

Title: “OIC Statement of Faith, Part 8: We believe in bodily resurrection unto everlasting life.”

Key verses:

1 Thessalonians 4:16-18 (NIV) – “For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. <sup>17</sup> After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. <sup>18</sup> Therefore encourage one another with these words.”

Hebrews 9:27-28 (NIV) – “Just as people are destined to die once, and after that to face judgment, <sup>28</sup> so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him.”

Good morning, everyone. Today I am continuing my sermon series on the Statement of Faith of Osaka International Church. I think it is important that we remind ourselves of the fundamental, essential doctrines on which we stand, on which we live our lives as Christians. So, I have embarked on this series spending one message on each of the ten paragraphs in our Statement of Faith. Usually, I cover just one paragraph per month, but this month I am doing two paragraphs, because these two paragraphs are closely connected to each other. Both have to do with our future hope: the return of the Lord Jesus Christ and our life with Him forever. Last week, we looked at the personal return of Christ – this is often called the second coming of Christ or the second advent of Christ. It is Jesus Christ Himself, in his resurrected body, who will return to earth for us – it is a personal return, not some kind of spiritual, non-material return, as some people have mistakenly proposed. This week, we will be looking at a related topic: our own bodily resurrection. You and me, after we die, we will be raised with new bodies. On Easter Sunday, I gave a message on the triumph of Jesus Christ over sin and death – He died on the cross as a penalty for our sins, and then He was raised triumphantly from the dead, with a new body: it was the same Person, but in a renewed, glorified body. We who have put our faith in Christ are looking forward to also being resurrected with new, glorified bodies, and to live forever with God and with His Son, Jesus Christ. I have entitled today’s message, “OIC Statement of Faith, Part 8: We believe in bodily resurrection unto everlasting life.”

Today, I will be speaking on the topic known as “Eschatology.” This word is derived from the Greek word *eschatos*, which means “last” or “final.” Thus, “Eschatology” means “the study of last things.” These are the things that will happen at the end of time, the end of this age, when the Kingdom of God is fully realized and the new heavens and new earth are established.

The Old Testament tells the story of the creation of the world, the fall of mankind into sin, God’s activities in both judging sin and providing a means of restoration in our relationship to our Creator. As we read the Old Testament, we see a repeated pattern of God’s mercy to people, followed by their faithlessness and disobedience, bringing God’s judgment and then a new provision of God’s mercy. The sin of Adam and Eve, the hint at a redeemer when God says that a descendant of the woman will defeat the serpent, God’s provision of animal skins to cover mankind’s nakedness – the first time that blood is shed to cover man’s sin. We see mankind’s spiral into sinfulness, but also a few notable righteous people such as Enoch and Noah. There is the judgment of the Flood, with mercy shown to Noah’s family. There is the call of Abraham, who is not only the progenitor of God’s chosen people but also the conduit

through which all the families of the earth will be blessed. We see the establishment of the Kingdom of Israel in the Promised Land and the promise that a descendant of David will reign over God's people. We see the faithlessness of His people and then God sends them into captivity – in Assyria and in Babylon. But the prophets Jeremiah and Ezekiel relay God's promise of a new covenant (see Jeremiah 31 and Ezekiel 36). And in the book of Isaiah we see messianic prophecies. We even see a new heavens and new earth (see Isaiah 65:17 (NIV) where God says: "See, I will create new heavens and a new earth. The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind."). The book of Isaiah has been called "the Gospel of the Old Testament" because of the many messianic prophecies – prophecies of His birth, of His triumph, but also a messianic figure who is a "suffering servant," a notion that puzzled some of the old Jewish commentators.

And then we come to the New Testament, where we see the coming of the Messiah, Jesus Christ, in fulfillment of numerous prophecies. We see His forerunner, John the Baptist.

Matthew 3:1-3 (NIV) – "In those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the wilderness of Judea <sup>2</sup> and saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near." <sup>3</sup> This is he who was spoken of through the prophet Isaiah: "A voice of one calling in the wilderness, 'Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.'"

Mark 1:14-15 (NIV) – "After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. <sup>15</sup> "The time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!"

This is the beginning point of the Gospel message: Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near ... the kingdom of God has come near ... so believe the gospel message. Matthew described John the Baptist as fulfilling the prophecy spoken through Isaiah: "Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him." This is the message to each of us: prepare the way for the Lord in your life by repenting of your sins and opening your heart to Him.

