



Date: October 10-11, 2020
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Scripture: We Believe ~ Statement #9

Predictions of apocalyptic events that would result in the extinction of humanity, a collapse of civilization, the destruction of the planet and the second coming of Jesus to earth have been going on for at least two thousand years. We see it depicted in writings, art, television and movies and in the media. In the past hundred years alone, we have had the following examples.

Months before Haley’s Comet was to pass by earth in May 1910, the New York Times announced that as the earth passed through the comet’s tail, toxic gas would quite likely snuff out all of life on planet earth. It did not happen.

Herbert W Armstrong, an American evangelist and founder of the World Wide Church of God, first predicted that Christ would return in 1936. When that failed, he then predicted a 1943 date. Nothing materialized. Then it was 1975. Still nothing. Not one to give in easy, Armstrong than boldly stated that Christ would return before he died. Armstrong died in 1986, thirty-four years ago. Understandably, the church and his followers have since abandoned his teachings and dispersed.

Do you remember the hysteria on the cusp of the year 2000? Many experts believed that the *Y2K bug* would create havoc in computers and computer networks around the world when the clock struck midnight on 1999 and ushered in the year, 2000. People were encouraged to stock up on water and supplies in the event of a global catastrophe. All the panic proved to be unwarranted.

Televangelists have been known to use the topic of end times to cause alarm amongst their followers. Jerry Falwell predicted in 1999 that the second

coming of Jesus would take place within ten years. Nothing.

Jack Van Impe has predicted many specific times and dates for Christ to return but when each comes and goes, he keeps moving the date further along.

In 2011, Preacher Harold Camping made the news by stating that May 21, 2011 would be “Judgement” day. When that day came and went, he modified his calculations to October 2011. You guessed it, nothing happened.

In 2012, doomsday alarmists rang the bell for the earth ending on December 21 of that year. Why? It was because it marked the end date of the 5 000 year cycle in the Mayan calendar. Alas, life went on.

In 2017, it was a Christian numerologist who used the geometry of the pyramids in Egypt to calculate that the world would end on September 23 of that year. It didn’t happen.

I could probably go on and on. Some of these events you have heard of because they made international news, others you have not but the point is that it is thanksgiving weekend, 2020 and here we are. There has been no extinction of humanity, no collapse of civilization, no destruction of the planet and no second coming of Jesus.

Oh, some of us could argue that there has definitely been an eroding of society given some of the events that we have seen unfold around us in the past six months or so but our lives continue on planet earth for at least another day.

This curiosity with end times or the theological concept of *Eschatology*, which is the study of end times, has fascinated Christians and non-Christians for centuries.

I remember as a boy growing up in the 1970’s seeing a book lying around the house with a title that both frightened me and captured my interest. It was called, *The Late, Great Planet Earth*. It was written by Hal Lindsey. I found out much later that it was a book about biblical prophecy and an attempted to predict scenarios that would result in the rapture (transporting of Christians to heaven), the tribulation (a time of suffering), and the second

coming of Jesus. The New York Times reported that *The Late, Great Planet Earth* was the best-selling non-fiction book of the 1970's and it was made into both a television series and a movie.

In the 1990's it was the *Left Behind* series again on the topic of Christian Eschatology, written by Tim LaHaye and Jerry Jenkins. In their fictitious scenario, the rapture has happened, all true Christians have been snatched away from the earth and those left behind are now struggling to survive in a godless world. To date, these books have sold over 70 million copies making LaHaye and Jenkins a lot of money but also continuing to fuel our interest and obsession in the second coming of Jesus and what will become of us and our planet.

There continues to be many videos, resources and conferences about prophecy and second coming of Jesus which is great but in all of our curiosity and study, we have to remember one very important truth. The bible says in,

Matthew 24:36

"... no one knows the day or hour when these things will happen, not even the angels in heaven or the Son himself. Only the Father knows

Jesus' second coming is what gives our lives as Christians hope but, only God knows when Jesus will return again. We have to be careful that we don't spend all of our time obsessing over it, consumed by it and worried about it that we forget that God has given us all a mandate while we are still walking the face of the earth. That is, to love him and to take His love into our world by the way that we live and engage with those around us. The rest, we can leave up to him.

