Affirming our Faith through the Apostles' Creed
Sermon Title: I Believe in God

Text: Hebrews 11:6 -- And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.

Introduction: Last week we launched into a new preaching series called, "**Affirming Our Faith through the Apostles' Creed**." We considered the importance of creeds in general (*they were almost always written to PRESERVE THE ESSENTIAL DOCTRINES OF THE CHURCH and to keep it from being influenced by false teaching*). And we talked about the value of the Apostles' Creed (*written to deal with the teachings of Gnosticism*). Together we discovered four reasons why the Apostles' Creed continues to be important to Christians today … **(1) It presents the Gospel concisely**; **(2) it protects the church from heresy**; **(3) it preserves the apostles' teaching**; and **(4) it provides boundaries for Christian fellowship**. ***The doctrines that we hold to as Christ-followers must be preserved***. This may surprise you but research today demonstrates that our world is not becoming increasingly secular as many of us might believe. ***But it is becoming increasingly more diverse in its beliefs***! That's according to **researcher Rodney Stark** in his book ***The Triumph of Faith***. He argues that **our world is still very open to spirituality, including traditional Christianity but also other beliefs. Stark writes**: The world is more religious than it has ever been. Around the globe, **four out of every five people** claim to belong to an organized faith, and **many of the rest** say they attend worship services. In **Latin America**, Pentecostal Protestant churches have converted tens of millions, and Catholics are going to Mass in unprecedented numbers. There are more churchgoing Christians in **Sub-Saharan Africa** than anywhere else on earth, and **China** may soon (if it hasn't already) become home to the most Christians of any nation. Meanwhile, although not growing as rapidly as Christianity, **Islam** enjoys far higher levels of member commitment than it has for many centuries, and the same is true for **Hinduism**. In fact, of all the great world religions, only **Buddhism** may not be growing. Furthermore, in every nook and cranny left (*untouched*) by organized faiths, **all manner of unconventional and unchurched "supernaturalisms"** are booming: there are more **occult healers** than medical doctors in **Russia**; 38 percent of the French believe in **astrology**; 35 percent of **the Swiss** agree that "***some fortune tellers really can foresee the future***," and nearly everyone in **Japan** is careful to have a new car blessed by a **Shinto priest**. In a world that is very diverse in its religious beliefs, Christians need to be equipped to share what we believe in a

way that can be understood by outsiders while maintaining fidelity to the teachings of the Scriptures and that's what creeds help us to do.

This morning we're going to look at the first phrase in the Apostles' Creed that begins with the most basic assumption of our faith … **I believe in God**. This statement is far more than just some sort of acknowledgment that God exists. Author **J. I. Packer** tells us that "**it renders a Greek phrase coined by the writers of the New Testament, meaning literally, "I am believing into God**." That's to say that Christians confess we are living in a relationship with the One, True God. Now join me as we consider the content of the verse we read only moments ago … **Hebrews 11:6** … and THE PRIORITY of believing in God, THE PERSON who believes in God, and THE PARTICULARS of believing in God.

The Priority of Believing in God (Without faith it's impossible to please Him …). Last week we said that ***to believe*** is to put your faith and trust in someone or something. If you take medicine prescribed for you, it is because you have faith that it will make you feel better. If you discover a fire in your home and call the fire department, it's because you ***trust*** they will come to your rescue. **Now here the writer of Hebrews says that there is nothing from men that can please God except our faith in Him**! ***Religion*** (*our attempts to establish our own righteousness before God through good works*) ***can't do it*** (God saves us … **not because of anything we've done but because of His own purpose and grace – 2 Timothy 1:9**); ***nationality, social status or gender can't do it either*** (**Galatians 3:28 – There is neither Jew nor Greek; there is neither slave nor free; there is neither male nor female…**). Remember in Jesus' day the Jews believed they were ***connected to*** God because they were descendants of Abraham. In **John 8**, Jesus corrects them. "**I know that you are offspring of Abraham (John 8:37).** *The Lord didn't dispute their heritage*. But then He adds, "**If you were Abraham's children**, **you would be doing the works that Abraham did** (**John 8:39**)." What did Jesus mean? **Only a moment before He was acknowledging their heritage. Now He is questioning it. What made them different from Abraham**? The Bible says he ***believed*** God! That's why he left his home in Chaldea to go to a land that God promised to give him. That's why he continued to live in a tent in the land of the Canaanites until he died. That's why he offered up his son Isaac on Mt. Moriah as a sacrifice to God. Abraham had faith in God while many of his countrymen did not! They had faith in their religion and heritage. **Now, how important is faith in God? Here we see that it is the only way we can please Him. It's the entry point for a relationship with Him**.

