

I Believe

For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. (1 Cor. 2:2 ESV)

“He himself bore our sins in his body on the cross, so that, free from sins, we might live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed.” (1 Peter 2:24 ESV)

Was Crucified Dead and Buried

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1 Corinthians 2:2

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Introduction:

It is my privilege this morning to continue us on our journey through the Apostles' Creed. Last week, Pastor Levi took us through Jesus' suffering. We saw that because Jesus suffered, we can have hope as we deal with suffering in this world. This week then really is a continuation of this topic as we consider the next clause of the creed:

I Believe in Jesus who was CRUCIFIED DEAD and BURIED.

We have now come to the heart or the center of this creed and we must ask ourselves why does a Christian creed which focuses on the God of the universe deal with the death and all-to-common burial of a man? Well, as Pastor Paul told us just a couple of weeks ago, every detail of Jesus' life MATTERS. It matters how he came into this world; it matters what he did here, and it matters how he left here and so all of these details are narrated very carefully in the New Testament and they are summarized, very succinctly here in the Apostles Creed.

Now, why does this creed, and indeed the Christian faith, hinge on this idea: that Jesus was crucified, that he died and was buried?

Dr. Albert Mohler writes:

“The three central truths confirmed here affirm the fact that Jesus was crucified on a cross by the act of scornful men, that he truly died, and that after his death he was buried- all of this in perfect fulfillment of the plan of God.”¹

This morning we are going to see that not only was Jesus crucified dead and buried, but that without these events, articulated in this clause of the creed, there would be no gospel, no reconciliation between us and God, and of course then- no Christian faith.

Was Crucified

So, first we must ask why was Jesus crucified?

Paul writes to the church at Corinth:

“For I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified” (1 Cor. 2:2).

So clearly the crucifixion of Jesus was critical to the early Christian faith. Of all the things Paul could have said in this moment to entrust the faith to these people, he tells them they must know that Jesus was INDEED crucified. The cross is ultimate and foundational.

The death of Jesus was an historical event. But if the death of Jesus was simply one more historical event, situated among numerous others, then this determination of Paul’s to emphasize that event alone would be curious and nonsensical.

Lots of Jewish men died on Roman crosses in the 1st century. In fact, according to the Roman-Jewish historian Josephus, the first century witnessed the practice of mass crucifixions. So, this was just one of many crucifixions. These were public executions and humiliations -which is what they really were. Crucifixion was saved for the most serious crimes such as revolts against the empire.

¹ R. Albert Mohler Jr., *The Apostles’ Creed: Discovering Authentic Christianity in an Age of Counterfeits*, Nashville: Tennessee (Fidelitas, 2019), p.72

So why was Jesus crucified?

Christ's death on the CROSS is central to everything taught in the New Testament.

Note that he wasn't stoned to death, which was at the time the most common means of public execution, he wasn't stabbed or beheaded, no- he was nailed to a cross. There is a significance to that truth.

We have a massive cross to my right with the crown atop which Jesus endured. The cross has been THE Christian symbol. It was used by early Christians to identify themselves as such as early as the 2nd century, and Clement of Alexandria, a church father who died 215, he even called the cross "the Lord's sign".

But more than just a symbol, the fact is that the death of Jesus Christ on the cross was necessary.

Galatians 3:13-14 tells us why:

"Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree"— so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith."

(Galatians 3:13-14)

It had to be a cross. Cursed is the one who hangs on a tree, that's a reference in this text to Deuteronomy 21:23. Christ had to become a curse for us in order to break the curse of sin and the bonds of death. And he had to become a curse for us in order for us to receive this promised Spirit through faith.

That's why the cross is so important here. It wasn't random or by accident that Jesus was crucified- he had to be to perfectly fulfill the plan of God.

Hymnwriter Isaac Watts wrote:

Not all the blood of beasts
On Jewish altars slain
Could give the guilty conscience peace,
Or wash away the stain.
But Christ the heavenly Lamb
Takes all our sins away;
A sacrifice of nobler name
And richer blood than they.²

It was Christ's blood alone that needed to be shed on that cross.

And what solace do we have in that! I mean think of the shame, hurt, and pain he endured on the cross for your sake and mine. It puts into perspective what we go through doesn't it? As a culture we struggle to deal with our shame. We hide it, we bury it from everyone around us, and we deny it to ourselves. But God became man and carried our shame. He experienced the depth of it on that cross being publicly humiliated. We have no shame today that he has not already dealt with on the cross.

I can get caught up in my own shame and failures when I forget -even just for a second- what he did there and what he experienced.

And so, now that we understand the necessity of the cross, let's turn to his death.

Was Dead

Why did Jesus Have to Die?

