

Time of Grace Ministry
Confidence from the Creed: He Suffered
Matthew 27:11-31 and Isaiah 53:10
March 15, 2015

I'm really serious about that question – is God cruel? Does God ever deliberately cause suffering in somebody else – including his son – did He cause the suffering that Jesus went through? Or was he simply the victim of the cruelty of other human beings? What is the reasoning for the suffering of Jesus? What does this have to do with you and with me?

That's what I want to talk to you about on today's episode of Time of Grace. We need to know answers to these questions. Is our God cruel? Did he himself stand behind the suffering of Jesus? Would he ever put suffering willingly and voluntarily on a person, on human beings, like you and me? Does God punish people and make them suffer? What is the meaning behind the suffering of Jesus on the cross?

Today, we're going to dig into God's wonderful word and there we'll see that none of this happened by accident and everything was designed to bring forgiveness of sins and life to you and to me. Let's dig into God's word right now.

In sales they talk about a thing called an “elevator speech.” Do you know what that is? Raise your hand again if you've ever heard that phrase “elevator speech?” Good, at least half of you know what that is. The elevator speech is how you can describe your company, its products and/or services in about thirty seconds; the amount of time it takes you to get from the tenth floor down to the first floor. Sometimes you will have the leisure over a cup of coffee to spend forty-five minutes laying it all out and easing up to it and being, you know, pouring out loads of information and sometimes you have only thirty seconds to say what it is that's going to make a difference in that person's life and you better be able to do both.

Jesus, to help you pray better and to have more fun in your prayers and be more fulfilled in the way you pray, wrote a prayer elevator speech for you and invited you to consider it. We call that little sweet effort of his the “Lord's Prayer.” We say it over and over and over and over and over. It tells you everything you need to know about the way in which you and God communicate. Another day we'll unpack the Lord's Prayer. I'll skip over it because that's not my main target today.

I want to talk to you about an elevator speech that's very, very helpful; although, some Christians don't get into it too much – only the Catholics, Episcopalians, Lutherans, and a lot of the Methodists and a few others really care about this – but they're called “creeds.” A creed is from the Latin word “credo,” which means “I believe.” And basically it's a way to take this enormous book – my book has 1600 pages packed with so much stuff you hardly know, if it's your job to explain it to somebody, where do you start and what do you put in and what do you leave out? It's complex. It's laws and stories and sermons and it's poems and maxims and wise sayings and it's the libretto to a musical and it's a play and it's biography and it's letters, personal and corporate letters, and it's apocalyptic, visionary, prophetic - seeing into the future and more. How do you boil that down if you want to be able to actually summarize it? First, for yourself,

here's the value of creeds – to tell yourself, “What is it that I believe?” The creeds have been developed historically to help you talk to yourself about who am I and what am I doing here and who is God?

Secondly, how you can explain to somebody else. That's harder than it looks, isn't it? When you're talking to somebody, increasingly more and more people in the age in which we live really have no background in the Christian faith, where do you start? How do you explain God and the world? It's so overwhelming a lot of people don't even start. The Creed is a great thing to learn by heart to talk you through a simple way – more or less twelve propositional statements – not so much what you must do for God; that comes later. But what God did for you; how he entered human history.

Also, how you pass the faith onto your children! Children need to learn stuff, the words to it, in advance of the concepts. Isn't that true? Think back to your own childhood. Think back to all the things you learned as a kid and then you didn't fully grasp the significance of it until later but you had the words in you and it slowly dawned on you how this all fits together. The Creed, like the Lord's Prayer, is so valuable that Martin Luther built it into his catechism that he wanted every child under his supervision to have learned and go over as a summary of the gospel.

