

A Declaration of Those Things Which Are Most Surely Believed Among Us

An Expository Study of the Gospel According to Luke Chapter 23- **Luke 23:54-56** 350- What Happened When Jesus Died

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Luke 23:54-56

54 It was the preparation day, and the Sabbath was about to begin.

55 Now the women who had come with Him out of Galilee followed, and saw the tomb and how His body was laid.

56 Then they returned and prepared spices and perfumes. And on the Sabbath they rested according to the commandment.

To the Glory of God

A Christian "Creed" is a "symbol" or a "summary" of the basic, fundamental issues of the Christian Faith. There are several "Creeds" that have been developed over time, and among them the most famous and the most widely used are:

1. The Apostle's Creed
2. The Nicene Creed

... both of which are used to this day by both Protestants and Romans. The Creeds were *initially* developed to help new converts understand the fundamental and essential Truths of Christianity. Most people in the early days of the Church were illiterate, and so, the Church developed simple, easy to memorize Creeds to instruct new believers into what they should believe and put their trust in.

Initially, those recently saved souls were instructed to take forty days to bear fruit of genuine repentance, study and memorize the Creeds, and to ask questions about what the Creeds meant so they could prepare themselves for the "public affirmation of their faith" in

the waters of baptism, where they would recite the Creeds before immersion.

So, Creeds were initially useful in instructing new converts in the basic Truths of the Christian Faith while helping to overcome the heresies and false teaching that began to war against the Truth. Over the years, as more and more attacks against the Church came from false teachers armed with doctrines of devils, the Creeds got longer and longer and contained more and more detail until the Creeds had more in common with Catechisms and Confessions than they did with short easy to memorize summary statements.

And this illustrates my problem with using Creeds in our services. I do not disagree that the Creeds can be somewhat useful, however, 2,000 years to the right of the Resurrection requires much more in-depth teaching and instruction than any Creed could possibly contain. In other words, the Creeds are good, but they don't go far enough. And case in point is the Apostle's Creed, which is used today in both Protestant and Roman services.

So, even though Protestants and Romans don't agree with who has final Authority to "bind the conscience" (we say, "Scripture alone", they say, "Papal infallibility") or how lost people are Justified (we say, "By faith alone, Sola Fide", and they say, "Sacerdotal Regeneration"), along with a host of other issues, they can both recite the Creeds with no problem.

Now the earliest mention of the "Apostles' Creed" occurred in a letter from a Church Synod back in AD 390. And back in the Fourth Century, it was commonly accepted that God the Holy Spirit had moved upon each of the twelve Apostles to write down a section of that Creed. We now know that that isn't true. But the Apostle's Creed is divided into several sections dealing with the basics of what the Bible teaches about the Triune God, the Church, and Salvation. And the English rendition of the Apostle's Creed goes something like this:

I believe in God, the Father Almighty,
Creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord,
Who was conceived by the Holy Spirit
and born of the virgin Mary.
He suffered under Pontius Pilate,

was crucified, died, and was buried;
He descended to hell.
The third day He rose again from the dead.
He ascended to heaven
and is seated at the Right Hand of God the Father Almighty.
From there He will come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic Church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting. Amen.

Now maybe you noticed that when delineating the basic Truths about Jesus, the Apostle's Creed said that Jesus:

... was conceived by the Holy Spirit
and born of the virgin Mary.
He suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried;
He descended to hell.
The third day He rose again from the dead.
He ascended to heaven

So, is that true? Did Jesus descend into hell when He died? Does the Bible teach that? And, if so, what did He do in hell? And, if not, then why does the Apostle's Creed say that?

First of all, we need to establish that Jesus actually died. And in verse 46, Dr. Luke wrote this:

And Jesus, crying out with a loud voice, said, "*Father, INTO YOUR HANDS I COMMIT MY SPIRIT.*" Having said this, He breathed His last.

... the Apostle Levi wrote:

Matthew 27:50

And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice, and yielded up His spirit

John Mark wrote in **Mark 15:37**:

And Jesus uttered a loud cry, and breathed His last.

