

The *Real* Apostle's Creed

How to Get to Heaven from Earth – Part IV

Romans 10:9-11

Introduction

The newspapers these days, are filled with stories of tragedy, and danger, and grief. Frankly, I cannot remember a time like these past few weeks, in the chronicling of one story after another of heartbreak. Perhaps it is the memory of our own land being invaded by terrorists and thousands of people losing their lives.

Skim through the newspapers however, and you will read of Russia's recent experiences with terrorism. The suicide bombing in Moscow on September 1, and just a week earlier, terrorists bombs exploding on two Russian jets, causing their crash, and the killing of all the passengers on board.

Then, this past week, we watched as a middle school in Beslan, Russia, was overtaken by terrorists. They ended by blowing up the school; killing themselves and hundreds of children and teachers.

Peter Bonner, our missionary to that part of the world, reported in an e-mail that four hundred children who survived have been hospitalized. Most of these children are badly injured or burned, and are so traumatized that they are unable to say their own names.

One local Baptist church in the area, pastored by a friend and acquaintance of several of our own congregation, is going to be worshipping today, surrounded by the sorrow of so many in their church who lost their children. One church member escaped, but only after seeing her nine year old son shot to death before her own eyes.

One church planter in the area – Pastor Totiev and his wife – lost two of their three children.

What incredible terror they must have felt. What incredible grief they feel even now.

Cast your eyes toward the Middle East and you will notice that suicide bomb attacks are occurring in alarming numbers. They are taking the lives of our own American soldiers. One article noted that the thousandth American soldier has died in Iraq.

In an editorial, I read the repeated phrase, “the tide of evil is rising . . . the tide of evil is rising.”

Add to that the natural disasters of these past few weeks:

- Earthquakes shake Japan;
- Floods rip through southwestern China, where more than one hundred people have lost their lives and many more are missing in floods and landslides triggered by torrential rains;
- Wildfires burn California;
- One hurricane after another pummels the Caribbean and our own coast – especially Florida – with another one on the way in a matter of hours.

All of this in one newspaper!

I heard on a radio program that last week, Los Angeles completed the largest evacuation exercise in history. More than 10,000 people participated in the downtown L.A. exercise.

Yesterday, more than a thousand people came to our church to an event that sponsored safety

procedures and highlighted our men and women who put their lives on the line. Never before have these people held so honorable an occupation.

Why? Because the threat of disaster, and now of terror, are no longer things that happen to people overseas – they happen to us; they happen to you and me!

A year ago, if I had said to someone on the street, “Americans are in danger and need to be saved,” they would have said, “What are you, a doomsday prophet? We’re perfectly safe!”

Today, they would say, “You’re right, we are in danger; but to which danger are you referring?”

Perhaps now, more than ever, we, as believers, are in a position to begin a search and rescue mission like the church has never seen in our generation.

Listen, I have read the rest of this Book; this Bible. Talk about national disasters . . . talk about disease . . . talk about famine . . . talk about danger unheard of . . .

Can you imagine animals losing their natural fear of mankind and attacking on a global scale? Can you imagine earthquakes so severe that mountains and islands are rearranged.

All of this in one chapter! Revelation, chapter 6.

I have read the rest of the story. This planet is groaning for the day of redemption.

Many long to see earth settled – governed by someone good and decent; at peace and trouble free! Many long to see earth improved!

I long to see earth re-created! Before that occurs, I long to see the kingdom come and the King seated upon His throne.

Ladies and gentlemen, according to this Book, earth is not going to be repaired, it is going to be re-created.

What I hold out to you today, as eternal hope, is not:

- a skill that teaches you how to avoid all disaster;
- a secret that guarantees a comfortable life;
- a system that keeps tragedy from coming your way.

No. However, I can give you hope beyond this burning collapsing building called earth; I can offer you biblical truth about this decaying universe; I can offer you an escape from this corrupt and terror filled world.

How?

- I know a divine Judge who released me from my death sentence;
- I know a divine Fireman who extinguished the fires of hell for me;
- I recommend to you this same Rescuer who picked me up, rushed me into the emergency room, gave me a divine blood transfusion, and brought me from the dead into everlasting life.

These things that we see in part, are warnings of a day when it will be unleashed on planet earth with the fury of holy God who moves to judge mankind.

