



MESSAGE

STUDY GUIDE

GROUP MATERIAL

SONGS

## Examining the text & our hearts:

### SUMMARY:

Jesus was crucified & buried on Easter Friday; he rose early Sunday. Where was Jesus during the interval? We hear a lot about ‘Good Friday’ & ‘Easter Sunday,’ very little about ‘Holy Saturday.’ What (if anything) did Jesus do that day? His body lay in the tomb; what about his (immaterial) soul & spirit? Were they with God the Father? Or did they simply “continue in the state of the dead” (Westminster Catechism)? Paul says Christ “descended into earth’s lower regions” (Eph. 4:8). The Apostles’ Creed’s cryptic phrase, “*he descended into Hell*,” echoes this; did they get it right? If so, why did Jesus descend; what does Scripture say? Diverse NT texts—from Jesus, Peter, & Paul—support the Creed’s descent clause. What did his ‘descent’ accomplish? Plus, what does all this imply for us today?

- Apostles’ Creed: “I believe in Jesus Christ...who suffered under Pontius Pilate, was *crucified, died, and was buried. He descended into Hell; the 3rd day He rose again from the dead; He ascended into Heaven*, & sits at the right hand of God...”
- “The doctrine of Christ’s descent into Hades *finds little support* [today] *among evangelicals*, [yet,] it received unanimous support...in the centuries before the Reformation [~1500].”—Z. Seals, J. Bush
- Descent Denial. Theologian Wayne Grudem argues “the troublesome phrase ‘*he descended into hell*’ [is] a late intruder into the Apostles’ Creed that really never belonged there in the first place &...*deserves to be removed*.” Others counter:
  - “The Apostles’ Creed includes *Christ’s descent into Hades as an essential tenet* of Christian orthodoxy.”—D. Daugherty

## I. Clarifying—What does ‘Hell’ mean in the Creed?

### A. Confusing ‘Hell’ & ‘Hades’

- Apostles’ Creed asserts that “Jesus went to *Hades*, which in the Greek signifies the world of the departed...When the Apostles’ Creed took its English form *in the 16th century*, ‘Hell’ meant *Hades as such*, rather than the final state of the lost (which Jesus called *Gehenna*), as it always is today.” [Did Jesus...Descend to Hell? CT, Feb. 7, 2000]
- The Creed confuses ‘Hell’ & ‘Hades’; it should say: ‘He descended into Hades.’ The KJV (1611) confuses them too. “KJV translates 2 main [NT Gk.] terms—Hades & *Gehenna* by one [English] word ‘Hell.’ *Gehenna* is translated as ‘Hell’ 12x, ‘Hades’ 10x...The problem [with] the KJV inconsistency can be seen from the fact that Hades [is not a] synonym for *Gehenna* (which really does mean ‘Hell’ in the traditional sense).” [James R. White, *King James Only Controversy*, p 179]
- “The word ‘Hell’ in the [Apostles’] Creed does *not* mean the place of eternal punishment, [that’s] *Gehenna* of the NT, the lake of fire...It is rather *Hades*...OT *Sheol*. This word [Hades/Sheol] is...associated with the depths of the earth, or...sea...Usually it’s...the place of the dead...of the disembodied soul, and thus is not identical merely with ‘the grave,’ the physical place where dead body is laid.” [Charles E. Hill, “He Descended into Hell,” *Reformed Faith & Practice* (2017) p. ]

## B. Christ descended **to Hades** (OT Sheol)

- When Jesus ‘descended,’ “where was Jesus? He was in a place called *Hades* (in Greek) or *Sheol* (in Hebrew), the waiting place of the dead. *Hades/Sheol* is the abode of the dead as they wait for the final judgment, while [in contrast,] ‘Hell’ is the place of everlasting punishment and eternal separation from God.” [Michael F. Bird, *Evangelical Theology*, p.]

## C. Christ’s ‘Descent’—Metaphorical, Vacuous, or Actual?

### 1. ‘Descent into Hell’—merely a metaphor (Reformed)

Some take Jesus’ ‘descent’ as a metaphor meaning ‘Christ suffered the pains of Hell while on the cross,’ not a distinct, subsequent event between death & resurrection. “C. Hodge...considered the descent synonymous with Christ’s death and burial. John Calvin...interpreted it psychologically: Christ *on the cross suffered in [his] soul* the wrath of God or ‘Hell.’ [So, Christ’s ‘descent’ becomes] a *metaphorical* one (suffering God’s wrath) and descent belongs to Christ’s humiliation rather than his exaltation.” [D. Wallace Jr, “Descent into Hell,” D. McKim (ed.) *Encyclopedia of the Reformed Faith* (1992) p. 100]