... while in **John 19:30**, the Apostle John said:

**Therefore when Jesus had received the sour wine, He said, "It is finished!"
And He bowed His head and gave up His spirit.**

So, the Gospel writers were unanimous, Jesus literally and physically died. But it isn't only the writers of the four Gospels that testified that Jesus died. The Apostle Paul believed and taught that Jesus died:

Romans 5:6

For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly.

Romans 5:8

But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

Romans 8:34

who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us.

1Corinthians 15:3

For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures,

1Thessalonians 5:9-10

⁹ For God has not destined us for wrath, but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ,

¹⁰ who died for us, so that whether we are awake or asleep, we will live together with Him.

But, not only Paul, the Apostle Peter also believed and taught that Jesus died.

1 Peter 3:18

For Christ also died for sins once for all, *the* just for *the* unjust, so that He might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit;

The writer of **Hebrews** wrote:

Hebrews 9:24-26

24 For Christ did not enter a holy place made with hands, a *mere* copy of the true one, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us;

25 nor was it that He would offer Himself often, as the high priest enters the holy place year by year with blood that is not his own.

26 Otherwise, He would have needed to suffer often since the foundation of the world; but now once at the consummation of the ages He has been manifested to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself.

... and the Apostle John said this in **The Revelation 13:8**:

All who dwell on the earth will worship him, *everyone* whose name has not been written from the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb who has been slain.

... and even Jesus Himself said:

Luke 18:31-33

31 ...Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and all things which are written through the prophets about the Son of Man will be accomplished.

32 "For He will be handed over to the Gentiles, and will be mocked and mistreated and spit upon,

33 and after they have scourged Him, they will kill Him; and the third day He will rise again."

So, the Bible is crystal clear that the incarnate God, Jesus Christ, died by Crucifixion. The only Person in the history of the world Who was fully God and fully Man in the same Body at the same time, without conflict or contradiction, *physically* and *literally* died. He quit breathing. His brainwaves ceased and the Heart of the God/Man stopped beating. Jesus died.

Now there are many today, like professing Muslims and Jews, who reject either that Jesus literally died, or that Jesus was God, or both. And they reason to themselves that God *cannot* die. So, if Jesus dies, then does that not prove that He was mortal and was not really God to begin with? And so, they reason, if Jesus was God, then His Death would be impossible. And false teachings like that have been circulating for 2,000 years. For example, back in the 2nd Century, an ancient group of heretics, called "the Gnostics", taught that Jesus only *seemed* to die, that His Death was only a mirage.

So, is it important that those of us, who live in the 21st Century, believe and teach that Jesus died? Is it a primary or essential Doctrine of Christianity? Since the entire subject of an incarnate God is so deep and so complicated and so fraught with wrong thinking, do we really need to struggle with it in our day? Is it enough to believe that Jesus was Crucified and then rose from the dead? May we just skip past His Death?

Yes, it is a primary and essential Doctrine of the Christian Church to believe and teach that Jesus actually died. And no, we may not just skip over it. The actual and literal and physical Death of Jesus is *mandatory* for biblical Salvation. In other words, to reject or deny or to even to *minimize* Jesus' real Death affects Forgiveness and Salvation so negatively that the end result would be that we would yet be in our sins.

You see, it is not enough for Jesus to simply *suffer* on the Cross under the Wrath of God that was against our sins. He must also die, so that our sins are eternally damned. So, our Salvation is dependent on Jesus actually paying the full Price for our Redemption. And that "Price" not only includes His horrific suffering, but it also includes Him dying with our sins completely damned by God. And then, it also includes Jesus rising victoriously *without* our sins. So, Jesus didn't just rise, He rose *from the dead*, which is why, in **Hebrews 9:28**, the writer of **Hebrews** said:

So Christ also, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time for salvation without *reference to sin*, to those who eagerly await Him.

