apparent reason for it. As we continue to trust Him we will feel better and stronger in spite of trouble. With God we know things can never be hopeless. Nothing can happen that He does not understand. He is faithful and will not suffer you to be tempted above that you are able to bear, but with the temptation will provide a way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.

When we say we believe in God it is as though we said, "I do not expect that if I do wrong, that I will get away with it. If I have done wrong I expect to stand before God and give an answer for the deeds done in the body." When we believe in God we expect to answer to Him for the life we lead. This kind of soul searching is wholesome, but at the same time our hearts are encouraged knowing that God cares for us and will show mercy to us. Deep down in our hearts we can take courage when we can openly and confidently said, "I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth." We can in faith lay hold on Him and cling to Him and commit ourselves to Him.

Chapter 2

In the book of Matthew we find these words recorded:

When Jesus came into the coasts of Caesarea Phillipi, he asked his disciples, saying, Whom do men say that I the Son of man am? And they said, Some say that thou art John the Baptist: some, Elijah; and others, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets. He saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am? And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church (Matthew 16:13-18).

As we contemplate Peter's response to Jesus and the words of commendation spoken by our Lord, we realize that when Jesus says, "Blessed art thou Peter," He is actually saying, "You are highly favored and most fortunate because of your confession of faith. This faith, this revelation did not come to you in any human fashion. You did not arrive at such faith by yourself. It is a gift from My Father which is in heaven."

The kind of faith which recognizes that Jesus is the Son of God, that He is the Saviour of mankind, comes from God alone. Ordinarily, as far as we are concerned, some of us might not detect God's hand in bringing this faith to us. It could be that as we read the Bible and listen to the preaching of God's Word, faith comes so naturally, so gently, that we assume that this could happen to everyone. This is a false assumption. It is true that God gives such faith to every willing person, but no human being arrives at this by himself. Faith is something that comes from God, in the same way that your life and strength comes from Him. This is why Jesus wanted Peter to understand from the very outset that his faith was not something that he as a human being could have from within himself.

There is a tendency in the human heart of a man to become vain. We can very easily become proud. Thinking that we can do things ourselves is not good for us. In fact, it is harmful in a Christian. We need to be grateful, we need to give thanks to God from whom we receive everything we have. This includes our life and our faith.

When Jesus said to Peter, "Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church," the word

'rock' is a figure of speech. It refers to something like a foundation. We are all familiar with the parable of the man who built his house upon a rock. This man is compared with the man who built his house upon the sand. The word 'rock' used in this parable implied a solid foundation. The same meaning applies here, "Upon this solid foundation I will build my church." We need not ask what that firm foundation is. We know that it is not a stone. It is not a physical thing. As we consider these words of Jesus more closely, it becomes quite clear that the heartfelt conviction that Christ Jesus is the Son of the living God, is the basis and the foundation of our whole Christian experience, and of the Christian church. No one seriously doubts that Jesus of Nazareth actually lived. However, believing the historic fact of His life as a man in Palestine is not the basis for the Christian hope. Accepting the Bible story of His birth in Bethlehem and His life upon this earth does not make us Christians. There were hundreds of thousands of people in Palestine in His day, who knew Him and yet did not become believers. It is when we can say with Peter, "I believe that Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God" that we stand upon the strong and sure foundation upon which His church is built.

Today it is a popular thing to praise Jesus of Nazareth as a man, as a great teacher and healer. Even in His day people were willing to say that He was somebody great. They were saying that He was John the Baptist and that meant that He was risen from the dead. Some said that He was Elias who had come back, as the Old Testament said he would. Some compared Him to Jeremiah who was a great prophet. All were prepared to call Him by these titles. These men were willing to make Him a great person, but this is not enough.

Today there are those who foolishly believe they can earn a place in the family of God by trying to follow His example, by trying to emulate His life. This is, of course, impossible and misleading. No sinful human being can live as He lived. Looking through the four gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, we find recorded His works and His miracles which He performed after He began His public ministry. From that time on everything that is recorded of Him is a miracle. This in itself should cause anyone who suggests to us that he can be a Christian by living like the Lord Jesus Christ, to pause and realize that no human being has the strength, the wisdom and the power for this. Only Jesus opened the eyes of the blind and healed the lepers. With His word He made the storm to cease. These and many other infallible proofs proclaim Him the Son of God, whom no sinful human being can aspire to liken himself to in that fashion.

