

# **Week 3: Suffering and Death; and the Resurrection**

## **Introduction**

Good morning everyone! Let's pray as we get started!

All right, today is the third of our four weeks looking at the doctrine of Christology: the things the church has learned from Scripture to say about our great God and Savior Jesus Christ. As a quick refresher:

- In the first week, we saw that God the Son is truly God, and *eternally* the Son, and how—amazingly—in Christ, by the Spirit, we're adopted into that same love the Father has for the Son.
- Last week, we saw that Jesus Christ was Israel's Messiah—the fulfillment of all God's promises to bring salvation to all nations through one people. We also followed the early church in thinking through the fact that Jesus was fully God and fully human, and how this is why we are fully saved.
- This week, we're talking about Jesus' suffering, death, and resurrection.
- Next week, we'll talk about his ascension, session, and reign, before wrapping it all up.

If you want to review any of these, the recordings are up at [forestgate.org/sunday-school](http://forestgate.org/sunday-school), and I'm putting all of my notes up on those pages as well.

## Part 1: Suffering and Death

We'll start out today by looking at Jesus's suffering and death. There is a weight here I hope we can all feel again: because it is the weight we *should* be under, and *would* be under if it were not for his suffering for us.

### The doctrine

I'm going to start with the Westminster Confession, chapters 8.4 and 8.5, which together cover *both* of our major doctrines for the day (as is right: they fit together, as we'll see):

**8.4.** *This office the Lord Jesus did most willingly undertake; which that He might discharge, He was made under the law, and did perfectly fulfill it; endured most grievous torments immediately in His soul, and most painful sufferings in His body; was crucified, and died, was buried, and remained under the power of death, yet saw no corruption. On the third day He arose from the dead, with the same body in which He suffered, with which also he ascended into heaven, and there sits at the right hand of His Father, making intercession, and shall return, to judge men and angels, at the end of the world.*

**8.5.** *The Lord Jesus, by His perfect obedience, and sacrifice of Himself, which He through the eternal Spirit, once offered up unto God, has fully satisfied the justice of His Father; and purchased, not only reconciliation, but an everlasting inheritance in the kingdom of heaven, for those whom the Father has given unto Him.*

It's worth chewing on those words: he *willingly* did this for us. He went under the law, and though he kept the law perfectly himself, he was crucified as one who had broken it—as we have. He was tormented in both body and mind—as we should have been. He died—as we have all earned death. He sacrificed himself, fully satisfying the justice of his Father—justice that was due as penalty on *us*.

## **Scriptural basis**

As with every one of these topics, there is more to say on this one than I could hope to fit into this time slot. The gospels dwell overwhelmingly on the final week of Jesus' life, on his death, and then look in wonder at his resurrection. The rest of the New Testament is in many ways a reflection on those two events: the death of the one who seemed to be Messiah, and then his vindication as Messiah when God raised him from the dead. And of course those reflections are informed as well by his miraculous birth and his ministries of teaching and healing. But the climax of death and resurrection is the focal point of the lens—not just of Jesus' life, not just of the New Testament, indeed not just of Scripture, but of *all reality*. *Everything else* comes clear in light of these two truths: that God has come to be with us and *died* in our place, under the judgment we deserved; and that he did not *stay* dead but rose triumphant from the grave.

In brief, though, let's feel the weight of what Christ did *for us* at Calvary:

