

**What We Believe, and Why it Matters**  
**Part 11: Second Coming of Christ,**  
**Resurrection, Judgment, Destiny**

COTN Articles of Faith 15-16

*Matthew 24:36*

**1. That's all folks**

- *Matthew 24:3; Hebrews 9:27; Psalm 90:12*

**2. I'll be back**

- *Matthew 24, 25; Mark 13; Luke 21; Philippians 3;*  
*1 Thessalonians 4; Acts 1:11; Philippians 2:10-11;*  
*2 Peter 3:9*

**3. What's ahead?**

- *1 Thessalonians 4:16-18*

- final decision

- *Acts 17:31*

- home at last

- *Genesis 1:1; Luke 15:18; Ephesians 3:10;*  
*Matthew 6:9; John 14:1-4*

- forever lost

- *Matthew 13:40-42, Matthew 5; Luke 16*

- out of time

- *John 3:36*

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**What We Believe, and Why it Matters<sup>1</sup>**  
**Part 11 – Second Coming of Christ,**  
**Resurrection, Judgment, Destiny<sup>2</sup>**  
**Articles of Faith 15-16**

Come with me to a hillside just outside New York. It is just before midnight on October 22, 1844. It's a balmy evening and we are standing in an enormous crowd numbering upwards of 100,000 men, women and children. All around us there is the low buzz of whispered voices as men exchange stories of how they have sold their homes, given up their jobs or abandoned their farms to be here. An almost tangible air of expectation hangs over the gathering.

Standing at the top of the hill is a lone figure – his name is William Miller – and most of the eyes in the crowd are trained on him. He is their leader; he is the man who has spent years studying the prophecies in the Book of Daniel and has predicted the second coming of Christ at midnight on *this* day.

Needless to say midnight comes and goes and slowly, sadly, certainly reluctantly, the crowd begins to drift away. Some, who have wagered their entire livelihoods on the truth of Miller's words, hesitate a little longer looking skywards expecting at any moment that they will see, in Jesus' own words, the "Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory."

But as we know, it was not to be. Unfortunately, instead of looking to the Old Testament prophets to give them a clue to the future, they should have looked to the words of Jesus when he said:

"No-one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father." (Matthew 24:36)

Sadly, this scene has played out again and again and again in modern history.

But even so, for some reason, the repeated failures of end-times charlatans hasn't stopped individuals and churches from spending enormous amounts of energy attempting to decrypt some non-existent meaning out of obscure, out-of-context Scriptures in order to predict Jesus' return. In the 1990's, Christian media marketers turned people's interest in the Second Coming into an entire industry

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<sup>1</sup> Resources: Frank Moore, *Coffee Shop Theology* (Beacon Hill Press, 1998); Frank Moore, *More Coffee Shop Theology* (Beacon Hill Press, 1998); Al Truesdale, Ed., *Global Wesleyan Dictionary of Theology* (Beacon Hill Press, 2013); Gay Leonard, *Articles of Faith: What Nazarenes Believe and Why* (Beacon Hill Press, 1995); *Manual: Church of the Nazarene, 2017-2021* (Nazarene Publishing House, Kansas City, MO, 2017); Randy L. Maddox, *Responsible Grace: John Wesley's Practical Theology* (Abingdon Press, Nashville, TN, 1994)

<sup>2</sup> See notes at the end of the manuscript for Church of the Nazarene articles of faith 15, 16

with the “Left Behind” series, with 17 books, seven other spin-offs, 40 children’s books, and several embarrassingly poor movies, making the two authors millions and millions of dollars, all while taking advantage of our desire to believe that *ours* is the generation when Jesus returns. What is wrong with us? I’m not sure our desire for Christ to return is as much about our love for him and desire to be with him, as it is for our desire to escape things.

Today we are concluding our sermon series called, “What We Believe and Why it Matters”. For the entire fall, we’ve been exploring our Articles of Faith. These are important truths about the Christian faith that we all need to be sure that we *understand*, and also that we *experience* if we are going to live life-to-the-fullest that God has for us in Christ, and if we are going to carry out our purpose in this world.

So far we’ve looked at the Trinity, Scripture, Sin, Prevenient Grace, Repentance, Atonement, Justification, Regeneration, Adoption, Entire Sanctification, the Church, and Communion, Baptism, and Divine Healing. If you haven’t been with us, I would really encourage you to go to our website and listen to the previous sermons in this series or read the manuscripts because all of these are intended to help you have a *smart* faith – to understand what you believe, if you are in fact a Christian, and to know why what you believe matters so much – to experience the difference that it makes.