Peter's confession points to the basis of our Christian life and experience. When we say with Peter, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God," faith is exercised in relating us to the living Son of God. Such belief on our part includes complete trust in Him. When a man says, "I believe in a bridge" it means that he would drive his truck over it and trust it not to break down. If a man says, "I believe in that doctor," it means that he would let the doctor operate on him.

Believing in anything means that we would commit ourselves to that person or thing that we believe in. It means trusting. When we say that we believe in Jesus Christ, it means that we believe the story of His birth as recorded in the Bible. We believe the unique, extraordinary story of the Virgin Birth.

There are only two accounts in literature of the birth of the Lord Jesus Christ. These are recorded in the book of Matthew and the book of Luke. From these records it becomes clear as daylight that Christ was born of a virgin. All of us who profess to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ are falling in line with the beliefs of the early church, who not only believed in the Virgin Birth, but also that Christ died for us. Now it does not particularly help to believe that He died. Everyone knows He died. It does not particularly help to believe that He died on the cross. There were hundreds and hundreds of people who saw Him on the cross. He was a public spectacle on the day that He died on the cross. It is when I believe that He died on the cross for me that God will forgive me and make me His own.

When we are in church at the time of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, we remember His death. Foremost it was His death that He wanted His followers to remember. "And He took bread and gave

thanks, and brake it, and gave unto them saying, 'This is my body which is given for you: this do in remembrance of me.' When He took the cup, He said: 'This cup is the New Testament in My blood which is shed for many, for the remission of sins. Drink ye all of it, for as oft as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you do show forth the Lord's death till He comes.'"

It is apparent that the one thing the Lord Jesus wanted His believing people to remember is that He died for them. Surely each time we recall these words of the Lord our hearts are moved to deepest gratitude and appreciation. When we say, "I believe in Jesus Christ," we confess openly that we believe in His resurrection. When Christ died for us He gave Himself for us in wonderful grace and mercy. His death was made effective by His resurrection. When we say, "He was raised from the dead," we accept the fact that "God raised Him from the dead." In the Book of Acts we read, "God raised Him from the dead." This is the great testimony of the Bible and of the New Testament.

Since God raised His Son from the dead, this means that God accepted the sacrifice which the Lord Jesus had made. God was satisfied. He endorsed the completed program of redemption. When God raised Jesus from the dead, He set the seal of approval upon His eternal plan of salvation which saves our souls now and forever more. Just as surely as God raised Jesus up from the dead, just so surely God will change each one of us and bring us up in newness of life in Christ Jesus. This is a wonderful hope for every Christian. It is not by personal will power that we will do better than we have done before. It is God, who will by His grace and mercy work that in us which is well pleasing in His sight.

As we contemplate our salvation bought for us by the blood of Jesus Christ, it will become the desire of our hearts to do His will. Our hearts will overflow with such gratitude to Him, "who loved us and gave Himself for us" that we want to be different, that we long to do His will.

When I was a boy, I had wonderful teachers, both in public school and in high school. They were men and women who held out before me the high ideals of that which is worthy and noble and good. I remember that in all honesty and sincerity I had the genuine desire to be good, but found somehow that this was not possible. In spite of the fact that my conscience bothered me when the things I wanted and the things I did were not good, I was powerless to change.

Now let me say very humbly that in the course of my life time I learned that when I became a child of God, I felt and acted differently from the way I did before. I found myself wanting to do for people. I became concerned about their souls, wishing that they might come to the Lord. All this was new to me, and none of this is a credit to me. God was working in my heart "to will and to do His good pleasure." It is a wonderful thing to know that we have the prospect, everyday, of being transformed by the power of God. This is the same power which raised Jesus Christ from the dead. Paul writes in his letter to the Romans that the very power which God exercised in raising Jesus Christ from the dead, He will also use to raise us up to new life in Him. In other words, He will revive us within. Although we were dead in trespasses and sins, He will raise us up. All this is involved in the resurrection from the dead.

