

Sermon MSS
On the Third day He Rose Again
Nicene Creed - Session #8

On the third day he rose again in accordance with the Scriptures

Welcome back to our study of the Nicene Creed. Let me remind you that a “creed,” used in a religious sense, is a formal statement of belief regarding essential doctrines that are held in common by the people within a church or group of churches.

The Nicene Creed has been confessed and declared by many Christian churches for the past 1,700 years. As we have been studying this creed we are seeing, I trust, more and more of its value. Its value lies in the fact that it is faithful to bring out clearly many key Biblical doctrines regarding the person and nature of the Triune God. And there is nothing more important than studying the person of God himself. This world, its pomp and pleasures and pains, is passing by quickly. But the living God, the Creator of heaven and earth, will not pass off the scene. When all else is gone, he will remain. Therefore, to know him, to study him, is to put ourselves in touch with the Eternal, that is, with the eternal God. It is to connect ourselves with ultimate reality and the only thing that is going to last forever – the person of God himself.

Time is not wasted studying God. Time, however, can be wasted by us, especially when we immerse ourselves in the things of this world – and leave God out of the picture.

Last time, in session #7, we studied the Bible’s teaching on the previous statement in the Creed which states, in summary, “Jesus was crucified, dead and buried.” So in a sense we had to leave him in the tomb last time. But that is okay, because we need to understand that the incarnated Son of God, Jesus Christ, really died on the cross of Calvary, and he was really buried - just like other people in his day. This is part of the mystery of the incarnation: how could the eternal God in the person of Jesus of Nazareth die? If he was God, how could he die? That’s a very good question and not easy to answer, but it is helpful to understand, I believe, that Jesus in his human nature died. But he did not and could not have died in his divine nature. He was two natures in one person - fully God and fully man. 100% God and 100% man. We may not be able to figure all this out, but we have to accept the Biblical revelation. As Christians, we must bow to the authority of the Bible.

The next phrase in the Nicene Creed says, “On the third day he rose again in accordance with the scriptures.” I want us to examine this statement in three parts. **First** of all, let’s consider the statement “in accordance with the scriptures.” It’s saying that “in line with the scripture” or “in fulfillment of the scriptures” Jesus rose from the dead. What he did in rising from the dead was actually predicted in the Old Testament. So his rising from the dead theoretically should not have been a big surprise to his contemporaries who had read and understood their Scriptures. But, of course, it was a big surprise, since it had never happened in the history of the world – before or since.

Let me read you a few of these predictions in the Old Testament, the scriptures given by God to the Hebrew people. I want to present these to you in three categories. **First, those that speak of a general resurrection of the dead of all people.**

The prophet Daniel says in chapter 12, verse 2:

² And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.

This is an amazing prophecy. It says that many of those “who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake.” And then some will go to “everlasting life” and some to “everlasting contempt.” The reasonable interpretation of this prophecy is that it is talking about a resurrection from death, from the grave, of all people. And there are only two directions in which these people will go: some to everlasting life and some to everlasting contempt.

This “contempt” must refer to the judgment of God against the people of the world for their sin. Jesus speaks of this same judgment to come in which all the peoples of the earth will be separated into two groups. In Matthew 25:31-33 he says,

³¹ “When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne.³² Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. ³³ And he will place the sheep on his right, but the goats on the left.”

You notice that Jesus uses the word “people” here. He doesn’t say that the spirits of people will be separated but people themselves. The implication here is of people in the totality of their human make-up – souls and bodies united in whole persons. They will face either the judgment of Christ, or else his everlasting fellowship.

Then there is a **second category** in the OT scriptures that speak of the resurrection specifically of believers in God. We read, for example, Isaiah 26:19:

⁹ Your dead shall live; their bodies shall rise.
You who dwell in the dust, awake and sing for joy!

This is a resurrection to joy – it can only refer to believers in God. As the old Southern Gospel song says, “On that great gettin’ up morning.” But it will be great day only for believes in God.

There is also a **third category** of OT prophetic scriptures – and these speak of the resurrection of the Messiah who was to come. The two principal prophecies are found in Psalm 16 and Psalm 110.

