

January 27, 2019

We Believe
We Believe in Jesus
Isaiah 42:1-7

Opening Words: Weekly, at Western Reserve, we recite the Apostles' Creed. The Apostles' Creed was not written by the Apostles; it is called the Apostles' Creed because it summarizes the teachings of the Apostles. The Apostles' Creed is important because it does three things. First, it tells the world what we believe. That is important because our world is getting smaller. Non-Christians want to know what we believe. Second, the Apostles' Creed reminds us, as disciples of Jesus Christ, of our core beliefs. Being a good person is not good enough. Christian theology is clear and structured. Third, the Apostles' Creed reminds us that we stand with the church throughout the ages. Ours is not the first generation to recite these words. The Apostles' Creed is a historic document, which has come to us from the first and second century. We stand with the saints of the past. Each phrase of the Apostles' Creed is grounded in scripture.

Last week, I began my new six-part sermon series, *We Believe*. In this series, I am looking at the six core beliefs found in the Apostles' Creed. Your understanding of these core beliefs is important because each one is a key piece of Christian theology. Last week, I began by looking at the Christian understanding of God. In the weeks to come, we will look at the Holy Spirit, the church, the forgiveness of sins, and heaven. Today, we are going to look at Jesus. This is the question you must answer: Who is Jesus? Like God, that question sounds simple, but it is very complex. Our scripture reading for today is Isaiah 42:1-7. Let me call this message *We Believe in Jesus*.

Isaiah 42:1-7 Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight; I will put my Spirit on him, and he will bring justice to the nations.

² He will not shout or cry out, or raise his voice in the streets.

³ A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out. In faithfulness he will bring forth justice;

⁴ he will not falter or be discouraged till he establishes justice on earth. In his teaching the islands will put their hope."

⁵ This is what God the LORD says— the Creator of the heavens, who stretches them out, who spreads out the earth with all that springs from it, who gives breath to its people, and life to those who walk on it:

⁶ "I, the LORD, have called you in righteousness; I will take hold of your hand. I will keep you and will make you to be a covenant for the people and a light for the Gentiles,

⁷ to open eyes that are blind, to free captives from prison and to release from the dungeon those who sit in darkness.

Josh McDowell (born 1939) is an Evangelical Protestant Christian author. He once said, *"I am not a Christian because God changed my life; I am a Christian because of my convictions about who Jesus Christ is."* That is the perfect quote for this message. What do you believe about Jesus? If you are ready to begin, say, **"Amen!"**

Years ago, before a civil war threatened to divide America, before Columbus discovered the New World or before Rome conquered their world, there was a man who spoke on behalf of God. His name meant "The Lord Saves," but we just call him Isaiah. He lived approximately 700 years before the birth of Christ. He lived in politically stormy times. The Assyrian Empire was expanding and Israel was declining. Yet, in those dark days, Isaiah offered words of hope. In our reading for today, he unveils the full dimensions of God's judgment and salvation. The focal point of God's plan of salvation was the Messiah. The first four verses of our reading are key. They are the first of four of Isaiah's songs.

What does that song tell us about this coming Messiah? There are three things. First, he will be chosen by God Himself. Second, the spirit of God will rest within him. Third, and finally, this hand-chosen, spirit-filled Messiah will bring justice. No wonder God's Chosen People longed for this Messiah. That generation only had one problem. They were mortal, and they would never experience this coming Messiah. He wouldn't be born for another 700 years. You know his story. He was born in a manger and was given the name Jesus. It is interesting to note that the name Isaiah means "The Lord Saves." The name Jesus means "Savior." Don't tell me names don't matter in the Bible. This is the question you must answer today:

Who is Jesus? There are a wide range of answers to that question. Some believe Jesus never existed – that He was just a fictitious person from history, who was the embodiment of goodness, like the American spirit is embodied in Uncle Sam. That is hard to believe, because Jesus' teachings and life stories have significantly influenced world history. Many consider him the most influential life who has ever lived, directly and indirectly influencing billions of lives, even non-believers. Other world religions respect Jesus. In Islam, Jesus is considered Allah's highest ranked and most-loved prophet. In the Bahai' faith, Jesus is considered the manifestation of God. In Sikhism, Jesus is considered a holy man or a saint. Some in the Hebrew faith see Jesus in a different way. Respected mainstream Hebrew scholars say, apart from his own disciples and followers, Jesus had very little influence on their faith. He neither fulfilled the Messianic promises nor embodied the personal qualifications of the Messiah. How do you answer the question, who is Jesus? How does Christianity answer the question, who is Jesus? If you are ready to answer that question, say, **"Amen!"**

In the Apostles' Creed it says, "I believe in Jesus". However, the creed is not satisfied with us just believing in Jesus. There is more detail, because the apostles understood the significance of Jesus. He was God's only son and our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit. His mother was the virgin Mary, but that did not excuse him from hardship. He suffered under Pontius Pilate. In the end he was crucified, dead and buried. Once

dead, he made a fast trip to hell. However, three days later, he was resurrected and, in time, ascended into heaven, where today he sits at the right hand of God. Someday, he will be our judge. That section of the Apostles' Creed is heavy, so let me unpack it for you with three basic beliefs.

