

Valley Bible Church – Adult Class

Living in Light of His Return: The Rapture of the Church

Adult SS ~ June 7, 2015

Introduction:

There is no hope more powerful and more rewarding than the “living hope” to which we have been born again to receive an imperishable, undefiled, unfading inheritance kept in heaven. Now, it is guarded through faith and guaranteed because of the resurrection. This salvation is ready to be revealed in the last time (**1 Pet 1:3–5**).

This greatest anticipation, for which we should be waiting most eagerly, is “for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ” (**Ti 2:13**). For God Himself to appear to us. For sinful man, redeemed from all lawlessness and purified for His possession, to see the glory and greatness of the Holy One of the Kingdom of Heaven—there is no equal.

Today, we embark on a brief study of the Rapture of the Church, the first dramatic event in the end times chronology. Last week was an “Introduction to Eschatology” and now we are going to walk through the Scriptures seeing *what* happens *when* in each of the biblical events introduced last week. And like any study of theology, we will be finding *why* this theology matters to us.

Review the chart from last week...

Let’s keep our series’ main thought in front of us: we are studying end times theology from the Scriptures primarily so that we might live in light of the return of Christ. To do so today, we are going to examine 4 aspects of the Rapture of the church.

1. Definition of the Rapture

a. Simple Definition

- i. Charles Ryrie in his *Basic Theology* (page 462) explains, “The Greek word from which we take the term ‘rapture’ appears in 1 Thessalonians 4:17, translated ‘caught up.’ The Latin translation of this verse used the word *rapturo*. The Greek word it translates is *harpazo*, which means to snatch or take away. Elsewhere it is used to describe how the Spirit *caught up* Philip near Gaza and brought him to Caesarea (Acts 8:39) and to describe Paul’s experience of being *caught up* into the third heaven (2 Cor. 12:2–4). Thus there can be no doubt that the word is used in 1 Thessalonians 4:17 to indicate the actual removal of people from earth to heaven.”

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b. Key Texts

- i. **First Thessalonians 4:13–18** This is the central passage of Scripture on the rapture for all those who are in Christ
- ii. **John 14:1–3** This is the first mention of the rapture in Scripture. This text parallels much of what Paul said in 1 Thessalonians 4.
- iii. **1 Corinthians 15:51–53** The “mystery” refers to the new revelation that believers will receive a heavenly, imperishable, spiritual body without first dying.
- iv. **Philippians 3:20, 21** This text speaks of our true citizenship and future transformation in glory.
- v. **Titus 2:13** Here we have the believer’s future hope—the return of the Lord Jesus in glory. We are to live in anticipation of that moment.
- vi. **James 5:7–9** James warns his brothers and sisters in Christ to be patient until the coming of the Lord. Do not grumble against one another for “the coming of the Lord is at hand”; “behold, the Judge is standing at the door.”
- vii. *One “macro-observation”:* Every rapture passage is set in the context of motivations for growing in godliness. **Why do you think that is?**

c. Sequence of Events

- i. The Lord Himself will descend from His Father’s house, where He is preparing a place for us (John 14:1–3; 1 Thessalonians 4:16).
- ii. He will come again to receive us to Himself (John 14:1–3).
- iii. He will resurrect those who have fallen asleep in Him (deceased believers whom we will not precede—1 Thessalonians 4:14–15).
- iv. The Lord will shout as He descends (“loud command,” 1 Thessalonians 4:16 NIV). All this will take place in the “twinkling of an eye” (1 Corinthians 15:52).
- v. We will hear the voice of the archangel (perhaps to lead Israel during the seven years of the Tribulation as he did in the Old Testament—1 Thessalonians 4:16).