### 2. “Descent into Hell”—just means ‘Christ continued in the state of the dead’—that’s vacuous!

– “Christ...continued in the state of the dead, and under the power of death till the third day which...[is] expressed in these words ‘He descended into Hell’.” [Westminster Larger Catechism (1647), Q. 50 in W. Grudem, p. 106]

– These 2 options suggest Christ was absent &/or inactive between death/burial & resurrection. Yet, “the [early] church...conclude[d] that the incarnate God was *not helplessly non-existent* between Good Friday & Easter Sunday.” [Ralph C. Wood, “Gates of Hell shall Not Prevail,” Center for Christian Ethics at Baylor University (TX) (2002) p. 32]

3. Christ’s Descent—an actual, significant event: “Jesus did go somewhere after his burial & before his resurrection...Something of significance did happen between the burial & resurrection...which the Church eventually...preserve[d] in the phrase ‘he descended into hell’.”— [David P. Scaer, “He Did Descend to Hell:...” *JETS*, Vol. 35/1 p. 95]

## II. Christ’s Cosmic Tour in Ephesians (Eph. 4:8-11)

- “It says: ‘*When he ascended on high, he took the captives captive; he gave gifts to people.*’ [Ps. 68:18] 9But what does ‘he ascended’ mean except that he also *descended to the lower parts of the earth?* 10 He who descended is also the one who ascended far above all the heavens, to fill all things. 11 & he himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets” (Eph. 4:8-11)

### A. Christ’s Triumphant Procession—from the Cross to Hades to God’s Throne

#### 1. **Death** on the Cross (1st day: ‘Good Friday’) (Col. 2:15; Jn. 19:30)

– God “disarmed the rulers & authorities [supernatural forces of evil...], He made a public example of them [exhibiting them as *captives in His triumphal procession*], having triumphed over them through the cross.” (Col. 2:15 Amp.) “The image is...of defeated foes led captive in the train of a triumphant general.” –James Dunn

#### 2. **Buried** (1st day: ‘Good Friday’ PM) “Christ died for our sins...he was buried...” (1 Cor. 15:3-4)

– “Ancient writers did not see *Sheol/Hades* as the ‘grave,’ but as a distinct realm where the souls of the dead dwell.” [Justin Bass, *Battle for the Keys*, p. 26]

#### 3. **Descent** “to the earth’s lower parts”—Hades, the underworld. The 2nd day, ‘Holy Saturday’ (Eph. 4:9)

– Christ’s body was buried in the tomb, Christ’s “soul entered into the realm of the dead” (Hades/Sheol)

– “The common...Jewish view in NT times was that the dead descend to *Sheol* (Hades); [so] *Jesus’ descent to Hades was simply the corollary of his death.*” [Richard Bauckham, *Fate of the Dead*, p. 38]

– When Jesus ‘descended’, “where was Jesus? He was in...*Hades* (in Greek) or *Sheol* (in Hebrew), the waiting place of the dead. *Hades*...is the abode of the dead as they wait for the final judgment, while ‘*Hell*’ is the place of everlasting punishment & eternal separation from God...*Hades* is not purgatory, a rehab clinic where old sins are worked-off...*Hades* simply means the abode of the dead wherever that location [is].” [Michael F. Bird, *Evangelical Theology*, p.]

#### 4. **Resurrection** (3rd day: ‘Easter Sunday’ AM) “he was raised on the 3rd day” (1 Cor. 15:4b)

#### 5. **Ascension**—“He ascended...; he led captivity captive [He led a train of vanquished foes]” (Eph. 4:8 Amp.)

a. Triumphant Procession—who are the “host of captives”? (Eph. 4:8)

b. Christ’s Captives: his defeated foes—principalities, cosmic powers, etc.

– “The best...identity of these hostile warriors that Christ has defeated is the *principalities, powers & authorities*...In Eph. [they are] the enemies of Christ & [God’s] people...They are the foes...subjugated...in Eph. 1:20-22. In Col 2:15 ...Christ stripped

them of their power...& led them in a triumphal procession.” [Clinton E. Arnold, Ephesians, p. 251]

– “Some think this [is] Christ’s taking captive the hostile principalities & powers...Others think it refers to the Messiah’s taking & *liberating those who were the prisoners of the principalities & powers* (Eph. 2:2), *especially the Gentiles*. This last interpretation...fit[s] the context best both in Eph. & in Ps. 68 which concludes by summoning the conquered Gentiles to praise the Lord & confess [God’s] power...(Ps. 68:33-35).” [Peter Williamson, Eph., p 115]

c. Christ’s Captives: OT saints—Moses, David, Daniel, etc. (see Mt. 27:51-53)