Today we are in the final week of a teaching series that we launched this fall that is entitled. *We believe. Exploring our Statement of Faith.*

Given all the uncertainty and fear in our world today, we thought it would be good to remind ourselves of what it is that we do believe as a church. What are our essential truths and how do they impact the way that we live and engage the world around us? At North Park, we have a Statement of Faith, which is an explanation of what we believe. About a year ago, the Elder Board

decided it was time to revisit this document to ensure that it represented our current reality. So, a committee was established to comb over the wording and making changes where needed. It was then presented to the elder board and the congregation for approval and it now serves as the statement of what North Park Church believes. Once again, I want to thank that committee and Dr. Terry Tiessen for the detailed commentary he has provided for our statement of faith. It has been invaluable in my sermon preparation.

In the first four messages in this series, we spent some time explaining the preamble that:

We affirm The Apostles' Creed and The Nicene Creed as foundational summaries of the Christian faith.

Then we took a closer look at the first eight statements of our Faith:

We believe...

There is one true God, exists eternally in three persons – the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. This is the Trinity.

Our sin separates us from God and brings us under his condemnation.

God sent us his only Son, Jesus who is truly divine and truly human, yet is without sin.

Jesus died in our place, and offers salvation as a gift received by faith.

Jesus was raised from the dead and the Holy Spirit has come to transform us to be more like Jesus.

The Church is made up of believers, empowered by the Holy Spirit to worship God, build one another up, share the gospel, and promote justice and love in the world.

And we believe that,

The bible is divinely inspired, fully trustworthy, and sufficient authority in all matters of faith and conduct.

Today we come to the final statement, #9. Fittingly, it is Thanksgiving weekend because this statement reveals that our faith gives us so much to be thankful for.

Statement #9 proclaims,

Jesus Christ will return, bringing about the resurrection of the dead, the judgment of all people, and the consummation of God's glorious eternal kingdom.

This is the statement that addresses what we believe as a church about Eschatology or end times. Which doesn't just include Jesus second coming but the entire sense of God's future for the world and the belief that that future is already at work to meet us in the present.

First things first, *Jesus Christ will return*, That is great news! We just don't know when. In fact, in the New Testament of the bible, there are over 300 references to the fact that Jesus will return. He even predicted it himself.

In *Matthew 24:30*, when he disciples ask him to tell them about the future, he says,

And then at last, the sign that the Son of Man is coming will appear in the heavens, and there will be deep mourning among all the peoples of the earth. And they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory

Two angels promised the disciples that Jesus would return. As he ascended into heaven after accomplishing everything that he was sent to earth to do in his first coming, the angels turned to his followers and said in,

Acts 1:11

"Men of Galilee," they said, "why are you standing here staring into heaven? Jesus has been taken from you into heaven, but someday he will return from heaven in the same way you saw him go!"

The followers of Jesus continually referred to this wonderful hope in the days after Jesus left the earth. After Peter heals a blind beggar in the Temple, he takes the opportunity to preach to the amazed crowd that had gathered. In *Acts 3:19-20*, he says,

Now repent of your sins and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped away. Then times of refreshment will come from the presence of the Lord, and he will again send you Jesus, your appointed Messiah.

So, make no mistake about it, all those "wanna-be" prophets, I mentioned at the beginning of this message were right on at least one detail, Jesus is coming back. But, how will we know him?

What if they were right and he has returned already and we missed him? Here's the thing, there will be no missing the return of Jesus because of three important details.

1. **He will be personal.** Jesus' return will be recognizable because he will be the same man whom the disciples saw drifting away, right before their eyes in Acts 1. Jesus will not be arriving incognito like some undercover agent. This time, he will be known.

1 Thessalonians 4:16

For the Lord himself will come down from heaven with a commanding shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet call of God.

2. **He will be physical.** This rules out what many have suggested, that Jesus will return in some sort of spirit form. That perhaps the coming of the Holy Spirit just after Jesus left the earth, was his second coming. No, he will be physical.

Revelation 1:7

Look! He comes with the clouds of heaven. And everyone will see him—even those who pierced him. And all the nations of the world will mourn for him. Yes! Amen!

