



from the desk of ...
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#807
3 June 2018

The Apostles' Creed - 1

I BELIEVE ...

John 6:28-35

How many of you remember
the old sitcom "Get Smart? ... (X)



It was all about a secret agent, Maxwell Smart,
who worked for the government agency CONTROL.
He was secret agent #86. His girlfriend was agent #99.



And he kept his "phone" in his _____ (shoe).
(X)

Maxwell Smart was always getting into dangerous
situations, & he'd try to bluff his way out. He'd say,
"Right now there are 100 SWAT team members coming
to my rescue with assault weapons." ... And the bad guys
would respond, "We find that hard to believe."
So, Max would counter, "would you believe 10 SWAT
team members with handguns?" ...

And the bad guys would shake their heads.

"Would you believe 5 Boy Scouts with pocketknives?" ...

"How about a little girl with a squirt gun?" ...

He'd go down & down ... "would you believe?
Would you believe?"

Today we're going to talk about the importance of believing ... what you & I believe theologically. The concern, of course, is to make sure that our beliefs are correct. And who better to move us in the right direction than Jesus Himself?

So, listen now to Good News, as recorded by John, to you who have gathered here at C.C.R.M. for worship. Within your hearing comes the Word of the Lord ...

So they asked him, "What can we do in order to do what God wants us to do?"

Jesus answered, "What God wants you to do is to believe in the one he sent."

They replied, "What miracle will you perform so that we may see it and believe you? What will you do? Our ancestors ate manna in the desert, just as the scripture says, 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.'"

"I am telling you the truth," Jesus said. "What Moses gave you was not the bread from heaven; it is my Father who gives you the real bread from heaven. For the bread that God gives is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world."

"Sir," they asked him, "give us this bread always."

"I am the bread of life," Jesus told them. "Those who come to me will never be hungry; those who believe in me will never be thirsty."

May the Lord grant that we may engage in contemplating the mysteries of His Heavenly wisdom with really increasing devotion, to His glory and to our edification. Amen

We're starting a series this morning about:
 what we believe ... why we believe it ...
 & how believing it should impact our lives.

The word "creed" means **belief**. And we're going to be studying the most famous "belief" statement that followers of Jesus have recited over the years ...

"The Apostles' Creed", which begins with the words
 ... "I believe."

Now portions of this Creed were being quoted all the way back in the 2nd century. And by the 4th century it was pretty much the way we have it now,
 & it's been repeated by believers ever since.

So, what's the purpose of a creed? Why should we spend 12 weeks studying this one? Even memorizing it?

The Apostles' Creed serves 2 basic functions.
 1st of all ... it's a statement of belief. If someone wants to know what followers of Jesus believe ... here it is!

Now this isn't everything we believe,
but the basics are here.

There's an interesting legend of how we got The
Apostles' Creed, it's not true at all,
but it makes for a good story.



(X) Supposedly Jesus' 12 Apostles were
sitting around a campfire one night, & Peter
said out loud ... "I believe in God the Father
Almighty, Maker of Heaven & earth."

There was a pause as they all starred into the campfire.
And then John spoke up ... "And in Jesus Christ, His only
Son our Lord." And then James declared... "who was
conceived by The Holy Spirit." And according to this
legend, they went around, one at a time, adding a line,
spontaneously creating The Apostles' Creed.

Nice story ... but it didn't happen that way.

The Apostles' Creed is a **summary** of what the **Bible**
teaches about **God**. It's arranged according to the
Persons of the Trinity. The 1st paragraph deals with God
the Father. The 2nd paragraph emphasizes Jesus Christ.

And the final paragraph focuses on The Holy Spirit,
& what He does in our lives.

This is what followers of Jesus **believe**.

The early Church thought it was important to sum-up
these beliefs in a creed that would clearly & concisely
state the foundations of our faith.

By the 4th century, Christianity had become "the" popular religion of the Roman Empire. Everyone called themselves Christians ... no matter what it was that they believed ... (sort of like today). But the Church leaders said, "Wait a minute, Christianity is founded on certain bedrock doctrines. You can't claim to be a follower of Jesus & believe whatever you want.