– “From this passage [Eph. 4:8] Christ is said to have led *the OT saints* from their captivity in *Hades to Heaven* at his ascension...The idea [is]...that Christ spent...the interval between his death on the cross & his resurrection...in the underworld where he ultimately led *the OT saints* (captives in Hades) to *heaven* at his ascension.” [Scott K. Leafe, “Two-Compartment View of Hades from Eph. 4:8-9,” pp. 10-11]

d. Christ’s Captives: NT Believers—Stephen, Paul, etc., you & me

– “After his crucifixion & resurrection, Christ led his people to freedom & ascended in victory. He ‘led captive a host of captives’ (Eph. 4:8), *seating [NT] believers* with Him spiritually in the heavens (Eph. 2:6). Though we were once [God’s] enemies...(Eph. 2:12), we’ve been brought into His family through the reconciliation of Christ (Eph. 2:19). Once...subject to [Satan’s] kingdom, we’ve been taken captive by Christ.” [C. Swindoll, *Insights on...Eph.*, p. 238]

e. Believers—released Hostages of Dark Cosmic Powers (2 Cor. 2:14)

– “The Warrior gives his prisoners, *like the Apostle Paul*, to the body (Eph. 4:11) so...it might be complete & protected from the attacks of the enemy. In this light, the descent & ascent of Christ is a...great encouragement not only for the original audience, but...for readers today. Those once held in bondage by forces of evil (Eph. 2:2) have been rescued by one who’s stronger, Jesus Christ (Eph. 1:22). He entered...enemy territory on their behalf in order to bring them into his own family (Eph. 2:18) & build his temple with them (Eph. 2:21-22). He places each person...in the church...he knows precisely what his body needs.” [D. Claire, “*Gifts of the Divine Warrior in Eph. 4:7-11*,” p. 26]

f. Relocating ‘Paradise’ from Hades to Heaven—too ‘physical’??

– ? “With regard to...the *location of ‘Paradise’* (Lk. 23:43) [‘Abraham’s side (bosom) Lk. 16:22] Christ’s ascension...evidently worked a drastic change...Paul was ‘caught up to the 3rd heaven...to paradise’ (2 Cor. 12:2-3). *Paradise now denotes the immediate presence of God* [–‘Heaven’].” [Merrill F. Unger, *New Unger’s Bible Dictionary*, pp.]

g. Changing the nature of ‘paradise’—not about place, but person

– “The most important...thing about...intermediate state [life after death] of the [NT] believer is not so much *that it is heavenly as opposed to being subterranean*. It’s that it is centered on *our union with Christ*...Jesus...to[ld the dying thief]: ‘Today you’ll be with me in Paradise’ (Lk 23:43)...Yet it is not just...Paradise...that is promised. The...thief would

be in Paradise *with his Savior*. For Paul too...departure from this life is...*to be with Christ*. He [says]...My desire is to depart & *be with Christ*...that’s far better’ (Phil 1:23). He [says]...he’d rather be ‘away from the body & at home *with the Lord*’ (2 Cor. 5:6).” [Charles Hill, “*He Descended into Hell*,” Reformed Faith & Practice (2017) p. ]

6. **Gift-giving** “Giving gifts to his people” (Eph. 4:8b)—“he gave some apostles, some prophets...” (Eph. 4:11)

– “‘He *received* gifts...’ (Ps. 68:18) [was] reworded...so Christ *gives*, not receives, gifts [&]...the gifts are given, not to people in general, but to *his* people, i.e., to the church.” [Robert J Miller, *Helping Jesus Fulfill Prophecy*, pp. 212-3]

– “Paul emphasizes that Christ...sovereignly works to raise up and supply gifted leaders to the church. These aren’t elected officials, nor are they offices achieved [via job promotion]. They are roles fulfilled by people whom Jesus himself sovereignly chooses & enables.” [Clinton E. Arnold, *Ephesians*, pp. 255-256]

B. Have you joined Christ’s triumphal procession? Are you being constituted a gift to his Church? (2 Cor. 2:14)

- “God...always leads us in Christ’s triumphal procession & through us spreads the...knowledge of him in every place.” (2 Cor. 2:14) Most interpreters see...a reference to...victory parades...in Rome after great battles. God is...the sovereign victor, with Christ as the general, leading the victory procession, & Paul has been ‘captured’ by Christ & now joyfully follows him. For images of such parades e.g. the Arch of Titus in Rome commemorating Rome’s victory over Jerusalem [AD 70]. [In 2 Cor. 2] the “triumphal procession” [reflects] Paul’s praise to God for leading him (like a prisoner in a Roman triumphal procession) [even] into situations of suffering...Paul’s ministry spreads the fragrance of [Christ] everywhere. [ESV]