I want to dig in a bit here because there is so much to be said about Christ's death. First, the New Testament builds on what the Old Testament says about the **atonement** for sin.

1. To Atone for the Sins

² Isaac Watts from *Trinity Psalter Hymnal* #354

Atonement means a bringing together of those who are estranged. In the Old Testament, the word atonement literally meant “to cover.” The animal sacrifices provided a “covering” for sin. The author of Hebrews captures the Old and New Testament understanding when he writes,

“Indeed, under the law almost everything is purified with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins.” (Hebrews 9:22)

The shedding of blood was required for atonement.

The basic meaning of atonement can be seen by splitting the word into three parts: “at-one-ment” – that bringing together of those who are estranged- at one moment. In fact, if you looked at the *Oxford English Dictionary* it notes that Thomas More said in 1535, “having more regard to their old variance than their new at-one-ment” or atonement — that is, the parties newly found unity.³ So we have, for some time now, come to understand atonement as a means of payment for something required.

John the Baptist truly understood this about Jesus. John 1:29 reads,

“The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him and declared, ‘Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!’” (John 1:29)

Jesus provided the perfect atonement, rendering sacrifices of a Passover lamb as no longer necessary. He was the true Passover Lamb. With His death on the cross, the veil of the temple was ripped apart, and you and I are given the very same access to the Holiest of Holies, which was reserved only for the High Priest on the Day of Atonement. And so, Jesus had to die to satisfy the wrath of God.

John Calvin wrote in his *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (1536):

³ <https://www.desiringgod.org/interviews/why-does-atonement-disappear-in-the-new-testament>

“He offered in sacrifice the flesh which he took from us, that by expiation wrought he might destroy our guilt and appease the Father's just anger”. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*

It's that word you may have heard: propitiation.

It's the word is used to describe the atoning death of Jesus. The word propitiation has the concept of the removal of wrath by the offering of a gift. Jesus laid down His life for us, fully satisfying God's holy and just standards. Jesus appeased God's wrath against evil.

That's what 1 John 4:10 says:

“In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.” (1 John 4:10)

Our sins needed atoning.

Secondly, Jesus had to die in order:

2. To Reconcile God to Man

This is a very important New Testament theme. Time after time, we are shown to be enemies with God, hostile parties to the Divine; sin separating us from the Holy God. Without the atonement, there could be no reconciliation.

Romans 5:10-11:

“For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life. More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.” (Romans 5:10-11)

Jesus died so that we can be reconciled to God. And Jesus knew that! He knew that the very ones who would cause him to suffer and crucify him were the ones who needed reconciliation.

On Wednesday we celebrate St. Patrick's Day. And it's not just a day to dress up in green and cook green food, but rather to remember the life and mission of Patrick. It has been over 1500 years since Patrick's death in 461. As a 16-year-old, Patrick was kidnapped from his home in Britain and sold into slavery in Ireland. He suffered there under terrible conditions being treated like an animal for 6 six years before he escaped and fled back home. However, God would burden Patrick's heart for the Irish and ultimately back him to Ireland to serve out the rest of his life as a missionary to the Irish- a missionary to the very people who imprisoned him.

You see, Patrick knew that these people needed to be reconciled to God and that he could be used by God to accomplish that end, and so he went. It puts into perspective what Jesus did on the cross. They crucified him, but Jesus died to reconcile man to God.

Thirdly, Jesus had to die:

3. To Ransom Sinners

“For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many.”
(Mark 10:45)

The imagery here is that of buying back or restoring.

In the days of first century slavery, a ransom was the most commonly used term to refer to the price paid for redeeming a slave. A ransom was the price of releasing the slave from bondage. It's the price for freedom. In our day an age -the age of TV shows and Netflix, we recognize the term ransom in referring to when someone is abducted or kidnapped. The parent or friend will have to pay the ransom if they want that loved one back. But note the important difference here when it comes to God:

God does not first ransom us, and THEN love us. Rather, He loves us and, because He loves us, He opens the way for reconciliation and ransom. Can you see that switch in the order? His love is not contingent on you paying a price. His love supersedes the price, and not only that, but the price itself IS PAID by this Lamb of God who is capable of paying that ransom. So, he loves you AND he provided a way for reconciliation and ransom.

I should note that as evangelicals we understand this ransom to be an internal transaction between the Godhead and not some sort of payment that Jesus had to make to Satan. In 1 Peter 1 we are told that we are not redeemed with perishable things such as silver and gold, but with the “precious blood of Christ, a Lamb without blemish or defect.” A Lamb like Abraham saw when he took his son Isaac to the alter- a lamb that was divinely provided.