When we say, "I believe in Jesus Christ," we actually say, "I believe not only that Jesus Christ was raised from the dead, but I believe it was meant for me." Whatever was involved in His resurrection applies to us personally. Not only do we believe that He was born and lived and died and was raised from death according to the Scriptures, but we believe that He lives now. We believe that He is at this moment in the presence of God, interceding and praying in our behalf. He is active right now in this ministry of intercession. He is not waiting until God's plans are worked out before He turns to us. No. He is actually even now exercising Himself in praying for us.

The Bible calls Him our advocate. A lawyer who defends the prisoner at court, is his advocate, so to speak. Each one of us knows that his or her life is not perfect by any manner of means. Not a single day goes by but what we do the things we should not do. God, Who is infinitely holy, could never bless us as we are, if it were not for the amazing grace of Jesus, interceding for us. Knowing this, we can look forward to each day, comforted in the assurance that the Lord Jesus is aware of our need. He is touched with

all the feelings of our infirmities. He knows what experiences we are going through. He cares about us and is praying for us. What wonderful assurance that He Who knows every single thing about us, and what the days ahead will bring, is praying for us.

Our belief in the living Lord Jesus Christ also means that we look to Him for guidance as to what we should do.

When we worship God in a group of Christians we have Christ's promise that, "When two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst." His actual presence is wherever His name is raised, and the Holy Spirit makes the things of the Lord Jesus real in our hearts. He becomes our Lord, our director, who wants to guide and direct us. When we need to think things through in order to make the right decision, we go to God in prayer. What a comfort to know that our Lord Jesus Christ is praying for us as we wait before God to guide our hearts as to how we should live and what we should do. We can always have this in our minds. Something else can never be left out of our thinking – He is coming again. He is going to return in person to this earth. Those of us who are called to our heavenly home before the day of His returning can confidently say, "Absent from the body, present with the Lord." He has prepared a place for us. While He was here in this world, He said, "Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go to prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself."

Chapter 3

The Gospel of John begins with these words:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life; and the life was the light of men. And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not. There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. The same came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all men through him might believe. He was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of that Light. That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not. He came unto his own, and his own received him not. But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.
(John 1:1-14)

In this chapter I want to say something about the Apostles Creed itself. When the Gospel was first preached the situation was vastly different than it is today.

In the days when Peter and Paul preached, there were no churches. There was no New Testament, and there were no Christian hymns. The early Christians had never heard a song like "Onward Christian Soldiers." They had never heard anyone sing, "I come to the garden alone," or "The Old Rugged Cross." They lived in a world where there were many heathen religions. They did, however, have the Old Testament Scriptures and the Jewish religion of Jehovah, the Lord of the Old and the New Testament. Into this world came the dynamic Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. Men who had personal dealings with Jesus were filled with a certain inward joy and gladness of heart that transformed their lives. They had experienced God's forgiveness. It had been revealed to these early Christians that God would accept them and bless them by faith in Jesus Christ. These men had a ringing testimony of their personal experience with God. They could speak with confidence of the inward peace in their hearts. They had peace and confidence in the face of death while other men feared death and the future. Now this message of hope and forgiveness was taken all over the known world, especially in the Mediterranean area of that day. These witnesses were individual men and women who could be distinguished from other men by their inward experience. Their

testimony of inward peace and comfort and joy and power filled others with wonder and envy. No doubt they were often questioned as to the reason for their faith. The early Christians told them the good news that the God who had created the world, sent His Son into the world. They would tell of His life, His death, His resurrection and His life in heaven at the right hand of God the Father.

These men, who were sent out by the Lord Jesus Christ at the time of his Ascension, preached the Gospel as long as they lived. All who believed as a result of their preaching told others the story of Jesus and His power to save. It is easy to understand that a time came when the things the Apostles had proclaimed and preached would be formulated into a statement which would be called, "The Apostles Creed." It would be a concise summary of their testimony and was accepted as the authoritative document of faith by the church then and now. This should be in our minds when we recite this Creed. "I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth; and in Jesus Christ His only Son our Lord who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried; He descended into hell; the third day He rose again from the dead; He ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead. I believe in the Holy Ghost; the holy Catholic Church; the communion of saints; the forgiveness of sins; the resurrection of the body; and the life everlasting. Amen."

