

“Descended + Rose”  
Apostles Creed  
Various  
07/23/2023

### Introduction

Tim. Pastor. BIBLES.

It's good to be back with you after a few weeks off on a not fully planned break if I'm being honest. As some of you are aware at the end of June Lindsay and I experienced a miscarriage. And while it goes without saying that you don't process or grieve this kind of tragedy in 3 weeks, but much more over the long haul, I am grateful for our team of pastors and leaders giving us some space to breathe and pull back and sort of handle the initial blow together as a family. I got to be a husband and a dad over the past three weeks, and it was such a blessing.

I'm so grateful for the leaders we have at this church, and for so many of you that have brought meals, prayed, and encouraged us, it really does mean more than you know.

**And I'm eager to preach today, if anything just for my own sake.**

About a week after receiving the news, I realized I was just struggling with sort of what to do. How do I process what's happening, how do I wrap my mind around all of this. And I was pointed to a book by a man named Jerry Sittser. He's one of my favorite authors, I mentioned his book *Water from a Deep Well* earlier in the series. Apparently he had written a book a couple of decades ago, I had never heard of, called *A Grace Disguised: How the Soul Grows Through Loss*.

And he says in the foreword of that book that he wrote it to make sense of his own suffering. “The primary way I know how to process as a writer,” he writes, “is through writing.”

And I thought – “That's it.” Except sub out writing and sub in preaching. When you do this craft for a living, and preaching is very much a spiritual craft, it's hard not to think in sermons. I imagine it's like a painter who processes their life through painting or a musician who, in order to make sense of their pain, writes songs.

I just felt like, man I'm a preacher. What if part of the way forward for me is to process through preaching? What if I can help start to make sense of my suffering through how I would teach our church family?

And then the next thought – “What better sermon to process this pain than a sermon on this line from the creed – ‘**He descended to hell.**’”

**Now if that seems strange to you it's my hope over our next few minutes together as we examine this phrase and the Scriptures that inform it, that this line would be transformed in your mind from something you scratch your head confused at and instead become a bolstering and deepening line for your faith.**

**So let's stand, and let's read the Creed together.**

#### **THE APOSTLES CREED**

**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.

**PRAY.**

### Recap of “Jesus”

Now just to help us remember where we're at – We are in section 2 of the creed. We said a few weeks ago:

- **Section 1** is about God the Father – Who He is as the almighty creator of heaven and earth.
- **Section 3** is about God the Holy Spirit and the work He does in forming and shaping the Church.

Section 2 is about the *person* and *work* of Jesus. And we said the Creed breaks down the work/story of Jesus into 5 sections and we've worked through the first 2 already:

- 1. Incarnation** – Jesus, God the Son, comes to earth, is conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary. Enters into humanity – fully God and fully man.
- 2. Substitution** – Jesus stands in for sinners. He takes our punishment on the cross we deserved.

So Jesus has died. Now what happens? What happens after that? What's the next part of the story? If you have any familiarity or background with Christianity you're probably like – rises again! Easter! Obviously Tim, I thought you were the pastor here. And that's true, we'll get to that in a little bit, the Creed and the Scriptures affirm that.

**But what happens between death and resurrection? What happens between Good Friday and Easter Sunday? What is Jesus doing in those 3 days?**

**The Creed tells us – He descended to hell.**

### Descended to Hell?

**Now, if you're like – “that's confusing, what in the world?” You would not be alone.**

This line from the creed has been a point of controversy and tension throughout history. It was a late addition to the creed. Whereas the rest is found as early as the first century, this line isn't included in the worship of the church until the 4th or 5th centuries. Many churches and church traditions still today don't include this line when they read or recite the creed in corporate worship.

So many resources – “just ignore it and move on.”

So I want to help us. Remember – I want to take this line **from head scratching to faith growing.**

**What does it mean and why is it good news when the Creed says “descended to hell?”**

To see that, let's look together at **Matthew 27:45-50:**

**45 Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land until the ninth hour. 46 And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, “Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?” that is, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” 47 And some of the bystanders, hearing it, said, “This man is calling Elijah.” 48 And one of them at once ran and took a sponge, filled it with sour wine, and put it on a reed and gave it to him to drink. 49 But the others said, “Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to save him.” 50 And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice and yielded up his spirit.**

This passage, Matthew's telling of these final moments of Jesus on the cross, points us to the two-fold meaning of "descended to hell". There are two layers to this line – **the physical layer and the spiritual layer.**

## 1. Physical Layer

One of the distinct frustrations that scholars have with the English language, is that it can be very lazy. Often what has happened throughout the centuries is folks have taken several words and combined them into one.