We read in Psalm 16, verses 9-10:

Therefore my heart is glad, and my whole being^[e] rejoices;
 my flesh also dwells secure.
 10 For you will not abandon my soul to Sheol,
 or let your holy one see corruption.^[f]

The apostle Paul in his sermon to the people in the synagogue in Antioch of Pisidia referred to this passage in Psalm 16 as one of the OT prophecies of the Messiah's resurrection, and specifically, of Jesus' resurrection from the dead after he had been crucified on the cross.

Jesus himself in speaking to the Pharisees one day showed them that King David's words in Psalm 110 had to refer to the Messiah, that is, the Christ. That psalm says in verse 1:

The LORD says to my Lord:
 Sit at my right hand,
 until I make your enemies your footstool."

What this Psalm is saying is that the LORD God was speaking to some other person and telling him to sit down at this right hand until he should make his enemies a footstool for his feet. Who was God talking to? Jesus pointed out to the Pharisees that it had to be David's Lord – a divine person, the Messiah, the Christ, whom God was telling to sit at his right hand. This was a place of supreme honor. So the meaning is that the Messiah would accomplish the work given him by God and then be granted the place of honor on heaven's throne. This is no defeated Savior, no dead Messiah, but a victorious one who would conquer death and the grave and be raised to the Father's right hand.

What I am trying to show you here is that the whole concept of resurrection, of both believers and unbelievers, and of the Messiah, is spoken of in the OT scriptures. It is not spoken of extensively, but enough and clear enough so that there was sufficient evidence for a belief in the resurrection of the dead for those who read and believed the OT revelation.

So we see in Jesus' day that there were Jewish men and women who believed this doctrine. We read, for example, in John chapter 11 that one of Jesus' friends named Lazarus died. Four days later Jesus arrived at the family's home and was talking to one of his sisters named Martha. Verse 23 says,

23 Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again." 24 Martha said to him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day."

Jesus meant, it seems, that he was going to raise her brother back to life immediately. She understood him to mean that he would rise in the resurrection in the last day. So we see here that she had a firm belief in the resurrection of the dead.

In fact, the conservative religious party of the Jews, the Pharisees, also believed in the resurrection of the dead. It was the liberal party, the Sadducees, who discounted the resurrection of the dead.

We can see this widespread belief in the resurrection of the dead in Paul's speech before King Agrippa in Acts chapter 26. Hear what Paul was saying to Agrippa in verses 6-8:

“⁶ And now I stand here on trial because of my hope in the promise made by God to our fathers, ⁷ to which our twelve tribes hope to attain, as they earnestly worship night and day. And for this hope I am accused by Jews, O king! ⁸ Why is it thought incredible by any of you that God raises the dead?”

What is Paul saying here? He is saying that he is on trial for his hope in the resurrection of the dead. This is the same hope that his people earnestly hope for as they serve God day and night. So what was the problem? The issue was the resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth from the dead. The Jews, at least those who believed in the scriptures, believed in the resurrection of the dead. But they could not accept the fact that a specific person, Jesus of Nazareth, was actually raised from the dead. They accepted the teaching, but would not accept its actual occurrence.

It takes faith to believe in the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. Romans chapter 4 likens the faith of the patriarch Abraham to the kind of faith we need. Abraham did not doubt but believed God when God promised to give him a son and many more descendants. In the same way, those who believe that God raised Jesus from the dead exhibit the same kind of believing faith that Abraham had, a faith which pleases God, and a faith that is rewarded.

So to summarize so far: the promise of the resurrection from the dead is made in the OT, as well as the promise of the Messiah's resurrection. The apostles of Jesus, led by the Holy Spirit, understood these OT prophecies and recognized how they were fulfilled in Jesus' resurrection from the dead.

Jesus' Own Predictions of his Coming Death and Resurrection

Jesus of course knew these same promises and this was no doubt one reason he could predict with such certainty his coming death and resurrection. For example, he said in Matthew 12:40:

⁴⁰ “For just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.”