### III. Christ’s Descent to ‘the lower regions of the earth’ (Eph. 4:8-9)

- “Therefore, it says: ‘He ascended on high and took prisoners captive; he gave gifts to men’. What does ‘he ascended’ mean except that *he also descended into the lower [regions] of the earth?*” (Eph. 4:8-9 NABRE)

A. Christ’s descent to Hades between his death & resurrection

– “Eph. 4:8-9 has the 2 “phrase[s], ‘he led captive a host of captives,’ and...‘He also descended into the lower parts of the earth’...The idea [derived] from these 2 phrases is that *Christ spent... the interval between his death... & his resurrection ...in the underworld [Hades].*” [Scott K. Leafe, “Two-Compartment View of Hades from Eph. 4:8-9,” pp. 10-11]

– In “Eph. 4:9-10...the words [‘the lower parts’] when conjoined with [‘the earth’], seem at first glance to be *an obvious reference to the netherworld [Hades].*” [G. Landes, “*Sign of Jonah*,” Meyers *Word of the Lord Shall Go Forth*, p. 679]

– “Pictur[ing] Hades as a stronghold in which the dead are held captive by the angelic rulers... *Christ’s descent could be seen as a conquest of Hades*...He released the captives from their chains and led them out of their prison (Ps. 68:18)... [see] Jesus’ parable of binding the strong man & plundering his goods (Mk. 3:27).” [R. Bauckham, *Fate of Dead*, p. 42]

## B. Descent in Eph. 4:9 is Not Incarnation—Christ’s descent from Heaven to Earth (e.g. Phil 2:6-7)

- “Some [say]...the...’descent’ was to the earth itself...[i.e.]...the incarnation. But *this must be judged unlikely* [because:]

o [The Greek phrase:] *katotera* (mere) *tes ges* [‘lower parts of the earth’] would most naturally be understood as a synonym for Hades, the place of the dead (cf. Ps. 63:9,...Ezek. 32:18)

o a genitive following *mere* (parts [‘of’]) most naturally denotes the whole to which the parts belong—parts *of* the earth, rather than parts *which are* the earth... [In that case, why not just say ‘he descended to earth’?]

o Eph. 4:10 is...an antithesis to Eph. 4:9 ‘far above all the heavens,’ corresponding to ‘the lower/lowest parts of the earth’...This is confirmed by...his purpose ‘in order that he might fill all things’...These denote the outer limits of his journey & in between lies the ‘all’ which he fills. But, if one limit is the supreme height of heaven, at the right hand of God (Eph. 1:20), the other is not the earth, but the *lowest depth of the earth...the underworld, the place of the dead...As...Christ’s resurrection [implies] his (prior) death, so...his ascension (from Ps. 68:18) carries with it the thought of his (prior) descent into the place of the dead.*” [James D G Dunn, *Christology in the Making*, pp. 186-7]

## IV. Descent Doctrine Based on Scripture, not a single ‘proof text’

- “The construction of a doctrine of descent into ‘hell’ need not be grounded upon specific biblical texts; rather it must rely upon a reading of Scripture as a whole.” [David Lauber, *Barth on the Descent: God, Atonement & Christian Life*, p. 112]
- “There’s no direct unambiguous biblical reference to Christ’s descent. Yet...the Scriptur[es]...put forward by the Church Fathers [consisted of] a whole battery of proof texts...The *most often suggested* Scriptural backing [was] from *1 Pet. 3:18-21* ...[M.] Connell argues...*1 Peter is the only Scriptural passage with an explicit warrant for the descent of Christ...Almost all the early commentators took it for that.*” [W. Biesbrouck, “...*Christ’s Descent*” *Louvain Studies* (2012) pp. 112-113]
- However, “the descent [doctrine] *doesn’t stand or fall on 1 Pet. 3:18–22*...2nd-century theologians...didn’t turn primarily to 1 Pet. 3:18–22 to...support the descent...They turned to... Mt. 12:40; Luke 23:53; Acts 2:27; Rom. 10:7; Eph. 4:9; & Rev. 1:18. 1 Pet. 3...certainly wasn’t ignored, but it...wasn’t the crux of the doctrine either.”—Matt Emerson [*Descent: 4 Myths*]