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- vi. We will also hear the trumpet call of God (1 Thessalonians 4:16), the last trumpet for the church. (Don't confuse this with the seventh trumpet of judgment upon the world during the Tribulation in Revelation 11:15.)
- vii. The dead in Christ will rise first (the corruptible ashes of their dead bodies are made incorruptible and joined together with their spirits, which Jesus brings with Him—1 Thessalonians 4:16–17).
- viii. Then we who are alive and remain will be changed (or made incorruptible by having our bodies made “immortal”—1 Corinthians 15:51, 53).
- ix. We will be caught up (raptured) together (1 Thessalonians 4:17).
- x. We will be caught up in the clouds (where dead and living believers will have a monumental reunion—1 Thessalonians 4:17).
- xi. We will meet the Lord in the air (1 Thessalonians 4:17).
- xii. Christ will receive us to Himself and take us to the Father's house “that where I am, there you may be also” (John 14:3).
- xiii. “And so we shall always be with the Lord” (1 Thessalonians 4:17).
- xiv. At the call of Christ for believers, He will judge all things. Christians will stand before the judgment seat of Christ (Romans 14:10; 2 Corinthians 5:10), described in detail in 1 Corinthians 3:11–15. This judgment prepares Christians for...
- xv. The marriage of the lamb. Before Christ returns to earth in power and great glory, He will meet His bride, the church, and the marriage supper will take place. In the meantime, after the church is raptured, the world will suffer the unprecedented outpouring of God's wrath, which our Lord called “the great tribulation” (Matthew 24:21).

2. Participants in the Rapture

- a. Those who are “in Christ” (**1 Thess 4:16**). All believers from Acts 2 to the rapture; all of “the church.” Deceased believers first and then those believers alive at the time of the rapture. In Thessalonica, believers were concerned that in the rapture Christ was just going to take up the living saints, but Paul encourages them with words that indicate that the dead and living in Christ will be caught up together.

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- b. No Old Testament saints will participate at this time because they were not positioned “in Christ” like the church was. They will rise again and be rewarded at the Second Coming (**Rev 20:4–6; Dan 12:2, 13**).
 - c. The sobering reality is that the majority of people you come across in life are not “in Christ.” Jesus told His disciples, “For many are called but few are chosen” (**Matt 22:14**). Each of us would do well to consider our relationship to Christ, our devotion to Christ, our love for Christ.
3. **Results of the Rapture**
- a. **A Promise Will Be Fulfilled**
 - i. **John 14:1–3, 18, 19; 16:22** This is when Christ promises to come back for His own. At the rapture, He will be true to His Word, as He always is.
 - 1. **John 14:18** “I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. **19** Yet a little while and the world will see me no more, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live.
 - 2. **John 16:22** “So also you have sorrow now, but I will see you again, and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you.”
 - b. **Our Salvation Will Be Complete**
 - i. **Romans 8:23** “And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.”
 - ii. **Ephesians 1:7** “In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace.”
 - iii. **Ephesians 4:30** “And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.”
 - c. **All Believers Will Be United**
 - i. The rapture brings legitimate hope, encouragement, and real comfort to those who have experienced (or will experience) separation from loved ones (**1 Thess 4:18**).
 - ii. It will be like a large family reunion for all those who are in Christ from Stephen the first martyr, to the many reformers who were

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burned at the stake to bring to common man the doctrines of our faith, to those we knew and loved who have passed.

4. Timing of the Rapture

Regarding this point, there is the most amount of disagreement among theologians. Many see a rapture or supernatural rescue of the church from the judgment of God in the Scriptures, but there are a few alternative views to the one we hold, which is called “pretribulationism.”

From our Rapture Position Paper on our website:

Midtribulation View

This view teaches that the rapture of the church will occur at the midpoint of the seven years of tribulation, after the first three and one-half years. In this view, only the last half of Daniel’s seventieth week is considered to be the tribulation period. The church will endure the first three and one-half years known as the wrath of men, but will escape the outpouring of God’s wrath during the final three and one-half years. The rapture of the church is said to occur in connection with the sounding of the seventh trumpet judgment and the catching up of the two witnesses in Revelation 11.

Posttribulation View

This view teaches that the rapture of the church and the second coming of Christ are facets of a single event, which will occur at the end of the tribulation period when Christ returns. The church will be on earth during the tribulation to experience the judgment of God. There are four different types of posttribulationism that emerge out of differing arguments and approaches. In fact, there is such diversity among them that they actually contradict one another. They are: Classic Posttrib, Semi-classic Posttrib, Futurist Posttrib, and Dispensational Posttrib. Discussion will be limited here.

Pre-wrath Rapture View

This view teaches that the rapture will occur sometime after the midpoint of the seven year tribulation but before the second coming. It serves as a variation of the mid-tribulation view with many similarities to posttribulationism. It divides the tribulation period into three distinct periods: 1) The Beginning of Sorrows; 2) The Great Tribulation and 3) The Day of the Lord. The church endures the first two periods, but will be removed prior to the third period, viewed as God’s wrath.

