

BELIEVE



Every Sunday that we attend church we recite one of the creeds, Nicaean, Apostle's or Athanasian. As part of that confession we assert that we believe in God, the Father, Son & Holy Spirit, that Jesus lived, died & was resurrected so that we would be welcome in God's Kingdom and that we are in Him forever. That is our assertion, the question is simple, do you believe that assertion or do you Believe that assertion? Whether you read the creed from the Hymnal or have committed it to memory is immaterial, do you Believe that?

2,000 years separate us from the events of Jesus's ministry and that's a long time, over those years much has transpired, some positive, some negative. Are you like Thomas and need "Touchy – Feely" confirmation to cement your faith. Jesus said, *"Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."* Jesus is speaking here about those who believe not because they have touched Jesus, rather because He has touched them. Thomas after his experience with Jesus went on to travel to places such as Persia, Ethiopia and India, the success of his ministry was great but the envy and malice around his success was the cause of his martyrdom.

Jesus has not only touched perhaps billions of people but many of the world's belief systems as well. Belief systems having their beginnings in the "Common Era" such as Islam, Bahai, Ahmadiyya (Muslim), and New Age all have Jesus melded into them. Interestingly enough, images of Jesus appear even in the world belief systems that preceded Him, Indra (Hinduism), Attis, Heracles, Krishna, Mithras, Buddhism all contain images merged into them that with the proper imagination have many of the characteristics of Jesus. Curiously Jesus was merged into those ideologies after His dramatic appearance and impact on the world.

All of the world ideologies that have incorporated representations of Jesus do not grant Him attributes equivalent to those described in the Bible even though some come closer to the image depicted there. The Jesus of the Bible is more than just a "Good" man, a "Teacher" of morals, a "Prophet", or even a "Spiritual Example". That brings us back to the creeds we so willingly recite. What do we know about Jesus by reciting any of the creeds?

Turns out that while the "Creeds" are a valuable affirmation of one's belief in the "Saving" power of Jesus, they are none the less a very two-dimensional image of the "Person" and "Testimony" of Jesus. To fill the space between Jesus's birth and crucifixion one must spend time in the whole Bible and while you will learn a great deal about Jesus in the Gospels, you will only learn about his mission by reading the "Whole" Bible.

"In the Beginning" God's Kingdom resided on Earth, in the form of "The Garden" but Humanity rebelled against God and ultimately rejected God's Kingdom in favor of Satan's. God has used a number of mechanisms to restore His Kingdom on Earth, going as far as destroying all life on the planet except for a select few. While wiping out the population didn't go as well as you might have hoped for, selecting a single man to focus His attention on seemed to work marginally well until they got into Egypt. Once there, their perspective changed and eventually the Egyptians began mistreating them they were in misery. Sending Moses to remedy the situation didn't work so well either, turns out "You can take the Israeli out of Egypt but you can't take Egypt out of the Israeli". Remember that quote, if you substitute your name for "The Israeli" and the World for "Egypt". God extracted the "World" out of the Israelites by marching them through the wilderness for 40 years, while that was only a temporary fix it did work for the life of Joshua. What has God done to extract the world from you and how permanent has that been?

The rest of the Israeli experience has had its highs and its lows, perhaps just like your life but we can only pray that each of us will not have to suffer the same persecution that the Israelites had, yet perhaps if we examine our lives we might be in the same rebellion that the Israelites were in, just at different levels. This is the real

reason we need to closely examine the “Old Testament” and at the same time closely scrutinize our own lives to see if we aren’t repeating the same activities they were in a different manner. Because God is obsessively passionate about providing humanity with “Free Will” His options are somewhat narrow.

This is where we return to the “Believe” part. “When the time was right” Jesus came to Earth. John the Baptizer prepared His way and even announced “*Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the Sin of the world*” (John 1:29). Mark says that the gospel of Jesus came from as far back as Isaiah and even then, John the Baptizer was part of the forecast. What is this Gospel all about? Jesus said, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand”, He qualified that statement by saying, “Repent and Believe in the Gospel”. The first part of the statement IS the Gospel and the second part is what you need to do to engage in that Gospel.

In the Garden the Kingdom of God occupied the entire Earth, post Garden the closest similarity to the Kingdom of God was The Tabernacle in the wilderness and The Temple in Jerusalem. When Jesus arrived, His presence represented “The Kingdom of God”. Although, He referred to Himself as a Temple, He was not a stationary object and consequently, everywhere He went He left pockets of God’s Kingdom.

One would think that anyone who did good everywhere they went would be loved and encouraged, not so with Jesus. Understandably the dynamics were different with Jesus than any other “Good Person”, never the less mistrust and hatred intensified.

The way the Israelites invoked “The Kingdom of God” was through animal sacrifice, somehow the death and blood of the animal cleaned up the Sin, Injustice and Ugliness of the world for a small area, unfortunately though just for a short time. When Jesus arrived, His presence invoked “God’s Kingdom” everywhere He went and just as the Israelite lamb implemented a brief span of God’s Kingdom, so “God’s Lamb” as referred to by John the Baptizer initiated God’s Kingdom on Earth.

Unfortunately, Jesus didn’t drive Sin, Injustice and Ugliness out of the World, rather He materialized pockets of this Kingdom but they are permanent. We can reside in these pockets but we can’t escape the Sin, Injustice and Ugliness of the world. Some, might enjoy a little of that from time to time but that isn’t part of this treatise. This brings us back to the Creed.

Jesus said, “*The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.*” (Mark 1:15). “Pisteuo” (pist-yoo’-o) is the Greek word that is translated “Believe” but it means more than to think to be true, it also means to be persuaded, place confidence in and to have trust in. This is what Jesus is referring to when He invites you into His portrayal of God’s Kingdom, He isn’t saying that your story will have a “Happy Ending” but rather, “If you are Repentant and Trust that God will do what is Best for you, your story will become New and you will reside in a pocket of God’s Kingdom right here on Earth”.

The Creed then becomes an affirmation of your “Belief” in Jesus’s promise that He and The Holy Spirit will construct a “New You” and place it in a section of God’s Kingdom right here on Earth.