... so, if Jesus did not die, He could not rise from the dead, and if Jesus did not rise from the dead, we are yet in our sins. As profound as Jesus' Death may be, as difficult as it may be for us to even imagine it and maintain His fully Deity, as difficult as it may be to teach it and to always distinguish the Truth about His Death from heresies, both ancient and modern, the actual, literal, and physical Death of Jesus is a *core* Doctrine of Scripture, and one that the Church of Jesus must uphold, maintain, believe, teach, defend and celebrate.

Yet, the great Mystery surrounding the Death of Jesus, in His full Deity, is no less profound, no less deep, and no less complicated than the great Mystery concerning His actual, literal, and physical Virgin Birth, or, for that matter, Jesus' sinless Life. *Everything* about Jesus is unique and different from everybody else's precisely because God will never take on human flesh and become a Man again. *Everything* about Jesus is miraculous and amazing, and that is why the Person of Jesus, in both His fully Deity and His full Humanity, has been the subject of much study, many books, many debates, and much false teaching since the earliest days of the Christian Church.

And it is over against all of these false teachings that the sacred Scriptures stand strong in what they clearly and repeatedly affirm:

Jesus Christ actually, literally, and physically died by Crucifixion.

And, so, while the concept of "Sola Scriptura" doesn't end the *amazement* about Jesus' Death, it does end the debate, even as it ends the debate about His Virgin Birth and His sinless Life and everything else about Jesus. These amazing issues are biblical, and thus, they are true. And that means these profound Truths are not just "window dressing", but *mandatory* and *core* Christian Beliefs that affect whether or not a sinful human being is saved. So, even as I would deny the Salvation of anyone who rejects the Virgin Birth and sinless Life of Jesus, I would also deny the Salvation of one who rejects that Jesus actually died.

Now as to just *how* a Person, Who is fully Deity can die, I have no idea, other than to say that He did. But that really doesn't bother me because I have no answer as to how Jesus could be fully God and fully Man at the same time, in the same Body, without conflict or contradiction either. The Mystery surrounding *everything* about Jesus

is part of why we marvel at Him, why we stand amazed at Him, and why we worship Him. In **1 Corinthians 15:3** one of the most educated men in the history of Christianity put it very simply when he said:

... Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures

... so, Paul didn't understand how it worked either. But notice that the entirety of the Authority and Basis as to *why* this highly intelligent Apostle believed and taught that Jesus died was *not* because he understood all of the nuances of it, but rather that Jesus' Death was:

... according to the Scriptures

Now to further prove that Jesus died, the Apostle Matthew goes into great detail as to what those who loved Jesus did immediately after He died:

Matthew 27:57-60

57 When it was evening, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who himself had also become a disciple of Jesus.

58 This man went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Then Pilate ordered it to be given *to him*.

59 And Joseph took the body and wrapped it in a clean linen cloth,

60 and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had hewn out in the rock; and he rolled a large stone against the entrance of the tomb and went away.

... while John Mark wrote:

Mark 15:42-47

42 When evening had already come, because it was the preparation day, that is, the day before the Sabbath,

43 Joseph of Arimathea came, a prominent member of the Council, who himself was waiting for the kingdom of God; and he gathered up courage and went in before Pilate, and asked for the body of Jesus.

44 Pilate wondered if He was dead by this time, and summoning the centurion, he questioned him as to whether He was already dead.

45 And ascertaining this from the centurion, he granted the body to Joseph.

46 Joseph bought a linen cloth, took Him down, wrapped Him in the linen cloth and laid Him in a tomb which had been hewn out in the rock; and he rolled a stone against the entrance of the tomb.

47 Mary Magdalene and Mary the *mother* of Joses were looking on *to see* where He was laid.

Now, even though we know that Jesus died, when we put everything we know about Jesus from the Scriptures together we can say a few things that makes the Death of Jesus very unique and special:

- Jesus' Divine Nature never died
- Jesus' human soul never died
- Jesus' fleshly body died

Even in death, Jesus remained fully God and fully Man. And therefore, unlike us, His Divine "Nature" or "Substance" or "Essence" never ceased to be *exactly* the same as His Father (*homoousia*). And so, even in death, Jesus never ceased to be Omnipotent, Omniscient, and Omni-present. And, like us, Jesus' immortal soul never died. So, the only thing that died with Jesus is the very same thing that dies with us, His Body.