But be warned that faith can be misguided at times. It is very possible to put your trust in someone or something that doesn't deserve it. Perhaps you remember that in February of 2016, fifteen drivers put their faith in the ice that covered Lake Geneva while attending **Winterfest**. They confidently pulled their cars out onto the lake in the morning when the temperatures were below freezing as I'm sure they'd done many times before. However, on that day (February 6th), the temperature rose and the ice began to melt. It wasn't long before it finally gave way under the weight of the vehicles and down they went. Since the lake was somewhat shallow at that place, five of the drivers were able to ***drive their cars and trucks*** out of the water. The owners of the other ten were not so fortunate. Their submerged vehicles had to be winched from the shallows. In every case they were a total loss. ***It turns out the ice didn't warrant their faith and trust. That's a good lesson for all of us! Faith is only as strong as its object***! ***For believers, our faith is well warranted because it is in God***. And guess what? Scripture says that it pleases him when He becomes the object of our trust. In fact, everything else that the Bible says we can do to please God is based on exercising our faith in Him (Christians who do good and share with others bring pleasure to God – **Hebrews 13:16**; God received pleasure when people put their trust in him so that He saved them – **1 Corinthians 1:21**; Enoch pleased God by putting his faith in Him – **Hebrews 11:5**). Note, however, that the writer of Hebrews doesn't stop WITH THE PRIORITY OF BELIEVING. He then talks about the PERSON WHO BELIEVES in God.

The Person Who Believes in God (For whoever would draw near to God …). Let's break this down a bit.

- **Whoever …** This is an inclusive word. It means that God is ready and willing to be known by ***anyone***. **John 3:16**, the best-known verse in the Bible, says the same thing. "**For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that *whoever* believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life**." Here are a few other times the word "**whoever**" is used in the Scriptures: **(1)** Whoever acknowledges me before men, I will acknowledge him before my Father; **(2)** Whoever loses his life for my sake will find it; **(3)** Whoever humbles himself will be exalted; and **(4)** Whoever believes in him is not condemned. There are more, but you get the idea. ***There are no prerequisites to be met, and the only requirement is, as we just discussed, our personal faith in the Lord***.
- **Draws Near … God constantly invites people into a relationship with Him. Unfortunately, many believe people are too skeptical of the existence of God to take the time to draw near to Him**! That's when God has to do a little