- He atoned for sin, once and for all. As Hebrews 7 tells us, "He doesn't need to offer sacrifices every day, as high priests do—first for their own sins, then for those of the people. He did this once for all when He offered Himself." His sacrifice was *sufficient*, for your sins and my sins and indeed every sin that has ever been sinned. For all who trust him, Christ *has done* what the blood of bulls and goats never could, and what we in our sinfulness never could: He has paid our penalty, as our substitute, and at-oned us with God—that's where "atoned" came from: Tyndale made it up to translate this word into English. Jesus made us one with God again.
- As part of that, he was *obedient*— "to the point of death, even death on the cross" (Philippians 2:8). And as Hebrews puts it: he was made perfect *through suffering* (2:10), and "learned obedience through what he suffered" (5:8). More: where we give in to our temptations all too easily, he resisted to the point of shedding blood (Hebrews 12:4): both in resisting the temptation to turn away in Gethsemane, and then in dying for us.
- He freed us from Satan's reign: Ephesians 2 reminds us that we were following "the spirit now working in the disobedient" when he saved us; Hebrews 2 tells us that through his death Jesus "destroyed the one who holding the power of death—that is, the Devil—and free those who were held in slavery all their lives by the fear of death."
- He broke down the wall of hostility between Jew and Gentile, and indeed every racial and ethnic division, *in his own flesh*. He reconciled us to God *together*—in one body, his *own* body, Ephesians 2 says—at the cross. Through his death he killed the hostility between Jew and Gentile, white

and black, Irish and English, Chinese and Japanese—every last one *made one* in his body at the cross.

In sum: everything we deserve, he endured at Calvary; everything we have broken, he began setting right in his death. He is our substitutionary atonement, and he is the victor—over sin, over death, over Satan. And we *know* it because of what we'll see in the next section: his resurrection.

## What the church has said

The Apostles' Creed in its traditional form says of Jesus' death that he:

| *I was crucified, died, and was buried.*

| *He descended into hell.*

The first half of that is uncontroversial, though worth reflecting on, and we're going to spend some time on it. The second half is obviously a bit *more* controversial!

First, the important bit: the Apostles' Creed's was defending against the idea that Jesus *didn't* really do any of those things: wasn't *really* crucified, didn't *really* physically die, wasn't *really* physically buried. But, as we saw last week in thinking about the Incarnation: our salvation hinges on the fact that Jesus didn't just *appear* to be a human being; he *really* was a human being—and so he *really did* die for us. It wasn't a good magician's trick! And so it's good news for us that he really died, because in really dying (not just seeming to die) he *really* defeated death.

Now, what about the descent into hell? The church has basically taken this in two orthodox directions: *either* that this is referring to Christ's soul enduring the same reality of hell as we would, on the cross; *or* that it's talking about what the Old Testament

calls Sheol, what the New Testament calls Hades: the place of the dead before Christ's coming.

The Reformed tradition, from Calvin's Institutes on,<sup>1</sup> has fairly universally held to the first meaning: that Jesus endured the wrath of God against our sin and the punishment of eternal separation from God: hell not in the sense of *location* but in the sense of *experience*. Thus, the Heidelberg Catechism says in Question 44:

**44:** Why does the creed add, "He descended to hell"?

*: To assure me during attacks of deepest dread and temptation that Christ my Lord, by suffering unspeakable anguish, pain, and terror of soul, on the cross but also earlier, has delivered me from hellish anguish and torment.*

If we read the creed this way, I think it's reasonable—but "descended into hell" requires a lot of explanation, if so! My own preference is to keep it in and deal with the work of explaining it, because I'm pretty hesitant to take out a line from a creed the whole rest of the church uses—but I also understand why not only Forestgate but a fair number of other churches hesitate here.

Because I think that the traditional Reformed angle is correct, I'm just going to leave aside the interpretation that this was Jesus going into Sheol and leading God's people waiting there to the heaven where God himself is. I think it's a *possible* interpretation, and it does pull together some threads (from the Old Testament especially) ... but the text just doesn't give us a lot to hang that idea on, so at least at this point, I don't hang anything on it!

---

<sup>1</sup> Institutes of the Christian Religion 2.16.10

## In our lives

It's hard to single out a point for application here! The New Testament is chock full of exhortations grounded in Jesus's work on our behalf. The two main things I want us to take away are:

First: we should come away with a sense of joy and awe at the weight of what Christ bore for us, and accomplished for us, in his death: delivering us from death, from hell, from ethnic hatred, from Satan's power, from guilt, from shame, from—as Athanasius reminds us, *corruptibility* to *incorruptibility*. From death to life, through his death.

