THE CREED: I BELIEVE IN GOD THE SON

Mar-Apr 2017

**about these notes**

Although I hope that they will be useful also to individuals, these notes are intended to assist disciple group leaders as they prepare to lead a session for their group. They will serve you best if you DO NOT SIMPLY SIT AND READ THEM TO YOUR GROUP. I am anticipating that the leader will look at them prayerfully in advance of the session, using them as a prompt or guide to your discussions according to the particular circumstances of your groups. I hope that they will prove useful as you invite the Holy Spirit to lead you into a deeper knowledge of what Jesus wants for your lives.

**Introduction to the series**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| 5th March  **I believe in God the Son:**  **God’s only Son, our Lord** | 19th March  **I believe in God the Son: our judge** | 26th March  **I believe in God the Son: born of the Virgin Mary** |
| Philippians 2:1-11 | John 5:19-30 | Matthew 1:18-22 |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| 2nd April  **I believe in God the Son: Whose resurrection was foretold (and who in turn promised the Holy Spirit)** | 9th April  **I believe in God the Son: Who suffered and died** |
| John 2:18-22, 14:18-26 | John 18:28-19:16 |

The Apostles Creed

I believe in God, the Father almighty,

creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, his 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 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.**

1. God’s only Son, our Lord

**PHilippians 2:1-11**

Therefore if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, 2 then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind. 3 Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, 4not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.

5 In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus:

6 who, being in very nature God,

    did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage;

7 rather, he made himself nothing

    by taking the very nature of a servant,

    being made in human likeness.

8 And being found in appearance as a man,

    he humbled himself

    by becoming obedient to death –

        even death on a cross!

9 Therefore God exalted him to the highest place

    and gave him the name that is above every name,

10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,

    in heaven and on earth and under the earth,

11 and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord,

    to the glory of God the Father.

**GETTING THE CONVERSATION STARTED**

These questions can be used as ice-breakers in the beginning OR interwoven between the

questions below to draw the group into the discussion.

* What sorts of things do you think that people chase after, or grasp at to make them feel significant or successful?
* What do you think makes some people happy to offer themselves willingly, and others jealously guard their time and everything they have?

**Questions for your group**

This passage is one of the high-tide marks of the letter, or even of the whole New Testament: a hymn that Paul either wrote, or quoted (in which case it represents one of the earliest examples of the liturgy of the 1st Century Church), and which captures beautifully and succinctly everything that Jesus did. It describes, in a nutshell, the ‘doctrine of the incarnation’: how an infinite God took upon himself the vulnerability and limits of humanity, giving up his glory to die on a cross for our salvation.

Paul introduces it here, though, for a reason: there are divisions in the Philippian church and he wants them to see the root of their divisions and fighting and overcome them.

1. Read v3. **What are they to avoid?**

The words ‘vain conceit’ are used to translate the Greek word ‘kenodoxia’ or literally ‘empty of glory’: the state that we find ourselves in when we are starved of glory, or lack a sense of significance.

* + **Where, in your lives, or in the world today, do you see a lack of glory, respect or acknowledgement leading to negative behaviour?**
  + **What do you make of the suggestion that ‘success is the new drug’?**
  + **What pressures do you think that there are in our day that explain the explosion of counsellors and therapists in recent decades?**

When C.S. Lewis wrote about hell, he said that separation from God’s love and attention is the same as being eternally and utterly ignored.

* **What does the feeling of being ignored lead to?**
* **Do you think that it’s possible for us simply to tell ourselves that we are significant when we feel ignored?**

Given that we are social creatures, we cannot escape the reality that our sense of self-esteem is dependent on the way that others treat us. It’s only when we get love and approval from someone whom we hold in high-regard that we will truly gain self-esteem.

* **Can you think of examples of when somebody’s praise has lifted you?**

2. The opposite of ‘kenodoxia’: the true source of our significance and worth.

The Bible tells us that we were made for God, and yet that we’ve turned away from God, which means that we have an immeasurable and infinite void within each of us, whether we identify it or not, which is intended to be filled with the delight and approval of our infinite God.

Read verse 3 again.

* **What does Paul set up as the opposite of ‘vain conceit / glory-emptiness?**

[Humility]

If humility is the opposite of an inner glory-emptiness, it must mean that it stems from an inner fulness. Paul tells us to have an inner fulness - to be humble and to have the same mindset as that of Christ Jesus (v5), so look now at Jesus’ example.

Read v6-11.

Read also Isaiah 45:23

* **When Paul quotes Isaiah 45:23, what point is he making out Jesus’ true identity?**
* **If Jesus started with that inner fulness of an assurance of equality with God, how does that explain the difference in his behaviour (in not clinging onto / grasping after glory, but giving himself freely) as compared to our default patterns of behaviour?**

[Note that in verse 7, the Greek word for ‘he made himself nothing’ is ‘*kenosis*’ - a deliberate contrast that Paul sets up with the Philippians in v3, who start as *‘kenodoxia’* or glory-empty, so are predisposed to clamour to gain glory as opposed to giving it up freely]

[Note also that in emptying himself, Jesus did not relinquish his divinity or identity as God’s eternal Son, but as is clear from Paul’s play on words above, he emptied himself of his glory]

When we turned away from God, it would have been only fair for God to turn away from us, but this is where the purpose of Jesus’ self-giving really becomes clear: he gave himself to death on a cross, where he said ‘my God, why have you forsaken me?’. He willingly accepting the separation from God that we deserved, but which would be our ultimate nightmare.

Read 2 Corinthians 5:21.

* **What does it feel like to take on board that God treats you as Jesus deserved?**

Read v9.

* **What was the Father’s response to Jesus’ self giving?**
* **What are the implications of these two truths?**

[Now, we can go to God and - from our hearts - cry out Father, accept me and love me. Let me feel smile and your delight, not because of what I’ve done, but because of what Jesus has done. When you believe in God the Son, when we put your trust in him, bowing the knee and calling him Lord, God looks at you and says: *“In Jesus Christ, you are dearly loved. You are precious. You are beautiful. You are glorious.”* And when we take that into our hearts - that fills them!]

* **Reflect together on the difference that this makes to you.**

It’s only if you get love and approval from someone whom you esteem that will you’ll ever regain self-esteem. And so there can’t be any greater possible basis for your identity than to know that you have God’s approval and you cannot lose it because it doesn't depend on you.

**PRAY FOR ONE ANOTHER THAT GOD WILL HELP YOU TO SEE AND TO APPLY TO YOUR HEARTS THE INCREDIBLE TRUTH AND CONSEQUENCES OF THE INCARNATION.**

**PRAY THAT, BY REJOICING IN WHAT JESUS DID, YOU TOO WILL BE MADE FULL AND BE ABLE TO LOOK BEYOND YOURSELVES TO THE OTHERS AROUND YOU, NO LONGER CONCERNED ABOUT GAINING GLORY, BUT CONCERNED WITH GIVING YOURSELVES FOR THEM IN THE KNOWLEDGE THAT GOD WILL TAKE ANYTHING THAT WE GIVE AND TURN IT TO HIS GREATER GLORY.**