DRAWING of his own (**John 6:44 – No man can come to Me unless the Father draws him**). Here's an example of what I'm talking about. **French atheist Guillaume Bignon** grew up in a loving family in France. He did well in school and landed a job as a computer scientist in finance. He also excelled in sports, growing to be six feet four inches, and played volleyball in a national league, traveling the country every weekend for the games. All in all, he was happy with his life. The chances of ever hearing the gospel—let alone believing it—were incredibly slim. While vacationing in the Caribbean he met an attractive young woman. She mentioned that she believed in God and believed that sex belonged in marriage. This was a problem to him, so his new goal in life was to disabuse his girlfriend of her beliefs which were standing in the way of sex. He started thinking: "***What good reason was there to think God exists? But, if I was going to refute Christianity, I first needed to know what it claimed. So, I picked up a Bible***." He also prayed, "***If there is a God, then here I am. Why don't you go ahead and reveal yourself to me? I'm open***." A week or two after his unbelieving prayer, one of his shoulders started to fail, without any evident injury. The doctor couldn't see anything wrong, but he was told that he needed to rest his shoulder and stop playing volleyball for a couple of weeks. Against his will, he was now off the courts. With his Sundays available, Guillaume decided to go to a church to see what Christians do when they get together. He drove to an evangelical congregation in Paris, visiting it as he would a zoo: to see exotic animals he had read about in books but had never seen in real life. After the service, he hurried to the exit door to avoid all contact with people and the pastor. But as he reached the door a chilling blast went up from his stomach to his throat. He heard himself saying: "***This is ridiculous. I have to figure this out***." So, he closed the door and went straight to the pastor. Bignon said, "***So, you believe in God?***" "***Yes***," the pastor said, smiling. "***So how does that work out***?" he asked. "***We can talk about it***," the pastor said. After most of the people left, they went to his office and spoke for hours. Bignon bombarded the pastor with questions, who patiently and intelligently explained his worldview. Bignon later wrote, "***My unbelieving prayers shifted to, 'God, if you are real, you need to make it clear so I can jump in and not make a fool of myself***.'" But instead of a light from heaven, God reactivated his conscience. He remembered a particularly sinister misdeed and God brought it back to his mind in full force. He said, "I was struck with an intense guilt, and disgusted at the thought of what I had done and the lies I had covered it with. All of a sudden, the quarter dropped. That is why Jesus had to die: Me. He took upon himself the penalty that I deserved so that in God's justice, my sins would be forgiven—by grace as a gift, rather than by my righteous deeds

or religious rituals. He died so that I may live. I placed my trust in Jesus and asked him to forgive me. This, in short, is how God took a French atheist and made a Christian theologian out of him. THAT'S WHAT GOD DOES FOR WHOEVER DRAWS NEAR TO HIM. HE MEETS HIM IN HIS JOURNEY.

The Particulars of Believing in God (And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that He exists and that He rewards those who seek Him). ***We discussed the priority of believing in God and said only our faith*** (belief) ***pleases Him … nothing else! We also considered the person who believes in God*** (*whoever draws near*). **But what does this person who accepts God's invitation to relationship have to believe? There are two things …**

- **God exists … In the twentieth century, most of our educators taught us that the only way to confirm that something is factual is by the scientific method**. Today more of us are realizing that it isn't ***the only way*** to prove that something is real, true, and factual. Take history for example. It cannot be repeated in a laboratory, yet we know that many of the events recorded by historians are verifiable. They really happened! **Why do I mention this? Because Christians cannot produce God in a test tube either**. **Still, that doesn't mean He exists only in our imaginations**. There are many good reasons to believe in the existence of God including people who have been changed by Him, as the only plausible explanation for the moral law that exists in all of us, the concept of God that is within all of us, the infinitely small odds that man exists at all (1 in 10 to the 173rd power – this is called **the Anthropic Principle**), and the created order itself all point to God. Anyone who would make a blanket assumption that there is no God is simply ignoring many of the proofs that are all around us every day. And it turns out that 90 percent of the world agrees with us that God exists!!
- **God rewards …** A reward is something you get in return for doing something else. **Here we're told that God rewards those who not only believe He exists but as a result, diligently seek Him.** The word "***diligently***" may not be found in your translation, but it should be there. Because the author of Hebrews wants us to know that he's not talking about a momentary thought regarding the existence of God and the possibility of knowing Him. Rather he is thinking along the lines of **Jeremiah 29:13** which says, "**You will seek me and find me when you search for me with all your heart**." ***The kind of person who seeks God like we seek the next breath of air is the one who finds Him***.

Can you assert today that you believe the first statement in the Apostle's Creed – I believe in God? Have you come to the place where you believe that He exists and rewards those who diligently seek Him? If so, here are three responses you might want to consider.