There are fundamental truths.

By the way, the Apostle Paul drove (X) this same thought home repeatedly.



"Stand firm & hold on to those truths which we taught you, both in our preaching & in our letters." (2 Thessalonians 2:15)

"You have obeyed with all your heart the truths found in the teaching you received." (Romans 6:17)

"I praise you because you always remember ... & follow the teachings that I have handed on to you." (1 Corinthians 11:2)

So, let's look at those teachings.

This is what we've got to believe if we're going to call ourselves ... followers of Jesus.

So, the Apostles' Creed is a statement of **belief**. But it's also a statement of **belonging**. In the early Church if you decided to become a follower of Jesus you were taught The Apostles' Creed. You memorized it.

And you recited it on the day you "joined" the Church.

Picture a group of immigrants coming to the U.S.A., & they study for weeks how to become a U.S. citizen.

And then one day, on the 4th of July, (X)
 they gather together on Ellis Island &
 they put their hands over their hearts
 & recite the Pledge of Allegiance.



The Apostles' Creed is the Christians'
Pledge of Allegiance.

And this morning we're looking at the opening
 expression ... "I believe." Say it with me ... (*I believe*).

Now I'm going to ask 4 questions about belief.

#1 ... why believe? ... In John's Gospel we read about
 Jesus feeding 5,000+ people with a boy's lunch ... 5 loaves
 of barley bread & 2 fish. (John 6:1-15) This makes Jesus a
 popular guy. Everyone wants to jump on His bandwagon.

"How do we become your followers?"

"What can we do in order to do
 what God wants us to do?"

"Jesus answered, 'What God wants you to do
 is to believe in the one he sent.'"

"Just tell us what God wants us to do, & we'll do it!"

And Jesus' response is ... believe.

That's what God wants ... believe in the One He has sent.

So, let's begin with a very basic question this morning ...
 why believe? ... That was a question asked on a recent
 national survey ... why believe anything at all?

There were 4 basic responses to that question.

We believe because of sociological reasons.
We believe what we believe because of other people's influence. Many of our beliefs come from our parents. But is it good to base our beliefs on our parent's or our friend's ideas? ... What if everybody told you the earth is flat? There was a day when your friends, parents, teachers, all believed that. Does that make it true? ...

We believe because of psychological reasons.

We believe certain things because they give direction, they give purpose to our life. They make us feel good about ourselves. They enable us to face difficult circumstances. They give a general sense of wellbeing.

But, couldn't we get that from a 6-pack of beer?

There are all sorts of things that make us feel good. And besides, aren't there occasions when we should believe something that doesn't make us feel good? ...

When our Dr. tells us that we need chemo treatments because we have cancer ... we believe him/her ... even though that may not be a comforting thought.

We believe because of religious reasons.

We believe what we believe because of an encounter with God. This category would include the influence of a spiritual leader or reading an inspirational book.

But we also can be led astray by these things as well. Just ask the followers of Jim Jones or David Koresh.

And then we believe for philosophical reasons.

The only **good** reason to believe in something is because it's **true**. There's objective criteria for truth. Truth is reasonable, it makes sense. Truth is something we have evidence for. Truth provides a good explanation of how to make sense out of life.

I don't want to lose you here, so let me get real practical.

Let me use an example to sum up everything I've said so far ... why believe in the resurrection of Jesus Christ? We shouldn't believe it for sociological reasons ... don't believe in the resurrection of Jesus Christ because our parents believe it or our friends believe it, or because many here believe it ... because they may all be wrong.

Don't believe in the resurrection of Jesus Christ for psychological reasons. Don't believe it because it frees us from guilt & fear. That may be true. Believing in a resurrected Jesus may have this impact on our life.

But don't forget about the 6-pack of beer.

We can't entirely trust psychological reasons.

What about religious reasons? ... "I believe in the resurrection of Jesus because I have a personal relationship with the living Christ." Okay, but there are children who have a "personal relationship" with Santa Claus. Don't believe for religious reasons.

Believe because the resurrection of Jesus Christ is **true**.

It is **reasonable**. It is supported by **evidence**.