Today we conclude with our last two Articles of Faith: number 15, which is the Second Coming of Christ, and number 16, which is Resurrection, Judgment, and Destiny. All of those things have to do with Christ’s return, and then what happens after that. Basically what we are saying is...

## **1. That’s all folks**

“How’s it all going to end?” People ask that question a lot, especially as they hear about natural catastrophes, shootings, and wars. Sometimes, when you watch the news and learn about the way our own government leaders on both sides of the aisle are behaving, you might wish that the end is coming soon! The study of last things, or “eschatology,” as theologians like to call it, has gotten a lot of attention. In fact, in the church, did you know that more attention has been given to this subject in the last century than in the previous 1,900 years of the church combined? How could it be that the Church in the last hundred years has discovered something that the first 1900 years of the church did not? My point is that all this talk about end times has more to do with our out-of-balance obsessions than it has to do with what the Bible wants to tell us! The Bible wants to tell us about Jesus, not send us on wild goose chases deciphering hidden timelines! That’s not to say that the Bible doesn’t talk about the end; “Jesus preached with the end in mind. He talked about the end of his hearers’ personal lives; he talked about the end of his public ministry and life; he talked about the end of the world. Jesus was very definite that our days and the

days of our world are numbered. He urged us to make preparations now.”<sup>3</sup> For instance, in one scene from Scripture:

“As Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately. “Tell us,” they said, “when will this happen, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?”” (Matthew 24:3, niv)

Then for the remainder of the chapter, Jesus taught at great length about what to expect. It’s good reading, and we’ll summarize what he said.

Typically, “the study of last things falls into two major categories: my personal end on earth, and the end of the world as we know it. My personal end on earth, of course, is my physical death. The Bible says:

“And just as each person is destined to die once and after that comes judgment.” (Hebrews 9:27, nlt)

A real mark of maturity is our willingness to come to grips with our own mortality. At the risk of sounding like an old man, one of the marks of younger generations is that they think they are invincible. I know, because I thought that when I was a younger generation. And yet with wisdom and maturity comes this realization:

“Teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom.” (Psalm 90:12, niv)

Each of us has a certain number of days. But that does *not* mean that God has predetermined the number of your days, so that when your number’s up, he yanks you out of here. That is *not* biblical. “Life is not like a parking meter that runs out.”<sup>4</sup> *God does not take the life of anyone who dies*; it simply means the consequences of this sinful world have run their course through sickness, disease, and old age. No amount of money, power, or religiousness can stop you from facing the end of your days. But there is more to the story than that, because Someone said...

## **2. I’ll be back**

And my friend, I am *not* quoting Arnold Schwarzenegger as the Terminator. The originator of that quote was Jesus Christ. Jesus mentioned his earthly return a lot in his three years of ministry during his first Advent, or his first arrival. He was putting his life and ministry into the context of God the Father’s bigger narrative of the redemption of people and of the world. His ministry and God’s work didn’t end at his resurrection; in fact, it only began, and it will be completed at his second advent, or his return. The writers of the New Testament understood this, and they referred to Jesus’ second coming a lot, too. Writer and theologian Frank Moore writes, “In fact, the New Testament offers 318 references to the second coming of Christ. That is not (just some) obscure teaching! Christianity stands alone among the religions of the world in teaching that its Founder will return to earth to claim

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<sup>3</sup> Moore, *More Coffee Shop Theology*, pg 111

<sup>4</sup> Moore, *ibid*, 112

his followers, bring judgment, and end the world as we know it. The Bible never doubts the certainty of the event. Much of Jesus' discussion about his return is recorded in Matthew 24 and 25, Mark 13, and Luke 21. Paul discussed it in Philippians 3 and 1 Thessalonians 4. The two angels who spoke with the disciples on the Mount of Olives following Jesus' (resurrection) and ascension back to heaven promised:

'This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back the same way you have seen him go into heaven.' (Acts 1:11, niv)<sup>5</sup>

So let me give you kind of an overview of the picture of what Christ's return will look like, according to what the Bible tells us: When the Father decides that the time is right, He will tell the Son to return back to earth, but it won't be anything like his first advent. "The same Jesus who scuffed His sandals over the dusty roads of Israel will personally revisit earth, accompanied by a great host of heavenly angels. He will appear in the eastern sky and will be visible to everyone (on the earth), not just the believers. His return will signal the (completion) of God's good plans for the world and will mark the end of time (as we now understand it)...The second coming of Christ will cause the dead to rise."<sup>6</sup>

