

The Restoration of All Things

The Gospel Coalition Booklets

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The Restoration of All Things

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Contents

The Inaugural Coming and Ultimate Consummation of the Kingdom of God	8
Resurrection	12
Judgment	16
Hell and Eternal Punishment	19
Heaven on Earth	21
Conclusion	26
Notes	27
The Gospel Coalition	29

Christ has died, Christ has risen, Christ will come again! This simple liturgical refrain reminds us of the profoundly important truth that eschatology is deeply and inextricably grounded in the gospel. The twofold past tense “*has died*” and “*has risen*” is the basis on which the Christian perseveres in hope that “Christ *will* come again.” Simply put, what God *has* already achieved in the past through the life, death, and resurrection of his Son is the foundation for what Scripture says he *will* do in the future, at the consummation.

Christian hope is not a wishful grasping at an uncertain tomorrow but a confident expectation rooted in the reality of what transpired 2,000 years ago. The efficacy and finality of Christ’s redemptive work, together with his resurrection and exaltation as Lord to the right hand of the Father, alone accounts for the anticipation all Christians have of the return of Christ and the consummate fulfillment of God’s eternal purpose in the new heavens and new earth.

The eschatological hope of the Christian is summarized well in the thirteenth and final article of The Gospel Coalition’s Confessional Statement. This statement does not address the variety of end-time scenarios present in the evangelical world but is designed to identify those *essential* elements of our eschatological hope that are embraced by all who affirm the authority of the inspired text. It is, therefore, a broadly evangelical statement that avoids the denominational and sectarian distinctives that have so often marred the discussion of God’s end-time purposes. It reads as follows:

We believe in the personal, glorious, and bodily return of our Lord Jesus Christ with his holy angels, when he will exercise his role as final Judge, and his kingdom will be consummated. We believe in the bodily resurrection of both the just and the unjust—the unjust to judgment and eternal conscious punishment in hell, as our Lord himself taught, and the just to eternal blessedness in the presence of him who sits on the throne and of the Lamb, in the new heaven and the new earth, the home of righteousness. On that day the church

will be presented faultless before God by the obedience, suffering and triumph of Christ, all sin purged and its wretched effects forever banished. God will be all in all and his people will be enthralled by the immediacy of his ineffable holiness, and everything will be to the praise of his glorious grace.

The Inaugural Coming and Ultimate Consummation of the Kingdom of God

The “blessed hope” of the Christian, and thus the controlling theme of biblical eschatology, is “the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ” (Titus 2:13), at which time he will consummate the kingdom of God. To understand what this consummation entails we must first explore the inauguration of God’s sovereign rule in the first coming of Christ. As noted above, we see here again that the key to the future lies in the past.

Christ’s first-century proclamation of the kingdom of God must be seen in relation to, indeed, in contrast with, the aspirations of the Jewish people of his day. The expectant attitude and hope of the first-century Israelite was for dominion in the land that God had promised to Abraham and his seed, together with an everlasting throne, international supremacy, and above all else the presence of the King himself in power and glory to rule over God’s people. The questions reverberating in the heart of the Jewish people at the time of Jesus were: “When will Yahweh send the Messiah to deliver us from our oppressors and fulfill the covenant promises given to our fathers? Where is God’s promised fulfillment of the kingdom?”

No one disputes the fact that the focus of Christ’s ministry was the announcement of *the coming of the kingdom of God*: “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel” (Mark 1:15; see also Matt. 3:2; 4:17, 23; 10:7; Luke 4:43; 10:9). The concept of the kingdom most prevalent in the mind of the Old Testament Jew was that of God’s visible conquest of his enemies, the vindication and restoration of his people, Israel, to supremacy in the land, and the fulfillment of the promises of a Davidic throne and rule upon the earth in power and glory.

“God’s kingdom, to the Jew-in-the-village in the first half of the first century,” notes N. T. Wright, “meant the coming vindication of Israel, victory over the pagans, the eventual gift of peace, justice and