Now, if you were trapped inside the elevator of a burning building, or you were feeling the high winds of a hurricane as the roof of your home is ripped away, which would you prefer? A fireman who can break down the door and pull you out; a rescue team who will take you to safety, or someone who will join you so they can say, “I understand how you feel; I’m here to feel your pain.”

Now, that would definitely be reassuring, to not be alone.

Which would you prefer? Someone who will experience the disaster along with you, or someone who can save you from the disaster?

When it comes to eternal torment, you do not need someone to say, “I’ll go along so you’ll have someone who understands how you feel.”

You want to get out! You want to be rescued!

The question remains then, “How can you be saved?”

How Can You Be Saved?

Our study in Romans, chapter 10, brings us to verse 9. In this verse and the next, we are given one of the clearest answers to the question of how to be saved in all of the Bible. Look at verses 9 through 11.

. . . if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved [“sozo” – rescued; delivered]; for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation. For the Scripture says, “Whoever believes in Him will not be disappointed [literally, “will not be put to shame”].”

There is the answer; the promise, at the end of verse 9,

... you shall be saved

How? Notice that Paul goes back and forth between the heart and the mouth. He talks of confessing with the mouth and believing in the heart in verse 9; he then reverses the order and talks of believing in the heart and confessing with the mouth in verse 10.

Is Paul talking about faith plus works? In other words, if you believe, but do not confess, you are not saved? And, who are you confessing to? God or man? Paul does not really say. And what about verse 11, which does not mention confession at all, but says the person who simply believes will be saved from shame.

A lot of confusion can be avoided by simply understanding that the two phrases concerning confessing with the mouth and believing in the heart are not to be taken separately. One Greek scholar wrote this warning:

To separate these two clauses (confessing with the mouth and believing with the heart) and look for a list of independent meanings in each of them, is a grave mistake. A heart believing unto righteousness, and a mouth making confession unto salvation are not two things, but two sides of the same thing.¹

Paul wrote the same idea in II Corinthians, chapter 4, verse 13,

But having the same spirit of faith, according to what is written, "I believed, therefore I spoke," we also believe, therefore we also speak.

In other words, Paul is not saying that salvation is partial through believing in Christ, and then completed by some public confession in Christ. To teach that would add human works to salvation and would thus transform salvation from a free gift into something you earned.

I believe that what Paul is actually attempting to do in these verses is to show that salvation comes to a person who believes in their heart. The Jews believed that the heart was the hub of existence – who you were – intellect, emotions, and will – and also believed the soul resided in the heart. Paul is writing in terms they would easily understand.

We know the heart is revealed by the mouth, don't we? As Matthew, chapter 12, verse 34 (NKJV), says,

... out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks.

What belief, and confirmation, brings salvation?

So, what does the inner man believe and the outer man confirm that brings salvation?

Jesus is Lord

1. Number one, that Jesus is Lord.

Go back and read verse 9a again.

... if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord...

Now there are some who try to bolster their particular definition of, what they call, Lordship salvation by misunderstanding this verse to say something like this, "If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is your Lord and Master."

In other words, this becomes for them, a verse that demands surrender to the Lordship of Christ. There are indeed, many other verses that challenge the true believer to surrender to the mastery of Christ, but this is not one of them. In fact, that view trivializes the depth of the meaning of this text.

Do not ruin this verse! Paul is actually saying, "if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Jehovah – God."

The Greek word for Lord, "kurios," was the word used in the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Old Testament), to translate the Hebrew name Yahweh. Yahweh was the personal name of God which was sacred to the Jews. More than six thousand times in the Hebrew scriptures, Jehovah, or Yahweh, was translated "Lord". Paul had access to the Septuagint and often quoted from it, as did the Lord.

I say that to press into your minds that for someone to say, "Jesus is Lord," actually meant they were saying, "Jesus is Jehovah."

Even the Jew, prayed this meaning, but missed the message of the great "Shema," the great Jewish prayer. This is in Deuteronomy, chapter 6, verse 4,

Hear, O Israel! The Lord [Jehovah] is our God [Elohim], the Lord [Jehovah] is one!

There is one God in three persons – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – and each is equally divine. There are not three gods, but one God. It is not "1 + 1 + 1 = 3 gods," but "1 x 1 x 1 = 1 God".

Isn't it ironic that a cult called Jehovah's Witnesses who deny the deity of Jesus Christ, call themselves by the very name that Jesus is given?

Luke wrote in chapter 2, verse 11,

... today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord [Jehovah!].