- **If you believe in God give THANKS.** In **John 10:25** Jesus told some of the Jews around Him, "…**you do not believe because you are not my sheep**." What did He mean? Well … had they been a part of His flock, they would have believed because one hundred percent of Jesus' sheep believe in Him. "**My sheep listen to my voice; I know them and they follow Me**." When we look at this passage it forces us to ask, "***How do I become one of the Lord's sheep***?" Jesus answers in **verse twenty-nine**: "**My Father … has given them to Me...**" **If you are a Christian today and have believed in Jesus Christ it is because the sovereign God of the universe presented you to His Son, the good shepherd, to become one of His sheep through faith in His atoning sacrifice.** This truth, while humbling us, also moves us to give thanks to God for His indescribable gift of salvation.
- **If you believe in God give TESTIMONY.** In **Acts 16** note what happened when Paul and Silas were miraculously released from prison. While praying and singing hymns to God, a violent earthquake shook the foundations of the prison and the cell doors flew open. They didn't make a break for it, however, and hide out until the heat died down. Instead, they spoke to the jailer and encouraged him **to believe** as well. "**Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved**." Then it says the two men shared the Word of the Lord with him and all those in his house and the entire family met Christ that day. Listen … we are on a mission to increase the number of people who ***worship the Lord***, ***grow as His disciples***, ***serve the body,*** and ***share the Good News*** (worship/grow/serve/share). **Believing in God demands giving an account for the hope within us**!
- **If you believe in God give PROOF. To believe in God is to be changed by Him.** One of my favorite stories in the Gospels is found in **John 9**. Jesus healed a man who was born blind. As you read the story, you see that he was on a journey that began as seeing Jesus as a man (**9:11**), then a prophet (**9:17**), and eventually as Lord (**9:38**). **It's clear that belief was inevitable** ("**Lord, I believe**"). **What evidence pointed toward his newfound faith**? One of the big ones was his willingness to be cast out of the synagogue, a form of excommunicating a person from the fellowship of the Jews. For most, this would have been a terrible loss. But for the man born blind who received his sight from Jesus, **it was a sacrifice worth making**. After all, Jesus really was

the Messiah of God! No one who claims to believe in God can remain the same person. **New life and new beliefs are always the outcome**.

Conclusion: Do you believe in God? Richard Robinson was one of the leading **atheist philosophers** during the latter part of the twentieth century. He died in 1996, and now he knows better. But in 1964 he published a book called ***An Atheist's Values***, in which he stated: "***Christian faith is not merely believing that there is a God. It is believing that there is a God no matter what the evidence may be***." "***Have faith,***" in the Christian sense means, "***make yourself believe that there is a God without regard to the evidence***." **Dallas Willard**, an American philosopher known for his writings on Christian formation, in his book ***The Allure of Gentleness***, responds to Robinson's view of faith: This reminds me of the definition of faith by **Archie Bunker**, a character on the 1970s TV show ***All in the Family***: ***"[Faith is] what you wouldn't believe for all the world if it wasn't in the Bible***." Our culture provides terrible teachings like these about the nature of faith, and they get absorbed into our churches. Then they haunt young people when they go into other contexts (*like college*). So we should understand that [the Christian faith] deals with ***real-life*** contexts for ***real-life*** people and challenges them to be helpful to others who are in doubt and to deal with that doubt honestly because ***there is an answer***. ***People are not foolish for believing in God***!! That's why, once we've given thanks, we have to work to translate what we believe (*I believe in God*) into words of testimony that talk about our personal experiences with our Creator and provide proof that confirms our faith. NOW LET'S FINISH BY RECEITING TOGETHER THE APOSTLES' CREED.

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I believe in God the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth: And in Jesus Christ His only Son, Our Lord; who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead and buried; He descended into Hades; The third day He rose again from the dead; he ascended into heaven and sits on the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy Christian church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting. Amen.