Which brings us to our final point here on the death, which is that Jesus was crucified and died as our **substitute**. This may be one of the clearest explanations for why Jesus had to die on the cross. He died:

4. To Serve as Our Substitute

Jesus took your place. He took my place. He was our substitute. He did for us what we could never do for ourselves.

I’ve stolen this from the last Puritan Jonathan Edwards. In his sermon “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God” (1741) he creates this picture whereby God is holding you, the individual, above this dreadful pit of the glowing flames full of the wrath of God. It is a pit with a wide gaping mouth open; and you have nothing to stand upon, nor anything to take hold of. There is nothing between you and this bottomless pit except the air. It is only the power and mere pleasure of God that holds you up. If God should withdraw His hand, nothing -not your good health, money, relationships- would keep you from falling. And, as Edwards kindly notes, we are heavy as lead. Our great weight presses downwards, and if God should let you go, you would immediately fall and swiftly descend into that bottomless pit. Were it not for the sovereign pleasure of God, you would fall.

We don't keep ourselves up, God does. It's his righteousness that keeps us – the righteousness of God.

“For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” (2 Corinthians 5:21)

That's what God has done for us in Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is our substitute. He's taken our place. Let's not forget that the wages of sin is death. He died for us so that we can live for Him.

Are you beginning to capture a bit of what's involved, what happened on the cross? It was more than a common crucifixion. It was grace, grace, God's grace. Grace that is greater than all our sin!

Was Buried

The third word here in this clause we've come to in the Creed is: buried.

Now, we should probably ask the question: why does this creed bother to add the word “buried?” Of course, he was buried—that makes sense. That's what you do with dead bodies. You bury them. Surely, it's the fact that Jesus died for our sins and that He rose on the third day that matters? We assume that he was buried for approximately 40 hours. In a Creed where words are used sparingly, where whole areas of doctrine are either assumed or passed over in silence, where the whole of Christ's teaching ministry and all of his miracles are not even mentioned, why does the Creed bother to tell us he was buried? Why state the obvious when so much else is left out?

I've never actually heard a sermon on the burial of Jesus. And so I'm thankful that we will approach it briefly now since this Creed affords us that opportunity. I'm also thankful that we have a physical reminder of the burial on the platform this morning- the stone concealing the body. Most of us tend to go straight from his death to his resurrection as if nothing important happened in between. But it is precisely at this point that the Creed forces us to stop and take another look at the biblical text. We stop to realize that Jesus' body was actually in that tomb.

The word “buried” tells us more than just what happened to the body of Jesus. It alerts us to an area of biblical truth that we might otherwise overlook.

So, let’s look at the immediate aftermath of the cross—the burial of Jesus. If you have your Bibles with you, I’d invite you to follow along with me as I read from John 19:38-42.

The details of Jesus’ burial appear in all four gospels: Matthew 27:57-61; Mark 15:42-47; Luke 23:50-56; John 19:38-42.

For the sake of this explanation, we’ll turn to John’s account. Here John writes:

“After these things Joseph of Arimathea, who was a disciple of Jesus, but secretly for fear of the Jews, asked Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus, and Pilate gave him permission. So he came and took away his body. Nicodemus also, who earlier had come to Jesus by night, came bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about seventy-five pounds in weight. So they took the body of Jesus and bound it in linen cloths with the spices, as is the burial custom of the Jews. Now in the place where he was crucified there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb in which no one had yet been laid. So because of the Jewish day of Preparation, since the tomb was close at hand, they laid Jesus there.” (John 19:38-42)

So, Jesus’ body was taken by Joseph and Nicodemus, and prepared with fragrances and linens.

That’s the first thing to notice about the burial. His body was taken and prepared. His body was claimed. It was claimed by someone who cared for him. The text says a “secret disciple”: Joseph of Arimathea. Mark’s account says that Joseph was a man “looking for the kingdom of God (x2), and so took courage and went to Pilate”. Joseph was helped by Nicodemus, who was interestingly enough, a Pharisee. He was a ruler of the Jews and he had previously gone to Jesus by night (again secretly) and said to Jesus, “Rabbi, we know that You have come from God as a teacher; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him.” (That scene comes from John 3:1-2) So, God was working in the hearts of these two even before they knew it, to be used in this crucial way.

He was then prepared for the tomb in the way usual or customary to these times. One thing I should say here is look at the amount of fragrances used. This actually confirms that he experienced a true death. The mixture of myrrh and aloes were about seventy-five pounds in weight. That amount, though necessary for a dead body, is life-threatening if done to a living person. It would result in their asphyxiation and suffocation. So, Jesus' body was being prepared to be taken to a tomb where it would remain forever.