This is the stumbling block to the Jews, as Paul wrote in Romans, chapter 9, verse 32b,

... They stumbled over the stumbling stone

In other words, they stumbled over the declaration that this carpenter was Jehovah, incarnate.

Imagine this – the Bible says, in Philippians, chapter 2, verses 10 through 11a,

... that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow, of those that are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord [Jehovah!]. . .

The visible expression of almighty God – was that what Jesus claimed? Did the Jews misunderstand the claims of Jesus?

Listen for yourselves, as I read from John's gospel, chapter 5, verse 18, of one encounter.

For this reason therefore the Jews were seeking all the more to kill Him, because He not only was breaking the Sabbath, but also was calling God His own Father, making Himself equal with God.

The Jews understood more than liberal protestants do today. Jesus is not just a good teacher; a moral example, He is the living, incarnate God of truth.

By the way, Paul uses the term "Lord" forty-four times in the book of Romans; eight of those times it is used to refer to God the Father.

For a Jew to confess that Jesus was Jehovah meant that their religious world would be turned upside down. They would be saying that the carpenter was Jehovah; God in the flesh; the Messiah.

Furthermore, for a Gentile to use the name of Lord for Jesus would also turn their world upside down, but for a different reason.

The Roman Emperors claimed the title "Lord". They also believed they were gods incarnate; sons of the gods.

Claudius, for example, would be deified. His images would show him as the god Jupiter incarnate.

Caligula, another emperor in the first century, believed he could converse with the planet gods. He often carried on supposed conversations with them.

We actually have the record of one occasion when Caligula was supposedly conversing with the moon. He asked one of his servants who was standing nearby, whether he could see the goddess for himself. The servant kept his eyes fixed on the ground and replied in a whisper, "Only You, Lord, may behold another god."

It would be the Christians who would get into trouble with Rome because they believed that Jesus Christ was the only true God. Rome eventually persecuted and martyred thousands of Christians who would not burn incense to the Roman emperor and call him "Lord".

Polycarp, a disciple of the apostle John, was urged by the chief of police to renounce his beliefs. "How could I blaspheme my King and Savior?" he replied.

"Hear my confession," Polycarp told the officials, "I am a Christian. If you are willing to learn what Christianity is, set a time at which you can hear me."

Refusing his offer, they instead offered him one last warning, but Polycarp answered, "You threaten me with a fire that burns but for an hour and goes out after a short time, for you do not know the fire of the coming judgment and of eternal punishment for the godless. Why do you wait? Bring on what you will."

As Polycarp was brought into the crowded arena where he would be executed, the masses cried out, "He is the Father of the Christians! The destroyer of our gods!"

They hoisted Polycarp upon a pyre of dried wood, but when his body failed to fully burn, because of the poorly lit flames, the executioner drove a dagger into the heart of this dear saint.ⁱⁱ

Romans, chapter 10, verse 9, would become a first and second century creed. In fact, I have named this study, "The *Real* Apostles Creed," for that very reason.

In the latter part of the first century and through the second century, a believer would have to repeat that Jesus was Lord, or literally that Jesus was God, before they could be baptized.

This verse then, is not talking about the believer's surrender, it is talking about Jesus Christ's sovereignty!

My friends, do you want to be rescued?! You must confess this very first creed of inspired scripture – Jesus Christ is God! You must declare it to be your belief that Jesus Christ is God; Jesus is Jehovah!

Jesus is living

2. Number two, salvation is granted to the one who believes, not only that Jesus is Lord, but that Jesus is living.

The Christian is not only one who believes that Jesus lived, but that Jesus lives.

A crucified Savior is only a dead Savior. A dead Savior cannot save anyone, but a crucified, resurrected Savior can save everyone from the grave He has just conquered.

Why is the resurrection pivotal?

Why is the resurrection so pivotal?

The resurrection is the foundation of our faith

1. First, because the resurrection is the foundation of our faith!

Paul writes, in I Corinthians, chapter 15, verses 1 through 4, 14, and 17.

Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received, in which also you stand, by which also you are saved . . . that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures . . . and if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is vain, your faith also is vain. . . . and if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins.

In other words, if Christ has not been raised, you have not been rescued yet; you are still in eternal danger!

