Congregation of the Lord Jesus Christ,

As I mentioned earlier, because we will celebrate the Lord’s Supper today, it seemed fitting to pause our 2 Peter studies and to focus on the matters addressed in this Lord’s Day. And that is because the matters in this Lord’s Day are what the Lord’s Supper is about. But even beyond that, these matters are the very heart of the gospel. And so, for believers, meditating on these things should deepen our love for Him, strengthen our longing to be with Him in the sinless glory of heaven, and fill us with an eagerness to put sin to death now. And for unbelievers, this is it! This is what Christianity is all about. This is why you need a Saviour and why Jesus is the Saviour that you need!

And the matters before us today are the lines in the Apostles’ Creed that say of Christ: “Dead, and buried, He descended into hell.” And just as we have done with previous statements of the Apostles’ Creed, we want to consider what they mean – are they historical realities or myths? And if they are historical realities, why are they significant? What do they mean for our salvation?

Well, these are the things we will consider together as we explore **What Christ’s Hellish Descent, Death, and Burial Mean for Our Salvation**. And you may have noticed that I reversed the order of these matters. In the Apostles’ Creed it is dead, buried, and descended into hell. But we are going to see that what is in view with “He descended into hell,” is not some journey that the Lord took *after* He was buried, but what He endured on the cross *before* He died. And I will say more about that in our first point as we consider what **the hellish descent of Christ** means for our salvation, and then, in our second point, we will consider what **the death and burial of Christ** means for our salvation.

1. So, let’s begin with **what** **the Hellish Descent of Christ** means for our salvation.
   1. And the first thing we want to consider here is what is the hellish descent of Christ?
      1. And as I mentioned a moment ago, it is **not** a journey to hell that Jesus undertook *after* He died. Some think that it is. For example, it is the official teaching of the Roman Catholic Church. In their Catechism, they state that after He died, Jesus travelled to the realm of the dead, which Scripture calls hell. And while He was there, He preached about His work on the cross and set free the souls of Old Testament saints who had been stuck in Hell until that time. Here is how the Roman Catholic Catechism summarizes this view: “In His human soul united to His divine person, the dead Christ went down to the realm of the dead. He opened heaven’s gates for the just who had gone before Him.”
      2. Now, there is lots that we could say about this view, and I have spoken about it in much greater detail on a previous occasion. But today I want to refute that view with **two of Jesus’ statements from the cross**. And we find these statements in Luke’s account of Jesus’ death:
         1. The first has to do with the thief who was crucified next to Jesus. Do you remember that thief, boys and girls? He believed that Jesus was the Son of God. He said, “*Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom*.” And do you remember Jesus’ reply? “*Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise*.”
            1. In other words, today, very soon, I am going to paradise, and I will see you there. So, it was the expectation of Jesus that after dying His spirit would go to paradise, not to hell.
         2. And we see this also in His last words from the cross, which were: “*Father, into your hands I commit my spirit*.” There is nothing there about three days of work that He first had to do in hell; when He died, it was the expectation of Jesus that His spirit would return to His Father. (“It is finished.”)
      3. So, just in view of these very plain statements of Jesus, we can confidently state that while the body of Jesus was taken to the tomb where it laid for three days, His spirit went to paradise to be with His Father. In other words, He did not descend to or travel to hell.