The clearest example of this is "love". We've said this before that the ancient Greeks had 6 different words for love – different words that described romantic love, Godly love, brotherly love. We in America have one...love. I love my wife and I love queso.

**The same is actually true for the word "hell".** Since around the 17th century, the English word "hell" has been used solely to speak of the place or state of eternal judgment, suffering, and torment reserved for those who reject Jesus. "Hell" is the bad place. "Heaven" is the good place.

But our one English word "hell" actually derives from 2 different Greek words with 2 different meanings.

- The first word translated to hell is the word **Gehenna**. And this is what the Scriptures use to refer to that place of suffering and judgment. Clear example in **Matt 5:29-30: 29 If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell [Gehenna]. 30 And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body go into hell [Gehenna].**
- The second word translated to hell is the word **Hades**. And this is what the Scriptures use to refer to the place of the departed, or the collective abode of the dead.

Hades includes Gehenna, but it also includes what the Scriptures refer to as "paradise" or more commonly "heaven".

**Let me give you this picture, maybe it'll help...**

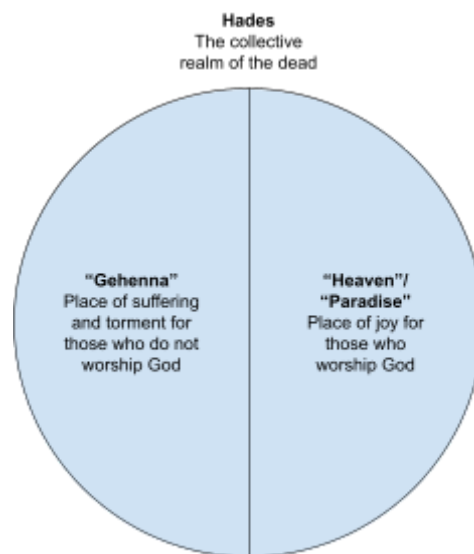
This word Hades, is the word the original translations of the Creed actually used, and some actually keep that language today, if you were to visit a Lutheran Church or Anglican Church you might hear them say – **"He descended to hades."**

So when the early Christians wrote and affirmed and confessed – "We believe Jesus descended into hell" – What they meant was not that Jesus went to *Gehenna* – the place of suffering and torment but rather He went to *Hades* - the collective abode/dwelling place of the dead.

**And this is backed up a ton in Scripture, let me show you a few...**

**Acts 2:25-27** [Peter's sermon on the day of Pentecost, summarizing the life and work of Jesus]

**25 For David says concerning [Jesus], "I saw the Lord always before me, for he is at my right hand that I may not be shaken; 26 therefore my heart was glad, and my tongue rejoiced; my flesh also will dwell in hope. 27 For you will not abandon my soul to Hades, or let your Holy One see corruption.**



- Peter references a Psalm (16:10) written thousands of years earlier by King David, where David says “God won’t let the Holy One be abandoned (better translation – “left behind in”) Hades and Peter says - this is talking about Jesus! God will not leave Jesus in Hades, but rather lift him back up to life.
- What’s the implication there? If God won’t let Jesus stay in Hades but will raise him up, where does that mean Jesus is? **Hades**.

### Luke 23:39-43

**39 One of the criminals who were hanged railed at him, saying, “Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us!” 40 But the other rebuked him, saying, “Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? 41 And we indeed justly, for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong.” 42 And he said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.” 43 And he said to him, “Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise.”**

- Paradise. Today you will be with me in this part of Hades that is not full of torment, but full of joy.
- Still the place of the dead. Meaning where does Jesus say he will be that day when he dies – Hades.

Now what was Jesus doing during those 3 days in Hades? That’s where scholars have a bit more disagreement. 1 Peter 3 seems to indicate He was preaching the good news of the Kingdom to Old Testament followers of God. But it’s best not to speculate past what the Scripture is clear on and that is this, here’s why “descended to hell” matters...

### Because it means – Jesus actually died.

Look back with me at Matt 27, that’s what we saw in v50 – **50 And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice and yielded up his spirit.**

Jesus’ death was not an illusion, it was not a magic trick, or a miracle where he appeared to be dead. Jesus actually died. His soul left his body. His body was placed in the tomb owned by Joseph of Arimathea, his soul went to *Hades*, the abode of the dead. Jesus really died.

