



*I believe in God, the Father almighty,  
creator of heaven and earth.*

*I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord,  
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,  
born of the Virgin Mary,  
suffered under Pontius Pilate,  
was crucified, died, and was buried;  
he descended to the dead.  
On the third day he rose again;  
he ascended into heaven,  
he is seated at the right hand of the Father,  
and he will come again to judge the living and the dead.*

*I believe in the Holy Spirit,  
the holy catholic church,  
the communion of saints,  
the forgiveness of sins,  
the resurrection of the body,  
and the life everlasting.  
Amen.*

If you grew up Catholic or have studied church history, those words sound familiar to you. It's called The Apostle's Creed, which is an ancient confession of faith. The Apostle's Creed takes one million verses of the Bible and summarizes the Christian faith in only 109 words. It wasn't written by the Apostles, but it does reflect what they taught. The Creed is essentially, "What all Christians everywhere have always believed." This is something Baptists, Methodists, Catholics, Presbyterians, and Fundamentalists can agree on. Today Mormons, Jehovah Witnesses, and Christian Scientists all call themselves Christians, but they can't affirm this creed. The Creed includes all that's essential to the Christian faith—the Trinity, Creation, the Incarnation of Christ, the Holy Spirit, the church, the forgiveness of sins, and our hope of eternal life. This morning I want to focus on one line of the Apostle's Creed—(Jesus) was crucified, died, and was buried. If you read The Story this week, chapter 26 is called The Hour of Darkness, which focuses on the final week of the life of Jesus Christ.

Just this past weekend my oldest son, Levi, on our drive to Sacramento asked me a really good question: Why did Jesus have to suffer and die? Couldn't God have found another way? How would you answer that question? To be honest, I was caught a

little off guard and fumbled with my answer a bit. Theologically, the death of Jesus is a buffet of biblical truth which include, justice, reconciliation, redemption, atonement, propitiation, expiation, victory, forgiveness, love, sin, grace, mercy, suffering, death, God's wrath, substitution, sacrifice, righteousness, salvation, and glory. Where does anyone begin? So, at the front of my message, let me give you my big idea: The death of Jesus Christ reveals the depth of our sin and the depth of God's love. The place we see this truth more than ever is at the cross.

### **The True Story of the Cross**

Pontius Pilate was the Roman Governor of Judea who sentenced Jesus to death by crucifixion. The Apostle's Creed reference of Pilate securely anchors the death of Jesus in history. The death of Jesus is not a fairy tale someone made up. Jesus really did live and die. History does not dispute that fact. The mention of Pilate is meant to give attention to the public nature of Jesus's trial, suffering and crucifixion. The four Gospels spend a considerable amount of time explaining the events surrounding the death of Jesus. They devote about one-third of their content to the final week of Jesus' life leading up to the cross. We call these events the Passion of Christ. Passion comes from a Latin word meaning "suffering."

Some will say, "How can you call him Savior when he suffered and died? What kind of Savior is that?" What others reject and scorn, we embrace. The cross was an object in the ancient world of Roman brutality and suffering. In our day, it would be like the electric chair becoming the world's most beloved symbol. The ancient Jewish historian, Josephus, called crucifixion "the most wretched of deaths." The pain of crucifixion was so horrendous that a word was invented to explain it—excruciating—which literally means "from the cross." Most people who were crucified eventually died by asphyxiation; they struggled to breathe because of the weight their hung bodies placed on their lungs. Not only was the pain of crucifixion unbearable, but the shame was just as bad. Crucifixion was done in public for all to see. Crowds would gather to mock, spit, and curse the victim. Once dead the poor soul would be left on the cross for vultures to pick apart while dogs chewed on the bones that fell to the ground. Tens of thousands of people were crucified in the ancient world. Yet, for Christians, we say that the cross is good news.

If all that is true, why then do we celebrate the death of Jesus and call it good news? One of the best summaries of the Gospel is found in 1 Corinthians 15: 1–4.

**Now, brothers and sisters, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain. For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures.**

### **The Death of Jesus Reveals the Depth of Our Sin**

In these four verses, Apostle Paul says the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus is the most important event in all of history. It is of first importance. Paul then explains why this is such good news by using one simple word, “for.” Jesus died “for our sins.” The word “for” in the original language can also mean “because of.” Jesus died because of our sins. Remember when the movie, *The Passion of the Christ* came out? At the time, there was a lot of buzz around the movie. A news channel contacted the church I was a pastor at in Las Vegas to get an interview. One of the questions the reporter asked me was, “Who killed Jesus?” I thought about it for a moment and told them that there were many people who could claim they killed Jesus. Pontius Pilate, the Jewish religious leaders, the crowd who yelled “crucify him,” and even Rome is to blame. But then I added, “I am also to blame. My sin nailed Jesus to the cross.” The news anchor was quite surprised! According to the Bible, we are all responsible for the death of Jesus. Your sin and my sin killed him. The death of Jesus Christ reveals the depth of our sin.