And finally, it's a great elevator speech when you become a geezer. Some of us are closer to geezerhood than others. When your memory starts to go and when your vision gets blurry and you can't read that print and every Bible you own the print gets smaller and fuzzier and you can't see it anymore and your hearing is getting bad and your memory's starting to go – in fact, you can't even remember what you had for breakfast but you can remember TV shows from forty years ago – the long-term memory is the last thing to go. When you have words that have now been carved into your heart like wagon ruts on the Oregon Trail, you will not forget them in your time of need. When your body will not allow you to get up and go to church or even to get up and go over and get your Bible, wherever you are, you can carry along your personal elevator speech of how you connect with your God. So it's an awesome gift that we have been given. There are any number of creeds – the two most famous and of heaviest use are one from the eastern Mediterranean and one from the middle and western Mediterranean. One comes from the Greek world, a little bit longer. It originated in the city of Nicaea called the Nicene Creed. The one I want to concentrate on, a phrase each Sunday for today and the next three weeks, is the western Creed; it originated in Latin. It originated perhaps in Rome or in Italy somewhere and it was called the Old Roman Creed and it was a baptismal statement. If you were serious enough about this Christianity thing that you and your family wanted to be baptized, the head of the family had to have processed a certain propositional statement. They didn't have elevators back then so I can't call it an elevator speech, but it might have been a toga speech or something; I don't know – what do you want to call it? But there needed to be some entrance, like threshold, and this was it. And it got real popular. By the 300s A.D. – this is already, by the way, the end of the 100s A.D. – that's how far back the first draft of the Apostle's Creed went. By the 300s, somebody – perhaps St. Ambrose himself of Milan – St. Ambrose was calling it the Apostle's Creed because there was this legend going on. There was no www.snopes.com back in the day. There was this legend going around that these twelve propositional statements in the Apostle's Creed came one from each apostle; that they had all like sat around in a circle and each one wrote something cool down under the guidance of the Spirit. They put it all together and

shazaam – we’ve got a creed. That was a sweet little story; completely bogus. But the name stuck because everybody loved the story. So today it’s called the Apostle’s Creed – not because it was crafted in that format by the twelve but because the beliefs outlined in that short little elevator speech completely aligned with the New Testament’s teachings. And today and for the next three weeks, I’d like to take one phrase from those golden twelve and celebrate it with you. And in this Lenten time the first one is one you’ve said many times but I want you to think about it really, really hard today; harder than you ever have before. And it is the phrase that goes like this: “He suffered under Pontius Pilate.” Why that matters now and forever.

And to do that – remember I told you to keep your finger or a piece of paper stuck in Isaiah 53 – we’re coming back to it. But let’s go to the gospel of Matthew and see where those lines were drawn from and what actually happened. Early Friday morning, the Friday that we now call the Good Friday, but it sure looked like a bad Friday to Jesus’ disciples. In fact, for some time their name for that was Bad Friday. Disaster Friday. Horrible Friday. Jesus had had the last supper with his disciples, taught them for hours, prayed in Gethsemane, betrayed by Judas, arrested by the temple police – even the Romans didn’t arrest him – but his own people arrested him. Pretended to have a trial in front of the Sanhedrin; illegal of course. And pass sentence on him in a pathetic display of cruelty and miscarriage of justice. There was no justice in the room; just lies and a pre-determined outcome.

And then in order to pretend that everything was legal and to maximize the humiliation, they didn’t want Jesus just dead. They could have just stuck a knife in him or stoned him or just had him disappear; a couple of thugs could have just taken him off somewhere in a black wagon and he would have just disappeared. They didn’t have black helicopters then but they probably had black wagons and he would have just disappeared. But they didn’t do any of that because they wanted not just to have him dead but to so humiliate and stain his memory and reputation that the movement would die out. They didn’t want any marches.

So off to Pontius Pilate they went. Because they were under occupation, they had to go to the Roman governor who represented the emperor in what we now call Samaria and Judea – the middle and bottom chunk of the three pieces of the land of Israel back then. Pilate listened to everything – we’ll skip over all that story and go to the finale – in chapter 27 we’ll pick up the story.

