

Creeds of the Kehillah ~ Part 7

The Apostles' Creed ~ Part 6

This post will continue our closer look at the **Apostles' Creed** to learn more about what we affirm that we believe.

AND IN YESHUA CHRIST, GOD'S 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 into hell.

On the third day he rose again from the dead.

He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father,

and he will come again to judge the living and the dead.

Suffered Under Pontius Pilate

Until now, you would think the creed was describing a perfect world. It has spoken of the **God** who creates the world and then enters into that world through a woman's womb. So far, there is no hint that anything is wrong. The **Apostles' Creed** makes no mention of the fall or original sin. But now we hear ourselves confessing the word **suffered**, and with a painful jolt, we realize all is not well.

When **God** comes into the world in the person of **Yeshua**, **God** is met with violent resistance. The creatures have turned against their **Creator**. The loving **Creator** of the world has been pushed out. The judge of the earth has come among us: we have judged Him and put Him on the cross. **He came to his own homeland, yet his own people did not receive him.** ~ John 1:11 (CJB). There is room in our world, it seems, for everything - except **God**.

Among **Messianic** scholars today, one of the main criticisms of the **Apostles' Creed** is that it contains no account of the life and ministry of **Yeshua**. The reading of the **Gospel** stories has always been central to the life of the **Messianic** community. The **creed** was never intended as a substitute for the four Gospels but only as a guide to the faithful reading of them. Whenever we read **Yeshua's** story, we are to keep in mind that He was born of a woman, that He was a flesh-and-blood human being. And when we read His story, we are to keep in mind that He was not just another human being, but was **God's only Son, our Lord**, the living self-expression of **God's** will. That is what the **creed** offers: some general guidelines for the faithful reading of the **Gospels**. The **creed** does not include all the details but only to remind us of the larger narrative and focus our attention on **Yeshua's** identity as divine and human, the **Son of God** and **Miryam's** son.

It is so easy to forget what the **Messianic** faith is really about. We might slip into the assumption that it is a kind of philosophy, a comprehensive view of life and the world. Debates with atheists are often carried out on this level. We give the impression that **our faith** has to be cleverer than atheism if it is to be true. Or we might assume that the **Messianic** faith is essentially a religious doctrine, a set of accurate beliefs about **God**. Scholars and students are especially vulnerable to this assumption. We start out trying to get a clearer understanding of our beliefs. Before long, we have come to feel that those beliefs must be flawlessly integrated into a theological system if they are to be accurate.

The **Apostles' Creed** is concerned with doctrine. The ancient catechism was meant to help **Believers** get a clear outline of the teaching of Scripture. There are some underlying doctrinal patterns in the **creed**: belief in **God as Father, Son, and Ruach HaKodesh**; and belief in creation's goodness, its redemption, and its final glorification. Still, it is essential to notice that the **creed** isn't a list of concepts and ideas. At the center of the

creed is a story, or at least the summary of a story. We are meant to take our bearings not just from doctrine but from history: from a sequence of events that occurred in a particular time and place.

The baptismal confession centers on a name: the name of **Yeshua**. And in case we start to think that **Yeshua HaMashiach** is a theoretical concept, the **creed** adds a second name: "**Yeshua** - the one who **suffered under Pontius Pilate**. **Pontius Pilate** is there to remind us that **God** has acted at a particular moment in human history. The salvation of the world can be dated. Certain people were there when it happened.

The heart of our belief is not an idea but a brute fact. Not a theory but a particular human life. Not a general principle but a person with a name: **Yeshua**, who **suffered under Pontius Pilate**.

Was Crucified, Died, And Was Buried

In the Roman Empire, crucifixion was not only about death. It was about public disgrace. The problem with getting yourself crucified was not just that it would kill you but that it would humiliate you at the same time. Modern readers of the **Brit Hadashah** might assume that the worst thing about crucifixion was the physical suffering. But in a culture of honor and shame, the pain of the soul – humiliation - can be even worse than the body's pain.

The psalms of **Isra'el** often lament over the experience of humiliation. Psalm 79 describes the sack of Jerusalem by a neighboring army. Asaf writes in verse 4: ***We suffer the taunts of our neighbors, we are mocked and scorned by those around us.*** We are familiar with **Yeshua** quoting the first verse of Psalm 22: ***My God! My God! Why have you abandoned me?*** But verses 6-7 speak of humiliation. ***But I am a worm, not a man, scorned by everyone, despised by the people. All who see me jeer at me; they sneer and shake their heads.***

To be crucified was to be cast out of the human community, rejected by **God** and the world. It was a fate worse than death.

The humiliation of **Yeshua's** death made a deep impression on His early followers. Quoting an early **Messianic** hymn, **Sha'ul** describes the whole life of **Yeshua** as a descent into humiliation and disgrace. ***He emptied himself, taking the form of a slave...He humbled himself still more by becoming obedient even to death - death on a stake as a criminal!*** ~ Phil. 2:7-8 (CJB). **Yeshua** descended to the lowest rung on the social ladder. He became a slave and died a slave's death. Though he possessed the highest honor, he embraced the worst disgrace. **Yeshua's** shame saved the world: that is the scandalous message of the cross.

Yeshua's followers were the first people in the history of the world to describe humility as a virtue. **Sha'ul** reminds the Philippian believers that they ought to have the same **attitude** as **Yeshua** (Phil. 2:5), renouncing honor and becoming like slaves in service to one another. In ancient Roman culture, the whole purpose of life was to acquire honor and shun whatever might diminish one's reputation. To be humble was the worst thing that could happen to a person.

Yet, the earliest **Messianics** scorned pride and elevated humility. **Sha'ul** calls himself ***a slave of the Messiah Yeshua*** (Rom 1:1) as if such slavery were the highest honor in the world. The message of a humble Lord was a shocking thing to hear in the ancient world. Yet today, if anyone is asked whether it is better to devote one's life to self-aggrandizement or service, most would admit that a life of service is better. The message of the cross has inverted the ancient values of honor and shame. **Yeshua's** shocking claim that it is better to serve than to be served is accepted today as if it were plain common sense. Because, today, the virtue of humility is taken for granted, we no longer feel the original scandal of the gospel.

In my next post, we will continue to unpack this second article of faith that **Yeshua is Adonai** in the **Apostle's Creed**.