

## **ORTHODOXY: *The Created Life* - week 2**

Rev. Scott McGinnis - First Presbyterian Church of Newton, KS - Jan. 19, 2020

We're continuing our series based on G. K. Chesterton's book *Orthodoxy* and our sermon this morning starts at the beginning. **"In the beginning, God created the heavens and earth."** Genesis 1 tells us that God created the world. This is foundational for Christians and that's probably why it is at the beginning of the Bible and also at the beginning of the Apostle's Creed. **I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth.**

Now as I said last week, the word for "create" in Hebrew is "*barah*," which is creating out of nothing. You and I create out of something. We don't create out of nothing. We use ingredients to make a meal. We use supplies to create art.

I made crepes for my family a couple weeks ago out of ingredients. But what if they just existed? What if there were always leftover crepes in my fridge. I didn't make them, I reached into my fridge and there they were. That wouldn't seem possible, let alone natural.

Chesterton says the same thing of creation, he says the Bible tells us about the "*unnaturalness of everything in the light of the supernatural.*" Pg. 80. We don't exist naturally, we exist because God created us. There is no necessity to our existence. There's nothing natural about us. We exist because God created us and then the Bible tells us

God meets us in a personal way. This is a conviction Christians have and we learned it from the Bible.

Now God is personally involved, He didn't wind up the world and then walk away from it. See you and I and many philosophers have reasoned that there must be a creator. That our world couldn't just exist without something making it. They reasoned this is God, but then many have rejected what the Bible says, and instead believed that God created the world and then walked away from it. Like a clock maker can wind up a clock and then walk away leaving it running, that's what some believe God did.

But God is involved, even more so, God loves us. Have you ever made something you were proud of? Ever made a kite or baked a cake? What did you do? You probably showed it to someone, right? You may have believed it was the best kite ever or the best cake you've ever made. But here's the problem. It's going to be pretty hard to convince someone that it is the greatest kite or the greatest cake ever.

If you said it was a good cake, many would believe you and try some. If you said it was the best cake ever, many would not believe you, not argue your point, and not promote it to others as the best. That kind of complete conviction, "*the best cake ever*," leaves us helpless to prove it. (Pg. 83.)

If you believe this is the one greatest cake ever in the history of the world or you made the one greatest kite ever, then how are you going to prove it? You may easily convince your mother or father it's the greatest. Out of your sincerity they may say, "*Surely, this has to be the greatest kite or cake ever.*" But beyond your parents, go ahead and try to convince a skeptic that your kite is the best ever.

What you have is a conviction, a conviction that is not merely personal. It has implications for others. There would be no other kite as good as the one kite you made. No other cake as great as the one cake you made. And at this we have the main objection people have with Christianity. It has implications for all of life, even for those who do not believe it.

Why do they have to believe that **In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth**, just because you and I believe it? Hear what Chesterton writes (p. 87), "The one real objection to the Christian religion is simply that it is one religion. The world is a big place, full of very different kinds of people..."

Let me expand the question. How can Christianity be true, if some cultures, great and advanced, like the Chinese culture or ancient European cultures, never believed it or never came to believe in it on their own? How can a minor religious group descending from Abraham and culminating in a Nazarene named Jesus, be rightfully the

one true religion for the entire world? That's a huge problem for many people.

In response to the problem, some have look for something other than religion to unite all people: Some proposed that morality should unite people, rather than religion. After all, they propose there is an ethical commonsense that can be appealed to in us all. This commonsense ethics is why many can appeal to following most of the 10 Commandments, without appealing to following God.

“Thou shalt not steal” and “*Little boys should not tell lies*” are two we can all agree upon. The problem with the proposal is there isn't really a common morality held by all people, even if there is a moral fabric of the universe. Morals don't unite people.

In response to this lack of common morality, some enlightened people have claimed that science will ultimately make one people of the entire earth, as we all learn the scientific truths about life. Yet that doesn't seem to be the case. There is as much arguing in scientific forums among scientists as there is about morality in other groups.

The problem we have, ultimately, says Chesterton, is that people like to live at extremes or in a balanced equilibrium. **Extremes and Balance.** You have the lion or the lamb. You don't have both. You have mercy or justice. You can't have both.

Some people go to extremes to prove themselves or to experience life. And some of us don't like seeing that, so we try to balance them in our minds. We tell ourselves things like, *"He's really a gentle lion."* And sometimes we completely block out the things that don't fit, we deny parts of reality to be happy with the rest. *"Yes, yes, he's truly a good person. He has a good heart."*

A neighbor lady in California had grown up in Chicago, where she was a neighbor to some of Al Capone's men. Her memory of them was that they were nice to the neighbor kids and gave out candy. We can deny parts of reality for the things we like. They were Al Capone's men, they weren't "nice people."

Then there are some that think living in balance is where virtue lies. *"Everything in moderation."* But those who don't like extremes can equally live in error, because they don't have firm boundaries. A little of this, a little of that, nothing is bad, just don't do much of it. A little white lie or a little cheating on one's taxes. Yet society often upholds these people who live in balance as the most stable and desirable citizens.

I remember a story from a friend who worked for the IRS in the 1970's. He said they targeted the "good people" of society for audits, because by hauling them in for audits, they hoped it would scare everyone into following the tax laws. Society likes balance.