The resurrection is the validation of Christ

2. Secondly, the resurrection is not only the foundation of our faith, it is the validation of Christ.

Jesus told the religious leaders in John, chapter 2, verses 19 through 22,

. . . Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.” . . . But He was speaking of the temple of His body. So when He was raised from the dead, His disciples remembered that He said this; and they believed the Scripture and the word which Jesus had spoken.

The resurrection is the inspiration of the apostles

3. Thirdly, the resurrection is the inspiration of the apostles.

Further in I Corinthians, chapter 15, verses 5 through 8, Paul writes,

. . . that He [Jesus] appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. After that He appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom remain until now, but some have fallen asleep; then He appeared to James, then to all the apostles; and last of all, as to one untimely born, He appeared to me also.

How do you think these cowards, who ran from the sight of the crucifixion, will now turn into fearless ambassadors in Jerusalem, within sight of the grave? They know it is empty!

So Paul shouts with victory at the end of this chapter 15 of I Corinthians, in verse 54b,

. . . Death is swallowed up in victory.

What is true without the resurrection?

According to the scriptures, five things are true if Christ is still dead. There are a thousand things, but I am out of time, so let me give five.

Without the resurrection, Jesus is a false prophet

1. Without the resurrection, Jesus is a false prophet.

In other words, Jesus is a liar – not a good man; not a good teacher, but the worst kind of teacher – a deceiver!

Without the resurrection, the apostles are false witnesses

2. Without the resurrection, the apostles are false witnesses.

In other words, the apostles are a bunch of liars too!

Without the resurrection, the church is promoting false promises

3. Without the resurrection, the church is promoting false promises.

Without the resurrection, the believer is under false assurances

4. Without the resurrection, the believer is under false assurances.

I repeat, you really cannot get out of the burning building!

Without the resurrection, heaven is a false hope

5. Without the resurrection, heaven is a false hope.

Did I go too slowly? Without the resurrection:

- Jesus is a liar – not a good man; not a good teacher, but the worst kind of teacher – a deceiver;
- The apostles are a bunch of liars too;
- You really cannot get out of the burning building!

Did not Jesus Christ promise heaven only as a result of His ability to live beyond the grave? Look at John, chapter 14, verses 2b through 3.

. . . I go to prepare a place for you. If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, there you may be also.

If Jesus does not go, He cannot prepare; if He does not prepare, then He will not come; if He will not come back for us, we cannot get to heaven.

This is all we get! We get a crumbling earth . . . a terror filled world . . . a fearful existence . . . disaster upon disaster . . . crime and injustice . . . a fleeting joy . . . a momentary success . . . but no future hope beyond this valley!

But there *is* more than this! Because Jesus did rise, therefore He did ascend, therefore He has prepared, therefore He will come back, therefore our future home awaits in heaven!

Do you want to be rescued? Do you want to be saved?

Then believe the exclusive claim of Christ that He alone is God. And confess the primary reason for that belief – that Jesus Christ has conquered death and is alive today.

Conclusion

D. L. Moody, the great evangelist of the 1800's, was surrounded by friends and family as he passed away. Suddenly, rousing a bit from his bed, he said, "Earth is receding and heaven is at hand . . . I can see the children."

Someone at Moody's bed remarked, "He's dreaming."

Moody opened his eyes and said, "I am not dreaming. If this is death, it is sweet. There is no valley here."

Then he said, "God is calling me and I must go."

Another dear saint of God, a famous Welch pastor named Christmas Evans, was dying and had his family and friends around his bedside. He seemed to be sleeping, but then opened his eyes toward the ceiling, waved to his friends, and said his very last words, as his arms fell to his bedside, "Drive on, Elijah, drive on."

This was a reference to Elijah and the chariot of fire that took him to heaven.

We cannot imagine what Moody and Evans saw, but we will one day, see it for ourselves.

Those who believe in their heart that Jesus is living and confess that Jesus is Lord, have every assurance that they can also say on their final day as a mortal man or woman on earth, "Drive on, Elijah, drive on."

I have been rescued by the living Lord of life everlasting. Drive on, Elijah, drive on!

Sing:

He is Lord, He is Lord,

He has risen from the dead, and He is Lord.

Every knee shall bow, every tongue confess,

That Jesus Christ is Lord!

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 9/12/2004 by Stephen Davey.

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ⁱ Ralph Earle, Word Meanings in the New Testament (Baker Book House, 1989), p. 195.

ⁱⁱ Michael Horton, We Believe (Word Publishing, 1998), p. 5.