Second: we should come away with a desire to imitate Christ—as 1 Peter 4:1-2 says:

*Therefore, since Christ suffered in the flesh, equip yourselves also with the same resolve—because the one who suffered in the flesh has finished with sin—in order to live the remaining time in the flesh, no longer for human desires, but for God's will.*

Now, before we move on to the Resurrection—any questions?

## Part 2: The Resurrection

As Jaimie can attest, about the only topic that gets me as profoundly excited as I got about the doctrine of the Incarnation last week is the Resurrection. A few years ago I read a book with an absolutely brilliant title: The Cross is Not Enough. The book

wasn't great, unfortunately, but the title has stuck with me because it gets at a fundamental truth of our faith. It sounds, at first blush, like we're saying something crazy, right? But the point, as we'll see, is exactly right: everything we've said about the cross is null and void if Jesus was not raised from the dead. The cross alone is not enough: the Resurrection is necessary.

## The doctrine

The doctrine of the resurrection is worth stating fully and clearly: Jesus was truly dead—not, as *The Princess Bride* might have it, “mostly dead” and therefore “still partly alive”: he was *all* dead, 100% dead. And then God raised him *bodily* from the dead. Not, as some heretical theologies have said, only as a spirit; and certainly not just the *ideas* of Jesus living on. He was physically dead, and then he was physically alive—but with his body transformed into something more glorious than it had been.

Every early creed includes the phrase “the third day he rose again.” The 39 Articles, the core Anglican statement of doctrine, says:

*Christ did truly rise again from death, and took again his body, with flesh, bones, and all things [relating] to the perfection of Man’s nature...*

That is: he rose with every last bit of his human nature, just as we said last week—skin and bones, too, not some kind of “spiritual” resurrection, whatever that would mean.

The Heidelberg Catechism, in its beautiful way, says:

**Q45.** *How does Christ’s resurrection benefit us?*

*: First, by his resurrection he has overcome death, so that he might make us share in the righteousness he obtained for us by his death.*

*Second, by his power we too are already raised to a new life.*

*Third, Christ's resurrection is a sure pledge to us of our blessed resurrection.*

For the rest of this lesson, I'm going to simply *marvel* at the wonder of what Christ has done in the resurrection—basically following that outline from Heidelberg: he has overcome death so we can share in the righteousness he obtained for us; we are raised *now* to new life; and we will be resurrected.

## **Scriptural basis**

Starting in Luke 24:1-8—after Jesus had laid dead in a rich man's tomb for days, *this* happened:

*On the first day of the week, very early in the morning, they came to the tomb, bringing the spices they had prepared. They found the stone rolled away from the tomb. They went in but did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. While they were perplexed about this, suddenly two men stood by them in dazzling clothes. So the women were terrified and bowed down to the ground.*

*"Why are you looking for the living among the dead?" asked the men. "He is not here, but He has been resurrected! Remember how He spoke to you when He was still in Galilee, saying, 'The Son of Man must be betrayed into the hands of sinful men, be crucified, and rise on the third day'?" And they remembered His words.*

Matthew 28:8-10 adds:

*So, departing quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy, they ran to tell His disciples the news. Just then Jesus met them and said, "Good morning!" They came up, took hold of His feet, and worshiped Him. Then Jesus told them, "Do not be afraid. Go and tell My brothers to leave for Galilee, and they will see Me there.*

And then Luke again, in 24:36-42:

*And as they were saying these things, He Himself stood among them. He said to them, "Peace to you!" But they were startled and terrified and thought they were seeing a ghost. "Why are you troubled?" He asked them. "And why do doubts arise in your hearts? Look at My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself! Touch Me and see, because a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you can see I have." Having said this, He showed them His hands and feet. But while they still were amazed and unbelieving because of their joy, He asked them, "Do you have anything here to eat?" So they gave Him a piece of a broiled fish, and He took it and ate in their presence.*

This dead man was alive. Alive like us. Skin and bones like us! Eating broiled fish like us! But also, somehow, not quite like us—resurrection means *this body* but transformed into something gloriously more and better. Dead, and then *not dead, forever*.

