

October 3, 2021
The 19th Sunday after Pentecost
Pastor Matt Duerr

Theology-The Science of Simplicity-Part III

Grace, Mercy, and Peace be to you from God our Father, from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, Amen.

As we continue with our sermon series dealing with theology; the process or the science of taking that which is most complex God, and simplifying God, so that we can understand Him, we have seen that the early church used creeds. Creeds that were necessary because there were no printing presses and scripture was not readily available to the general public. Therefore, they couldn't test what preachers were saying and there was the problem, preachers. Preachers are men. They're sinners, and they fall short of the glory of God. And as we read in scripture, "the love of money is the root of all sorts of evil." And so, from almost the beginning of time, we see that mankind can warp what the scripture says for personal gain. And so, the creeds were an answer to an ancient challenge, and to modern day challenges.

Today the creeds are most useful. As most of you know I didn't follow the normal way of becoming a pastor with seminary training and all. I went to the seat of your pants seminary, and when I became a pastor, it didn't take long before I got one of those phone calls where I was asked to go to the hospital because one of our members was about to meet the Lord. And I really didn't know what to do in that situation. And so, I leaned heavily on my background. In college I was taught in the Kennedy evangelism program with the Evangelism Explosion. And so, when I got there, our member was awake and was coherent. I asked her, "If you were to die tonight and God asked you 'why should I let you into my heaven,' what would you say?" When she responded with something along these lines, 'well I hope I'm getting to heaven, I've always been a member of the church. I've tried to live a good life. Um I don't know.' That's where the Bible where the creeds came in very useful for me. I went through that evangelism program, and I pointed out that it's in scripture, Romans 6:23 that we see the wages of sin is death. In Romans 3:23 we see that all of us fall short of the glory of God. We are all sinners, and therefore we all stand condemned in our sin. That's when I could then bring the creed in and

just use it as a foundation of, the steppingstone on, God is Creator, His Son is Savior, and His Son fulfilled the prophecies. His Son made atonement for us so it's not what we have done, it's what He has done for us. That's why we are saved, by grace through faith. Faith and trusting that we can't earn our way to heaven but God, who is almighty, has earned our way to heaven and we trust Him. We trust Jesus to have already done that for us. And do you know, her response to that was surprise, relief, and a certain amount of anger. Why wasn't that stressed? Why weren't we talked to about that? The creeds are still a wonderful foundation to use.

And as I was working through those creeds, and working on the sermon today, as we really focus on Jesus. And in the Nicene Creed in particular, which was written to really focus on Jesus; I gained a whole new appreciation. Especially of the Nicene Creed, and to be honest, there is a part of me that almost wishes that I didn't gain this whole new appreciation. Because, in all honesty, I think this is the most difficult sermon I've ever written; because it really puts theology to the test of taking God the most complex and making it so that we can understand Him.

The creeds, they were written to educate, they were written to unite, and of course those two go together well. People who have learned the same thing, tend to be united. But the creeds were also written to destroy as we heard in our New Testament reading. Destroy the thoughts of man, the logic of man, of false teachings. And I know destroy is not a very welcome word in this day and age because it's so violent. It is reality, any false teaching can lead astray. As we saw two weeks ago, if you deny creation, you deny the almighty power of God. And if you adopt the concept of theistic evolution, that God used evolution; then death was always around so the wages, of sin is not death. Death was always around, and atonement becomes very cheap because it really isn't an answer to the wages of sin being death. Or, last week we saw that if we deny that Christ is God, we make Jesus himself a liar, we diminish the atonement on the cross, to just a man dying for all mankind. And what man if given the opportunity to save all mankind, wouldn't be willing to die for all mankind? He'd be the most popular person ever in the world, right?

And so, the Nicene Creed was written to attack and destroy that concept the Jesus is only a man. It begins with God the Father, Almighty, the Creator of heaven and earth. But then when we get to that second article that focuses

on the Son, I want you to notice how those writers at the council of Nicaea in the early 4th century wrote everything in the singular. "And in one" there's no plurality here. One Lord, Master of all, because He is the master of the universe. One Lord, Jesus, a person, God in the flesh, in one Lord Jesus Christ. That's the Greek word from the Septuagint for the Anointed One. The Promised One, the one prophesied, the Messiah.

All of you are probably saying, 'yeah pastor we know that.' Here's where the challenges came; one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only begotten, Son of God; begotten before all worlds. What is meant by before all worlds? Well, it's a way of saying eternal. He was begotten before the creation of this universe. He was begotten before the angels. When the angels were created, there was a time frame started for the angels. They are not eternal. When we were created there's a time frame for us; time for us was started, which is before time. That's what this is saying. He's eternal. The real struggle though is with the "only begotten." And the reason there's a struggle is because there's a certain tension, I guess you could say, within the Bible.