Now there are three very important aspects of Jesus' Death and Resurrection that we need to understand:

- Jesus died on Friday afternoon just *before* the Sabbath began.
- Jesus was dead during the entire period of the Sabbath.
- Jesus rose from the dead after the Sabbath was over.

And these three indisputable facts give us the answer to several important questions that have troubled people for centuries, and that trouble people in our day as well, such as:

- ✓ How could Jesus fulfill **Matthew 12:40**?
- ✓ Why do Christians not assemble together on the Sabbath?

Matthew 12:39-42

39 But He answered and said to them, "An evil and adulterous generation craves for a sign; and *yet* no sign will be given to it but the sign of Jonah the prophet;

40 for just as *JONAH WAS THREE DAYS AND THREE NIGHTS IN THE BELLY OF THE SEA MONSTER*, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.

41 "The men of Nineveh will stand up with this generation at the judgment, and will condemn it because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and behold, something greater than Jonah is here.

42 "The Queen of the South will rise up with this generation at the judgment and will condemn it, because she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and behold, something greater than Solomon is here.

Now here in verse 40, Jesus clearly says that the Son of Man will be:

... three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.

... yet, we see that Scripture tells us that Jesus died about 3 pm on Friday, just before the Sabbath came into effect at sundown. Now, normally, three whole days and three whole nights equals 72 hours, (24x3). And yet, at best, Jesus was only in "the heart of the earth" for no more than 39 hours (3 hours on Friday, 24 on the Sabbath, and 12 on Sunday). So, what do we make of this? Why was Jesus so specific in **Matthew 12:40**? And how do we make this all work out?

Some try to make it to be "three *whole* days and three *whole* nights" by suggesting that Jesus was crucified on Thursday. But this ignores what Dr. Luke wrote in **Luke 23:54** about the moment Jesus died:

It was the preparation day, and the Sabbath was about to begin.

... so, when Jesus died at around 3 pm on Friday, it was just about three hours *before* the Sabbath began at sundown.

Now there is no reason to jump through all these hoops to try to make this all work out because a fact of Jewish culture back in the 1st Century was that any part of a "day" (Hebrew *yom*) that occurred *before*

sundown was considered to be the *entire* day. Jesus died at around 3 pm on Friday, about 3 hours or so before the Sabbath began at sundown. And that means that the entire "day" of Friday counts. He remained dead all during the Sabbath (sundown Friday through sundown Saturday), thus completing the second "day", and did not rise until after the Sabbath was finished, allowing for the third "day" which was Sunday.

And so, the Resurrection did not occur on the Sabbath, but on the first day of the week, which was Sunday. And this is why the Christian Church gathers together and celebrates together on Sunday rather than on the Sabbath, and we will get into that in more detail, Lord willing, next week.

So, now we know that Jesus has died. But, what happened *after* He died? We know that His Body was laid in Joseph's tomb, but what about His Divine Nature and His immortal Soul? Where was He from 3 pm Friday until His Resurrection, and what did Jesus actually "do" after He died and before He rose from the dead? The Apostle's Creed says that Jesus:

Descended into hell

Now literally, the ancient Latin wording here says:

descendit ad inferos

... where "inferos" may be translated as "the lowest" or as "those below" or "underworld", "netherworld", or "abode of the dead". The concept that Jesus actually went to hell and preached to those souls who were there, freeing *some* to be resurrected and others to simply go into heaven was first preached by Melito of Sardis (died AD180) in his sermon "*Homily on the Passion*". The early Church father, Tertullian, began calling this event "The Harrowing of Hell" in his sermon, "*A Treatise on the Soul*". Hippolytus (*A Treatise on Christ and Anti-Christ*), Origen (*Against Celsus*, 2:43), and, later, Ambrose (died AD 397) all wrote of about the "Harrowing of Hell". The early heretic, Marcion and his followers also discussed the "Harrowing of Hell" in their writings.