"All created beings in heaven and on earth—even those long ago dead and buried—will bow in worship before this Jesus Christ, and call out in praise that he is the Master of all, to the glorious honor of God the Father."  
(Philippians 2:10-11, tmt)

This is an unchanging article of our faith that has been in place in God's plans from the beginning, and has been a part of Scripture since Jesus first walked the earth. You might be tempted to think that since it's been two thousand years, that it's not going to happen. Don't fall into that thinking. Let me ask you, Christian: Do you believe that God is Trinity? Do you believe that God miraculously came to earth in the person of Jesus Christ? Do you believe that Jesus healed the sick? Gave sight to the blind? Fed the hungry? Raised the dead? Do you believe he was sinless? He died on a cross and was buried? That on the third day he rose again? Then why do you *not* believe with the same present certainty that Jesus will return again? It *is* a reality.

The delay in his return does not mean that it's not going to happen; it is as certain as all of God's other promises. If you are not a Christian here today, let me just say that you are part of the reason for his delay; because God loves you so much, he is waiting as long as possible for you to respond to his love and enter into a relationship with him. The Bible makes this plain:

"Don't overlook the obvious here, friends. With God, one day is as good as a thousand years, a thousand years as a day. God isn't late with his promise as some measure lateness. He is restraining himself on account of you, holding

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<sup>5</sup> ibid

<sup>6</sup> ibid

back the End because he doesn't want anyone lost. He's giving everyone space and time to change." (2 Peter 3:9, tmt)

*Pray: Holy Spirit, help us just now to more deeply understand both the reality of Christ's second coming, and the implications of it for how we ought to live today. And for those who have not accepted Jesus' first advent, I pray you will impress on them the incredible seriousness of that reality as well. May we be ever and always ready until Your anticipated return.*

Okay, so what happens then?

### **3. What's ahead?**

The Bible clearly teaches about a resurrection of all people who are not alive at the time of Jesus' return:

"For the Lord himself will come down from heaven with a mighty shout and with the soul-stirring cry of the archangel and the great trumpet-call of God. And the believers who are dead will be the first to rise to meet the Lord. Then we who are still alive and remain on the earth will be caught up with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air and remain with him forever. So comfort and encourage each other with this news."  
(1 Thessalonians 4:16-18, tlb)

There will be a physical resurrection of your body. We don't know exactly what the nature of our new bodies will be like, but we do know that it will include a spiritual body that will never die again or suffer need; we will recognize each other and will still have our personal identity. Jesus has led the way for us in this, and just like he has a recognizable body and personhood, so will we.

So who gets resurrected – is it just Christians, or does everyone? Make sure you are clear about this: *everyone gets resurrected*. All of us, Christian or not, get resurrected, but then we face the...

#### **- final decision**

Jesus spoke with certainty that Judgment Day would come, then God will bring about the final judgment for each of us. The Bible tells us:

"This is because God has set a day when he intends to judge the world justly by a man he has appointed. God has given proof of this to everyone by raising him from the dead." (Acts 17:31, ceb)

Let me just say a few things about this real quick. First of all, God does not balance his books every Friday; he doesn't settle up with us at the end of the week or year or decade. But just because he doesn't do it yet doesn't mean he won't. You and I are living in what's called the age of grace. That means that as long as you are alive on this planet and as long as Jesus hasn't come back yet, you won't face judgment. Not because God won't judge you, or that he has his back turned while we get away with stuff. He is extending grace to us, like we read earlier, giving us as much time as

possible to accept what Jesus did for us on the cross, accept his forgiveness, and enter into a right relationship with him. You do, however, often face consequences here for your sinful decisions. That's not judgment; it's the consequences of sin.

But mark this article of faith: judgment will come for everyone at the resurrection from the dead. I'll explain in a minute what happens to those who know God in Christ, and those who don't.

But let me also say that, despite people's predictions, we're not sure about the events leading up to and around the end – people lately have been speculating on things like raptures and thousand years and tribulations; but we really don't have any clear cut details about those, and sadly that doesn't keep people from taking their stand on those things and arguing with each other about it. God bless them, I just hope they don't end up at midnight with their little group on some hill somewhere having sold all their possessions, expecting Jesus to appear. But we *do* know that Jesus is coming back and that there *will* be a judgment. Christ will sit on the seat of judgment; he will separate those who are getting an eternal reward from those who are getting eternal punishment. All that was wrong will be made right, every injustice will be punished and everything that evil destroyed will be restored to those from whom it was taken.

For those who know Jesus, it means that they will be...