* 1. So, what **is** meant by Christ’s descent into hell? Well, trying to keep this as simple and brief as possible today, we are helped here by another of Jesus’ statements from the cross. And Mark does record this one in **verse 34**. For that is where Jesus said, “‘*Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?’ which means, ‘My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?’*” And He said at the end of the supernatural three hours of darkness from 12pm-3pm. For it was during those three hours that Jesus suffered the eternal agonies of hell. So, this was not a *physical* journey to hell, but **a spiritual suffering** of hellish agonies.
     1. And this is why we read **Psalm 116** earlier. An Old Testament word for hell is Sheol. And in verse 3, the Psalmist said, “*The snares of death encompassed me (*deathwasnearbyandallaround*); the pangs of Sheol laid hold on me (*andpangs means pain and agony. The Psalmist was talking about the pains and agonies of hell coming upon him); *I suffered distress and anguish*.” Now, the psalmist himself was clearly suffering greatly. But he was also prophesying about what would happen to Christ in a far more profound way. On the cross, Jesus suffered the agonies of hell, emotionally and spiritually and physically.
     2. And I want us to ponder this hellish suffering of Christ for a few moments.
        1. Forsakenness means that the Father **withdrew** from the Son and **withheld** every comfort from Him.
           1. Verse 33 tells us that there were three hours of darkness in the middle of the day. Well, as an example of God’s most common grace to all people, believer and non-believer alike, **Matthew 5:45** says, The Father “*makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good*.” But here, God removed even the sunshine from His beloved Son.
           2. And further to this, as you read through the Psalms, there are many occasions when the psalmist laments the evil activities of false accusers or betrayers or enemies. But he always **takes comfort in the Lord’s presence and provision and protection**. He says, even if my closest friend abandons me, Lord, you are with me! But what did Jesus say? “*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*” One of His disciples had betrayed Him, the rest had abandoned Him, and now even His Father turned His back on Him.
           3. And even further to this, do you remember what happened after the devil tempted Jesus in the wilderness? We are told that “*angels came and were ministering to Him*.” And we can be sure that as Jesus suffered on the cross, all the angels were volunteering to go and minister to Him or rescue Him. But the Father would not let them go.
           4. So, the Father *withdrew* from the Son and *withheld* every comfort.
        2. But it was not just a withdrawing and withholding, it was also an active **punishing**.
           1. In **Matthew 25:44**, Jesus said that on Judgment Day those who refused to believe in Him in this life “*will go away into* ***eternal punishment***.” Hell is a place of fire and torment and hatred and loneliness and despair and punishment, forever.
           2. And that is what we all deserve because we are all sinners. But the good news of the gospel is that Jesus came to endure that punishment so that all who believe in Him will go instead to eternal *life*!
           3. And we get an idea of the eternal punishment that he suffered on the cross in **Isaiah 53**. There it says of Christ that He was “*stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted*.” Stricken and smitten means to be beaten or bashed. And *the Father* did this to Jesus! He was “*wounded for our transgressions; He was crushed for our iniquities; upon Him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with His stripes we are healed*.” Verse 6 says, “*the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all*.” During the three hours of darkness, the Father laid on Christ the sins of all His chosen ones and punished Him for every one of those sins.

Just think about that for a moment. Each one of your and my lies and lusts and lazy moments and words of gossip and rebellious thoughts and disrespect and lack of forgiveness and loss of temper, and on and on and on, was laid on Jesus, and He was punished for them all.

I saw a photo on Facebook of kind of gap in the universe with star clusters all around it. And it said that to travel from one end of the gap to the other would take 750 million years. And that’s just one spot in the universe. Well, that number is tiny compared to the total number of sins that Jesus was punished for.

* + - 1. So, the hellish descent of Christ was a withdrawal of the Father’s communion, a withholding of every comfort, and a punishing of all our sins.
  1. And that brings us to what the hellish descent of Christ means for our salvation. And it means two things in particular:
     1. First, as I said before, because He endured hell, **believers will not go to hell and will instead enjoy eternal life in heaven**! Hell sounds truly awful, doesn’t it. And heaven sounds truly delightful! Well, the promise of God is that “*whoever believes in [Jesus] should not perish (go to hell) but have eternal life*.” Do you believe that Jesus is the Son of God and that He experienced the agonies of hell in your place? If so, then eternal life is yours! But I must also warn those of you who do not believe in Jesus that if you do not repent and believe, then you will be condemned to eternal punishment in hell on Judgment Day.
     2. But secondly, for believers, because Jesus was forsaken by the Father, **you** **will never be forsaken by the Father**! Do you feel alone and abandoned today, believer? Have your closest friends accused you, falsely, or betrayed you? Well, if you trust in Christ for your salvation, then listen to His promise to you from **Hebrews 13:5**: “*I will never leave you nor forsake you*.”