Jesus will be visible and his appearance will be sudden. This is important to grasp. Yes, there are signs and prophecy that predict when Jesus will return again. As I said before, many books have been written, conspiracy theories developed and dates predicted. That is part of our human nature, we have enquiring minds so we want to know when.

But get this, Jesus' physical return will be sudden and it will take us by surprise. Jesus said so himself. Remember that passage I shared earlier about no one knowing the time and place when he will return in **Matthew 24:36**? Listen as Jesus continues in the text.

Matthew 24:36-39

However, no one knows the day or hour when these things will happen, not even the angels in heaven or the Son himself. Only the Father knows.

“When the Son of Man returns, it will be like it was in Noah’s day. In those days before the flood, the people were enjoying banquets and parties and weddings right up to the time Noah entered his boat. People didn’t realize what was going to happen until the flood came and swept them all away. That is the way it will be when the Son of Man comes.

His return will take us by surprise so there is no use selling all your belongings and going and standing on a mountaintop with suitcase in hand waiting for him. You might be waiting a long time but, when he does arrive, no one will miss him.

3. His return will be triumphant.

Unlike the first time he came to earth, as a humble baby in a nondescript town born of a poverty stricken teenage mom in a lowly manger, this time Jesus will return in glory. As *Revelation 1* stated, all will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds with power and glory. Trumpets will blast. He will be surrounded by entourage of angels and archangels and flames of fire.

You thought the celebration in Ottawa for Canada’s 150th birthday a few years ago, was a big deal? They put on the largest fireworks show in the history of our nation. That is nothing compared to the day when Jesus Christ will return. It will be a “can’t miss it” event.

Jesus is coming again. He will be personal. He will be physical and he will come in glory and triumph. Can you imagine what a day that will be for those of us who have known him and loved him? It will be like meeting face to face with someone we have only known by letter or phone or email or social media.

Many of you have been isolated from loved ones due to this pandemic. You have made use of Facetime or Skype or Zoom to stay connected but nothing replaces that moment when you are reunited face to face. To hold each other again and look into

each other’s eyes. To be able to read each-others facial and physical gestures. Can you image that moment that we will have with Jesus? Incredible, But, why? Why is he coming? Have you ever thought about that? Oh, we have spent a lot of time thinking about him coming to earth again, but do we really know why he is coming?

In a word, the return of Jesus represents the hope that we have as Christians. He will among other things;

1. *bringing about the resurrection of the dead*

Jesus Christ will return, bringing about the resurrection of the dead, the judgment of all people, and the consummation of God’s glorious eternal kingdom

Jesus will return to complete the work that he began at his first coming which is, the redemption of his followers by delivering us from persecution and joining us with him forever. He will make all things new.

If you were to ever drive by my house, chances are that you will see a lawn that although not immaculate, is certainly mowed on a regular basis.

I have this obsession with cutting and trimming my grass. Sometimes to the detriment of its health. One thing that is the bane of my existence is weeds or grass that grows in cracks in the driveway or between the stones of our walkway. I take an unusual amount of joy in “whipper snipping” those suckers into oblivion.

Periodically Carolyn will discover that it is actually a flower and not a weed that is taking root in the midst of the asphalt and concrete and she will make me promise not to execute it. It is hard but I am always amazed that this new life can thrive in the midst of such a hostile environment. That is a bit of a picture of us in our world today.

Due to Jesus’ resurrection, we who believe in him and follow him, are like that flower that grows through the asphalt on my driveway. We grow through the corruption and decay of our world but this life we have on earth is only temporary.

Our final redemption will be when Jesus returns and heaven, God's realm and earth, where humanity dwells are joined together at last and He will make all things new again. The old, decaying, sinful world will be done away with and the new will come.

Jesus' coming will bring about the resurrection of the dead.

This has been a somewhat controversial topic in Christian circles throughout the years. What happens when you die? Have you ever thought about that? For most of us, we imagine heaven, don't we? When we die, we either go to heaven and enjoy the good life for all eternity or we go to... but, even amongst those of you who are listening to this right now, there are different beliefs.