Early on, the Roman religious organization codified this doctrine into their Catechism and used the early Church father's position as their justification. They also reference **1 Peter 3:18-20** and **Ephesians 4:9** to justify their position. But I want to look at those verses carefully.

1 Peter 3:18-20

18 For Christ also died for sins once for all, *the* just for *the* unjust, so that He might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit;

19 in which also He went and made proclamation to the spirits *now* in prison,

20 who once were disobedient, when the patience of God kept waiting in the days of Noah, during the construction of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through *the* water.

Ephesians 4:9

(Now this *expression*, "He ascended," what does it mean except that He also had descended into the lower parts of the earth?)

Now this doctrine may be true. However, there are several problems with this interpretation. First of all, the Roman religious organization conveniently omits the fact that Augustine (a man they consider to be the greatest Christian thinker of all time) taught that Jesus did *not* preach to the people in hell when He died, and that **Ephesians 4:9** was simply allegorical and *not* to be taken literally. But, even *more* importantly, using the Bible to interpret the Bible, the Passage in **1 Peter 3** is explained by **1 Peter 4:4-6** that says:

4 In *all* this, they are surprised that you do not run with *them* into the same excesses of dissipation, and they malign *you*;

5 but they will give account to Him who is ready to judge the living and the dead.

6 For the gospel has for this purpose been preached even to those who are dead, that though they are judged in the flesh as men, they may live in the spirit according to *the will of God*.

Now these verses contain some of the most complicated Greek wording in the entire Bible. And later this year as we begin to go verse by verse through **1 Peter**, I will take more time with this. But, in

context, **1 Peter 3** is not talking about the time frame when Jesus died, it is talking about the time when Noah was alive. And the Apostle Peter is merely saying that back when Noah was building the ark, Jesus Christ, through the voice of Noah, preached the Gospel to that generation. And then Peter tells us that the generation that Noah preached the Gospel to are now "in prison," that is, in hell.

In other words, Peter does not say here that Christ preached to these people *while* they were in prison during the time He was dead. Now Jesus very well may have done that, but you simply cannot prove that from what Peter is saying here without taking these verses completely out of context. Peter is saying that Jesus preached to them once, during the days of Noah, and *now* these people are in hell.

That is the most natural understanding of this Passage, *especially* when you realize what Peter said earlier about:

1 Peter 1:11b

... the Spirit of Christ within them was indicating as He predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories to follow.

And so, in **1 Peter 4:6**, the phrase,

... the gospel has for this purpose been preached even to those who are dead

... refers to those who, after being preached to, have *since* died. So, Peter is *not* talking about Jesus preaching to them in hell after He died. And the late Oxford theologian, John Kelly, agreed when he said:

“They [the Christians] may well have been exposed to scoffing questions from pagan neighbors, and anxious ones from one another, ‘What is the gain of your having become Christians, since you apparently die like other men?’ The writer’s [Peter] answer is that, so far from being useless, the preaching of Christ and his gospel to those who have since died had precisely this end in view, that although according to human calculation they might seem to be condemned, they might in fact enjoy life eternal.”¹

So, there really is no biblical basis in the New Testament for claiming that between 3 pm Friday and Sunday morning Jesus was

¹ JND Kelly; *A Commentary on the Epistles of Peter and Jude*, p.175

preaching to souls imprisoned in Hades. There *is* biblical basis, however, for saying that Jesus was with the repentant thief in Paradise, and that He was very busy, and that powerful and amazing things happened. And when you consider the great Hope that the Promise Jesus made to that robber had for him, you cannot then think that Jesus meant some *inferior* or *defective* place from which the robber had to be delivered by even *more* preaching.