## V. Christ’s Descent to Hades: Corroborating Scriptures (Mt. 12:39-40; Acts 2:27-28, 31; 1 Pet. 3:18-20)

## A. The Sign of Jonah (Mt. 12:39-40)

- Jesus: “No sign will be given...except the sign of the prophet Jonah. 40 For as *Jonah was in the belly of the huge fish* 3 days & 3 nights, so the *Son of Man will be in the heart of the earth* 3 days & 3 nights.” (Matt. 12:39-40)
- There’s a “natural association that Jesus’ hearers (& Matthew’s readers) would make between the centre of the earth & *Hades* as the realm of the dead. [There’s also a] parallel between the experience of Jonah and what’s being described. The term *kardia* [‘heart’] occurs in the [Gk. OT] of Jonah 2:3-4 where the reference is to Hades, & in Jonah 2:6-7. Jonah’s descent to Hades is described as *kataben eis gen*...The word *Hades* is replaced by...its location, ‘the heart

of the earth’ [in Mt. 12:40]...parallel to ‘the belly of the [fish].’ Mt. 12.40...clearly expresses a doctrine of Christ’s descent after death into the place of the dead; however, it tells us no more [about what Jesus did there...Nevertheless, in] Mt. 12.40... Jesus clearly speaks of an extended sojourn in Hades...after his death.” [John Yates, “*He Descended into Hell: Creed...*,” pp. 303, 310]

B. Paul: Don’t say “who will ascend...?” or “Who will descent...?” (Rom. 10:6-7)

- “Don’t say in your heart, ‘*Who will go up to heaven?*’ that is, to bring Christ down or, ‘*Who will go down into the abyss?*’ that is, to bring Christ up from the dead. 8 ...The message is near you...:9 If you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ & believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.” (Rom. 10:6-9 CSB)
- Paul’s assertions in Rom. 10:6-7 “imply that Christ has dwelt in heaven and need not be brought down and that he *alone has come up from the abyss, from the realm of the dead.*” [Edith M. Humphrey, “*Why Bring the Word Down?*” in S. K. Soderlund (ed.) *Romans & the People of God*, p. 133]

C. Peter: Christ not abandoned in Hades (Acts 2:27-28, 31)

- At Pentecost Peter quotes David: “...*you won’t abandon my soul to Hades*, or let your Holy One see corruption...28 You make known to me the paths of life; you’ll make me full of gladness with your presence.” (Ps. 16)...[Peter asserts David] “spoke of Christ’s resurrection: *He was not abandoned in Hades, & his flesh didn’t experience decay.*” (Acts 2:27-28, 31)
- “The most explicit textual support for the descent doctrine is Acts 2:27–31. Here Peter twice affirms that Christ was not abandoned to Hades [Gk.]...[but] resurrect[ed] *from Hades.*” [Z Seals, J Bush, “*Redeemed from Death,*” MJTM, V20 p 164]
- In his sermon at Pentecost (Acts 2:27, 31) “Peter declares that Jesus was not abandoned to Hades (Sheol) to ‘experience corruption,’ or...fade from existence. Here we find the concept *that every individual who dies descends to Hades, which is not a place of torment, but the natural abode of the dead.* Just as death & Sheol were companion terms in the OT, they also appear together in the NT.” [E. ANNI JUDKINS, “*Unquenchable Fire,*” Center for Christian Ethics, Baylor Univ. p. 26]
- “Peter is...quoting from Psalm 16:10 (...[at] Pentecost) with reference to the experience of Jesus between his death and resurrection...The natural way of understanding this verse is that while Christ’s soul...went down to Hades, God did not leave him there, but raised him from the dead. If such an exegesis be accepted we have a clear reference to ‘the descent into hell.’” [John Yates, “*He Descended into Hell: Creed...Scripture Part II,*” Churchman, #102.4 (1988) p. 305]
- “Acts 2:27, 31 & Rom. 10:7 are the two strongest passages to be reckoned with if one believes that the doctrine of Christ’s descent is *not* taught in the NT. It’s very difficult to read these passages in any other way.” [J. Bass, *Battle for Keys*, pp 76-7]