And it has a way of **making sense** out of life.

It's reasonable? ... A guy coming back from the dead? ...

That makes no logical sense whatever.

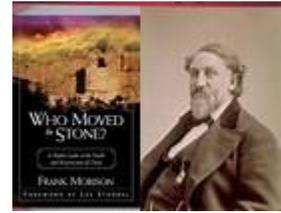
That's what Frank Morrison thought. (X)

Frank Morrison was a British journalist.

He was a skeptic.

He set out to disprove the resurrection.

He was tired of this Jesus nonsense. And in the process of his investigating the Christian faith, guess what happened to Frank Morrison? ... He became a believer.



And he became a believer because he discovered that the resurrection of Jesus was the most reasonable explanation for the empty tomb. He looked at all the potential explanations & said ... "They don't make sense."

Well, given who Jesus claimed to be (John 8:58) ... the resurrection makes absolute sense. It's reasonable.

And there's strong evidence, the 2nd criteria.

Paul writes that more than 500 people saw Jesus, (1 Corinthians 15:6), & spoke with Him, after He was resurrected from the dead. And when Paul wrote that most of those witnesses were still alive. They could validate his claim.

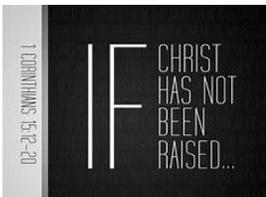
Paul goes on ... (X)

"If Christ has not been raised, then your faith is a delusion & you are still lost in your sins." (1 Corinthians 15:17)

Life is pointless. It has no purpose.

We're here for a brief moment, & then we're gone.

(The Psalms 90:12)



So, the **resurrection** of Jesus Christ meets the basic criteria for **truth**. Why believe? ...

There's only one good reason to believe something, & that's because it's true. By the way, that's the very reason Jesus gives His listeners.

"So they asked him,
'What can we do in order to do what God wants us to do?'

"Jesus answered, 'What God wants you to do is to believe in the one he sent.'

"They replied, 'What miracle will you perform so that we may see it & believe you? What will you do? Our ancestors ate manna in the desert, just as the scripture says, 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.'

"'I am telling you the truth,' Jesus said. 'What Moses gave you was not the bread from heaven; it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven.'"

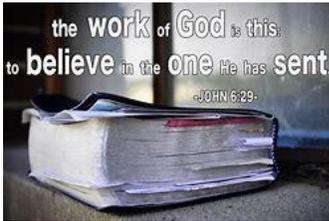
Jesus is telling the truth. (John 18:37)

Why believe in Jesus' resurrection? Because it's true!

2nd question ... why believe Christianity? I've already begun to answer this question with the example of the resurrection of Jesus. But let me spell it out more clearly. Why believe anything? ... Because it's true.

Why believe Christianity specifically?

Because of the truth that's found in Jesus Christ who's revealed to us in Scripture. (John 5:39)



(X) Jesus says, "What God wants you to do is to believe in the one he sent."

Jesus doesn't want His listeners to profess a generic belief in God.

He wants them to believe specifically in Him. (John 14:6)

There are a lot of people out there (X) today who are promoting the value of having faith in faith.



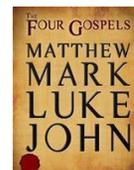
How many times have you heard someone say? ...
 "Well, it doesn't really matter what you believe, just as long as you believe in something." ... Wrong!
 Jesus says, "God wants you to believe in me." (The Acts 4:12)

Okay, what should we believe about Jesus, & where should we get our information? There are only 3 possible sources of information: there are secular historians, (Pliny, Tacitus, Josephus) who confirm Jesus' existence; who put Him in time & place.

But they don't tell us what Jesus said or what He did.

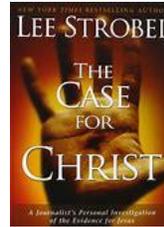
The 2nd source of information is our own imagination. I hear this all the time. "I like to think of Jesus as" That's subjective. It's creating a Jesus of our own liking. That can introduce all kinds of problems.