How dead was Jesus? Dead dead. Jesus actually died to the fullest extent of what it means to die.

**Alisdair McGrath – “Jesus really was human like us. His divinity does not compromise his humanity. Being God incarnate did not mean he was spared from tasting death. He did not merely seem to die; he really did die and joined those who had died before him.”**

But there’s another layer to it...

### 2. Spiritual Layer

When the Creed says that Jesus descended into hell, it also connotes a spiritual reality.

**Jesus faced what could only be described as hell in the spiritual torment of judgment and wrath poured out on him by the heavenly Father.**

Look back again at our passage, **Matthew 27**, this picture we are given of Jesus’ final moments on the cross...

**45 Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land until the ninth hour. 46 And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, “Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?” that is, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”**

Here's what's incredible about this, Ryan talked last week all about the physical suffering of Jesus. He comes not to be served, but to serve and He gives up his life in tremendous amount of physical agony and pain.

But that's not the full extent of the agony. Because of what's happening in verse 46 – "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" Remember back in week 2 – the trinity from before time began. God the Father loving God the Son. God the Son loving God the Father.

Somehow, in a mystery hard to explain, while there is no rupture or break in that trinity, Jesus' experience of that relationship in the moment is broken. In order to pay the full penalty of judgment for sin and sinners, Jesus must experience a loss of everything he had with the Father. Just like a damned soul under the penalty of sin, Jesus experiences the loss of God's presence, favor, communication and sense of God's love.

That can only be described as spiritual gehenna. Spiritual hell. You want to talk about what makes hell hell? It's not a bunch of flames. Hells not one giant oven. The torment of hell is the rebellious soul getting what it always desired – freedom from the loving union of God, which is nothing but utter torment.

**Michael Horton – "Hell is not ultimately about fire, but about God. Whatever the exact nature of the physical punishments, the real terror awaiting the unrepentant is God himself and his inescapable presence forever with his face turned against them."**

That utter agony for all who do not trust in Christ, is what Christ Himself took on the cross. When Jesus says "forsaken" it carries with it the idea of a son being disowned by a Father. Jesus, who was God's perfect Son, is experiencing on the cross, as he bears our sin, takes our punishment, the spiritual reality of all who do not trust in Christ, the absence of being God's child.

In the words of **John Calvin – "Not only was Christ's body given as the price of our redemption, but he paid a greater and more excellent price in suffering in his soul the terrible torments of a condemned and forsaken man...Surely no more terrible abyss can be conceived than to feel yourself forsaken and estranged from God; and when you call upon him, not to be heard."**

Jesus feels in this moment, for the first time, the presence of God to judge. He senses and feels the reality of gehenna. The reality we all deserve because of our sin, Jesus takes on the cross.

**"So Jesus "descended to hell" by 1) actually dying and 2) absorbing the wrath of God on our behalf."**

### Good News for Us

**So it's worth pausing here to ask – Do you feel the weightiness of this line?**

When the church throughout time and space confesses together "We believe Jesus Christ descended to hell" what we are confessing is that Jesus experienced the full weight and agony of physical death and the full weight and agony of spiritual death.

**Jesus knows death.**

He bore the full weight of what it is to die physically. To go to the grave.  
He bore the full weight of what it is to die spiritually. To experience separation from God.

After all, isn't that the penalty and price for sin? The wages of sin is death, Romans 6:23 tells us. Physical death – death enters the world, all things including humanity now head towards brokenness and decay. Spiritual death – we are separated from life forever with God.

And so Jesus faces both. Experiences both. Knows both.

What incredible solace and comfort! That when Hebrews 4 tells us Jesus is our empathetic high priest – it is not blowing smoke. It's not making stuff up. It's not lying. He's not able to sympathize a little bit, he's not able to sympathize in some ways. He's not keeping us at arms length. He is not absent or unaware of our human experience. Rather, He took on flesh, entered into it, and lived it all.

He knows the fullest extent of human pain and suffering and trial – all the way up even to the greatest tragedy we can face as humans – physical and spiritual death.

### **Rose from the Dead**

**But our hope today is not simply that Jesus knew death, so therefore He can sympathize with us. But that Jesus conquered death, therefore He can deliver us.**

What good news that the Creed doesn't end here. We're only halfway into the series. The creed does not end with "Jesus suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried; he descended to hell." End of story, pack it in and go home.

What's the next line? **"The third day he rose again from the dead."**

Keep going in the story of Matthew. Jesus is buried. They roll this giant stone across the entrance to the tomb. But turn the page.

