

Articles of Faith XVI

Resurrection, Judgment and Destiny

Resurrection, judgment and destiny are inseparably linked to the return of Jesus Christ. These great and glorious events take place when Jesus Christ returns in triumph as King of Kings and overthrows our three great enemies: sin, death and the Devil. After he has “destroyed all dominion, authority and power,” and “put all his enemies under his feet” he will hand the kingdom over to God the Father. (1 Cor. 15:24-25). The end times can best be understood in relation to the Kingdom of God.

The Kingdom of God has its roots in the Old Testament. God is often referred to as King or sovereign Lord. “The LORD has established his throne in heaven and his kingdom rules over all. Israel was chosen to be a “kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Exodus 19:5-6). It was revealed to Daniel that “God will “set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed ... but it will endure forever.” (Dan 2:44)

The Kingdom of God is the major theme running through the ministry of Jesus. It begins with the angelic announcement “God will give him the throne of his father David...he will reign over the house of Jacob forever: his kingdom will never end.” The wise men came looking for the king of the Jews. John the Baptist announced the soon arrival of the kingdom, and Jesus proclaimed, “Repent for the kingdom of God is at hand (Matthew 3:2, 4:17 Mark 1:5). Many of the parables relate the kingdom of God. The healing miracles were demonstrations of the coming kingdom and Jesus connected the casting out of demons to the arrival of the kingdom. (Matthew 12:28). The triumphal entry was the coming of the King fulfilling Zechariah 9:9. The kingdom of God is also contrasted with the kingdom of Satan (Matthew 12:25-29). Satan is depicted as a strong man, but Jesus is the implied stronger man who is able to bind him, enter his domain and take possession of his property. Jesus as king is a major theme in the accounts of Jesus’ trial and crucifixion. The book of Acts begins with Jesus explaining to his disciples about the Kingdom of God. It is in reference to a question about the “kingdom” that Jesus replies, You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you and you will be witness unto me ...to the ends of the earth.” It is significant that the book of Acts concludes with Paul, at the ends of the earth, in the city of Rome boldly preaching about the Kingdom of God.

The Kingdom has been inaugurated but it has not been completed. We have been delivered from the dominion of darkness and brought in to the kingdom of the Son and share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light (Col 1:12-13). Jesus connected the Kingdom of God with the coming Judgment. In Jesus parable of the weeds and the wheat (Matthew 13:24-30) the weeds are allowed to remain until harvest time. The good and the bad are not separated in this present age. The harvest is the end of the age, and the harvesters are angels. “Everything that causes sin” and “all who do evil will be weeded out of the kingdom.” The weeds are destroyed by fire and the “righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father” (Matt 13:39 – 43).

Jesus has already defeated Satan, sin and death through his life, death and resurrection. Through his perfect obedience and sacrificial death Jesus defeated Satan and provided atonement for sin. Through his resurrection Jesus demonstrated his triumph not only over Satan but over death as well. Yet these three enemies stubbornly fight on. For this reason we are told to put on the whole armor of God and to take our stand against the devil's schemes. When Jesus returns however it will be a time of celebration for our salvation and the victory over evil will be complete.

Resurrection. We believe that when a person dies the spirit departs from the body and goes to be with Jesus. The spirits of the righteous dead are with Jesus enjoying his presence and worshipping him. When Jesus returns he will come, not only with the heavenly army of angels, but also with the spirits of the righteous (1 Thes 3:13, 4:14), who will be reunited with their bodies and the dead will be resurrected. This resurrection will parallel the resurrection of Jesus who is described as the first fruits. Our resurrected body will be like his. Some features will stay the same and some features will be changed. Jesus was recognized both by the sound of his voice and by the scars of the nails. He was able to eat and people could touch him. On the other hand his body was not subject to the laws of time and space like we are. He could appear and disappear at will. The resurrected body will not grow old with time. The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; it is sown in dishonor and raised in glory,; it is sown in weakness and is raised in power; it is sown a natural body and is raised a spiritual body (1 Cor 15:42-44)

The Bible says very little about the state of the spirits of the unrighteous who have not believed in Jesus. The story of the rich man and Lazarus indicates they are in torment, and are not free to travel about or to return to talk to the living. They are under the control of Jesus for he is Lord of the living and of the dead (Rom 14:9). Ever since his death and resurrection Jesus has held the keys of death and hades (Rev 1:18). The unrighteous will also be raised to life to face the judgment (John 5:28-29).

Judgment

A righteous, holy and loving God must judge sin. Human systems of justice often fail. Petty criminals often receive harsh penalties while people guilty of white collar crimes, who can hire clever lawyers often get off lightly. When Jesus comes as judge, "He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of men's hearts" (1 Cor 4:5).