We notice that the things said about the Lord Jesus Christ in this Creed do not in any way refer to His personal life while in this world. We recite the story of His birth, His suffering, His death and resurrection, but not one word about the thirty years of His life. There is no mention made in the Creed about His teachings, nor His divine love for sinners. The facts listed are these: conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead and buried. He descended into hell, He ascended into heaven. These are the things that have to do with our salvation. Jesus of Nazareth obtained our salvation for us, and the Apostles Creed identifies Him. This is the Jesus we believe in. Let us look more closely at the facts we have just mentioned.

The Bible account of His birth is found in the Gospel of Matthew and the Gospel of Luke. Nowhere else in all the world is there a miraculous birth like His recorded. He had no human father. There can be no question that God was His Father and that Jesus was born into this world by the Virgin Mary.

In this day and time there are people who would imply and say that they do not believe in the Virgin Birth of the Lord Jesus Christ. They say that it is not important to believe in His miraculous birth. Anyone who takes this position simply is in opposition with the Bible. "Suffered under Pontius Pilate." I repeat that there is nothing between His birth and death in the Creed. May I suggest to you again that the life the Lord Jesus lived upon this earth has no particular relation to our salvation. He lived a perfect life because He was a perfect man. He did everything right and good because He was right and good. He manifested the power of God in His life but actually now this is not of direct help to us. The thing that is of help to us is that Jesus Christ died for us, and that is what we have here.

Christians are people who love God. Deep down in their hearts they feel a deep sense of gratitude to God, and a great desire to be well pleasing in His sight. We as Christians feel this way, not because we are good. We love God because He first loved us and gave His Son for us. It is a wonderful thing to contemplate God's love, who gave His Son to die for us. We are deeply moved to read that the Son of God actually endured suffering and shame for us. This is the great point of the Christian Gospel. Then, in the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ, we are given the assurance that God will raise us from the dead.

There is another statement in the Apostles Creed which some church bodies include and some leave out. "He descended into hell." The reason, of course, that these words are left out of some variations of the Apostles Creed is simple. In the early literature of the church, in the writings that are still being discovered, some versions of the Creed leave these words out. They are not omitted because they are not true. Some people leave it out because they think that it could be misunderstood. The word "hell" means several different things. With some people it means a lake of fire. With some, the idea of hell refers to

complete and total destruction in flame, from which there is no return.

Now there are several other uses of the word "hell." There is a meaning which speaks of "hell" as the abode of departed spirits, the way in which we would describe the state of a soul which has left the body but has not as yet come to the final judgment.

In the story which Jesus told of Lazarus and the rich man, both died. and Lazarus went to heaven and was in Abraham's bosom. The rich man went to hell and was in torment. He talked to Abraham from there. In other words, the condition of an unbeliever who has died is that he is unforgiven in the sight of God, but he has not yet been brought up for final judgment. Such a man is also spoken of as being in hell, although he has , not yet been thrown into the lake of fire.

Now because of these several ideas of the term, the English word for "hell" is rather ambiguous. I, myself, feel that the words, "He descended into hell," contain a valuable truth and that it is wholesome to include them in the Creed. When we say, "He descended into hell," we are saying, "He took my place. He went down and suffered in my place, the way I was supposed to suffer. He was separated from His Father. He actually suffered the agony of being separated from God, bearing the burden of the sins of the world – bearing the burden of my sins." This is the Gospel. No one can deny that, "He descended into hell and the third day rose again from the dead."

As we note the reality of the resurrection, we realize that the most important thing said about the resurrection of our Lord from the dead is this promise to us that as He rose from the dead so shall we rise from the dead. This is a wonderful truth to recall to our hearts and minds as we live in this world. As we go about our daily affairs, those events which took place 1900 years ago, seem to be very far off in the distance. The things that may happen at some future time before the great White Throne seem to be very far off in the distance. As we live and move and have our being in this world, we know perfectly well that one of these days will be our last day. As we walk and talk and go from place to place, we know perfectly well that one of these days we will no longer walk and talk and move about in this world.