D. Jesus told the thief on the cross “Today you’ll be with me in Paradise” (Luke 23:43)

- “Is [the Creed’s] ‘He [Jesus] descended to Hell (Hades)’ true to Scripture? The answer [is]...‘yes’ but with qualifications. In the light of the clearest accounts of what happened to Jesus immediately after his death, i.e. Luke 23:43; Acts 2:24ff, according to the NT Jesus was in that part of Hades known as ‘paradise’. That is, he went to that blessed abode which at that time contained (only) the OT righteous.” [John Yates, “*He Descended into Hell: Part II,*” Churchman, #102.4, p. 311]
- Jesus told the thief on the cross: “Truly I tell you, *today* you’ll be *with me in paradise.*” (Luke 23:43) Some (e.g. the ESV) claim that ‘paradise’ is ‘heaven.’ But, “According to Luke, Jesus

was not in heaven...for the 3 days prior to the resurrection, rather he was in Hades (Acts 2:27, 31).” [Tony Wright, *Death, the Dead & the Underworld in Biblical Theology—Part 2*, Churchman, 122/3, p. 109] Note: Acts 2 & Luke 23 (both authored by Luke) are reconciled if “paradise” is part of “Hades.” Note also that Jesus’ promise to the thief suggests *continuing consciousness* in the ‘intermediate state’ i.e. life after death.

#### E. Peter: Christ proclaimed to the imprisoned Spirits (1 Peter 3:18-20)

- “Christ...suffered for sins once for all...[to] bring you to God. He was put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit, in which **he also went & made proclamation to the spirits in prison** 20 who in the past were disobedient” (1 Pet 3:18-20)
- “According to 1 Pet. 3:18-22 Jesus did go somewhere after his burial & before his resurrection appearances...Something of significance did happen between the burial & resurrection appearances of Jesus, which the Church eventually... preserve[d] in [Creed’s] phrase ‘he descended into hell.’” [David P. Scaer, “*He Did Descend to Hell*,” JETS, Vol. 35/1 p. 95]
- “Jesus [proclaimed]...his victory to the wicked in Hades. Such is implied by...1 Pet. 3:19-20; 4:6...[We could] understand [these verses] as describing how Jesus went to the place of the dead and declared his victory over the disobedient angels imprisoned therein...” [Michael F. Bird, *Evangelical Theology*, p. ]
- Who are these *spirits in prison*? “There’s much debate about the identity of these spirits...[One view is these] spirits are the fallen angels who were cast into [Hades] to await the final judgment. Reasons supporting this view: (a) Some...say that the ‘sons of God’ in Gen. 6:2-4 are angels who sinned by cohabiting with human women ‘when God’s patience waited in Noah’s day’ (1 Pet. 3:20). (b) Almost without exception in the NT, ‘spirits’ (pl.) refers to supernatural beings rather than [humans] (c) [This Gk.] word [for] ‘prison’ it is used for Satan (Rev. 20:7) & other fallen angels (2 Pet. 3:4; Jude 6)...the message...Christ proclaimed is...one of triumph [his victory; not the Gospel of salvation]...Some [say] Christ offered a *2nd chance* of salvation to those in [Hades]. But this [‘2nd chance’] interpretation...contradicts other Scripture (Hb. 9:27) ESV

#### F. ‘Handle with Caution’—Parable of Rich Man & Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31)

- This is “one of the most misinterpreted of Jesus’ parables...used repeatedly to provide in great detail a realistic description of life after death.” [Craig Blomberg, *Historical Reliability of the Gospels*, pp. 22-23]
- The Rich Man & Lazarus interpreted literally leads “many to conclude that Hades contained 2 compartments, one for the righteous (...‘Abraham’s bosom’ or ‘Paradise’) & one for the unrighteous (Hades...)...To harmonize with NT teachings on Paradise or Heaven, an interpretation of Eph. 4:9 arose that...*Christ entered Hades* (...the saved portion...) after his death to take OT saints to heaven [as ‘a host of captives’] when he ascended...” [Scott Leafe, “*2-Compartment View of Hades*,” p. 1]
- It’s a parable: It’s “sometimes asserted...this story is not a parable but depicts real people...*I’m not aware of any modern scholar who would agree*...This is without question a parable... Scholar[s]...caution...the parable is not intended to give a description of life after death...[It’s] a parable with an intent other than teaching about the future life. [This] should warn against taking the picture too literally...[&] against taking the details about Hades...literally [e.g.] that the righteous/evil... see the bliss/punishment of each other...is...terrible...if taken literally...The nature of the story does not allow it to be taken as an actual description of the future life.” [Klyne Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent;...Parables of Jesus*, pp. 426, 431-2]