After Pilate listened he realized this man – this is all a put-up job. He has done nothing of evil.” But he made a calculation: Jesus is not a citizen, he has no rights. As far as Pilate’s concerned, he’s just an animal. He’s just a nuisance. He’s just a varmint causing trouble and he weighed – he made a decision: If I get rid of him, the mob disperses. That’s an easy way to get rid of all of this emotion and all this anger. And so he simply blew it off.

“What shall I do, then, with Jesus who’s called the Christ?” he said in verse 22. There’s this big mob in front of his court praetorium. “What should I do with Jesus?” which is the wrong question. That was his job to make a decision. By yielding the decision he showed what a weak man he was. He’s going to go against his conscious and against his proud Roman principles. But he’s going to do it in such a lame, weasely way. He’s going to try and push the responsibility off that really belongs to him.

They were glad for the decision. “Crucify him!” “Why? What crime has he committed? There’s no crime here. They shouted all the louder, ‘Crucify him.’” The Sanhedrin had convicted Jesus of blasphemy but the Romans didn’t care; he’s just a little crazy. He thinks he’s God? The guy over there think he’s Napoleon and the guy over there thinks he’s Julius Caesar. You don’t kill people who are crazy. You just let them drool and babble and run around and as long as they’re not a harm to themselves or others, you don’t kill people who are a little loony.

They didn’t care. “Crucify him.” So Pilate saw he was getting nowhere. He goes through this elaborate little ritual of “not my fault, not my problem,” washes his hands of course, that’s ridiculous. Lady Macbeth couldn’t get the blood off her hands by wringing them and washing them endlessly and Pilate didn’t get so much as of one drop off of him either. The Greek historian Eusebius said in gloom and guilt he was fired from his job from mismanagement and a little bit later after this event and ended up his life in France and committed suicide in shame because he realized what a loser he was and this was just an example of it.

He pretended it’s not my fault; it’s your responsibility, which is absurd. All the people said, “Sure, we’ll take it!” So he released Barabbas. He had tried three feeble things to get rid of having to deal with this snotty problem because he knew what he was doing was wrong. So first he tries to give him to Herod; pawn the problem off on the semi-Jewish ruler of Galilee in the north since Jesus was a Galilean from Nazareth. That didn’t work. Herod was too shrewd to stick his face in that mess and just said, “Thanks, buddy.” Played with Jesus a little bit; Jesus wouldn’t play with him. Sent him back. It’s a hot potato. Here Pontius, you can take care of this. He happened to be in town for the Passover so he was handy. That didn’t work.

Pilate decided: What if I give you a choice. I’ll release Barabbas – he was like the Charles Manson of prisoners, maximum security, a menace to society, a vicious killer – and Pilate thought, “Well, they don’t want that guy lose on the street again.” Well, I guess they did. Then he decided to have Jesus flogged. Maybe when they see the sight of blood they’ll back off but actually the blood only did to that mob what blood does to sharks. It just made them hungrier and angrier and the feeding frenzy intensified.

So Pilate just shrugged, did an elegant shrug. Not only can the French shrug well, the Italians – Pilate was probably an Italian – they can shrug elegantly alright. “Have him flogged.” One quick word for him. The Roman way of flogging was designed to break a man. Not just one single lash but when you say in the Creed, “He suffered under Pontius Pilate,” what you are saying is I grasp the fact that a multi-lash whip with sharp little bits of glass or metal or led embedded in the tips of each of those leather strips, that is what he was struck with thirty-nine times. Not just to sting; this was not just for administering some pain. Those little sharp things at the end of each lash were meant to draw blood, a lot of blood. Thirty-nine of those would turn a person’s back into raw meat. The blood was pouring off of him. He suffered under Pontius Pilate because of the flogging that he received.

“Then the governor’s soldiers took Jesus into the Praetorium and gathered the whole company of soldiers around him. They stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him and wove a crown of thorns and set it on his head. Put a staff in his right hand and knelt in front of him and mocked

him. ‘Hail, king of the Jews!’ they said.” This was great fun. They said, “Oh king.” It was a way to show contempt for the entire Jewish nation, whom they despised and feared a little bit; feared that there would be an uprising. So they took out their fear and contempt on this one who wore the title “King of the Jews.” The legend that incidentally was going to be above Jesus on his cross.