During the first century A.D., there was an expectation that the Messiah would soon appear. They had read Daniel chapter 9 and done the calculations for the predicted time of the appearance of the Messiah and they knew that it must be coming soon. But the expectation was for a political messiah that would free the nation from dominance by Rome. They were excited by the ministry of Jesus, but many people became puzzled. Jesus was teaching and healing, but people expected more. Jesus' disciples expected more, the Pharisees and Sadducees were not expecting someone like this man Jesus, and even John the Baptist was puzzled.

Matthew 11:2-5 (NASB) – "Now while in prison, John heard about the works of Christ, and he sent word by his disciples, <sup>3</sup> and said to Him, "Are You the Coming One, or are we to look for someone else?" <sup>4</sup> Jesus answered and said to them, "Go and report to John what you hear and see: <sup>5</sup> those who are BLIND RECEIVE SIGHT and those who limp walk, those with leprosy are cleansed and those who are deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the POOR HAVE THE GOSPEL PREACHED TO THEM"."

That is Jesus' answer to John the Baptist – rather than giving a clear yes or no, Jesus tells him to note the things that he has seen and heard about Jesus' ministry: there are healings of sick people and the word of the gospel has been preached. This is indeed the beginning of the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies. The Kingdom of God has indeed been inaugurated.

It is taking a rather different form than what was expected. God has His own timing. Do you remember what I shared with you last week about the disciples' expectation of the Kingdom? It was after the resurrection of Christ and just before His ascension into heaven.

Acts 1:6-8 (NASB) – “So, when they had come together, they began asking Him, saying, ‘Lord, is it at this time that You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?’ <sup>7</sup> But He said to them, ‘It is not for you to know periods of time or appointed times which the Father has set by His own authority; <sup>8</sup> but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem and in all Judea, and Samaria, and as far as the remotest part of the earth’.”

God has His timetable. He will restore the kingdom to Israel according to His own plan. Right now, we are to focus on the task that He gave us: to be His witnesses to the ends of the earth, to make disciples of all nations, to live holy, God-honoring lives, as I showed you last week in 2nd Peter 3:11.

The New Testament era begins with the proclamation by John the Baptist to “Repent, for the kingdom of God is near.” The Kingdom is near. The Kingdom has actually begun – it has been inaugurated, but it is not yet fully realized. Jesus is coming again. Then the establishment of the Kingdom will be fully consummated.

In recent years, I have been learning about what is called “Inaugurated Eschatology.” Inaugurated Eschatology – the Kingdom has been inaugurated, but it is not yet consummated (brought into its fullness). Theologians speak of the “already” and the “not yet” aspects of the Kingdom – the “already” and the “not yet” aspects. The Kingdom is already here in some form: we have in the New Testament the instructions for how to live in the Kingdom age – we Christians are citizens of heaven and we are to display the hallmarks of being the children of the King. The Kingdom is “already” here in some form, but it is “not yet” here in its fullness. In the Lord’s Prayer, Jesus teaches us to pray “Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.” We are to display heaven’s values here on earth (to follow God’s will) as we await the full consummation of the Kingdom that He will fully establish in His own time.

Today’s message is on eschatology, on our future hope and our future destiny. There are several passages of Scripture that give us pictures, prophecies, promises of the return of Jesus Christ and the final and full glorification of His people with new bodies and our home in the new heavens and new earth. Much of the book of Revelation speaks of this, as does the Olivet Discourse in Matthew 24 which I showed you last week. And Daniel 9 and 1st Corinthians 15 and 1st Thessalonians 4 and 5. It is time now to look at some of these passages.

But first, I would like to read two paragraphs from the OIC Statement of Faith. These will guide us in our look at scripture for the remainder of today’s message. I read Paragraphs 7 and 8 last week, and I will read them again now. These are the statements about our future expectations that I have been focusing on last week and this week.

Paragraph 7:

We believe in the personal return of the Lord Jesus Christ, and that this ‘blessed hope’ has a vital bearing on the personal life and service of the believer. John 14:2-3, 1 John 3:2-3.