The 3rd possible source is the Scriptural account of His life: specifically the Gospels ... (X) Matthew, Mark, Luke, & John.

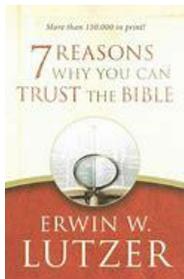


Okay, if Jesus is the central truth of Christianity, & if it's a truth that compels belief, how do we know that the Gospel accounts are accurate? How do we know that they're reliable? If they're the reason to believe Christianity ... how do we know that the Gospel accounts of Jesus' life can be trusted? ...

Here's the short answer ... (X)
read Lee Strobel's book,
"The Case For Christ."



Lee Strobel was an atheist who became a follower of Jesus. Yale Law School graduate, extremely intelligent, legal affairs editor for the Chicago Tribune. Lee investigated the source of information about Jesus & tested it for its' accuracy. He went after it with all the fervor of an investigative journalist ... & came away believing that it could be trusted.



(X) Read Irwin Lutzer's book,
"7 Reasons Why You Can Trust The Bible."

Lutzer goes through all the fulfilled Scriptural prophecies, all the archeological evidence. That's the short answer to the question. But there are those who still have concerns.

"Weren't the Gospels written a long time after Jesus lived?" ...

"And by time they were written hadn't Jesus become a kind of legend?" ... No. All good Bible scholars agree that the 4 Gospels were written within the lifespan of those who knew Jesus 1sthand. Think of what that means. ...

What if I said to you this morning ... (X)
 "Remember President John F. Kennedy? ...



I don't know if you knew this, but he walked on water. In fact, he healed people. I can remember one time hearing him on TV claiming to be God."

Now a # of you would call me to task on that.
 "What a minute, I was alive back in the early 60's.
 He didn't do any of that stuff.
 He didn't say any of those things."

Well the writers of the Gospel accounts were there during the lifetime of Jesus. They saw what He did.

They heard what He said. (Luke 1:1-4)
 So, did many of their readers.

A 2nd objection ... some people are concerned because we don't have the original documents. All we have are copies. How can we believe that these copies were all transmitted without error? Remember the telephone game we played as kids? ... We'd go around a circle repeating what we heard from the person beside us ... & by the time it got to the end of the circle ... the initial words never ended the way it started.

Well, we have over 5,000 manuscripts of portions of the N.T. There are far more documents of the N.T. than any other piece of literature from ancient times.

And because we have so many manuscripts it allows us to compare copies with copies. And guess what? ... Incredible agreement. There's nothing of significance that they disagree on. So those copies confirm that Scripture is a reliable history.

3rd objection ... the Gospels describe Jesus performing miracles, & we know today that miracles are impossible. ... Why are miracles impossible? That's just somebody's thinking. They're starting with the presupposition that miracles can't happen. Who knows that much about how the universe works that they can categorically rule out the possibility of miracles? ...

4th objection ... the Gospel accounts are full of contradictions. This one's my favorite because I usually just grab a Bible, & say, "Wow, if this is full of contradictions I really would like to see one." That's usually the end of the objection. Occasionally, someone who has done some reading will say, "well, how about this? One Gospel writer, reporting the resurrection, describes an angel at the tomb of Jesus. But another Gospel writer refers to 2 angels ... a contradiction."

Let's say you read 2 newspaper accounts of an accident that took place out here on Rte. 53.

One account reports that there was an officer on the scene directing traffic. And the other newspaper noted there were 2 officers there.

Contradiction? ... Of course not.

So many of the things that are said to be contradictions aren't really inconsistencies at all.

Why believe in Christianity? ...

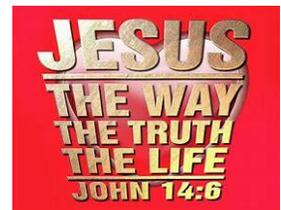
Because of the truth that's found in Jesus Christ, revealed to us reliably in the pages of Scripture.

3rd, why believe Christianity alone?

Listen again to what John writes, & notice how Jesus describes Himself. He calls Himself "the real bread from heaven." If Jesus is the real bread ... then any other so-called bread is fake. And just in case we miss the exclusiveness of Jesus' claim at this point, He spells it out even more clearly several chapters later.