The time between our death and our resurrection in bodily form has been called by some, the "intermediate state". It just recognizes that everything is still incomplete. For Christians, it is a blessed state of peace and tranquility but we are still eagerly awaiting our final redemption and resurrection in Christ.

There is a familiar passage in scripture that we often hear at funerals. It is found in,

John 14:2. Jesus says,

My Father's house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you?

We have often use this passage to mean that dead Christians will simply go to heaven immediately and permanently because God has prepared a place.

This makes sense and is a comforting thought but in the Greek, the original language of the New Testament, the word for "many rooms" here refers not to a final resting place but a momentary stop on the way to somewhere else. It will be *life after death*, but it is only temporary.

Our final destination will occur when Jesus comes again and brings about the resurrection of the dead. That is what noted New Testament scholar N.T. Wright refers to as, *life after, life after death*.

Just as it was for Jesus, our resurrection will be physical and bodily. The Apostle Paul describes it so wonderfully in 1 Corinthians 15. When raised by Jesus, we will have a literal, real body but it will be adapted to the new order of existence in his new creation. So no matter whether you are buried in a coffin six feet under ground or cremated, our new bodies will be resurrected versions of our former bodies.

So Jesus Christ will return,

1. *bringing about the resurrection of the dead* and
2. *the judgment of all people*

So, Jesus Christ will return, bringing about the resurrection of the dead, and the judgment of all people, and the consummation of God's glorious eternal kingdom

Judgement. Now that is a word that causes all of us to recoil a little bit, doesn't it? The word judgment carries negative overtones for a large segment of our liberal or postliberal world.

In fact, this has often been a knock on Christians that we are too judgemental and that should be a knock because we are not to be judgmental, but Jesus is.

We need to be reminded that throughout the bible, it describes God's coming judgment as a good thing.

In *Psalms 98:8-9* it says,

*Let the rivers clap their hands in glee!
Let the hills sing out their songs of joy
before the LORD,
for he is coming to judge the earth.
He will judge the world with justice,
and the nations with fairness.*

God's coming judgment is actually something to be celebrated, even longed for. It causes people to shout for joy and even nature to cry out in glee.

Just think about in the world that we live in today. There is a global pandemic, economic distress, unemployment, political unrest, civic and racial disharmony, terrorism and climate change. The list goes on. There is systemic injustice, bullying, violence, arrogance and oppression.

The thought that there might come a day when the wicked are firmly put in their place and the poor and weak are given their rightful due? That is the best news there could possibly be. Faced with a world in rebellion, a world full of exploitation and wickedness, a good God must be a God of judgment, don't you agree?

Do we really want a world where nothing is seen as wrong and nothing is seen as sin? Oh, it seems like evil goes unpunished in the world we live in today but a day is coming when as it says in,

2 Corinthians 5:10

For we must all stand before Christ to be judged. We will each receive whatever we deserve for the good or evil we have done in this earthly body.

The point of this judgment is not to decide our destiny. It is not to add up all the good things we have done on a scale with all the bad things and whichever way the scale leans, that is what we get. No. Our eternal destiny was already decided at the moment of our death.

In our life, did we make a decision to turn from the way that we have been living apart from Jesus, repent of our sin and in faith surrender control of our lives to him, or did we not? If we did, then our future is guaranteed for all eternity in heaven with God. If we didn't, then that is where Hell comes in. The concept of Hell is disturbing to us, though isn't it? It should be. It is a horrific place because it is devoid of God.

It doesn't matter if you also believe that it is a place of eternal fire, unquenchable thirst and relentless torment. The most significant aspect of Hell is that it is eternal separation from God. Isn't that bad enough!?

Have you ever had someone ask you, *how can a loving God send someone to Hell?* He doesn't. We send ourselves. Imagine it like this. I am a boater. I have a boat on Lake Huron. Occasionally, I will be out in the water and come across another boater who is in distress.

Let's say their boat has sprung a leak and they are sinking quickly. I offer to rescue them and take them back to the marina. They have a decision to

make. They can either agree to let me rescue them or they could refuse my help and possibly drown. If they refuse, that is their choice. I didn't send them to their death, I wanted to help but they denied my assistance and chose their own destiny.