Secondly, Jesus' body was placed: in a new tomb which was near them. This was Joseph's newly made tomb which he had had hewn out of the rock. It was unoccupied and therefore appropriate for a new burial. AND it was near them. Note, that they had to hurry to prepare the body because of the Jewish day of Preparation. John 19:31 reminds us that "the bodies should not remain upon the cross on the sabbath day." If Jesus died sometime around 3pm (see Matthew's gospel 27:45 for that estimation) they would have only had a couple of hours to place him in the tomb. Because at sundown (5 or 6pm) the Passover day and Sabbath would begin. Jesus could not be left on the cross all weekend as it were and so there had to have been a (1) divinely placed, (2) nearly located, (3) unused tomb and (4) an individual who was willing to give up their own place of burial for a crucified and dead Messiah.

We can see clearly now that the burial of Jesus was divinely orchestrated. Plainly stated- the Father did not abandon the Son. Just like he has not and will not abandon you. Jesus had a true human body, capable of dying- that's clear. He was a man who could die, and who under those terrible circumstances did die. His death was a true death and the proof of that was the burial.

This exclamation point is part of the gospel. It's part of the Gospel as the apostle Paul recounts it in 1 Cor 15:3-4:

"For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures." (1 Cor. 15:3-4)

You can see now why this creed had to include the "burial": Jesus Christ, the Saviour of the World, was dead. You can imagine the loss the disciples felt- that His mother Mary felt. And

what about all those people who had just lined the roads welcoming Him to Jerusalem on Palm Sunday? There they were, now left staring at his lifeless body being taken to a tomb. But praise be to God he did not remain dead. AMEN?! If he had, then we are all a bit delusional.

But when the Son of God joined himself to humanity, human nature was changed by that union. Mortality joins hands with immortality. The grave becomes the beginning of life. Jesus would not have truly shared our nature if he had not also shared its limits. Everyone comes into the world through the womb and departs into the tomb. And so, the Son of God embraced our humanity at these extreme limits. Human beings endure the indignity of the tomb. Dirt is thrown on our faces, we fall into shadow, and are returned to the earth from which we were formed- and Jesus endured the same!

Gregory of Nyssa, a 4th CE church father said, “The birth makes the death necessary. He who had decided to share our humanity had to experience all that belongs to our nature. Human life is encompassed within two limits, and if he had passed through one and not the other, he would only have half fulfilled his purpose.... [Listen to this:] Our whole nature had to be brought back from death. The chain had to be broken; the bonds of sin and death overcome”.⁴

Because, in Jesus, God has fully shared our condition. There is no human experience that can alienate us from God. Every affliction that we experience is an opportunity to identify with Jesus, to “suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him” (Rom 8:17). Even dying becomes another way of following Jesus. Right, we die differently because the Son of God has touched our frail mortality and has drawn it into the wider context of his life. We die differently because we know that “neither death, nor life ... will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom 8:38–39).

We believe that the pinnacle of the Christian faith is the resurrection of Christ, however that pinnacle would not be possible without the crucifixion, death, and burial. The resurrection affirms his divinity, but the burial confirms his humanity. He was truly God AND truly man!

⁴ Gregory of Nyssa as quoted by Ben Myers, *The Apostle's Creed - A Guide to the Ancient Catechism* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2018), 75.

Conclusion

That's what makes Christianity so unique. Every other religious system has a "do-it-yourself" proposition, except for historic Christianity that says we can't do it ourselves. We needed the second Adam, the one who was truly God AND truly man. The cross of Jesus Christ is the central event of all history – it is the vehicle of God's grace! Each one of us approaches the day of our death. That's a sobering thought. BUT there is someone waiting for us there: Jesus, the Lord of life, who meets us at all life's crossroads, at the beginnings and at the ends. He died so you don't have to. God treated Jesus as if he were us, so that He can treat us as if we were Jesus for all eternity!

Charles Spurgeon put it this way:

"Death is no punishment to the believer: it is the gate of endless joy".⁵

Death which surrounds us in this world is but a gate to endless joy for the Christian. Praise be to God!

God has acted on your and my behalf. He offers His grace, freely given. It is His gift to you. All you need to do is repent and put our trust in Him alone for salvation. Have you done it? If so, celebrate. Thank him for the cross, his death, and burial. If you haven't, open your life to Him today. Come and see what's so amazing about this grace. It's God's unmerited favour, acceptance, reconciliation, offered freely. It is Christ's atoning work on the cross- a result of His crucifixion, death and burial! Thanks be to God.

⁵ Charles Spurgeon in *The Complete Works of C. H. Spurgeon*, Volume 32: Sermons 1877-1937 (ed. 2015)