There is no one in this world, who has any sense, who does not know that he is facing death. Looking ahead to this, a good many of us have an uneasy feeling. It upsets our hearts and minds to think of this disturbing prospect that some day we must face the judgment of God. Of course, not wanting to think about it does not help a single bit. It is much better to think about it and see what we can do about it. Thank God that He has the solution to this humanly insurmountable problem. He sent His Son into this world to suffer and die in our stead. He raised His Son from the dead. God did this with the express purpose to help us, to give us hope that He who raised His Son from the dead will one day raise us from the dead.

Even now our Lord Jesus Christ is in glory interceding in our behalf. Even now we may live by faith in His presence day by day.

Chapter 4

In the Gospel of Luke these words are recorded.

And he led them out as far as to Bethany, and he lifted up his hands, and blessed them. And it came to pass, while he blessed them, he was parted from them, and carried up into heaven. And they worshipped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy, and were continually in the temple praising and blessing God. Amen. (Luke 24:50-53)

Then, in the Book of the Acts of the Apostles, in the first chapter, beginning at verse 8, we find these words. "But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth. And when he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight. And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel; which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this

same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven."

These two passages of Scripture, one taken from the Book of Luke and the other from the Acts of the Apostles, contain the Bible record of the ascension of the Lord Jesus Christ. This expression, "He ascended into heaven," is included in the Apostles Creed, in their proclamation of faith. It belongs to the Gospel. It is what the apostles testified to and what the early church believed. When we say that we believe that He ascended into heaven, we are openly confessing that we believe in another world, that this world is not everything. When we get up in the morning and go out and look about us, as far as our eye can see, until the horizon meets the sky, we notice the things that are round about us, the things that we can see and taste and smell and touch. Everything that we see and sense belong to the natural world. When we believe that Jesus Christ ascended into heaven, we believe that there is another world than this one. Sometimes we call it the invisible world. Sometimes we call it the unseen world. The Bible tells us that we do not know what heaven is like. "It does not yet appear what we shall be like. We know that when He shall appear, we shall be like Him for we shall see Him as He is." Often when we think and speak about going to heaven, after death, we may not understand how this would happen. Many people are tinged with a feeling of doubt when they think of another world. In the early church the apostles had no such feeling of uncertainty. They believed it. They knew that Christ Jesus had ascended into heaven in full view of His followers. Heaven had to be a real place. It is as real as this earth. This is what the Bible teaches. Heaven is actually existing right now, even though invisible.

It is important for us to realize that when the apostles preached and taught that Jesus ascended into heaven, this means that He was alive through the transition. This emphasizes the fact that heaven is as real as this world, and the folks here on earth are no more alive than the folks who are in heaven. In the ascension of His Son, God revealed Himself to humanity as the giver of eternal life through His Son. "Whosoever believeth in Him shall not perish but have everlasting life." The early church not only believed that Jesus ascended into heaven, but they also believed that, "He sitteth at the right hand of God the Father Almighty." Now the right hand of God is a place of honor. It was commonly accepted then, as now, that to sit down to a table on the right of the host is a primary honor. Jesus is even now at the right hand of God, where God bestows on Him honor and glory and dominion.

It is the sure hope of every Christian that if he should be called out of this world, Jesus would intercede for him. He will stand with us when we stand before the Judge of all men. But it is also true that right now while we are still in this world, Jesus intercedes in our behalf. We do not need to die in order to have the Lord Jesus pray for us. He is praying for us now while we live. He knows everything that happens to us and prays for us, according to our needs. This is His function in that place of honor at the right hand of God. No one but the only begotten, well-beloved Son of the Father can fill this place, and He is our Saviour. He brings us into fellowship with God, heirs of God and joint heirs with Jesus Christ.

I do not want to make too much of this, but the Lord Jesus sitting there implies, if anything, a waiting mood and a settled, quiet confidence. He has fulfilled His Father's plan of salvation and is in the presence of God the Father Almighty, praying for us. When we Christians are facing problems, when we are confronted with situations where the pressure can be too heavy to bear, we can take comfort in the assurance that Christ is praying for us. What an encouragement it is at such times, to have our Saviour pray for us moment by moment and hour by hour.