Several times he told his disciples what was going to happen to him. He said, for example, in Mark 10:33-34:

“See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn him to death and deliver him over

to the Gentiles. ³⁴ And they will mock him and spit on him, and flog him and kill him. And after three days he will rise.”

Jesus knew he was going to be mocked and tortured and crucified. But he also knew that he would be raised from the dead after three days. Last time we saw in our study of the Nicene Creed that Jesus was “crucified, dead and buried.” He truly died on the cross. Then his body was taken down and washed and wrapped in burial cloths that were packed with ointments and spices, according to the custom of the Jews. Then he was placed, lifeless, in a borrowed tomb and the tomb was sealed shut.

For three dark days he lay in the cold dampness of the burial tomb. His disciples were scattered, scared, and depressed. Their beloved leader and Rabbi had been publicly executed and his life and ministry were over. Why had they followed him for three years? Why didn't they just keep doing what they had been doing? Why had they wasted three years of their lives?

But then as they thought more about it - how precious those three years had been. How much they had learned from Jesus about the scriptures and about the kingdom of God and about life. He had loved them with strong, yet tender and compassionate love. Why did he have to die? Why couldn't they still be with him? So we can imagine such thoughts going through their minds.

But then something happened early on that first Sunday morning after his death and burial. Some of the women went to the tomb and found it empty. Jesus was gone and angels told them he had risen from the dead. In confusion they ran back and told the disciples. Peter and John ran to see what was going on and found the tomb empty. Jesus' burial clothes were lying on the stone slab like a cocoon in the shape of a man – but the body was gone. And the head cloth was folded up neatly off to the side. What in the world happened, they wondered?

Then some of the women returned to the garden tomb area and a man appeared to him whom they thought at first was the gardener. But it was Jesus and in joy they fell down and grabbed his feet.

Later that day Jesus appeared to Peter, and then to two disciples on the road to a village named Emmaus and then to a group of them that first Sunday night. Listen to the account in Luke 24:36-43:

³⁶ As they were talking about these things, Jesus himself stood among them, and said to them, “Peace to you!”³⁷ But they were startled and frightened and thought they saw a spirit. ³⁸ And he said to them, “Why are you troubled, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? ³⁹ See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself. Touch me, and see. For a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have.” ⁴⁰ And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet. ⁴¹ And while they still disbelieved for joy and were marveling, he said to them, “Have you anything here to eat?” ⁴² They gave him a piece of broiled fish,^[b] ⁴³ and he took it and ate before them.

What is clear in these texts is that Jesus really did arise bodily and physically from the grave. He was in the same body that had been crucified on the cross. He said to his disciples in v. 39: ³⁹“See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself.”

It was the same Jesus who had walked with them for three years. He even had the scars in his hands and feet where the nails had held him to the cross. He was not a ghost – he had flesh and bones. And to top it all off, he ate a piece of broiled fish right in front of them. Ghosts do not eat food – they are spirits and cannot eat physical food. But Jesus ate physical food in his physical body.

What happened to Jesus was beginning to sink into their dull understanding. They could not deny the evidence before their eyes, ears, and hands. Their master and Lord was no longer dead. He was alive! He had risen from the tomb.

These events recorded here in the Gospel of Luke were authored by a man who was both a physician and a historian. He was careful to interview eye witnesses and document the facts of the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The New Testament documents a total of ten different appearances of the risen Jesus Christ to his disciples over a period of 40 days. Then on the 40th day, as they were looking on, he was taken up from before their very eyes and disappeared in a cloud as he was carried up to heaven.

All four of the gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, spend extensive time recounting the events of Jesus’ death, burial and resurrection. In fact, the entire New Testament, 27 books, devotes a large percentage of its time talking about not just the facts of Jesus’ death and resurrection, but what the meaning is, the significance of his death and resurrection. What are the practical results and ramifications of Jesus’ resurrection from the tomb? Let me mention several.

First of all, because God raised his Son from the dead, we see confirmation that his sacrifice of himself for the sins of his people was accepted by God the Father. Payment was made and accepted.