When Jesus stood in the synagogue at Nazareth and read from Isaiah, he read as far as the words, "to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor" and stopped. He said, "today this scripture is fulfilled" (Luke 4:21). Jesus did not read the next line of text from Isaiah "and the day of vengeance of our God," because that would not be fulfilled until his second coming. In Revelation 6:10 we read of the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God, crying out for justice, "How long Sovereign Lord holy and true until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?" They were told to wait a little longer. In Revelation 19 we read of a great multitude in heaven shouting, "Salvation and glory and power belong to our God for true and just are his judgments"

(Revelation 19:1-2). A few verses later comes the picture of the King of kings and Lord of lords who is also called “Faithful and True” riding a white horse who “treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God” and with “justice he judges and makes war” (Revelation 19:11-16). God’s love is holy love and he is like a consuming fire and he will punish wickedness.

Satan will receive his reward and is “thrown into the lake of burning sulfur.”

The dead great and small will stand before the throne of God. There will be no preferential treatment for the rich and powerful but all must “appear before the judgment seat of Christ” to answer for “the deeds done in the body whether good or bad” (2 Cor 5:10). Those who have placed their faith in Christ have the calm assurance, “There is therefore no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus” (Romans 8:1). We are assured that “whoever believes in him (Jesus) is not condemned, but whoever does not believe in him stands condemned already because he does not believe in the name of God’s one and only Son” (John 3:18).

The judgment is twofold and includes both judging the dead and “rewarding your servants the prophets, and your saints and those who reverence your name” (Rev 11:18). As believers we can rejoice that whoever believes in the Son has eternal life” (John 3:36) however “the quality of each man’s work” will be tested (1 Cor. 3:13). Paul compares this to building materials that are tested by fire. Some people’s lives have been spent on trivial things and like wood hay and straw will be burnt up. Others have invested their time more profitably and their like gold, silver and costly stones will survive the fire and they shall receive their rewards.

Eternal Destiny

We can only correctly understand our eternal destiny when we think of it in relation to the consummation of the Kingdom of God. Jesus announced the Kingdom of God as present and yet he also taught us to pray, “Your kingdom come.” The kingdom is yet to be consummated in its fullness and we look forward in anticipation for the coronation of the king.

Coronation of the King

The Kingdom of God can be defined as God’s people living in God’s place under God’s rule and blessing. God revealed to Daniel the “His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom will not be destroyed” (Daniel 2:44, 7:14). Prophecies like this are waiting to be fulfilled when Jesus returns.

In the book of Revelation John uses the striking picture of a lamb who has been slain but is now alive and standing in the center of the heavenly throne to depict the righteous rule of God and the triumph of Jesus over all that is evil. The picture is that of a coronation ceremony of a monarch as all the subjects come before him and pledge their allegiance to the ruler. The Lamb is the focus of heavenly worship as the 24 elders fall on their knees and sing a wonderful song of worship. Their song is joined by millions of worshipping angels. Then all of creation including every creature “on earth under the earth and on the sea” joins in the great chorus of praise. Finally a great multitude “from every nation tribe

people and language” stand before the throne singing, “Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne and to the lamb.”

Marriage.

Jesus compared the Kingdom of God to a wedding banquet in two different parables (Matt 22:1-14, 25:1-13). This same theme reoccurs in the final chapters of the Revelation. Marriage conveys the sense of joy, celebration, family togetherness, unity and the consummation of holy love. God’s story began in Genesis with people and God living in harmony. God walked and talked with them in fellowship. Sin however brought shame fear guilt death and separation. Marriage conveys the idea that the time of separation is finished. Now the two are united as one forever, for there will be no more death. Jesus is the bridegroom and the church is the bride who has been dressed in white garments that symbolize righteousness and holiness. The church has been waiting for the bridegroom to come to take his bride to his home that he has been preparing.

There is a marriage supper for those who have accepted the invitation. At the last supper Jesus said that he would not drink of the fruit of the vine until it finds fulfillment in the kingdom of God. We are also told to observe the communion feast until Jesus returns. The marriage supper is the consummation of the last supper.

New Creation

Sin brought a curse of upon the world (Gen 3:17-19). Creation is in bondage to decay and groans waiting in eager expectation to be liberated (Romans 8:19-22). Peter reminds us that the God has used water to flood the earth and to cleanse it from evil. In the same way at the end times it will be destroyed by fire, but out of the ashes God will create a “new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness” (1 Peter 3:13).

Here God will dwell forever with his people. “They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God.... There will be no more death crying mourning or pain for the old order of things has passed away.(Rev 21:3-4). This is the fulfillment of the promise God made to Abraham (Gen 17:7) and later to Moses as the covenant was established at Sinai (Exo 6:7, Lev 26:12) and repeated to Jeremiah when God declared he was making a new covenant (Jer 30:22, 31:33). God keeps his promises.