Jesus says, (X)

"I am the way, the truth, & the life;
no one goes to the Father except by me."



Those are the accurately recorded words of Jesus Christ. He said them ... whether we choose to believe them is another thing. But Jesus said them.

We live in a pluralistic culture today.

People are fond of saying, (X)
"all religions have a piece of the truth."

(It's amazing how many people think that.)



The trouble with that perspective is that it denies the logical law of non-contradiction, which states that 2 diametrically opposed truth claims cannot both be true. Let me explain. What happens to a person after death?

Some religions believe that when a person dies they become extinct. They become part of the cosmos.

Other religions believe the person is reincarnated. They become a different form of life. Others say that when a person dies their soul continues to live on.

The body decays in the grave; that's the end of it, but their soul lives on in another sphere.

Followers of Jesus believe that eventually the physical body will be resurrected from the dead & reunited with the spirit & that person will live forever in a Heavenly existence.

Can all of these be true at the same time? ...

Let's say that Frank dies. I believe that Frank is resurrected. One day Frank's body comes up from the grave & is reunited with Frank's soul, & Frank goes on living as Frank in Heaven for all eternity. Someone else believes in reincarnation. Frank dies ... what happens? He comes back as Fred, or maybe Felicia, or Fluffy, or Fido. But he's no longer Frank. There's no more Frank.

Can we believe in a resurrection of Frank,
& a reincarnation of Frank, at the same time?

Of course we can't!

These are contradictory truths. Why believe Christianity alone? Because if Christianity is **true**, especially about the Saviorhood of Jesus Christ ... then contradictory religious beliefs have got to be **false**.

4th, why believe wholeheartedly in Christianity alone?

"For the bread that God gives is he who comes down from heaven & gives life to the world."

"'Sir,' they asked him, 'give us this bread always.'

"'I am the bread of life,' Jesus told them.

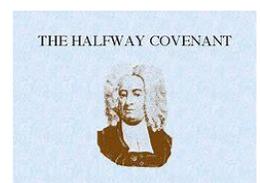
'Those who come to me will never be hungry; those who believe in me will never be thirsty.'"

Jesus says, "I'm living bread." That's quite the metaphor. This word picture tells us that Jesus wants to be "ingested" into our lives. Belief in Jesus is not just a head thing. It's not believing "that" ... it's believing "in".

- Believing in Jesus is a commitment to **love** Jesus.
- Believing in Jesus is a commitment to **obey** Jesus.
- Believing in Jesus is a commitment to **pursue** Jesus.

Our English word "belief" just doesn't do justice to the Scriptural understanding. When we state, "I believe", we're typically saying, "I agree with certain facts." But in the language of Scripture, "I believe", means I put my complete trust in, I'm devoted to.

Back in the 17th century there was a group (X) of "Christians" known as " $\frac{1}{2}$ -way Covenant."



They were pretty much located in New England.

Those who were part of this group would say they "believed" in Jesus Christ ... but they never came to "know" Him in a personal way; they hadn't come to faith.

A $\frac{1}{2}$ way believer is someone who says, "I believe Jesus is the Savior of the world" ... but has never sought forgiveness through His atoning death on the cross; has never said, "Please forgive my sin & become my Savior."

A $\frac{1}{2}$ way believer is one who says, "I believe that Jesus is Lord of all" ...

but on a day-to-day basis doesn't even consider Him.

A $\frac{1}{2}$ way believer is one who says, "I believe God is most important" ... but who has all sorts of other compelling priorities in their life crowding God out.

I need to ask you as we close this morning ...
are you a $\frac{1}{2}$ way believer ... or are you all the way there?
What do you mean when you say ... "I believe"?

"God's message is near you, on your lips & in your heart' - that is, the message of faith that we preach. If you confess that Jesus is Lord & believe that God raised him from death, you will be saved. For it is by our faith that we are put right with God; it is by our confession that we are saved. The scripture says, 'Whoever believes in him will not be disappointed.'" (Romans 10:8-11)

MARANA THA