Secondly, this acceptance of the ransom payment that Jesus provided by his own death also led to his being received into the presence of God his Father in heaven. He had accomplished the work the Father had assigned for him to do. He had come to earth, he had conquered sin and death and Satan. Then he was taken back into heaven from earth. This is called **the ascension**, that is, the “going up.” God the Father received him and crowned him with glory and honor, and he was given a name above every other name, that every knee should bow and every tongue confess that Jesus is Lord to the glory of God the Father. The resurrection of Christ led naturally to his ascension. Actually, the resurrection would be incomplete without the ascension. The ascension was the victory parade, so to speak, of Christ’s redemptive work for his people.

A third reason the resurrection is crucial to the Christian faith is because Jesus was the “firstfruit” of all who would follow him. His resurrection from the dead paved the way and made it possible for all his people to also be resurrected from the dead. Because Christ rose from the dead, we have confident hope that we who believe in him will also rise from the dead at his return.

This is exactly what the Bible says will happen. When Christ returns to this earth at the end of human history he will raise up his own people, those who believe in him, from the dead and clothe them with “resurrection bodies,” similar to his own resurrected body.

At that time the new heaven and earth, along with the New Jerusalem, the city of God, will descend from heaven and it is there that God’s resurrected people will live in the presence of Jesus Christ for all eternity future. All sin, pain, and sadness will be banished and God’s people will dwell in perfect joy with their Savior forever – not as ghosts, may I remind you, but as fully restored humans, with all their faculties of mind, soul, and body. Indeed, the future of God’s people is bright.

Fourthly, it is the resurrection and ascension of Christ which affirms the reality of the incarnation. The Son of God had left heaven and taken upon himself our full human nature. But this was not a temporary assumption of our nature. The fact that Christ’s body was raised from the dead and he lives on in heaven as the God-man, fully divine and fully human in one person, makes it clear that God has permanently taken to himself our human nature in the person of Jesus Christ. There is a man sitting at the right hand of God. He is Jesus Christ our Lord. He is there in his glorified humanity which is united to his eternal deity - God and man in one person forever.

A fifth practical result of Jesus’ bodily resurrection is that it shows us how valuable and precious our human personhood, particularly our bodies, are to God. He demonstrated this when he sent his Son to be incarnated in a human body and be raised from the dead in a human body. Then he will raise the bodies of believers from the dead to be similar to Christ’s resurrection body.

Christianity, unlike some other religions, does not despise the body. Our bodies are a creation and gift of God and to be used for his glory. They are not to be used to engage in sinful and immoral behavior but dedicated to the service of God. And we will live on in these bodies when Christ resurrects his people from the grave at his return.

The sixth and final point I want to mention regarding Christ’s resurrection is that it is a cornerstone of the Gospel. The Apostle Paul says this in 1 Corinthians 15:3-4:

³ “For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, ⁴ that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures...”

There is no Christian Gospel, no Good News, without the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ on the third day. Paul, who had, in fact, been a witness to the risen Christ,

declared with absolute confidence:

“²⁰ But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.”

Paul, a man of high integrity and spiritual sensitivity, is an example of the kind of men who wrote the gospels and letters of the New Testament. All that they wrote is built around the facts of Christ’s death, burial and resurrection. They were witnesses and, guided by the Holy Spirit of God, they wrote down what they had heard and seen and touched with their hands regarding Jesus Christ the Son of God. They wrote so that we, too, could hear and believe that Jesus Christ was crucified, buried, and raised from the dead for the sake of his people - that we might believe in him, place our faith in him, and receive forgiveness of sins and eternal life.

Have you believed in the resurrected Son of God? He is alive and well at the Father’s right hand. His arms are open wide to receive you as his own child. Why not come to him today? Call upon him to save you from your sins. Call upon him to bring you into his everlasting kingdom. ...Everlasting joy awaits you in Christ’s presence.

Thank you for being with me today. This is Jeff Gregory, pastor of Good Shepherd Church in Dallas, TX, a Baptist Reformed Fellowship. Please subscribe to our channel. And watch our other videos also that we will produce.

Join us again for our next session, #9: “he ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father.”

The LORD bless you and watch over you, extend his rich grace in Christ to you, and make his face shine upon you, now and forever. Amen.

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