And the implications for us! Romans 4:25 tells us:

*He was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification.*

Do you catch that? We are justified *because he is raised*. Sometimes we talk as though the Resurrection is just kind of a bit of punctuation on the cross, as though the cross is the *real* work, and the Resurrection secondary—but that's not it at all; they're of a single

piece, and neither is whole without the other. Romans 8 emphasizes the point, just in case we missed it the first time:

*Who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is the one who died, but even more, who has been raised.*

Even more, it says: he has been raised! And this is our first confession, per Romans 10: if we confess and believe that God raised him from the dead, we will be saved. Not, notice, believing just that he died. Everyone believes that! The keystone is believing he is *raised*.

And when we are being saved, we have been brought to new life. Thus, Ephesians 2:4–7 tells us:

*But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love that He had for us, made us alive with the Messiah even though we were dead in trespasses. You are saved by grace! Together with Christ Jesus He also raised us up and seated us in the heavens, so that in the coming ages He might display the immeasurable riches of His grace through His kindness to us in Christ Jesus.*

Somehow we are now raised, resurrected spiritually from the death to which we used to be enslaved. And we are raised for a reason, for a purpose that Romans 7:4 paints this way:

*so that you may belong to another—to Him who was raised from the dead—that we may bear fruit for God.*

And as Colossians 3 puts it:

*So if you have been raised with the Messiah, seek what is above, where the Messiah is, seated at the right hand of God.*

We are called to live in the righteousness he bought us with his death and resurrection. And this much alone is amazing—but there is *yet more*: we will also be resurrected not only spiritually as we have been now, but physically, as Christ was on the third day.

Going back to Romans 6 again:

*Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with Him, because we know that Christ, having been raised from the dead, will not die again. Death no longer rules over Him.*

And Paul hammers this home in 1 Corinthians 15:16-17:

*For if the dead are not raised, Christ has not been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins.*

But the good news in v. 20:

*But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.*

And so our confidence, as 2 Corinthians 4:14 puts it, is that:

*We know that the One who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and present us with you.*

These bodies, which *die*—all of us have to stare that in the face at some point—God will raise from the dead because we are *his*, his Spirit living in us now and forever.

As the Heidelberg Catechism puts it:

**Q57.** How does “the resurrection of the body” comfort you?

: Not only will my soul be taken immediately after this life to Christ its head, but also my very flesh will be raised by the power of Christ, reunited with my soul, and made like Christ’s glorious body.

In other words, as good as the news is that we’ll be with Christ when we die, even better news is that we will be *raised*. A few years ago I read an article which pointed out that right now we are in the body, which is good, but sinful, which is *very bad*. At death, we will no longer be sinful, but we will also no longer be in the body: *better*, but not yet fully what we were meant for. At resurrection, we will be truly holy and embodied: exactly what we were meant for from the beginning.

Very often, the theology I encountered earlier in my faith had little to say of resurrection. It’s not that it denied it. It’s just that it really wasn’t talked about much. We got as far as “we will be in heaven with God”—and that alone is incomparably good news. As Paul says in Philippians 1: it will be “far better” to die and be with Christ. But it never clicked for me until much later that Jesus is in heaven with his resurrected body *now* and in some sense intends to resurrect heaven and earth and *us* into something more glorious than we can imagine—which will itself be better even than being in heaven with God, astounding as it is to say that.

When we thrill at the beauty of this earth, when we delight in our bodies working as they were meant to—and when we see the brokenness of these things, and feel our bodies aging and decaying—we know that *this but even better* is what we are meant for, and Christ’s resurrection is the first fruits of that, and the guarantee that it will be ours. We will be raised *with him*, and he will dwell *with us*. His Resurrection is the seal

of the promise of ours; it's the way in which God remains *forever* not only for us but also *with us*.

That's as good as news gets.

Now, as we wrap up here: what questions do you have?

## Conclusion

Let's pray!