Paragraph 8:

We believe in the bodily resurrection of all the dead: of the believer to everlasting blessedness and joy with their Lord, and the unbeliever to judgment and everlasting conscious punishment. 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, Hebrews 9:27.

Paragraph 8 is the lesson for today, so let me read it again: “We believe in the bodily resurrection of all the dead: of the believer to everlasting blessedness and joy with their Lord, and the unbeliever to judgment and everlasting conscious punishment.”

There is both good news and bad news in these words.

Good news to believers in Christ: “everlasting blessedness and joy with their Lord.”

Bad news to those who do not believe: “judgment and everlasting conscious punishment.”

That last part is a reference to the place called Hell. This is not a popular topic in contemporary society – many people, even many Christians, shy away from this. But it is discussed in scripture and therefore we will discuss it today. “Everlasting ... conscious ... punishment.” Forever? Really? Conscious punishment forever?

Over the years, some Christians have tried to find a different way to describe the destiny of unbelievers. There is the idea of “Universalism,” that every human being will eventually be saved. But I see too many verses in scripture that indicate that some really evil people will face eternal destruction. I will share some of these verses later today.

Another notion that people have come up with to avoid the idea of everlasting punishment is the theory called Annihilationism. According to this theory, when unbelievers are punished, they are completely destroyed and they cease to exist – annihilated. I heard about this idea when I was in my 20’s and I learned that some prominent evangelicals hold to this idea. I was attracted to this notion, but whenever I read the book of Revelation, I can’t make the notion of annihilation work with some of the verses I see there. Again, I will share some of those verses with you later.

Actually, the historic position of orthodox Christian churches throughout the centuries has been that the scriptures teach that hell is a place of everlasting, conscious punishment. That is the position of the Roman Catholic Church, the Eastern Orthodox churches, and those Protestant churches that remain committed to standing on the Scriptures as their only rule of faith and practice.

Looking back at Paragraph 8 of our Statement of Faith, I would like to divide the remainder of today’s message into three parts:

1. The bodily resurrection of believers and unbelievers.
2. The eternal destiny of unbelievers.
3. The eternal destiny of believers.

Part 1. The bodily resurrection of believers and unbelievers.

John 5:28-29 (ESV) – “Do not marvel at this, for an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice <sup>29</sup> and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment.”

Those persons who have done good and those persons who have done evil with both likewise experience a resurrection. But they will go in two different directions. The good will experience “the resurrection of life.” The evil will experience “the resurrection of judgment.” I told you a moment ago that the notion of “Universalism,” that everyone will eventually be saved, cannot be supported when we see verses like this. There are two classes of people and they are resurrected from the dead to experience two different destinies.

Here is another verse. 1st Corinthians 6:9-10 (ESV) – “Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality,<sup>10</sup> nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.”

Such type of people will not inherit the kingdom of God. The scriptures do not support the notion of universalism.

Let’s read a famous passage about what has been called “The Great White Throne Judgment.”

Revelation 20:11-15 (NASB) – “Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat upon it, from whose presence earth and heaven fled, and no place was found for them.<sup>12</sup> And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened; and another book was opened, which is the book of life; and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds.<sup>13</sup> And the sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them; and they were judged, each one of them according to their deeds.<sup>14</sup> Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire.<sup>15</sup> And if anyone’s name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.”

This is the final judgment. All the dead, believers and unbelievers, are brought before the great white throne. White symbolizes God’s purity and wisdom. There are some books mentioned here: certain books contain a record of the deeds of individual people, while one book is called the “book of life.” In the “book of life” is recorded the names of all those persons who have put their faith in Christ and thus whose sins were paid for and forgiven at the cross. They will inherit eternal life.

Here at the great white throne, unbelievers are judged according to their deeds which are written in the other books – they will be judged guilty. Their evil deeds condemn them to punishment, and verse 15 says that because their names are not recorded in the book of life, they are thrown into the lake of fire. Verse 14 says being thrown into the lake of fire is the second death. The first death was our physical death at the end of our life on earth. The second death is the destiny of those who went their own way and did not repent of their sins and turn to God.

Part 2. The eternal destiny of unbelievers.