From the beginning of The Story (Gen. 2:17) to the very end (Rev. 21:8), the penalty for sin is spiritual death. Listen to what the Bible says about sin:

*For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.* (Roman 3:23)

*For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.* (Romans 6:23)

*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...For he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.* (Isaiah 53:6,12)

Sin is essentially selfishness and a disregard for God and others. And God hates sin because he is holy. He cannot turn a blind eye to it. The good news of the Gospel is Jesus died to take upon himself the penalty for our sin. He made a payment. Jesus satisfied the demands of God’s wrath by his life. Theologians call this the atonement. Let me explain what that means.

Adam, the first man who symbolized all humanity, was our representative in the Garden of Eden. Through his disobedience, God counted us all guilty as well. God never wanted to be separated from his people, so he promised a way to get us back. In the Old Testament, the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur), was the most important day of the year. It was intended to deal with the sin problem between a holy God and a sinful people. On that day, two healthy goats without defect were chosen. The first goat was called a sin offering. The High Priest slaughtered this innocent goat, which was a substitute for the sins of Israel. He then sprinkled the blood around the Most Holy Place inside the Temple (Lev. 16:15). The blood, which represented life, was given as a payment for sin and therefore cleansed the sin of Israel. God’s holy wrath was satisfied by the sacrifice.

The High Priest took a second goat and with his hands laid on him confessed the sins of the people. This goat, called the scapegoat, would be released and sent far into the wilderness away from the people, symbolically taking their sins along with it. All of this was a foreshadow of Jesus Christ, our High Priest, who mediates between unholy people and a holy God. If you are attending Women’s Bible Study, you just went over this in Hebrews. Jesus is the sinless substitute who died a bloody death in our place and for our sins. Jesus is also the scapegoat who carried our sins and takes them away. Jesus, the Son of God, became a man to restore a right relationship between God and humanity.

Jesus, the new Adam, was also our representative and unlike Adam, obeyed God perfectly (Rom 5:18-19). Jesus had to be man in order to be our representative, to obey in our place, and to fully pay the price for man’s sin. Jesus also had to be God to bear the full penalty for all the sins of all those who would believe in him. Only someone who was truly God and truly man could be the mediator between both God and man. 1 Timothy 2:5 says, *“For there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus.”* All this I was trying to explain to my son on the 1-80!

### **The Passion**

Since it is Holy Week, let’s consider again all Jesus went through for us. After a long and sleepless night where Jesus was in such agony he was sweating blood, Judas betrays him with a kiss. Jesus was arrested, falsely charged, and sentenced to be murdered. After being beaten by a mob of angry men, he was stripped naked and in great shame he was scourged by a cat-o-nine-tails. The whip was a series of long leather straps and at the end of several of the straps were balls of metal which were designed to rip flesh. Jesus was beaten so severely that you couldn’t even recognize him. Most people didn’t even make it to the cross after such a beating.

Jesus then had a crown of thorns pressed into his skull. He was forced to carry a wooden crossbar which weighed around 100

pounds to the place of crucifixion. Since wood was expensive in those days, the crossbar Jesus used was no doubt covered in the blood of other men. Arriving at the place of crucifixion, the guards pulled Jesus' beard out, an act of ultimate disrespect in ancient cultures. They continued to spit and mock him as five- to seven-inch, rough metal spikes were driven into the most sensitive nerve centers on the human body, his hands and feet. Naked, bloodied, traumatized, and in shock, Jesus labored just to breathe. Rather than fighting back or declaring his innocence, after seven last words, Jesus breathed his last breath and died.

Jesus hung on the cross for six hours. He died quickly enough that his legs were not broken in fulfillment of an ancient prophecy. To ensure he was dead, a professional executioner ran a spear through his side, which punctured his heart; water and blood flowed from his side. Jesus died literally and metaphorically with a broken heart. Because Jesus was poor, a wealthy man named Joseph of Arimathea generously gave his own tomb as a gift to house the body of Jesus. He lay in it rotting for three days. Next Sunday we'll celebrate the resurrection.

Why then was Jesus' death so bloody and brutal? Why didn't God strike him down with a bolt of lightning? Why didn't he die in his sleep? Because sin, Satan and death were being dealt with once and for all! God's wrath was being satisfied. Here's the problem: many people today don't really think they are all that bad. People believe that humanity is essentially good. This thinking can also be seen in the church. Some don't like to even use the word sin. It's like the website I looked at this week that read: 10 Most Horrifying Big Snake Attacks on Humans. Six of the ten attacks came from household pets, people who kept large snakes in their home.

