

## **The Faith We Confess**

*A Series of Sermons on the Core Doctrines of the Christian Faith*

### **Jesus Christ Our Savior: The Only Source of Our Salvation**

Last week we looked at the doctrine of the Lordship of Jesus Christ. Is Jesus Lord, or not? Is he simply one lord among many lords, or is he **the** Lord? The creed's answer to that question, echoing the clear witness of the Bible, is that "Jesus Christ is Lord!" The creed says, "We believe in one Lord Jesus Christ."

Today we turn our attention to a matter that is closely related to his Lordship. It is the subject of salvation. Because Jesus Christ is Lord he is the only one who can save us. So we will focus in on that part of the creed which says, "For us and for our **salvation** he came down from heaven, was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary and became truly human. For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate; he suffered death and was buried."

What this sentence says is that Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God, left heaven and came down to us as the one who is fully God and fully human. This is what the word incarnate means. It means to come down and be one of us, by taking up residence with us and in us.

In Christ, God gets down on our level, so to speak; he condescends himself to us; for we cannot be saved unless God does this. This is what Jesus does. But as huge as that is (the incarnation) God must do something more than that. God must take action for us on our behalf and the creed, echoing the testimony of the Bible, tells us that in Christ God destroys the sin problem- the very thing that destroys our relationship with God. The creed tells us that Jesus died on the cross for our sins. "For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate."

Because God is holy and we are sinful we need someone to die in our place if we are to be forgiven and reconciled to God. Our sin deserves God's wrath and judgment. But in Christ God takes that wrath and judgment upon himself. The Father sends the Son to be our substitute. Jesus stands in our place before the judgment seat of Father and he pays our penalty. "He was pierced for our transgressions and crushed for our iniquities." (Isa. 53:5) This is how we are saved and this salvation becomes effectual (real) in our lives when we believe.

#### **Is Jesus the Only Way?**

The question that I want to deal with today as we consider this portion of the creed is this: Is Jesus Christ the **only** way to salvation, or are there other ways? Is he the only path to God, or are there other paths?

This question is a real rabble rouser if it is answered in a certain way. Notice I didn't say in the wrong way, but a certain way.

If your answer is no and you say that he is not the only way, but simply *a* way to God then you will not offend anyone. Most of the world believes in the existence of God; therefore most of the world would have no problem with someone saying that Jesus is *a* way, but not **the** only way to God. This is definitely the path of least resistance.

If your answer is yes, Jesus is the only way to God; for there is no salvation outside of him, then your response will engender deep feelings of hostility among the masses. "How can you say that? How can you believe that? You are an unintelligent, narrow-minded, fascist, bigot!"

If this is your answer then you can expect to "benched" by the masses for making such a claim. In the eyes of those whom you have offended what you need on the back of your car is not a fish, but one of those blue "co-exist" bumper stickers that has the symbols of the world's major religions on it.

The question I am raising today presses in on us much harder than it used to.

In the last 50 years or so, because of increased globalization, advances in technology, the ease and speed of travel, and the transient nature of people, the world has now come to our own backdoor. Building an Islamic mosque at ground zero would have been unthinkable fifty years ago. But now you cannot ride through any major city and not find a Muslim mosque, or a Hindu or Buddhist temple. The world has come to our own back yard and the various religions of the world are now rubbing shoulders in America in ways that people would have never dreamed of 50 years ago. By default, this complex situation forces people to deal with the Jesus question in ways that they weren't forced to a few years ago.

### **The Church Has Shown us the Way Before**

It must be said that the context that American Christians face today is not a new one.

This new age of pluralism, this new world that we live in where we are surrounded by many different religions and where Christianity is no longer the only game in town, is very much like the Greco-Roman world of the early disciples.

Jesus became human flesh in a Greco-Roman world and the apostle Paul took his three missionary journeys to spread the gospel of Jesus Christ in a Greco-Roman world, where there were many competing claims and ideas about God that were very different from the claims of Christ. So the pluralism and the diversity of religions that we face today not a new thing. The early Christians faced this too.

How did they face it?

In short, they proclaimed “Jesus is Lord!” There are no other lords. All other claims to lordship are wanting. They also proclaimed him to be the only Savior of the world. There are no other Saviors. We heard this witness in our text from Acts. Only Jesus saves.

Peter and John had gotten into trouble for preaching Jesus and when they were called into account for their ministry they proclaimed that “Salvation found is in no one else; for there is no other name in heaven given to men by which we must be saved.” (v.12) Their answer angered their detractors therefore they ordered Peter and John to quit preaching Christ. They replied, “Judge for yourselves whether or not it is right in God’s sight to obey you rather than God. For we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard.” (v.20)

Now why did Peter and John and the apostles so doggedly preach the singularity of salvation in Christ alone?

1. Well for starters because Jesus himself said he was the sole source of salvation. Christ said that he was God in the flesh (not just like God) and that “he was the gate for the sheep;” for there are no other gates, and that “I am the way the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” (Jn. 14:6) So the reason why the disciples said what they said was because Jesus said it first. The disciples were simply mouthpieces for the words of Christ!
2. The second reason the disciples preached salvation in Christ alone was because they believed Jesus was telling the truth about himself. What he had to say about how a man was saved through his work on the cross resonated with them as truth. They came to believe that if man were not saved by the cross then he simply cannot be saved. So the disciples came to believe that Jesus was telling the truth.
3. The final reason they proclaimed salvation in no other name is because of the relationship. We are not dealing in abstract theories when we deal with Jesus but rather we are dealing with the relationship. In short, the lives of these early apostles had been turned upside down and inside out by the man Jesus. Their lives had been positively affected by him, so they bore witness to him in their preaching, teaching, and evangelism.