- Respected scholars “argue...we can learn nothing about Jesus’ understanding of Hades from the Parable...[e.g.] ‘Jesus’ story is a cautionary tale meant for this life & *not a road map to the next*’ (Croford)...[Typically] parables contain only one [or a few] point[s] of teaching...Similar stories [circulated] at Jesus’ time [which] casts doubt on [whether] Jesus intended to convey information about Hades.” [R. Harper, Hades in Rev.,” Date (ed.) *Consuming Passion...Hell & Immortality*, p. 194]
- “Jesus does not intend to give a preview of life after death. On this almost all commentators agree.” [E. Ellis, *Luke*, p. 202]
- But, perhaps it’s not too much to say “Jesus’ [parable] implies...persons continue to be conscious in the ‘intermediate state’ [i.e., life-after-death, even though believers’ death is called ‘sleep’ (1 Thess. 4:14-15)] [G. Habermas, *Beyond Death*, p. 223]
- “The parable...serves to negate...any communication between the dead & the living [“they won’t be persuaded even if someone rises from the dead.’ (Lk. 16:30-31)]...We should *not expect [this parable] to cohere with other Hades texts*...its contribution relates to what [it] deconstructs.” [Kim Papaioannou, *Geography of Hell in the Teaching of Jesus*, p. 239]
- Ineffectiveness of ‘Hades/Heavenly Tourism’: The parable raises the possibility of someone (Lazarus) returning from the afterlife to inform/warn the living [‘heavenly tourism’/‘Hades’/‘Hellish tourism,’ near-death or temporary-death reports] “Abraham’s unexpected refusal of the rich man’s request [to send Lazarus back to his brothers (Lk. 16:27-28, 30)] directs attention away from [the] revelation of the afterlife...[It’s ineffective Luke 16:31].” [R. Bauckham, *Fate of the Dead*, p. 118]

## VI. Christ’s Descent embodied in Historic Christian Creeds

- Apostles’ Creed (~400 AD) says: “I believe in Jesus Christ...Who...suffered under Pontius Pilate, was *crucified, died, & was buried. He descended into Hell; the 3rd day He rose again from the dead; He ascended into Heaven...*”

### A. The Apostles’ Creed—Importance: “*The Apostles’ Creed is the Creed of creeds.*”—Phillip Schaff

- “The Apostles’ Creed includes *Christ’s descent into Hades as an essential tenet* of Christian orthodoxy.”—D. Daugherty
- “The popularity of the [Apostles’] Creed is almost unparalleled...to the point whereas the ‘Lord’s Prayer is the Prayer of prayers, the [10 Commandments] is the Law of laws, so *the Apostles’ Creed is the Creed of creeds*’.” (Phillip Schaff, *History of the Creeds*, pp. 14-15.) [Scott Fillmer, “...*Did Jesus Descend to Hell after the Crucifixion?*” (Feb. 29, 2012) p. 12]

### B. The Apostles’ Creed—History: first appears 359 AD

- “Christ’s descent into Hell first appears in a creedal formula in 359 CE. But [that] should be viewed as an endpoint, not the beginning of the Church’s teaching about Christ’s descent into Hell.” —Carey C. Newman
- “He Descended...” in the Apostles’ Creed. “Rufinus [~345-410 AD] wrote a ‘*Commentary on the Apostles’ Creed*,’ ...that includes...the descent between the burial & rising: ‘I believe in Jesus Christ...who was buried, *who descended into hell*, & on the 3rd day rose from the dead’.” [MARTIN F CONNELL, “*CHRIST’S DESCENT TO THE DEAD*,” *Theol. Studies*, V. 62 p. 266]

### C. Until 1500 ‘Descent’ (Eph. 4:9) meant ‘Descent to Hades’

- “Although the doctrine of Christ’s descent into Hades finds little support [today] among evangelicals, it received *unanimous support* across theological traditions *in the centuries before the Reformation.*” –Z. Seals, J. Bush
- “Throughout the early [Church] Fathers and *up to the Reformation* [~1500 CE] the descent in Eph. 4:9 was *unanimously understood as Christ’s descent to Hades.*” –Todd Scaewater
- “When the Apostles’ Creed says [that Christ] ‘...descended into [Hell/Hades],’ it surely borrowed its language from Eph. 4:9. There are [currently]...3 mainline interpretations of Ephesians 4:9’s ‘lower regions of the earth,’ but *early Christians clearly understood it to refer to Christ’s descent into the underworld*” –Todd Scaewater

## VII. What does Christ’s Descent mean for Christians Today?

### A. As a genuine human being, Christ fully experienced Death

- “Jesus really, truly died as all humans do. He walked through the ‘valley of the shadow of death’ before us & for us to rescue...us...from it. When Christians are bereaved of believing loved ones, we proclaim the hope [to see them] again at the resurrection of the dead. That ultimate hope is accompanied...by a more immediate one, namely that Christ has gone before our loved ones into the place of death & shines the light of his resurrection there now.”—Matt. Emerson