1. So, that is what the hellish descent of Christ means for our salvation. But let’s continue on in our second point to see what **the Death and Burial of Christ** means for our salvation.
   1. In terms of His **death**, verse 37 says that He “*breathed His last.*” And many people saw Him die. John tells us that the Roman soldiers did not break his legs to hasten His death because He was already dead. And soldiers know what death looks like. What they did do was to pierce His side with a sword and blood and water flowed out, which doctors tell us is another evidence of death. And we see in verse 45 of our text that it was only when Pilate was certain that Jesus was dead that he granted permission for Him to be buried. So, this was not a fake death; He *really* died.
      1. And His death was **necessary** because way back in the Garden of Eden, God told Adam that on the day he ate of the forbidden fruit, he would surely … what? Die. So, the price of sin is death. Therefore, for Jesus to pay for our sins, He had to die. That is why Q/A 40 says that God’s truth demanded the death of Jesus.
      2. But think also of the animal that died to provide Adam and Eve with skins to cover their nakedness and sin. Think of the ram that died in place of Isaac. Think of the Passover lamb that died in place of Israel’s firstborn. Think of the hundreds of millions of bulls and rams and goats and pigeons and doves that died in place of God’s Old Testament people to teach them that only the death of a substitute can take away sin. So, also to satisfy God’s justice, Jesus had to die.
   2. And in terms of His **burial**, there were many witnesses of this too. Mark tells us about Joseph, Nicodemus, Mary Magdalene, and the other Mary. Luke and Matthew tell us that many other women “*who had come with Jesus from Galilee saw the tomb and how His body was laid*.” And to this list, we can add the Chief Priests and the Pharisees who were given permission by Pilate to seal the tomb and post a guard, so no one could steal His dead body and claim that He had risen. So, the dead body of Jesus was 100%, for certain, really and truly, literally, buried.
      1. And His burial was **necessary** **to prove that He was really dead**. If He had just been lifted off the cross and then immediately came back to life, we all know what people would say: He wasn’t really dead! But the many witnesses of His burial and three days in the sealed tomb make His death undeniable.
      2. But His burial was necessary also for Him to be our ‘**full Saviour**.’ When we speak about the fulness of human experience, we sometimes talk about ‘from the cradle to the grave.’ Have you heard that saying? Well, we have already talked about Jesus being conceived in the womb of the virgin Mary. So, He experienced the beginning of life that we experience. And with His burial, He experienced the end of life that we experience.
      3. And this is **a great comfort** to those who have to stand by the graveside of a loved one, as Ann and Grahame and their family did on Friday, and as many of us have done. Christ has been there! And He conquered the grave! It was not His final resting place, and it is not the final resting place of all those who have believed in Him. Jesus said, “*An hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear His voice and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgement*.”
      4. Do you have the comfort of knowing that your body will rise to the resurrection of life? Have you received Christ and believed in His name?
   3. If you have, then I want to very briefly describe **three benefits** of the death and burial of Christ that belong to you:
      1. First, **when you die, you will die to sin**. When you take your last breath, your struggle with sin will be over! Earlier I mentioned Christ’s words to the thief on the cross, “*Today, you will be with me in paradise*.” The moment we breath our last breath, our soul goes immediately to be with Christ in heaven. It is why Paul said in **Philippians 1:21-23**, “*For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.*” And so, he said, “*My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better*.” You see, when we are with Christ, as one commentator put it: “Sin can … no longer hinder us—even if it is only as far as our souls are concerned— [from sharing] in the glory that God has prepared for us through Christ. My death is also the death of my mortal enemy: the sin.”
         1. What an amazing thought! It is why when we are at the funeral of a believer, there is a sense in which we are even jealous of the loved one, because they are with the Lord and are free of sin! So, mixed with our sadness at losing them, we also rejoice!
      2. And closely related to this truth, the hellish descent and death and burial of Christ also means that **death is your entrance to eternal life**. Without Christ, death would be the doorway to hell and eternal punishment. But with Christ, death is the doorway to heaven and eternal life! First for our souls, and later, when Jesus returns, also with our resurrected bodies. **1 Thessalonians 4:16-17**, “*For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord*.” And so, for believers, death is the entrance to eternal life.
      3. And that brings us to the third and last benefit of Christ’s death and burial. And it is this: If you understand what Christ suffered for you, **you will be so thankful to Him that you will want to put to death and bury your sinful nature with all its lusts, desires, and sins and bring to life all that is good and right**.
         1. This is the chief point of **Romans 6**. For having stated that believers are united to the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ, Paul concludes with: “*But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin … have become slaves of righteousness*.” Believer, in Christ, you *are* a slave of righteousness.
         2. **Romans 8:9** says, “*If the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you*.” So, the Spirit will help you put to death and bury your sinful nature, as you apply yourself to preaching and the sacraments and public and personal Bible study.
         3. And what this looks like has been described well by one commentator: “Therefore: our sinful *thoughts* must be nailed to the cross; our sinful *words* must be killed before we utter them; our sinful *deeds* must be buried so deep that they will never ever surface again in our lives. It is a painful … operation, but with the power of Christ it can be done and must be done.”
         4. So, if you are struggling with repeated sin, be encouraged. Confess your sin, resolve in your heart to leave that sin behind, and remember that you have been set free from slavery to sin, because, by faith, you have been united with Christ, in His death, burial, and resurrection, and His Spirit lives within you!

Brothers and Sisters, one hymn that we sometimes sing begins with these words: “How vast the benefits divine, which we in Christ possess.” And it is true, isn’t it. We benefit, even, from His hellish descent, death, and burial. Hallelujah! What a Saviour! Amen? Amen.