#### **Matthew 28.**

**1 Now after the Sabbath, toward the dawn of the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. 2 And behold, there was a great earthquake, for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled back the stone and sat on it. 3 His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. 4 And for fear of him the guards trembled and became like dead men. 5 But the angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. 6 He is not here, for he has risen, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay.**

The hinge point of this whole thing. He comes to earth – awesome, great, necessary. He dies for our sins. Yes. But the hinge point of our faith is this – He rises again. The resurrection of Jesus is the central confession of our faith.

Jesus' soul does not remain in Hades, and his body does not stay in the tomb. So not only does Jesus know what it means to die, but He knows what it means to rise.

And he promises that we will rise too! **Because, just as the death of Jesus has physical and spiritual layers, so too does His resurrection.**

#### **1. Spiritual Layer**

The resurrection means all of us who are dead in our sins, can be made alive to God. We can be raised to walk in the newness of life. We who are dead, separated from God, can enter into spiritual life with Him.

## Romans 6:3-5

**3 Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? 4 We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. 5 For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.**

Christ's resurrection means we who trust in Him are and will be raised to life with God. We are not stuck in our sin. Sin has been defeated. The grave could not hold Jesus, so our slavery is not the end of the story. Spiritual death is not our sealed fate. You do not have to resign yourself to spiritual death.

You are offered eternal life in the resurrection of Christ Jesus. If you put your faith in Him, your trust in Him, you can be raised to walk in newness of life. Your old self can be done away with. You can be a new creation. You can be born again into life with God.

But there's a physical layer as well...

### 2. Physical Layer

Because our hope is not simply that we are and will be raised to a new spiritual life, but that also our future for those who trust in Christ is a physical resurrection as well. Though at death your body goes in the ground, your spirit goes to Paradise in the presence of God.

But even that paradise is not forever. There's something better than a disembodied state of souls floating with Jesus – your body will be raised. When Christ returns, the Scriptures tell us that our bodies will be resurrected, just like Jesus. I get to dwell in a better version of this forever with Christ.

## 1 Cor 15:20-23

**20 But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. 21 For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. 22 For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. 23 But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ.**

One day Christ will return. And the promise for all who trust in Him is that we too will rise. We will shed our earthly bodies and we will gain new glorious physical bodies. And death won't have the last laugh. It is swallowed up in victory. Its sting will be no more. And we will always be with the Lord.

And so the encouragement is that yes, Christ was dead dead. And yet even dead dead was not enough to hold him, and because it did not hold him then, it will not hold us in the time soon to come.

Jesus reigns, and the Scriptures promise:

**1 Cor 15:26 – 26 The last enemy to be destroyed is death.**

### Conclusion

**And so when I say I don't know of a better line than "descended to hell" for us to cling to in our grief, I mean it.**

I have been more acquainted with the reality of death in the last 3 weeks than ever before. There's a darkness to just how final it seems. There's a pain that comes with loss. There's something that rises up in my soul off and on for the past few weeks that just screams (correctly and in line with the Scriptures) – "This is not how it's supposed to be."

And then I look at the cross, and I hear this line – descended to hell. And it's like this line shouts back at me across eternity – "EXACTLY! And here's what Jesus has done about it."

**Because, and here's what I have no choice but to cling to:**

- When I'm angry at God over death, He knows what it means to die.
- When I'm bitter at God that I'm giving up my life to serve Him and yet THIS happens, He knows what it means to die.
- When I'm confused at God over why he doesn't fix it all and right the wrongs and do away with suffering, He knows what it means to die.
- When I'm grieving at God over senseless loss, there's nothing we could have done to prevent it, He knows what it means to die.
- When I'm grasping for breath at the death of my child, He knows what it means to die.

And even though I don't know that I even fully believe it as I'm saying it to you, I have no choice but to cling to this reality:

- He also knows what it means to live again.
- He knows what it means to defeat death.
- He knows what it means that Hades could not hold Him.
- He knows what it means for His body to rise.

**So Church, take great comfort in our high priest who knows what it means to die.**

**But take even greater comfort in our conquering king who knows what it means to defeat death.**

Jl Packer, after exploring all the theological arguments for what this line means and how we should and can interpret it, says it this way – "What makes Jesus' entry into Hades important for us is...simply the fact that now we can face death knowing that when it comes we shall not find ourselves alone. He has been there before us, and he will see us through."

Jesus died. Descended to hades. And rose again. He will see us through.

**Pray.**