“Spit on him, took the staff and struck him on the head again and again. And after they had mocked him, they took off the robe and put his own clothes on him and then led him away to crucify him.” When you say, “He suffered under Pontius Pilate,” you say that he suffered betrayal and abandonment by his own people giving him over to the Romans. That he was convicted as an innocent person in a court unworthy even to shine the leather on his sandals. That he took physical, horrible physical torture. Not just discomfort like waterboarding or something, which we get intensely exercised about in our country of what is cruel and inhumane punishment to a prisoner. This was torture of the highest order from people who had not a drop of human compassion left in them and treated Jesus like a thing.

And then the worst of it all was the suffering under Pontius Pilate of the mockery. A crimson robe must have been an old army cloak they threw around him to make fun of him as “royalty.” A crown for his head but not one of gold but of thorns. A stick in his hand for his scepter and then as if that weren’t enough, they yanked it out of his hand and beat him over the head with it to make sure that those thorns had gotten pounded in good and tight. And then as the blood now started to stream down his face as it was streaming down his back, spit on him so that their saliva now was mingled with the blood. When you say “He suffered under Pontius Pilate,” that is what you are saying you believe happened to Jesus Christ. And all that remains is the why.

Now you should have your finger stuck in or a piece of paper stuck into Isaiah 53; please look at it now. This is the moment. Verse 10 tells you why Jesus suffered under Pontius Pilate. Read it with me: “Yet it was the Lord’s will to crush him and cause him to suffer.” Stop there. Just stop there. The rest is important but you can read that on your own.

Wrapped around the hands of those Roman soldiers, around the whip hand, were the fingers of God the Father. And behind those goobers of saliva hurdling towards his face, that was the spit of God the Father as well who was spitting on his Son and judging him guilty and in contempt; treating him at that moment as the worst sinner in the world. A menace to society unfit to live. Convicted rightly of the guilt of the sins of the world. And the hand holding the stick beating on his head, beating the crown of thorns deeper and deeper and deeper was the angry hand of God carrying out the judgment of the world. Yes, you read Isaiah right, it was the Lord’s will to crush him and cause him to suffer. Get a load of that!

And here’s the meaning: He suffered under Pontius Pilate because God the Father loves you that much so that he would smite his Son instead of you for your many bazillion sins. He suffered under Pontius Pilate because Jesus loves you that much. And he suffered under Pontius Pilate because that’s what it took to make you once again sons and daughters of God, forgiven now and forever, and immortal like him. He suffered under Pontius Pilate to give you the holiness you could never earn yourself and he wore a crown of thorns so that you could wear a crown of glory.

I have a question from a viewer that you might find interesting, especially in regard to the Bible study we just did from the Apostle's Creed – phrase in the creed that “Jesus suffered under Pontius Pilate” and Scripture's explanation of the meaning of that suffering. This viewer writes in: *“I just don't get it – Jesus was King of Kings and Lord of Lords and yet, God allowed him to suffer so much. Wouldn't crucifixion have been enough? Why all the rest – carrying the cross, the beatings, etc? Our God is supposed to be a merciful God.”*

Isn't that a good question? And here the answer is yes, to both. It's both of those things and God is both of those things. The way the Scripture explains God to us is the way God wants us to see and understand and believe in him. He is indeed an angry God, angry over sin, and furious at Satan and everyone who follows Satan's ways. Truly, hell does exist. Truly, God's punishments and disciplines have been carried out upon the earth and its people and God indeed will administer suffering to all who join in the rebellion against his holiness.

But God is simultaneously a God of supreme mercy and his mercy trumps his judgment for all who trust and believe in Jesus. God not only arranged that his Son would be crucified, but his heavy fatherly hand was in all of the beatings and whippings, as well. And in this way, his anger at human sin was put on his son and the mercy and love that he gave to his son, Jesus, is now given to us. So this isn't just incidental; this is the heart and core of everything that Christianity means.