I find it ironic that some of the more “schooled liberal theologians,” who I would presume cherish their Christian faith, are quick to abandon the very doctrine (meaning the doctrine of

salvation in Christ alone) that had a great deal to do with the fact that they are Christian in the first place! What do I mean by that?

If the early apostles had not believed in the exclusive claims that Jesus made about himself then they would have never left Jerusalem and traveled westward along the Mediterranean coast line, penetrating deeply into the heart of Europe, with the gospel of Christ (think of Paul's three missionary journeys). And if that had not happened then that would mean that the first European settlers who came here and founded this nation in the 17<sup>th</sup> century would have come without their Christianity.

You see, it was their dogged belief that Jesus was the only Savior that led to the early apostles spreading the gospel throughout the Greco-Roman world. For if they did not believe that Jesus was the only Savior then they would not have gone through all the trouble they went through in order to spread it. (*What's the point if all paths are equally valid and if all roads lead to God?*) So, in short, for a liberal Christian in America to water down and reject the exclusive claims of Jesus Christ, by becoming a pluralist, inclusivist, and a de-facto universalist, so as to not offend anyone, is to, in fact, bite the hand that has fed you!

### **Is It Unreasonable to Believe that Jesus is the Only Way to God?**

So this is what Jesus said: He is the only Savior. And this is what the disciples believed, but is this an unreasonable belief to have? Could God really be that exclusive?

What needs to be said here is that the belief that all religions lead to God and are equally valid is an even more absurd belief. If that belief were true then God would be a schizophrenic kind of God. What do I mean by that?

Let's just examine one broad, basic difference between western and eastern world religions. Judaism, Christianity, and Islam (religions that have major differences amongst themselves) are western monotheistic religions. Consequently, in each one of these three religions there is a clear distinction that is made between God and creation. In the western religions God is not the creation and creation is not God. There is no confusion between the painter (God) and the painting (creation), so to speak. On the other hand, eastern religions, such as Hinduism and Buddhism, are polytheistic in nature, meaning they espouse a belief in a multiplicity of gods and they are *pantheistic* as well, meaning they believe that everything is God, or God is in everything. There is no distinction made between God and creation; they are all one in the same.

Logically speaking you cannot have it both ways. God cannot be monotheistic (there be only one God) and polytheistic (there be a thousand gods) God has to be one or the other. Likewise, God

is either a tree or an animal (pantheism; God is everything) or God is not a tree or animal. God is separate from creation or He is not. You can't have it both ways.

There are many examples we could use that would show that there are huge differences between all the many different religions. But unfortunately a lot of people have bought into the intellectually lazy and logically absurd idea that all religions are the same, that all paths are valid, and that it does not matter which one you choose because all roads lead to God.

The question here is did God reveal himself rightly in the midst of all of this confusion and different ideas? Did God give us revelation? Did God give us truth? That is the question. I believe God did and the moment I quit believing that I need to resolve myself to become a deist, or an agnostic, or even worse, an atheist. If God is God then why would he do that? And I believe that God did it perfectly, truthfully, fully, and completely, through the Lord Jesus Christ.

### **What We Need to Do as it Concerns Salvation in Christ Alone**

So here is where I think we need to stand as it concerns this question of salvation in Christ alone:

1. We need to acknowledge that Jesus Christ himself made the claim that only he saves. This is not an invention of the church. This is what Jesus said and this is what the Bible teaches. We have to decide whether or not we trust the Bible. I would advocate that we hold to our confession that there is no salvation outside of Christ. Even our own denomination mustered up the strength to say this when it was called into question by some in church. e PCUSA. The Office of Theology and Worship wrote a position paper that, though being somewhat murky on the question of the necessity of faith in Christ for salvation, did acknowledge that there is no salvation outside of Jesus. In essence it said that all who are saved by God are saved by the grace of God through Jesus Christ.
2. Because we ought to hold fast to this affirmation so too ought we to proclaim that Jesus Christ is “the way, the truth, and the life” for all people. The call is inclusive, it goes out to everyone and if we fail to do this then we are failing in the Great Commission. Our whole purpose as Christians is to “go out into the world and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.”
3. We should exercise care when speculating on the eternal state of people who die. I think we can say with great assurance that those who have professed faith in Christ and bore good fruit for him in their lives go to be with God at death. I think we can also say with equal assurance that those who have heard the gospel and have rejected it with their lives

and their confession are in great peril. I would say that if a person wants hell then God will give him hell. The book of Hebrews says “The Lord will judge his people. It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.” (10:31) As for those who die apart from having ever heard the gospel I think we need to exercise extra caution. I think what we can say is that God is a just, merciful, and gracious God and that we trust God to be just, merciful, and gracious in His dealings with those people who had little or no knowledge of Christ. And then one final thing as it concerns people and their salvation. We should wish well for all people. This is what the apostle Paul did as he reflected on the fact that his own people, the Jews, had rejected Christ. Paul was desirous of their salvation. (Rom. 9) We should not be wishing or wanting anyone to be in hell. We should be desirous of all people come to faith and repentance in Jesus Christ. (Rom. 9:1-5)

4. We should not be bone-headed in our presentation of the gospel. There is a way to stand firm in your faith without being rude, insensitive, and uncaring. I cannot promise you that if you do that that you will be liked. Sinful man, apart from the work of the Holy Spirit, still finds the idea of the cross and Jesus being the only way to be repugnant, no matter how tactful you are. None-the-less, God wants your conversations with non-Christians to be “full of grace and seasoned with salt” (Col. 4:4-6) so that you may present the claims of Christ with “gentleness and respect” (I Pet. 3:15). This means that we not only speak, but we also listen and love, as we point them to the one who loves them and died for them, so that they might be saved: Jesus Christ, the way, the truth, and the life; and the only source of our salvation.

In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.