We may be discouraged with the limited things we have, with our limited understanding and our lack of strength and power. At such times, let us remember that Jesus is pleading for us in glory. He knows what we are going through. He knows when we are tested and tempted to do something that would be displeasing and dishonoring to God. He stands ready to guide us and shape our circumstances in such a way as to keep us from faltering. He will stand beside us.

This has been the testimony of Christians everywhere. In the Book of Hebrews we read,

"Wherefore He is able to save men to the uttermost, that come unto God by Him, seeing He ever liveth to make intercession for us." He is a Friend who knows all about us no matter how weak we are, no matter how easily we fall. He asks the Father to forgive us and by His grace and mercy help us in every possible way.

The next phrase in the Apostles Creed, so familiar to us is, "from thence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead." Here is something that the world would never know. The fact that Jesus is ever more at the right hand of God, praying for His own, and that He will come to judge the quick and the dead, is something that no amount of understanding of natural processes could explain. This is something God is going to do, and no one else would even guess it, because it is tied up with God. God intends to send the Lord Jesus Christ to judge this world.

The Apostle Paul, speaking to the Athenians on Mars Hill, says, "God hath appointed a day where-in He will judge the world by the righteousness of that man whom He hath ordained." God is going to call all men to account and measure them by His Son the perfect man, Jesus Christ, who, Himself, will be the One to pass judgment. Men will stand or fall according to how they measure up to the light that is in the Lord Jesus Christ. With reference to Christ's office as Judge, we could say that His work here in this world is not completed. It is true that He came into this world, and that He laid down His life, but that is not all. During the time He was in this world, He taught His people and promised to them certain things, but that is not all. He is alive now and interceding on behalf of His people, and that is not all. Jesus is coming again and when He returns, He will come to judge. His work will then be finished. Our salvation was complete when He atoned for our sins by His death on Calvary's Cross, but as far as the whole world is concerned, He will come to pass judgment upon it. These are the truths the apostles taught and which were held fast by the early Christian church.

As we recite the Apostles Creed, we find that Jesus is its central figure, its central topic. This makes the Apostles Creed primarily a statement of faith which emphasizes the redemptive work and the name of Jesus. It is a comprehensive summary of what the apostles taught and the early church believed. These are the things we stress above all else.

When we say that, "He shall come to judge the quick and the dead," do we have in mind what this means to us personally? Everyone of us will stand before the judgment seat of Christ. There is not a person in our town that will not stand before the judgment seat of Christ, to give account of every wasted opportunity, of every idle word that has been spoken. Almighty God knows all about us. When He deals with us, He is going to do it in and through the person of His Son Jesus Christ, who is even now in the presence of God, waiting for the time when He will return to this earth to call all men to task. God Himself will evaluate and appraise men by the righteousness of the man Christ Jesus, whom He hath ordained to judge the quick and the dead.

The next simple statement in the Creed is this, "I believe in the Holy Ghost." That is to say, "I believe in the Holy Spirit." In the original Greek these words can be used interchangeably. There is no significant difference between the word "ghost" and "spirit," although by ordinary common usage we think of the "ghost" in connection with apparitions and the like. We are inclined to think that nobody seriously believes in ghosts. Let me ask this question, "Do we think people seriously believe in spirits?" Someone will answer and say, "I hardly think that." Before we close our minds to that question, let me say, "God is a Spirit, and they that worship Him, must worship Him in spirit and in truth." It is no wonder that the third person of the Godhead is called the Holy Spirit. When we say, "I believe in the Holy Ghost," we believe that God Himself will come into our hearts when we are Christians, and show us the things of God. When we are willing to be led and willing to be helped, the Holy Spirit will come and guide us. When we say that "we believe in the Holy Spirit," we are saying that we believe also in the functions of the Holy Spirit. Of course, the thing the Holy Spirit does primarily, above everything else, is to take the things of the Lord Jesus Christ and show them to us and make them clear to us. We may actually count

on the Holy Spirit to do this for us.

Reading the Scriptures, singing the hymns and listening to the preaching of the Word, becomes meaningful as the Holy Spirit speaks to our hearts, making what we have read and heard real to us. This is the ministry of the Holy Spirit here on earth, and it is available to all believers everywhere. The Apostles Creed closes with these words of summation: "I believe in the communion of saints, the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting. Amen."