For these and other reasons, it seems best to me to either just omit the phrase, “he descended into hell,” when reciting the Apostle’s Creed or be able to defend your position. And before you take up rocks to stone me, consider that no less than John Calvin struggled with this phrase as well.²

Now I want to be crystal clear about what I’m saying here. I am *not* telling you that Jesus didn’t preach during the time He was dead, and that some believed and part of them rose from the dead while others just went into Heaven. I personally believe that Jesus was very busy the entire time He was dead, fulfilling all that Scripture details. But **1 Peter 3:18-20** doesn’t say that.

So, all I’m saying here today is that if you believe that Jesus was doing great things while He was dead, like I do, then you have to come up with another Passage besides what the Apostle Peter wrote, because he didn’t talk about it. We are left, then, with having to take a little bit from a lot of different verses and put them together to arrive at what we believe about this issue, like we do with the Doctrine of the Trinity.

Now one of the reasons we know that great and powerful and amazing things happened during the time that Jesus was dead was because Matthew tells us that many of the Old Testament saints rose out of their graves and went into Jerusalem and spoke to many people. And, by that, (and much more) we know that Jesus was very busy *finalizing* the Old Covenant. And so, we know that Jesus ended the way that God deals with the redeemed who die. So, when a saint dies today, Jesus doesn’t transfer them into “Abraham’s Bosom” but straight into the Bosom of God the Father!

Now how should this affect us today? Well, first of all, look at what David wrote, as he was moved along by God the Holy Spirit, 1,000 years before Jesus died:

² http://www.reformed.org/master/index.html?mainframe=/documents/Christ_in_hell/index.html

Psalm 16:10

For You will not abandon my soul to Sheol; Nor will You allow Your Holy One to undergo decay.

Now this Passage describes the *normal* account of what happened when a human being died *prior* to the Death and Resurrection of Jesus. Normally, the soul was “**abandoned to Sheol,**” and the body “**underwent decay**”. Yet, notice that in this verse, David prophesies that this is *not* the way that it will be with the Messiah.

Now the New Testament Greek translated the Hebrew word “Sheol” into the Greek “Hades”. So, “Hades” in the New Testament is “Sheol” from the Old. And, for some reason, the King James *incorrectly* uses the word “**hell**” in every instance where either Hades or Sheol was used. And that translation difficulty has contributed to many of the doctrinal issues that people have had through the years in understanding all of this. Now please go with me to **The Acts 2** and read what Peter said about this in **The Acts 2:23-36**:

23 *this Man, delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death.*

24 *"But God raised Him up again, putting an end to the agony of death, since it was impossible for Him to be held in its power.*

25 *"For David says of Him, 'I SAW THE LORD ALWAYS IN MY PRESENCE; FOR HE IS AT MY RIGHT HAND, SO THAT I WILL NOT BE SHAKEN.*

26 *'THEREFORE MY HEART WAS GLAD AND MY TONGUE EXULTED; MOREOVER MY FLESH ALSO WILL LIVE IN HOPE;*

27 *BECAUSE YOU WILL NOT ABANDON MY SOUL TO HADES, NOR ALLOW YOUR HOLY ONE TO UNDERGO DECAY.*

28 *'YOU HAVE MADE KNOWN TO ME THE WAYS OF LIFE; YOU WILL MAKE ME FULL OF GLADNESS WITH YOUR PRESENCE.'*

29 *"Brethren, I may confidently say to you regarding the patriarch David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day.*

30 *"And so, because he was a prophet and knew that **GOD HAD SWORN TO HIM WITH AN OATH TO SEAT one OF HIS DESCENDANTS ON HIS THRONE,***

31 *he looked ahead and spoke of the resurrection of the Christ, that **HE WAS NEITHER ABANDONED TO HADES, NOR DID His flesh SUFFER DECAY.***

32 "This Jesus God raised up again, to which we are all witnesses.

33 "Therefore having been exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He has poured forth this which you both see and hear.