You see, when John speaks about Jesus being God; as we saw last week in John 1:14, "and the word became flesh and dwelt among us full of grace and truth; we have beheld his glory, glory as of the only Son." The older versions of the Bible say, "only begotten," the ESV says "only Son," because the word begotten is not there. In fact, many of you have learned John 3:16, the gospel in a nutshell. "For God so love the world that he gave his only son." Probably most of us learned it as, "only begotten son," that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life." The word begotten is not there. It's also not in John 3:18. It's the only son from God. And that's because John used a particular Greek word it's monogenas; and anytime you see something start with MONO. MONO, like mononucleosis; that means one single, the sole one. Genas, it's where we get the word genetics from; what direct our lives. It's the only One arisen to direct our lives; the only One with the answer. And so, John uses this word for He's the only one risen to the position, the answer, of salvation. He's the only One from God. However, Paul and the author to the Hebrews, and then John and 1st John chapter 5, use the word genaho, which is begotten. And for us in the English, begotten means, well the child was born to; and it can mean that in the Bible; but in the Greek language, and in its Hebrew counterpart, begotten is-of one kind, or to give rise to one kind, or to make one in a new relationship of unity. In short, it's giving rise to a new

relationship in purpose of unity. It's not referring to a birth, to begetting. And so that's why in first Corinthians 4:15, Paul writes "for I became begotten in Christ Jesus through the gospel." The ESV says, "I became your father." Why father? Because the father has the responsibility of passing on everything he knows as we heard last week. With you know, we are a royal priesthood.

So, instead of using the word begotten which people in English think 'well that means give birth to;' they use father. And they focus on what begotten is really talking about. It's that passing on, and he became begotten, he became a person in relationship with Christ; to pass on the unity that comes through Jesus Christ. It is why he writes in Philemon 1:10 "Onesimus begotten in my imprisonment, who was begotten of me." He became the one who was carrying on the gospel ministry while Paul was in prison. And it's this word the *genaho* that in John's last reference, where he speaks of Jesus being the Son of God in first John 5:1. This is what then John uses, "everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ, has been begotten of God; made one with God, with a purpose to spread that oneness of God, that unity of the Church, throughout the world.

And so, the writers of the Nicene Creed, at the Council of Nicea, they had this challenge. How do we bring this *monogenas* and this *genaho* together? And they basically said, 'well let's take the simplest way, let's just use both words; only, begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father, before all worlds, He's eternal. How do we know? Well, He is God of God, always One, He's God from God, Light of light, God is light, Christ is light, and together through Christ, the very first thing in creation, they created light. And as an extension that then becomes a part of our being begotten, and we are to continue to be the light of the world.

Very God of very God, there is no difference between Jesus and God the Father. They are both totally God, begotten not made. He wasn't created but He was given this special purpose, this special relationship, to bring the unity of God and make that unity ours. Unity with Him, unity with each other, being of one substance with the Father; total unity by whom all things were made. And when they did that, they just finished a beautiful literary pattern. It starts with God who is Creator, goes through how Jesus is God, was given this special purpose, begotten, and back to; and He was a part of the creation which then would just take us right through. And when you do this, you put in a circle. It's a closed circle. It's like saying, 'end of story.' This is it, it's one whole

complete unit. So, it's kind of like the idea behind the wedding ring. It's always there and Adam and Eve were made for each other for eternity. When we get married, we are basically saying we were made for each other for all eternity. We're not going to break this. There's no break in this circle. Because God is eternal. And what did this eternal God who gave us a begotten, His begotten son, the special purpose; what did he do? "Who for us man, and for our salvation, came down." When He came down, He was begotten, and rose up to the position of Savior.

Why? That takes us back to Evangelism Explosion. Because sin separates us from God. Sin brings death, both temporal and eternal. And God is just and demands justice. Only God could pay the price of sin of all mankind. No man can do that because all men are equal. We needed something bigger, and that is Jesus. And this is what separates Christianity from every other religion. All other religions tell you, 'You work your way to God, you appease God, you make him happy, and He owes you salvation.' And the problem is none of us can measure up to God because we are all sinners. We need a God who lowered Himself to our level, and took on our sin, and paid the price of our sin. And the only begotten son of God was given that position to unify us with Him.

And I want you to think about that. We are referred to, like Paul says of himself, we are begotten of God. We are His begotten children. We have been put into the special relationship of unity with Him and with each other for all eternity because of what He has done for us, and so it's kind of like this movie that I saw; I've seen a couple times. It just makes me laugh. It's kind of a comedy, action, flick. The title is Night and Day. It's with Tom Cruise, he's this superspy who can do anything. And he meets this lady Cameron Diaz who is kind of a nitwit blonde, it would appear. This terrible group is out to get her. And he just flat out puts it to her this way, your chances of living with me, up here. Without me, down here. With me, up; without, down. With me, without me... and that's the way it is. This is what the Bible tells us. This is what the Nicene Creed is saying. This is what the only begotten Son is saying. With Him, we have unity with God because our sins have been washed away. Without Him on our own, we're sunk.

And that's why now we can approach His table, we could approach communion. It is such an intimate relationship, that we've created, we can now in this time and space of this sinful world, we can come and experience that unity with God; right here, right now, as we partake of the bread, of the cup, and God miraculously comes to us in this physical, sinful, world, and says 'welcome, My begotten child, we are one because My only begotten Son passed our relationship of unity, and purpose onto you. Welcome to the Lords' table. In His Name, Amen