The book of Revelation contains a series of visions that were given to the Apostle John about certain events – past, present, and future. Among these visions is that of chapter 13, where we read about a beast who rises from the sea and another beast that rises out of the earth. Many Bible commentators identify the first beast with the Antichrist mentioned in the epistles of John or the “man of lawlessness” mentioned in 2nd Thessalonians chapter 2. The second beast in Revelation 13 is later called the “False Prophet,” because he leads people to worship

the first beast. These two beasts are allied with Satan (who is pictured as a dragon in the book of Revelation) and they lead political and religious systems that are opposed to Christ and His followers. In Revelation 19, Christ leads a victorious army against the Antichrist and the False Prophet.

Revelation 19, verse 20 (ESV) – “And the beast was captured, and with it the false prophet who in its presence had done the signs by which he deceived those who had received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped its image. These two were thrown alive into the lake of fire that burns with sulfur.” *These two were thrown alive into the lake of fire that burns with sulfur.*

Revelation chapter 20 describes the dragon, Satan, being bound in a pit for a thousand years. And then Jesus reigns on earth for a thousand years – we call this the millennial kingdom. Jesus does indeed return and reign over a kingdom. Then after the thousand years are over, Satan is released from his prison and leads a final rebellion.

Let’s read Revelation 20:10 (NIV) – “And the devil, who deceived them, was thrown into the lake of burning sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet had been thrown. They will be tormented day and night for ever and ever.” The devil, the beast, and the false prophet have been thrown into the lake of fire. And there they will be tormented day and night forever. It is from Revelation 20:10 and also Revelation 14:9-11 where we get this picture of everlasting torment in the lake of fire for the devil and for all who follow him. Right after Revelation 20:10 comes the Great White Throne Judgment in verses 11 to 15, which I read a few minutes ago. Everyone who does not follow God and His Son Jesus Christ will be thrown into the lake of fire.

I told you a few minutes ago that there are some Christians who don’t like this idea that the unbelieving and disobedient will experience everlasting conscious punishment. Some people have proposed an idea that everyone will be saved in the end, but I already showed you some verses that will not support that idea. I also told you the theory of Annihilationism, which suggests that unbelievers will simply be destroyed completely and cease to exist. I was attracted to that idea, but it was these verses in Revelation which told me that it would not be right to embrace that theory.

There is another picture of the final judgment given to us in Matthew chapter 25, verses 31 to 46. Here we read that the Son of Man is sitting on His throne and He gathers all the nations together to judge them. He divides them into two groups: the sheep at His right hand and the goats at His left hand.

[Unspoken in the sermon: Matthew 25:31-33 (NKJV) – “When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory. <sup>32</sup> All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats. <sup>33</sup> And He will set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left.”]

We can’t read the whole passage, but let’s read a few verses. Matthew 25:34 (NKJV) – “Then the King will say to those on His right hand, ‘Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world’.”

The righteous ones who have honored the King and His people will inherit the kingdom.

Verse 41 – “Then He will also say to those on the left hand, ‘Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels’.”

Verse 46 – “And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.”

The evil people who did not honor God will be sent to everlasting punishment. And here is an interesting point (verse 41): that place of everlasting fire was prepared for the devil and his angels. Hell was not made for you and me. God prepared the everlasting fire for the devil and his angels – the fallen angels who followed Satan in his rebellion against God. Hell was not made for you and me, for us humans. However, if you turn your back on God and His righteous standards and follow the devil and his corrupt ways and the world’s corrupt ways, then you will share the devil’s fate in the everlasting fire.

That does not have to be your fate. Hell wasn’t made for you. If you have not yet put your trust in Christ and turned away from your sin, you can do that today. Talk to one of the workers here at OIC or go to the “Lift” sign after the service and one of us can show you the way to be restored to a right relationship with God.

Let’s move on to Part 3. The eternal destiny of believers.

Paragraph 8 of our Statement of Faith cites two Bible passages: 1st Thessalonians 4:13-18 and Hebrews 9:27.

Let’s read Hebrews 9:27-28 (NIV) – “Just as people are destined to die once, and after that to face judgment,<sup>28</sup> so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him.”

People are destined to die once, and then to face judgment. I described that to you a few minutes ago. For the unrighteous, they will face the resurrection of judgment and be thrown into the lake of fire, which is the second death. Verse 28 focuses on the righteous who have placed their faith in Christ and await His return. That verse tells us that when Jesus came the first time, He came to be the sacrifice for our sins, but He will come a second time (that’s the second advent of Christ), and when He comes, He will come not to bear sin, but to finalize our salvation, to bring us finally into His kingdom and give us new bodies – that’s the resurrection unto life.

