

**March 24, 2019**

## The Way to Heaven

John 14:1-6

14:1 “Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me.

14:2 In my Father’s house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you?

14:3 And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also.

14:4 And you know the way to where I am going.”

14:5 Thomas said to him, “Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?”

14:6 Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”

### **1. The Way to the Dead**

The Apostles’ Creed says, “The Lord .... suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried; he descended to the dead.” This part of the Apostles’ Creed is taken from 1 Corinthians 15: 3-5, saying, “For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried ....” The 15th chapter of 1 Corinthians does not have the word “descended to the dead”, but the Apostles’ Creed adds the word “descended to the dead” after “died, and was buried.”

The “Old Roman religion,” that is underpinning the Apostles’ Creed, does not have the word “descended to the dead.” It is said that it would have been added to the Apostles’ Creed around 350 to 360

AD. So there is an opinion that the Apostles' Creed does not have to be the word, "descended to the dead." In addition, there are people who say that it is better to cut off this part in order to avoid conflict, because there are various interpretations of the word; "descended to the dead." Besides, people who claim that the Apostles' Creed can not be accepted as a confession of the church because this part is not Biblical because there is no direct word in the Bible, "Christ descended to the dead."

We can not agree with the opinion that "this part is not Biblical because there is no direct word of the Bible that Christ has descended to the dead." Because the words of confession of faith are not necessarily made by combining the quotations from the words of the Bible. For example, even though the word "Trinity" itself is not in the Bible, the Trinity God is drawn everywhere in the Bible, and if someone teaches, "The Trinity is not Biblical," it becomes the teaching of "heresy". The teachings of "heresy" consist only of a part of the Bible, here and there. And, it is far from what the whole Bible speaks. We would like to find the meanings of the word; "descended to the dead" from the whole context of the Bible, as it is in the Apostles' Creed.

The place Jesus descended is called "Sheol" in Hebrew and "Hades" in Greek and is used to represent the world of the dead. In the Old Testament period, it was considered to be a hopeless place. If a person dies, they will never come back from there. The first child born between David and Bathsheba died seven days later. David fasted for seven days asking God to save his child's life, but when he heard that the child had died, he stopped fasting. David said to his

retainers who wondered about it. “While the child was still alive, I fasted and wept, for I said, ‘Who knows whether the LORD will be gracious to me, that the child may live?’ But now he is dead. Why should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he will not return to me.” (2 Samuel 12:22-23) As David said, “I shall go to him, but he will not return to me.” However, the way to Sheol is one-way, and even if a living person goes to Sheol, those who are in Sheol cannot come back to the living person’s world, It was something everyone knew.

Although the believers were revealed the hope of resurrection, that does not mean that the grief separated from his beloved by death will not disappear. Depending on the illness and age, you may be prepared to someone’s death, but when the time actually comes, how hard and sad you will be. The death of a person is painful in any case, but the pain, sadness, and grief of a sudden loss of the loved one in an accident etc. is like a heartbreak and can not be expressed in verbal terms. At the time of the burial of Jesus, there must be deep grief and pain in the hearts of Mother Mary who lost her son and the disciples. Jesus, the Son of God and the Savior, was not different from us. He was buried in sorrow and pain and headed to the world of the dead.

When the apostle creed says, “he descended to the dead,” it expresses that Jesus became human completely and experienced all the suffering that man experiences, including heading to the dead. The Bible says, “And just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment.” (Hebrew 9:27) Jesus also went on the same path as a human.

## 2. The Way to Heaven

The way to the dead is one way. So, did Jesus also go to the dead and not come back from there? No, Jesus rose on the third day. He came back from the dead. The one-way path to the dead has become bi-directional way as Jesus “descended to the dead.” No, not only that, it became a path to heaven. After the resurrection, Jesus ascended to the heavens. That’s why Jesus opened the way from the dead to heaven.

The world of the dead has been considered dark and hopeless, but God has shown the light of hope to believers even in the Old Testament period. Psalm 139:8 says, “If I ascend to heaven, you are there! If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there!” It is said that Sheol was not a world hidden from the eyes of God. Jesus reached out there by “descending to the dead.”

When Job encountered a hardship more painful than death, he said, “Oh that you would hide me in Sheol, that you would conceal me until your wrath be past, that you would appoint me a set time, and remember me!” (Job 14:13) and asked to himself, “If a man dies, shall he live again?” (Job 14:14). Actually, Job already had the answer to this question. He said, “For I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been thus destroyed, yet in my flesh I shall see God.” (Job 19:25-26) As the word of Job, the hope of resurrection was revealed to believers even in the days of the Old Testament.

John 14:1-3 “Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. In my Father’s house are many rooms.... And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also.”

And in the New Testament time, this hope became more certain. Jesus told the disciples before the cross. “Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. In my Father’s house are many rooms.... And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also.”(John 14: 1-3) Jesus was about to “be crucified, die, be buried and descend to the dead” at that moment. However, Jesus did not tell the disciples to go to the dead, but to go to his Father. It speaks of the resurrection and ascension after the descending to the dead in advance.

The words that Jesus said, “Where I am you may be also,” give us great comfort. “What happens when we die?” We are not informed of everything. So, even Christians are troubled. I think that it is natural that there is anxiety. However, there are a certain thing that Jesus will be with the believers. When we take our breath, Jesus will be with us and with us in the dead. Jesus is with us where we are. Not only that, we will be with Jesus where he is.

Jesus said, when one of the crucified criminal repented on the cross and believed in Jesus, “Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise.” (Luke 23:43) This says, the spirit of this criminal will be where Jesus will be with Jesus. I think that this robbery died soon after Jesus’ death. Then Jesus said “today.” Crucifixion is a cruel thing that exposes criminals for a number of days alive, and kills them gradually. So, “today” was a great mercy for this person.

Jesus was resurrected after three days, and ascended after forty days. So it seems to be inconsistent with what Jesus said, “today you will be with me in Paradise.” What does this mean? I think that the

paradise came to him at the moment he repented. Jesus said, “Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.” (Luke 15:7) If one of the hundreds repent on the earth, the great joy will rise in the heaven, and the joy of salvation will also come to the person who repents and paradise will come to the place where the person is. “Today,” that day, when the criminal repented, paradise has appeared, even on the hills of Golgotha, even on the cross.

Jesus became a person, endured the suffering of the cross, died, and descended into the dead. From the glory of the heavens, he became lower, and came down to the bottom. If so, no one can say, “I am too far from God. I will not be saved as I am at the bottom.” If you believe that the Savior is there even if you are at bottom, you will be saved by Jesus who descended to the dead. This Jesus allows us to go up to the heavenly house where Jesus is. Because of that, Jesus “has been crucified, buried in death, and descended to the death.” He overcame the death, and ascended to heaven. He made the way to heaven a certainty. He said, “I am the way,” and he became the way to heaven itself. The way to heaven has already begun from there wherever you are. Come on, let’s go up the way to heaven through this Jesus.

### **(Prayer)**

God, who delights the sinner’s repentance, we give you thanks because you opened the way back to you and to heaven. Just as Jesus promised paradise to the criminal on the cross, give us the promise

that we are in paradise with him today. Help us to be with Jesus forever, by living with Jesus today. We pray in the name of the Lord Jesus. suffer. And let us experience the salvation that you promised. We pray this in the name of Savior Jesus.