**- home at last**

"Jesus talked about heaven from a personal perspective. He had firsthand knowledge about what we can expect. He talked as matter-of-factly about heaven as if it were around the corner or down the street. He took the fear and mystery away and replaced it with beautiful and inviting images. His best image pictures a loving father standing at the door awaiting our arrival."<sup>7</sup>

Heaven awaits all those who have accepted Christ. Sometimes the Bible refers to the heavens as the universe (Genesis 1:1), sometimes it refers to God (Luke 15:18), and sometimes it refers to the spiritual realm of life (Ephesians 3:10). But most of the time it refers to the place where God dwells with his followers (e.g., Matthew 6:9). We sing songs about it, write poems about it, and read Scriptures about it. What heaven is exactly like is hard to know for sure. The Bible uses a lot of descriptive language for it, but the trouble is that we can only use language of what we know here on earth to describe a place we've never seen, so our words all fall short. The Bible uses things like gold and precious metals and precious jewels, forests and rivers, but all those are just shadows. Here's what we know for sure: God lives there. And God is pure love. Imagine your greatest experiences of the presence of God and his love in your life. Now imagine what it might be like unhindered by this sinful world, and simply pure and holy love and glory. That is home for every follower of Jesus. He said:

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<sup>7</sup> *ibid*

“Don’t be troubled. Trust in God. Trust also in me. My Father’s house has room to spare. If that weren’t the case, would I have told you that I’m going to prepare a place for you? When I go to prepare a place for you, I will return and take you to be with me so that where I am you will be too.”  
(John 14:1-4, ceb)

It will be stress free, grief free, and calorie free! It will be a place for us to grow and create and love in completely unhindered ways.

That is what awaits those who accept Christ.

What about those who do not accept Christ? Jesus invited sinners to God and held out a loving hand of healing and hope. But this didn’t stop him from talking about Hell. His message was a double-edged sword. He offered abundant life, salvation, and hope, but that offer requires a choice. People can either accept his offer or reject it. And if a person rejects it, they will suffer the consequences. They will be...

**- forever lost**

Our Articles of Faith validate this truth: Hell is a real destination. Again, the Bible uses words to describe an indescribable place, but rather than a place of beauty and pleasure and love that heaven is, hell is a horrible place that our worst words fall short in describing. Jesus attempted to explain it this way:

“As the weeds are pulled up and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of the age. The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil. They will throw them into the blazing furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”  
(Matthew 13:40-42, niv)

If you want a graphic picture of the eternal torture involved, read Jesus’ statements in Matthew 5 and Luke 16. But the worst thing of all about Hell is this: it is the absence of God. God’s presence defines heaven. His absence defines Hell. Right now we live with God’s blessings all around us, whether we deserve them or not. It is impossible for us to imagine life without him. But without God means there is *no* good, *no* justice, *no* kindness, *no* blessing, *no* healing, *no* fulfillment, *no* love, and *no* hope of *ever* having an ounce of any of those things for all of eternity.

That is what awaits those who refuse to accept God’s free gift of love and salvation. But let me make something clear: *a loving God would never, ever send someone to hell.* A loving God would send his one and only son to die in your place so that you don’t have to go there; he would never send someone to hell. But a loving God will not stop anyone from going there who wants to. God will not deprive you of the consequences of your choice. You can choose Christ and gain abundant life here on earth and heaven forever one day. Or, you can reject Christ – or simply *not choose Christ* – and you will get the results of your choice: struggle and sin in this life and hell forever. The choice is absolutely, entirely, and only yours.

*Pray*



Now, you might ask: is it only people who accept Jesus that get to go to Heaven? What if there is someone who has never heard about Jesus? What if someone is a really good Muslim, or even a really good person who is an atheist, who has never heard about Jesus? Would a loving God keep them out of heaven when it's not really their fault?

Well, first of all, God has revealed all about himself in all of his creation, and he has given us each a conscience that we must answer to. So God will ultimately judge those folks who haven't heard about Jesus. But let me just say, I think we might be surprised who is in heaven when we get there. I think we will also be surprised by who is not in heaven when we get there. But for everyone sitting in this room today – you don't get to use that excuse. You've already heard about Jesus – if no other day, than today.

But the bigger question for us is, if there is someone who never got to hear about Jesus, why not? I think the more important question is, why didn't we tell them?

The fact is folks, that God expects *us* to tell people about Jesus or else they will never hear about his love for them. And we better take this seriously, because we are almost...

