

The Apostles' Creed: Week 6

...Dead, and buried...

In the Scriptures:

1. We all, like sheep, have gone astray,
each of us has turned to our own way;
and the Lord has laid on him
the iniquity of us all.
He was oppressed and afflicted,
yet he did not open his mouth;
he was led like a lamb to the slaughter,
and as a sheep before its shearers is silent,
so he did not open his mouth.
By oppression and judgment he was taken away.
Yet who of his generation protested?
For he was cut off from the land of the living;
for the transgression of my people he was punished.
He was assigned a grave with the wicked,
and with the rich in his death,
though he had done no violence,
nor was any deceit in his mouth.
Yet it was the Lord's will to crush him and cause him to suffer,
and though the Lord makes his life an offering for sin,
he will see his offspring and prolong his days,
and the will of the Lord will prosper in his hand.

(Isaiah 53:6-10)

2. ...Jesus said, "It is finished." With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.
Now it was the day of Preparation, and the next day was to be a special Sabbath. Because the Jewish leaders did not want the bodies left on the crosses during the Sabbath, they asked Pilate to have the legs broken and the bodies taken down. The soldiers therefore came and broke the legs of the first man who had been crucified with Jesus, and then those of the other. But when they came to Jesus and found that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. Instead, one of the soldiers pierced Jesus' side with a spear, bringing a sudden flow of blood and water. The man who saw it has given testimony, and his testimony is true. He knows that he tells the truth, and he testifies so that you also may believe. These things happened so that the scripture would be fulfilled: "Not one of his bones will be broken," and, as another scripture says, "They will look on the one they have pierced." *[continued...]*

...Dead, and buried...

Later, Joseph of Arimathea asked Pilate for the body of Jesus. Now Joseph was a disciple of Jesus, but secretly because he feared the Jewish leaders. With Pilate's permission, he came and took the body away. He was accompanied by Nicodemus, the man who earlier had visited Jesus at night. Nicodemus brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about seventy-five pounds. Taking Jesus' body, the two of them wrapped it, with the spices, in strips of linen. This was in accordance with Jewish burial customs. At the place where Jesus was crucified, there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb, in which no one had ever been laid. Because it was the Jewish day of Preparation and since the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus there.

(John 19:30-42)

3. You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him! For if, while we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life!

(Romans 5:6-10)

As described by Christian writers:

4. For He took upon Him the flesh in which we have sinned that by wearing our flesh He might forgive sins; a flesh which He shares with us by wearing it, not by sinning in it. He blotted out through death the sentence of death, that by a new creation of our race in Himself He might sweep away the penalty appointed by the former Law. He let them nail Him to the cross that He might nail to the curse of the cross and abolish all the curses to which the world is condemned. He suffered as man to the utmost that He might put powers to shame. For Scripture had foretold that He Who is God should die; that the victory and triumph of them that trust in Him lay in the fact that He, Who is immortal and cannot be overcome by death, was to die that mortals might gain eternity.

– Hilary of Poitiers, “On the Trinity”, Book 1.13

5. Death has seized Our Lord Jesus Christ; but shall not keep its hold on Life. It swallowed Him; it swallowed Him, not knowing Him: but, with Him, it will give up many. Of His own will He is now held; tomorrow, He shall rise again, and hades shall be emptied. Yesterday, on the Cross, He darkened the sun's light, and behold in full day it was as night; today death has lost its dominion; suffering itself a kind of death. Yesterday the earth mourned, contemplating the evil hate of the Jews, and in sadness clothed itself in a garment of darkness. Today, *the people that walked in darkness have seen a great light* (Is. ix. 2).

- Amphilocius of Iconium, "Sermon on the Solemnity of the Burial of Our Savior"

6. Appealing to history and medicine, to archaeology and even Roman military rules, [Dr.] Metherell had closed every loophole: Jesus could not have come down from the cross alive. But still, I pushed him further. "Is there any possible way – *any possible way* – that Jesus could have survived this?"

Metherell shook his head and pointed his finger at me for emphasis. "Absolutely not," he said. "Remember that he was already in hypovolemic shock from the massive blood loss even before the crucifixion started. He couldn't possibly have faked his death, because you can't fake the inability to breathe for long. Besides, the spear thrust into his heart would have settled the issue once and for all. And the Romans weren't about to risk their own death by allowing him to walk away alive."

"So," I said, "when someone suggests to you that Jesus merely swooned on the cross –"

"I tell them it's impossible. It's a fanciful theory without any possible basis in fact."

-Lee Strobel, *The Case for Christ*

Why we believe in Christ's death and burial

- The Gospels mention the names of multiple women and men who saw Jesus' crucifixion, death and burial. Given the physical trauma of the crucifixion, the brutality of Roman soldiers, and the care taken over Jesus' tomb, conspiratorial suggestions that Jesus didn't really die, or that nobody cared what happened to his body, are highly implausible and have no basis in the historical record.
- The central Christian message is that God sent his Son into the world in order to save the human race from sin and death. In the process of doing so, he had to physically experience our own weakness and mortality. If he did not really die, then what is the point? He has to be with us at our worst moment, the seeming loss of everything, in order to bring hope out of despair, and to speak to the most essential conditions of the human experience.