We believe Jesus was fully human. According to the Apostles' Creed, Jesus's biological mother was Mary. Philippians 2:6-7 says, speaking of Jesus, *"Who being the very nature of God, did not consider himself equally with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness."* You remember her story. Through the eyes of the world, Mary was nothing. There was nothing exceptional about her. She is not remembered for her good looks. She is not remembered for her bright mind. She is not remembered for her vast wealth. She was just another teenage girl from a small town. She was nothing to the world, yet to God, she was exceptional. Of all the females who have ever lived, Mary was selected by God to be the mother of this long-awaited Messiah. No one debates the issue. Mary was Jesus's mother and Jesus was Mary's son. If DNA testing had been available then, the tests would have proved it. We believe Jesus was fully human. If you believe Jesus was fully human, say, **"Amen!"** Jesus was fully human, yet there is more.

We believe Jesus was fully God. According to the Apostles' Creed, Jesus's biological father was God. John 1:2 refers to Jesus by saying, *"He was in the beginning with God."* John 10:30 quotes Jesus himself. The Master said, *"I and the father are one."* Those are not the only Bible verses that emphasize the divinity of Jesus. Countless Bible verses emphasize the divine truth, that Jesus was divine. According to the Bible, the Holy Spirit came upon Mary and she conceived. It is easy for the faithful to accept that divine truth. However, the scientific world has always had a problem with the virgin birth. For years, they have been trying to explain it away. Some believe, Mary was raped by a Roman soldier. Some say, the word "virgin" does not mean sexually innocent. They say the word virgin means young girl. That means Joseph, or another man, was the biological father of Jesus. There is only one problem with that line of thought. It is simply wrong. I don't know what the DNA test would have revealed, but Jesus was fully God. We believe Jesus was fully God. If you believe Jesus was fully God, say, **"Amen!"** We believe Jesus's biological mother was Mary, so Jesus is human. We believe Jesus's biological father was God, so Jesus is divine. That made him the perfect sacrifice for the sins of the world.

We believe Jesus is our only hope of salvation. According to the Apostles' Creed, Jesus is our only hope of salvation. Romans 10:13 says, *"Everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved."* That verse summarizes why Jesus came. He came to save us. He did not come to be our role model. He came to be our savior. That is what makes Holy Week so special annually. It doesn't just remind us of what Jesus did, it reminds us why he did it. You know what happened. We talk about it annually.

It all began at the Passover. On the lips of everyone was the name "Jesus". He was not just known for his teachings, he was known for his healings. Nowadays, we would say Jesus was trending. So, when Jesus arrived, everyone wanted to see him because

everyone wanted him to do something for them. They wanted to be impressed, so they must have been disappointed. Jesus came into town riding an unimpressive beast. It was the size of the crowd that disturbed those in religious authority. When the word came to them that Jesus cursed a fig tree, the very image of Israel, they must have been enraged. Jesus just wouldn't go away. He stood outside the temple teaching about the Kingdom of God. It was then they knew something had to be done. A plan was conceived to eliminate Jesus. He was arrested after the Seder meal, in the garden. When they came to arrest him, he was doing nothing wrong; he was praying. Once arrested, Jesus endured two trials. The first was in front of the authority of his own people, the Sanhedrin, the Jewish Supreme Court. They wanted to kill him, but they lacked the authority. For this reason, they sent Jesus to the ultimate authority in their world, Rome. The representative of Rome in their little corner of the world was a man named Pontius Pilate. When he gave the order to kill Jesus, the end was near. Jesus was executed, crucified, between two known criminals on a Friday. His death came relatively quick, and they laid him in a tomb. The people who loved Jesus must have been in denial the next day. How could something so right go so wrong, so fast? Unable to deal with his corpse on the Sabbath (Saturday), a few women showed up early Sunday morning. They are the ones who made the great discovery. The tomb couldn't hold Jesus. Jesus had returned from the dead. I have never been able explain the resurrection, because I can't explain a miracle. However, I do know this. The resurrection is the cornerstone of our faith. The resurrection is our hope in the face of our impending death. The Apostles' Creed reminds us, Jesus is our only hope of salvation. In the life of the church, it is all about Jesus. If you believe Jesus is our only hope of salvation, say, **"Amen!"**

Do you remember this story? A pastor started at his new church. The first Sunday came and a big crowd was there to greet him. When the time came for the sermon, he preached a well thought out and powerfully delivered sermon about Jesus. Everyone was impressed. On his second Sunday, the crowd had thinned out, because the novelty was gone. The crowd was a little surprised when he preached the same exact sermon about Jesus. The congregation showed him some grace, because he was just getting settled into the community. However, on the third week, their patience grew a little thin when he again preached the same exact sermon about Jesus. When they heard the same sermon for the fourth time, they were upset. The leaders of the church decided to have a meeting and confront the new pastor. They were tired of hearing the same sermon about Jesus. They wanted to hear something new. They met behind closed doors. The leader of the congregation was firm and clear. He looked at the new pastor and asked, "Don't you have any other sermons? We are tired of hearing your sermon about Jesus. There are so many other topics. There are so many problems in the world. There are so many problems within this church. Yet, all you do is talk about Jesus. Doesn't anything else matter, but Jesus? And the pastor answered, "No!" The only thing that matters in the life of the church is Jesus. The only thing that matters in this church is Jesus!

Do you remember the quote from Josh McDowell? He said, *"I am not a Christian because God changed my life; I am a Christian because of my convictions about who Jesus Christ is."* And all of God's people said, **"Amen!"**