The life and death of Jesus was about what God was willing to do to save people from the consequences of their decisions but we have to take him up on the offer. If we don't then, yes Hell, separation from God is our choice.

The bible teaches that its God's desire that no one should experience Hell as a punishment for their broken relationship with him but that everyone receive the gift of eternal life in heaven that is offered through Jesus. God didn't create us as robots, however. He gave us the freedom to choose for ourselves.

Back to judgment. The point of God's judgment is not to decide our destiny but it is a day of revelation. Where our lives are revealed and the motive of our hearts will be exposed.

Matthew 12:36 Jesus speaking to the Pharisees says,
And I tell you this, you must give an account on judgment day for every idle word you speak.

Judgement will not be done to shame or condemn us but to vindicate God. Vindicate God in both his justice of condemning the wicked and evil and his grace and mercy in saving those who turned to Jesus. God will be glorified on Judgment Day. Do you see that?

So Jesus Christ will return,

1. *bringing about the resurrection of the dead*
2. *the judgment of all people and*
3. *the consummation of God's glorious eternal kingdom*

So, Jesus Christ will return, bringing about the resurrection of the dead, and the judgment of all people, and the consummation of God's glorious eternal kingdom

This topic deserves far more attention than I can give it in the time I have remaining but let me just say a few things.

Have you ever wondered why Jesus performed miracles when he walked the face of the earth? Maybe it was to demonstrate his power to everyone around him, to show that he truly was the Son of God. Maybe it was to simply give those few people a better life than they would otherwise have in that culture.

But have you ever thought that Jesus was doing in the present, what he was promising for the future? He was rescuing people from the decay and sinfulness of the world, including healing their disease, so that they could enjoy in the present, the renewal of creation that he is promising for the future. Jesus' miracles were a foretaste of what it will be like when he returns and puts everything back together again.

A careful reading of the bible shows us that God's idea of salvation was never about him saving souls for a disembodied eternity floating around in clouds somewhere out there, strumming on harps and eating Philadelphia Cream Cheese. It was about the renewing of creation.

So that means that what we do with our life in the present, matters. This present body we live in is not worthless because it will one day die. God will raise us to new life. What we do in the present, whether it is using the gifts and talents God has given us to teach, lead, campaign for justice, care for the poor and needy and love your neighbour as yourself matters because it will last into God's future.

Everything that you do on earth in this present life is not just to alleviate boredom and pass the time until you wait for Jesus to return. How we live is important in demonstrating the rule of God and his Kingdom in our midst.

That is why the Apostle Paul says this in,

1 Corinthians 15:58

So, my dear brothers and sisters, be strong and immovable. Always work enthusiastically for the Lord, for you know that nothing you do for the Lord is ever useless.

When we collect food for My Sister's Place or Ark Aid or Sanctuary, or have a Food Cupboard for those in need, or have our Dare to Give campaign

for Mission Services, this is not just busy work. When we partner with IJM and work for justice in our world, it is not frivolous. It is not just a call for you to do a good deed in the midst of the humdrum of a global pandemic. It is furthering the building of the Kingdom of God on earth as it is in heaven. It is giving a foretaste of heaven on earth and it will last into God's future. Do you see that? If we believed that we were headed for a timeless, bodiless, eternity floating on a cloud somewhere, why would we even care what happened to planet earth?

Why would we care about injustice or the poor and needy? We would just be begging God to get us out of here. But with Jesus' resurrection, God's future purposes broke through and gave us a glimpse of eternity and those purposes are further anticipated with the mission of the church.

To be saved does not mean "going to heaven" some geographic transition out there somewhere but "being raised to life in God's new heaven and new earth". He is making everything new right here and now. God's purpose was for the Messiah, Jesus to establish a just, righteous and enduring worldwide kingdom on earth. He would abolish war and bring peace to the nations. The prophet Zechariah looked forward to that day, when he says in,

Zechariah 9:9-10

*Rejoice, O people of Zion!
Shout in triumph, O people of Jerusalem!
Look, your king is coming to you.
He is righteous and victorious,
yet he is humble, riding on a donkey—
riding on a donkey's colt.
I will remove the battle chariots from Israel
and the warhorses from Jerusalem.
I will destroy all the weapons used in battle,
and your king will bring peace to the
nations.
His realm will stretch from sea to sea
and from the Euphrates River to the ends
of the earth.*

What Jesus and the apostles were doing when they were healing people and rescuing people was giving the world a glimpse of the Kingdom of God that would one day come to consummation when Jesus returns again. He will bring about the resurrection of the dead and the judgment of all people and he

invites all of his followers to be a part of this Kingdom mission.