34 "For it was not David who ascended into heaven, but he himself says: '*THE LORD SAID TO MY LORD, "SIT AT MY RIGHT HAND,*

35 *UNTIL I MAKE YOUR ENEMIES A FOOTSTOOL FOR YOUR FEET.*'"

36 "Therefore let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ — this Jesus whom you crucified."

So, here in **The Acts 2**, Peter tells us that David, in writing **Psalm 16**, foresaw the Resurrection of Christ. Peter said:

He [David] looked ahead and spoke of the resurrection of the Christ, that *HE WAS NEITHER ABANDONED TO HADES, NOR DID His flesh SUFFER DECAY.*

Now notice that here in **The Acts 2:31**, Peter is quoting David from **Psalm 16:10** to say that Jesus' Soul will *not* be left in Hades and His Body will *not* decay. So, "Sheol" or "Hades" is the resting place of the dead *before* the Resurrection of Jesus. And evidently, Sheol or Hades had two compartments, one for the dead who were saved and the other for the dead who were lost.

Now, today when a saved man dies, his immortal soul goes *immediately* into the very Presence of God. **2 Corinthians 5:6-9** says:

6 Therefore, being always of good courage, and knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord —

7 for we walk by faith, not by sight —

8 we are of good courage, I say, and prefer rather to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord.

9 Therefore we also have as our ambition, whether at home or absent, to be pleasing to Him.

So, ever since the Resurrection of Jesus, for any of us to be "absent in our body" through death means that our soul is immediately "**present with the Lord**". And there we will remain until that day when our

immortal soul is re-united with a glorified body, which is the *finality* of our Salvation.

Since the Resurrection, the dead who refused to repent and put their trust in Jesus in this life will go immediately into Hades where they will be tormented day and night. And, at some point in the future, their immortal soul will be united with an indestructible body and they will then be cast into the "Lake of Fire" to forever suffer Divine Vengeance and Retribution in everlasting Punishment.

So, it is important that we know that the understanding about things like Death and Hell and Eternal Rewards and Eternal Punishment grew exponentially with the coming of the final, full, and completed Revelation of God in the New Covenant. Under the inferior First or Old Covenant, these things were not revealed clearly. *Before* the Resurrection of Jesus, comprehension about these eternal aspects were cloudy and vague and general in nature.

From what we can read in inspired Scripture and what we can glean from reading ancient rabbinical writings, *before* the Resurrection of Jesus, both the saved and the lost dead went into a place that was called "Sheol" in the Hebrew and "Hades" in the Greek. And this place had two sections:

1. A Place for the Righteous
2. A Place for the Ungodly

And the place in Sheol for the Righteous was referred to as "Abraham's Bosom". And this was the resting place of the dead who were saved *before* the Resurrection. The place of the damned before the Resurrection of Jesus was not named, but it did contain tormenting fire.

So, in the New Testament, "Hades" became the resting place of the dead, both saved and lost, until the Resurrection of Jesus. And all of this is best illustrated in the Parable that Jesus gave back in **Luke 16**.

Now, evidently, *part* of the torment of the lost during this time was that they could actually see those who were saved sitting at the table with Abraham rejoicing, while they were separated from that with a wide gulf and being tormented in flames. And, from the Scriptures, we know several things about the *part* of Sheol or Hades where the damned went:

- ✓ It is under the earth (**Numbers 16:30-33**)
- ✓ It is like a city with gates (**Isaiah 38:10**)
- ✓ It is a place with iron bars (**Job 17:16**)
- ✓ It is a land of darkness, a place where shades, the shadowy souls of men, dwell (**Isaiah 14:9; 26:14**)
- ✓ It is the land of forgetfulness (**Psalms 88:12**)
- ✓ It is a place where no work is done and no wisdom exists (**Ecclesiastes 9:10**)
- ✓ It is a place where no one praises God (**Psalms 6:5, 88:10-11, 115:17, Isaiah 38:18**).