Let's pray to our Lord Jesus, shall we?

Lord Jesus, thank you, thank you, thank you for being willing to bear the blows for us. Not only the curse of the cross, but also all of the sufferings that you underwent on our behalf. Father, thank you for being willing to take that punishment off of us and having the strength and courage to administer to another. Father and Son, accept our thanks and love and gratitude for in this way, bringing us forgiveness and salvation, we will never forget. We will always remember what you did for us. Help us believe it with all our hearts. In Jesus' name, Amen.

For Time of Grace, I'm Pastor Mark Jeske celebrating God's amazing grace with you today.

Grace notes

guides for personal Bible study

Confidence From the Creed: He Suffered

Matthew 27:11-31: “Meanwhile Jesus stood before the governor, and the governor asked him, ‘Are you the king of the Jews?’ ‘You have said so,’ Jesus replied. When he was accused by the chief priests and the elders, he gave no answer. Then Pilate asked him, ‘Don’t you hear the testimony they are bringing against you?’ But Jesus made no reply, not even to a single charge—to the great amazement of the governor. Now it was the governor’s custom at the festival to release a prisoner chosen by the crowd. At that time they had a well-known prisoner whose name was Jesus Barabbas. So when the crowd had gathered, Pilate asked them, ‘Which one do you want me to release to you: Jesus Barabbas, or Jesus who is called the Messiah?’ For he knew it was out of self-interest that they had handed Jesus over to him. While Pilate was sitting on the judge’s seat, his wife sent him this message: ‘Don’t have anything to do with that innocent man, for I have suffered a great deal today in a dream because of him.’ But the chief priests and the elders persuaded the crowd to ask for Barabbas and to have Jesus executed. ‘Which of the two do you want me to release to you?’ asked the governor. ‘Barabbas,’ they answered. ‘What shall I do, then, with Jesus who is called the Messiah?’ Pilate asked. They all answered, ‘Crucify him!’ ‘Why? What crime has he committed?’ asked Pilate. But they shouted all the louder, ‘Crucify him!’ When Pilate saw that he was getting nowhere, but that instead an uproar was starting, he took water and washed his hands in front of the crowd. ‘I am innocent of this man’s blood,’ he said. ‘It is your responsibility!’ All the people answered, ‘His blood is on us and on our children!’ Then he released Barabbas to them. But he had Jesus flogged, and handed him over to be crucified. Then the governor’s soldiers took Jesus into the Praetorium and gathered the whole company of soldiers around him. They stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him, and then twisted together a crown of thorns and set it on his head. They put a staff in his right hand. Then they knelt in front of him and mocked him. ‘Hail, king of the Jews!’ they said. They spit on him, and took the staff and struck him on the head again and again. After they had mocked him, they took off the robe and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him away to crucify him.”

Isaiah 53:10: “Yet it was the LORD’s will to crush him and cause him to suffer.”

Points to Ponder

- I. What are some reasons why a statement of faith like the Apostles’ Creed can be helpful to us?

2. Read this section of Matthew and underline the many ways that Jesus suffered mockery, injustice, and cruelty.

3. According to Isaiah 53:10, whose will was it that Jesus had to suffer?

4. Read Matthew 27:24. Was Pilate innocent of Jesus' blood?

5. Are we innocent of Jesus' blood?

6. Why would God cause suffering to his own Son for us?

7. Why would Jesus endure it?

Hell is real. We are to take it seriously, yet we have the assurance that our salvation is not dependent on what we do but on what Jesus did. God's wrath was poured out on him; he suffered for us. Now we can say, "Lord, what gives me confidence and hope is that you came looking for me. You saved a wretch like me. You took a blind person like me and gave me eyes to see my Savior." And with that same confidence and hope, we can use our time right now to tell others about the only way to heaven.

What else does God say?

Matthew 25:46: They will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life.

John 3:36: Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on them.