### **- out of time**

I don't know when Jesus is going to return, but I know we are a whole lot closer to it today than we were 2,000 years ago! And we don't know how much more time there is. God expects us to introduce people to Jesus Christ by showing the world what his love looks like by our words and actions of selfless giving, and by telling people who Jesus is. God wants everyone to be in relationship with him and be in heaven. And we ought to want everyone possible to be there. I hope you understand that *that* is our greatest priority until Jesus comes back. We ought to want everyone to be able to live forever in that place where we are no longer bound by time – when we are outside of time. Jesus said:

“Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life.” (John 3:36, niv)

The term “eternal life” in the Bible means not just duration of life but also quality of life. God wants everyone to have the greatest, most abundant life, starting now, and for it to last forever when we get to that place that is out of time, beyond time. So for every one of us, that is our mission: introduce people to Jesus Christ, equip people with a faith that works, and live as people with purpose.

This series has taken us all the way to Advent – the first Sunday of Advent is next Sunday. Advent means arrival, as we said. And advent helps us to remember what it was like for people to be waiting for Christ's first advent, and it reminds us that we are awaiting his second advent.

I don't know what you were like at Christmas, but as I child, I could not WAIT for Christmas! It seemed like it took forever for Christmas to arrive. And what made it seem to take even longer was that I had to be good for at least the entire month leading up to Christmas day. My parents told me that I wouldn't get any presents if I was on Santa's naughty list, and they assured me he kept a detailed list of every little

boy and girl. My older brother, who knew the truth about Santa, played it to his advantage. He knew it didn't matter if *he* was naughty or nice, so he would be mean to me, but I thought I had to keep being nice to him! I knew Christmas was coming, and I wanted to get everything on my list, so I had to keep being nice if I wanted to get the goods.

When I got older, and especially when we got children, I started looking at Christmas differently. I realized how much joy there is in caring for others, in being generous to those in need, and giving gifts to others. Before I was forcing myself to be nice, but now I found real joy in participating in the joy of the season. Being good was the reward in itself; gifts that I receive are really just the icing on the Christmas cookie. See the difference in the two perspectives?

A lot of people look at Christ's second coming in the same way. They know that they'd better be good, so they try to behave well, be religious, and be nice to others because Jesus is coming back soon, and they want to get the good judgment and not the bad punishment, so they'd better behave, right?

But *real* Christians understand that until Jesus comes back, we get to participate in God's Kingdom by loving and serving others, by being generous, and by telling others the good news of God's love in Christ. We get to participate in and share with others the Kingdom of God until Jesus comes back! Then, when Jesus comes back, on top of all that, we get to live forever in heaven with all the people we helped get there. The rest is just icing on the cookie.

Let's affirm our faith by singing together before we head into this Advent season.

*Sing*

One way you can tell others about Jesus is by inviting them to the place where Jesus is talked about and worshipped – all our special advent events!

1 Thessalonians 3:12-13 – May the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, as we do for you, so that he may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints.

Revelation 22:20-21 - He who testifies to these things says, "Surely I am coming soon." Amen. Come, Lord Jesus! The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all. Amen.

**15. Second Coming of Christ:** We believe that the Lord Jesus Christ will come again; that we who are alive at His coming shall not precede them that are asleep in Christ Jesus; but that, if we are abiding in Him, we shall be caught up with the risen saints to meet the Lord in the air, so that we shall ever be with the Lord.

(Matthew 25:31-46; John 14:1-3; Acts 1:9-11; Philippians 3:20-21; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; Titus 2:11-14; Hebrews 9:26-28; 2 Peter 3:3-15; Revelation 1:7-8; 22:7-20)

**16. Resurrection, Judgment, Destiny:** We believe in the resurrection of the dead, that the bodies both of the just and of the unjust shall be raised to life and united with their spirits—“they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation.”

**16.1** We believe in future judgment in which every person shall appear before God to be judged according to his or her deeds in this life.

**16.2** We believe that glorious and everlasting life is assured to all who savingly believe in, and obediently follow, Jesus Christ our Lord; and that the finally impenitent shall suffer eternally in hell.

(Genesis 18:25; 1 Samuel 2:10; Psalm 50:6; Isaiah 26:19; Daniel 12:2-3; Matthew 25:31-46; Mark 9:43-48; Luke 16:19-31; 20:27-38; John 3:16-18; 5:25-29; 11:21-27; Acts 17:30-31; Romans 2:1-16; 14:7-12; 1 Corinthians 15:12-58; 2 Corinthians 5:10; 2 Thessalonians 1:5-10; Revelation 20:11-15; 22:1-15)