Now remember that Jesus was fully God and fully Man. And so, Jesus' Nature was Divine. And so, Jesus' Substance or His Essence was the very same as God the Father and God the Holy Spirit. And so, it is correct to say that at the moment of His Death, Jesus' Divine Nature went to Heaven with God, His physical Body was placed in Joseph's tomb, while His immortal Soul went into the depths of the earth, into Hades or Sheol. And, evidently, another description of Abraham's Bosom was "Paradise". And it was in Paradise that very day that Jesus and the repentant robber were re-united at the death of the robber.

Now understanding all this not only sheds light on the Bible's teaching about Death and the afterlife, but it also is a great encouragement to those of us who will face death in the future and who seek to do so without fear.

First of all, what exactly is "*Death*"? By definition, Death is a separation, a dividing between things that ought to be united. So, fundamentally, Death is separation from God. And Paul suggests as much in **Ephesians 2:1-2** when he said:

**1 And you were dead in your trespasses and sins,
2 in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world,
according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now
working in the sons of disobedience.**

So, to be "fallen" is to be "spiritually dead". Not sick, not merely separated, but stone, cold dead. To be lost is to be enslaved to dark powers, to be separated from God, and to be children of His Wrath. And this type of separation is an estrangement, a hostile alienation from the Life and Hope of the living God. So, in this sense, all of us, by nature, are "still-born". We are conceived in our mother's womb as spiritually

dead people. And it is for *this* death that Jesus endured in His Suffering on the Cross.

But, of course, death is much more than just separation from God. Death also marks the separation of the soul from the body. God made human beings to be two things:

1. Embodied souls
2. Ensouled bodies

... and death rips this union asunder. So, Christians are different from Buddhists and Hindus in that we believe that we are not completed until we our souls are united with a body. And that is why we believe in Resurrection and not Re-Incarnation.

So, evidently, following His Death for sin, Jesus' Soul journeys to Hades, to the City of Death, and He violently ripped its gates off the hinges. Jesus then, victoriously *liberates* Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, David, John the Baptist, and the rest of the Old Testament faithful, ransoming them from the power of Sheol (**Psalm 49:15, 86:13, 89:48**). These believers had waited there for so long, not having "received what was promised", so that their spirits would be "made perfect" along with the saints of the New Covenant (**Hebrews 11:39-40, 12:23**). This effectively ended the way that God dealt with the saved before Jesus.

And then, after His Resurrection, Jesus ascends to Heaven and brings the ransomed dead with him, so that now Paradise is no longer *down* near the place of torment, but is *up* in the "Third Heaven", the *highest* Heaven, where God dwells (**2 Corinthians 12:2-4**).

So, now, in the Church Age, when the righteous die, they aren't merely carried by angels to "Abraham's Bosom"; they depart to be with Christ, which is far better (**Philippians 1:23**). The wicked, however, remain in Hades in torment, until the Final Judgment, when Hades will give up the dead who dwell there, and they will be judged according to their deeds. At that point, both Death and Hades will be thrown into "hell", which is the Lake of Fire, the Second Death (**The Revelation 20:13-15**).

So, why is this Good News for us? Jesus' journey to Hades demonstrates that He was indeed made like us in every way. Not only did He bear the Wrath of God on our behalf, He endured death, the separation of His Soul from His Body. So, while His "Essence" was

always with God the Father and God the Holy Spirit, His Body was in Joseph's tomb, and his soul was three days in Sheol, in **“the heart of the earth” (Matthew 12:40)**.

But, as **Psalm 16** makes clear, Jesus is not only like us, but He is also very different. Jesus's Body was buried, like ours, but it did not decay. Jesus's Soul went to Hades, like the Old Testament saints', but wasn't abandoned there. God raised Him from the dead, reunited His Soul with a now-glorified Body, so that He is the “first-fruits” of the resurrection harvest.

And this is good news for us, because those in Christ now bypass the land of forgetfulness, where no one praises God. Instead, when we die, we join with the angelic choir and the saints of old to sing praises to the Lamb who was slain for us and our Salvation!

Amen. Let's pray

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The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen. Be watchful and quicken your pace. Soli Deo Gloria. For the Glory of God alone.