And that, is a brief explanation of **statement # 9** of what we believe at North Park Church. *Jesus Christ will return, bringing about the resurrection of the dead, the judgment of all people, and the consummation of God's glorious eternal kingdom*

As I have said over the past five weeks, I am only scratching the surface of the depth of meaning of these statements. I encourage you to do some additional study on these topics, read a book, watch a podcast or talk with a friend, a pastor or have a discussion in your small group. It is important for you to get a deeper understanding because this is a declaration of what this church believes and it should reflect what we believe as well.

As a way to conclude our time together and this message series, can I invite you to read with me, our entire Statement of Faith as a way of affirming that this is what we believe. Let's read it together, wherever you are.

North Park is a non-denominational Christian church. With the whole Church, we affirm The Apostles' Creed and The Nicene Creed as foundational summaries of the Christian faith.

We believe...

There is one true God, the creator and sustainer of all that is, who exists eternally in three persons—the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

God's original creation was perfect, but the first humans sinned against God by willful disobedience and passed on a corrupted nature to all humanity. Our sin alienates us from God and brings us under his condemnation.

Our Lord Jesus Christ, God's only Son, was born of the virgin Mary, is truly divine and truly human, yet is without sin.

Jesus died in our place, reconciling sinful humanity to God, and offers salvation as a gift received by faith.

Jesus was raised from the dead, ascended into heaven, and is the mediator between humanity and God the Father.

The Holy Spirit, who is the eternal Spirit of God, leads people to repentance, lives in them, and is transforming them to be more like Jesus.

The Church is made up of all believers, who are adopted into the family of God and empowered by the

Holy Spirit to worship God, build one another up, share the gospel, and promote justice and love in the world.

The writings of the Old and New Testaments comprise the divinely inspired, fully trustworthy, supreme and sufficient authority in all matters of faith and conduct. Jesus Christ will return, bringing about the resurrection of the dead, the judgment of all people, and the consummation of God's glorious eternal kingdom.

North Park Church, this is what we believe.

Points to Ponder

We Believe. Exploring Our Statement of Faith.

Statement #9

With a friend, your family or in your small group, discuss the following questions.

1. Discuss with your group what you have been taught in the church about "eschatology" or end times. Has what you believe about end times changed over the years? What has caused that change?
2. What does Jesus' "second coming" mean to you? What does it mean for our world? Why does Jesus need to come again?
3. What do you think happens when you die? What does "life after death", mean to you? What is the "resurrection of the dead" and why does noted New Testament Scholar N. T. Wright refer to it as, "life after, life after death"?
4. Why do you think "judgment" is an unsavory concept in our world today? Have you ever been judged by someone? Describe how it made you feel. Why is the judgment of God a good thing for humanity and our world? What is the purpose of God's judgment?
5. What does the concept of "hell" mean to you? Why is it relevant to the Christian faith?
6. What is your idea of heaven? How were Jesus' miracles a foretaste of what our eternal future with him would be like?
7. Unpack this statement as a group, *To be saved does not mean "going to heaven" some geographic transition out there somewhere but "being raised to life in God's new heaven and new earth"*.

Prayer and Action Item

Pray for one another out of the key points that were discussed. Invite God to give you a greater understand of what you believe and why you believe it. Read through statement # 9 of what North Park believes as a church and ask God to give you clarity and faith to hold this statement as your belief as well.

Statement # 9

Jesus Christ will return, bringing about the resurrection of the dead, the judgment of all people, and the consummation of God's glorious eternal kingdom.

Review the entire North Park Statement of Faith found on our church web site. <https://northpark.ca/vision-mission-values>