Balance or Extremes, that's how most people live. What orthodox Christianity does though is it gives us reality. Life as it actually is. Orthodoxy doesn't cling to one side calling for "justice, justice, justice" or the other side calling for "mercy at all cost." It isn't pessimistic about life or blindly optimistic. It doesn't justify man as only good or only bad. It's not saying, just a little of everything and you'll be ok.

Orthodoxy says, we were created good, but as you look around the world, something has obviously gone wrong. And the explanation is sin. And that's a good explanation. You've heard of the idea, "*Hate the sin, but love the sinner.*" That's an orthodox understanding.

Let me say again though when I say orthodox or orthodoxy, it's with a small "o". I'm not talking about the Greek Orthodox church or the Russian Orthodox church. I'm talking about the beliefs stated in the Apostle's Creed. The Apostle's Creed states what Christians have always believed. It is then good to recover this vision of life, if we have lost it.

Look at the Apostle's Creed and you'll find life as it actually is. The good and bad of humanity. **I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth.** We learn that in Genesis 1. Now here's a quiz. When God created the world, at the end of each day, what did God say? It was "GOOD". And then on the sixth day when He had

created humankind, he said what? It was “very GOOD”. *Tov meod* in Hebrew.

Then something went wrong. We call it sin. Life isn't the way it is supposed to be, but orthodoxy still tells us how life is, not what we wish were true. Orthodoxy tells us we've fallen and we can't get up. Sin is evident in people's lives. They can be so complexly messed up that nothing much explains it as well as sin.

And now Jesus enters life, as God's solution to the reality of sin. He... **suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried; he descended to the dead.**

Death is the result of sin. Some translations say “he descended into hell”. The meaning of the word translated as hell meant simply, “where dead people are.” As in, “in the grave”. Without Jesus people died without a hope of the resurrection. When Jesus died, He went where people who die go, to the grave. But then Jesus broke the power of sin two days later at the resurrection.

**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.**

Why would Jesus judge the living and the dead? Because of sin. Simply we're all good people, who've done bad, and we need a Savior. We've fallen and we can't get up.

That's actually a different worldview than some people have.

Some people, in response to suffering, say that all the physical things of world are bad, and therefore, we need to be freed from the physical world. Many Christians believe this, but it's actually an old believe that modern people adapt. Maybe because they feel their body has betrayed them in some way. So they begin to think of their bodies as bad and their spirit as good.

In ancient times you would have been called a Gnostic, and when that belief entered Christian circles the Apostle's Creed continued to declare what Christians truly believe. The Apostle's Creed gives us life as it really is. The Apostle's Creed is the clearest example of what Christians have always believed. The Bible tells us that we're waiting for our resurrection on the day Jesus returns. It doesn't say, we float off to puffy clouds. It says we're waiting for the resurrection of our bodies, which as far as I've noticed, they don't float very well.

The truth is, you and I, don't need to abandon the physical world, because Jesus is going to redeem creation. You, me, and all creation. Through faith in Jesus we are then freed from the power of sin and invited into Christ's church. That is then my last point about the way life is: in the Apostle's Creed the church is called the "**holy catholic Church.**"

Now that may sound strange, if you're not Roman Catholic, and if you're Roman Catholic it may sound strange to have a Presbyterian minister say our church is catholic. But what it means is the entire church throughout the past two thousand years. It's not Roman Catholic, it's small "c" catholic. It comes from a Greek word that "*kath'holou*", meaning "*about the whole*".

Let me read this portion of the Apostle's Creed.

**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.**

That's our hope summarized. Jesus loves us, but doesn't overlook the wrongs we've done. He's not pretending Al Capone's men were "nice people," just misunderstood. But he bore the penalty for their. He says to them, to you and I, "*You're worth it, I created you, you sinned, and now I'm going to save you.*"

Jesus came and died, because we have sins that make God's good creation a really, really difficult place to live in. But that's obvious to many of us, the question is, why is only Jesus God's response? Why not another religion or another way to God?

Because Jesus' claim is total. He claims Lordship over everything and everyone. If we put our faith in Him, then we can't saddle up to the bar of religion and pick and

choose what we like. Jesus says of Himself, **“I am the way the truth and life, no one comes to the Father except through me.”** Now that’s a total claim, one worthy only if it is also a total answer for life, sin, and eternal life. And it is.

Throughout the centuries the orthodox beliefs of Christians have traveled with people through multiple cultures, eras, philosophies, and fashions, and all along the way they have been thought a bit odd, when a new popular theory emerged. Really? The Apostle’s Creed? How old is that? And I have to believe that? But these philosophies and fashions are more often extremes, or a melding equilibrium, than the actual truth of life.

Nothing gets at the total truth of life, than the orthodox Christian faith. I’m not talking about your hair brained neighbor or Great Aunt who always yelled at you about Jesus. I’m talking about the root of Christian belief. It’s what the Apostle’s Creed describes.

Chesterton says of these philosophies and fashions, cultures and eras, when compared to orthodoxy, *“There are an infinity of angles at which one falls, only one at which one stands.”* (Pg. 101) The orthodox Christian faith has always remained what Christianity is about. We will continue to study it next week by looking more at the “holy catholic Church”. In conclusion, it is good once in awhile to revisit what we believe using the Apostle’s Creed and to recover a vision of life as it meant to be lived.