### B. No Cosmic Realm is outside the sphere of Christ’s lordship, or can exclude His presence

- “Jesus has transformed ‘Paradise’ [the place of God’s departed people] from a place of expectation to reality—Jesus is really, truly...present with departed saints until his return & their resurrection from the dead. Believers who die do not descend into nothingness & are not alone until Christ returns. Christ is present with them [Believers depart to ‘*be with Christ* which is far better’ (Phil. 1:23) they are ‘away from the body, but *at home with the Lord*’ (2 Cor. 5:6)]...And his... presence...reminds departed saints that they will one day, too, be raised from the dead, & heaven[ly Jerusalem] will descend to the new earth, the Paradise of God where believers dwell bodily forever with their king.”—Matt Emerson

### C. Christ ‘has the Keys of Death & Hades’ (Rev. 1:18) & Hades’ Gates won’t prevail against Christ’s Church (Mt. 16:18)

- “...Death & destruction still wreak havoc in our world, [but] they [don’t] have the keys...Jesus holds the keys to Death & Hades [Rev. 1:18]. One day, they’ll be...thrown into the Lake of Fire [Rev. 20:14]...with the rest of Christ’s enemies. Jesus’ descent, [plus] his resurrection & ascension, [apply] the victory bought at the cross to...all 3 realms of creation [Heaven, earth, under the earth]. [So,] we...have nothing to fear, ‘neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation’ (Rom 8:38-39).”—Matt Emerson
- “Jesus achieved a victory over death & Hades...Death & Hades are [linked] (Rev. 6:8; 20:13-14)...Jesus said the ‘gates of Hades’ won’t overcome his church (Mt. 16:18)...John...[saw] a vision of the exalted Christ [saying] ‘Don’t be afraid. I am the First & the Last, 18 & the Living One. I was dead, but look—I am alive forever & ever, & *I hold the keys of death & Hades.*’ (Rev. 1:17-18)...Because Jesus descended & rose, he owns the keys of death & Hades...The descent is part of Jesus’ victory over Death. Because Jesus descended & rose the doors of death & gates of Hades can’t prevail against the church... The descent means Death is defeated & Hades...has been subjugated to the will of the Risen One. There is no place

— whether in death, depression, or disease—where God in Christ can’t reach us.” [Michael F. Bird, *Evangelical Theology*, p. ]

## VIII. Eph. 4: Christ’s Descent & Ascent—to give Gifts to His Church

- “The description of Christ’s triumph in Eph. 4 is remarkable. Although the readers were God’s enemies, aligned with the forces opposed to him & his agenda when God took captivity captive he didn’t humiliate them, confiscate their belongings or exact tribute...Rather he gave them gifts.” [Roy E. Ciampa, “*Missio Dei...in Eph.*,” in J. Laansma, *NT Theology*, p. 235]

### Questions:

1. Prior to Sunday’s message (March 7) & the accompanying material:

a. What was your understanding of the phrase “He [Christ] descended into Hell” or “...into Hades” or “...to the Dead”?

b. How would you answer the query—“Where was Christ (his soul/spirit) on Saturday, between death & resurrection”?

c. What (if anything) was Jesus doing (via his soul/spirit) on Saturday, between death & resurrection”?

2. In what ways (if any) has the message (& materials, & your study/discussion) changed your understanding?

3. The Apostles’ Creed says Christ “*died, & was buried. He descended into Hell; the 3rd day He rose again from the dead...*” Notice the historical sequence. With this in view, how would you evaluate the claims that according to the Creed:

a. “*He descended into Hell*” describes Christ’s ‘sufferings of Hell’ while on the cross

b. “*He descended into Hell*” means “Christ continued in the state of the dead’ ‘til the 3rd day

c. “*He descended into Hell*” means Christ continued to suffer for us, even after his burial, ‘til his resurrection

d. “*He descended into Hell*” means Christ (as a genuine human) descended to the realm of the dead (Hades/Sheol)

4. The message & materials presented Bible passages used to support the view that Jesus descended to Hades—Mt. 12:39-40; Acts 2:27-28, 31; 1 Pet. 3:18-20, etc; which of these passages presents the strongest case for this view? Discuss.

5. David Scaer asserts “*Jesus did go somewhere after his burial & before his resurrection... Something of significance did happen between the burial & his resurrection.*” Based on the Scriptures (e.g. Q4 above):

a. Where did Jesus go after his burial & before his resurrection?

b. What happened (what did Jesus do) between the burial & his resurrection?

6. Paul appeals to the descent & ascent of Christ (Eph. 4:8-10) in the context of the church, its gifts & gifted people (Eph. 4:9-13). How should Christ’s descent & ascent affect our view of the church, of CIT, & our gifts?

7. More generally, what does all this imply for us today?