Let’s read 1st Thessalonians 4:13-18. Here, the Apostle Paul is writing to the Thessalonian church to address a few problems there. One of these problems had to do with the expectation that the Christians there had that Jesus will some day return to earth for them. However, some of their church members had died already. Will they miss out on becoming a part of the kingdom? Will they miss out on their eternal reward? No, says the Apostle Paul – don’t worry about those who have already passed away – they will not miss out.

Let’s read the passage: 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 (NIV) – “Brothers and sisters, we do not want you to be uninformed about those who sleep in death, so that you do not grieve like the rest of mankind, who have no hope.<sup>14</sup> For we believe that Jesus died and rose again, and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him.<sup>15</sup> According to the Lord’s word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep.<sup>16</sup> For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first.<sup>17</sup> After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever.<sup>18</sup> Therefore encourage one another with these words.”

Those Christians who have already passed away will not miss out when Christ returns. In fact, we read in verses 15 and 16 that they will rise up to meet Jesus first, before other Christians do. Verse 17 – after that, those Christians who are still alive at Christ’s return will be caught up to meet the Lord in the air. And then we will be with the Lord forever. This occurs with the trumpet call of God.

Perhaps that is the same trumpet that we read about in 1st Corinthians 15:50-53 (ESV) – “I tell you this, brothers: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. <sup>51</sup> Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, <sup>52</sup> in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. <sup>53</sup> For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality.”

At the last trumpet, the deceased Christians will be raised imperishable, and all of us Christians shall be changed – our mortal, perishable bodies will be changed to immortal, imperishable bodies. Verse 44 speaks of being raised having a “spiritual body.” Many Bible commentators think that the immortal, spiritual bodies we will be given will be much like the body Jesus had when He was resurrected from the dead. People could recognize Jesus. Jesus could eat food. He could also apparently go through closed doors. Our spiritual bodies are likely to be something like His.

Philippians 3:20-21 (ESV) – “But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, <sup>21</sup> who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself.”

Let’s move back to the book of Revelation. Chapter 20 tells about the millennial kingdom. Verse 6 (NASB) gives us a little picture of what happens to believers at this point in time – “Blessed and holy is the one who has a part in the first resurrection; over these the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ, and will reign with Him for a thousand years.” Christians will have a part in what’s called the “first resurrection.” The second death has no power over such people – remember, the second death is to be thrown into the lake of fire. If your name is written in the “book of life,” the second death has no power over you. You belong to the King.

And then in Revelation 21, everything is made new. I enjoy reading this chapter. Verses 1-2 (NASB) – “Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and there is no longer any sea. <sup>2</sup> And I saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.”

A new heaven and a new earth. Everything is renewed. And the holy city, New Jerusalem, comes down out of heaven from God. This New Jerusalem is populated by God’s righteous ones, those who have put their faith in Christ and have been raised to new life – they come down out of heaven, like a bride made ready to meet her husband, who in this case is the Lord Jesus Christ.

Verse 3 – “And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, “Behold, the tabernacle of God is among the people, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them”.” We now have unhindered access to our God.



Verse 4 – “And He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be any death; there will no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away.” No more tears or pain or death. The effects of the curse after Adam and Eve sinned have now been reversed. A new heavens and new earth. It is like Eden being restored.

We will not be spending eternity up there in heaven. Our future home will be here – a renewed earth. God will dwell with us here, as He originally intended in the Garden of Eden.

Revelation 22:1-2 (NASB) – “And he showed me a river of the water of life, clear as crystal, coming from the throne of God and of the Lamb, <sup>2</sup> in the middle of its street. On either side of the river was the tree of life, bearing twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit every month; and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.”

Here we see the tree of life from the Garden of Eden. The leaves of the tree are for healing – there will be no sorrow or sickness in the new creation.

Verses 3-4 – “There will no longer be any curse; and the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and His bond-servants will serve Him; <sup>4</sup> they will see His face, and His name will be on their foreheads.” We will see Him face to face, like Adam did in the Garden.

This is where we will spend eternity – on this restored planet in perfect fellowship with God and with His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