Spiritually, we do the same thing. How often do we allow subtle compromises into our lives like an innocent pet, thinking we can handle them without any real risk. When we do that, when we don't take sin seriously, we place ourselves in great danger. I'm sure guilty of that. Jesus suffered so brutally because he was fully paying the price for sin. God dumped on Jesus the sum total of every murder, every lust, every envy, every theft, every profanity, every act of racism, every injustice against the poor, every sin of every person from every generation. His death was literally killing the Ancient Serpent the Devil. Jesus Christ really suffered so that our sins might be forgiven. The death of Jesus Christ reveals the depth of our sin. It also reveals the depth of God's love. You are so bad Jesus had to die. You are so loved Jesus willingly died.

### **The Death of Jesus Reveals the Depth of God's Love**

I thought I understood God's love for many years. Then I had kids and my appreciation for God's love grew even more. I would do anything for my children, I love them that much. I love them so much that it sometimes hurts. God loves every person who has ever lived more than I love my own children. That's incredible to

think about, especially with all the annoying and terrible people out there! Francis Chan, in his book *Crazy Love* says, "So why, when we constantly offend Him and are so unlovable and unloving, does God persist in loving us? Why does God still love us despite us? I do not have an answer to that question." God loves us despite us. Incredible.

God's love reminds me of a lost dog sign I saw: "3 legs, blind in one eye, missing right ear, tail broken, recently castrated, answers to the name of 'Lucky.'" That dog isn't lucky! He's been through a whole lot of mess! When our dog, Sprout, was lost we did everything to find her and thankfully we did. Sprout is also lucky because she's got an owner who loves her and wants her back. You have an owner who loves you and wants you back even though you're a mess. Listen to some of these incredible verses about God's love:

*For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.* (John 3:16)

*This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.* (1 John 4:9-10)

*But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.* (Romans 5:8)

Some people believe we need to do away with all this talk of sin and Christ's bloody death. Let's just talk about a God of love, they say. Here is the problem. If you take away the cross you don't have a God of love! Without the cross, you and I would be stuck in our sin and still under God's wrath and judgment. The cross reveals the depth of God's love and the price he was willing to pay for us. Nails didn't keep Jesus on the cross, love did! He could have called on a legion of angels to help him, but he didn't.

In his book, *The Reason for God*, Tim Keller says real love is always a personal exchange. He writes, "It is impossible to love people with a problem or a need without in some sense sharing or even changing places with them...It requires very little of you to love a person who is pulled together and happy." Consider parenting for example. My kids are all totally and completely dependent upon me and my wife for survival. They don't think so, but it's true! Missy and I have given up much of our independence and freedom to love them. We didn't have to do that, but we chose to do it out of love. To love my children well, we have to constantly sacrifice our freedom for theirs. Keller says, "All life-changing love toward people with serious needs is substitutional sacrifice." God, in his love, died in my place and for my sins. His death was substitutionary. Why? For love.

Maybe you're thinking, "Was there any other way for God to save human beings other than sending his Son to die in our place?" Others of you may be thinking, "It's too narrow to think that

Jesus is the only way to God." But who else paid for our sins? Apostle Paul said there is one mediator and one only. Jesus said, "I am the way." Not **a way** but **the way**. There is no other way to God. Think about this as well: God didn't have to save anyone. God didn't spare the angels, but cast them into hell when they sinned (2 Peter 2:4). But once God, in his love, decided to save some human beings, there was no other way for God to do this than through the death of his Son. That is the way he chose to bring salvation and redemption. Jesus asked God the same question in the Garden of Gethsemane, Is there any other way? God's answer was no, there wasn't. His wrath against sin and his love for humanity compelled Jesus to go to the cross. It's there, on the cross, Jesus cried out, "It is finished!", meaning that there was no need to pay the debt of sin any further. Everything that needed to be done to save sinners was done at the cross. The death of Jesus Christ reveals the depth of our sin and the depth of God's love.

On October 16, 1987 Northwest Airlines flight 225 crashed on take-off in Detroit, Michigan, killing 155 passengers. Only four-year-old Cecilia survived, with major injuries. She came to be known as the "miracle child." It's believed that just prior to the crash, Cecilia's mother, Paula, unbuckled her seat belt and knelt in front of Cecilia with her arms wrapped around her daughter. Paula took the devastation of the crash and Cecilia lived. Paula took the fall for her daughter that she loved. Cecilia had major injuries but survived. Her mom did not.

God sent his Son, Jesus, who wrapped his loving arms around you and me, and took the horrible fall with all its sin so that in the midst of the wreckage of this world we might live. God is holy and God is love. Our merits do not enhance God's love and our mistakes do not diminish it.

*This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.*

© 2015 Central Peninsula Church North, San Bruno, CA  
Catalog No. 1404-26N