The Partial Rapture View

This view teaches that only those who are faithful and spiritual will be raptured prior to the tribulation. Those who are prepared for the Lord’s return and are found waiting and watching, will escape the terrors of the tribulation by being taken in the future rapture. Those who are not taken and enter into the tribulation period tribulation period because of their worldliness and carnality

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will be raptured progressively during the tribulation period as they become more faithful and spiritual, while still others will entirely miss the rapture. The tribulation is seen as a time of purging these believers from their sin and carnality.

The points in your notes lay out a few key characteristics of pretribulationism that lead us as a church to believe that it is the most compelling case:

a. Precedent to Israel's Future

- i. Preceding in time, order, or importance; lit. "preceding."
- ii. One must maintain a clear distinction between what passages, events, prophecies are relating to Israel, to the church, or to both. The clearer you make the distinction, where Scripture seems to, then you will notice these "two programs of God" with two distinct groups.
- iii. The church did NOT take over, replace, or fulfill the covenant promises that God made with Israel in the OT. These covenants will all find their final fulfillment in the Millennial Kingdom, where not only a future, believing generation of Israel inhabits the earth but also the redeemed from all time (including Gentiles!).
- iv. The Tribulation is a period of preparation that gets Israel ready for the Messiah's coming. God will complete His program with the church, rapture us into the heavens, and then He will resume His program with national Israel on the earth.
- v. **Romans 11:25** "Lest you be wise in your own sight, I do not want you to be unaware of this mystery, brothers: a partial hardening has come upon Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. **26** And in this way all Israel will be saved, as it is written, "The Deliverer will come from Zion, he will banish ungodliness from Jacob; **27** and this will be my covenant with them when I take away their sins."
- vi. The book of Revelation leaves room for the two programs of God.

b. Imminent in Nature

- i. About to happen; at hand; hanging over; "immanent" (different word) means inherent or existing within; any moment.

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- ii. “An imminent event is one that is always hanging overhead, is constantly ready to befall or overtake a person, is always close at hand in the sense that it could happen at any moment. Other things *may* happen before the imminent event, but nothing else *must* take place before it happens. If something else must take place before an event can happen, that event is not imminent.” Mr. Showers
- iii. So if the rapture and the second coming happen at the same time, then there would be several signs and pre-cursors to observe.
- iv. That is why **Mark 13:32** is true even when May 21, 2011 signs, books, and blogs went public: “But concerning that day or that hour, *no one knows*, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.”
- v. And because of the rapture’s imminence, may we patiently await our Savior’s return:
 - 1. **James 5:7** “Be patient, therefore, brothers, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, being patient about it, until it receives the early and the late rains. **8** You also, be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand. **9** Do not grumble against one another, brothers, so that you may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing at the door.”
 - 2. He will appear at any moment. The picture James paints is that the Judge is standing right at the door with His hand on the knob, ready to fling the door open at any moment...

c. Distinct from the Second Coming

- i. One of the biggest differences between the Rapture and the Second Coming is that the Second Coming—after the 7 years of tribulation—has many signs of His coming to earth to set up His kingdom. Other distinctions include:
 - 1. At the Rapture, we meet Him in the air; at the Second Coming, He comes to the earth.
 - 2. At the Rapture, reward and protection is the focus; at the Second Coming, judgment comes to those whom He visits.
 - 3. At the Rapture, there is no talk of establishing the millennial kingdom; at the Second Coming, that is the main objective.
 - 4. At the Rapture, saints (dead and alive) receive glorified bodies; at the Second Coming, there are no church age saints receiving glorified bodies.

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5. At the Rapture, the event precedes God's wrath; at the Second Coming, the event follows His wrath poured out on the earth.
 6. At the Rapture, we are removed from the earth; at the Second Coming, we are taken to dwell on the earth.
- ii. **2 Thessalonians 2:3** "Let no one deceive you in any way. For that day will not come, unless the rebellion comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction, **4** who opposes and exalts himself against every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God."

d. Absent from the Wrath of God

- i. Among almost all rapture views, most hold to the fact that the church is exempt from God's wrath. This doesn't mean that in this life we won't encounter trials and tribulation (**John 15:18–20**). But this kind of tribulation is distinct from the future outpouring of God's wrath on the wicked, irreverent, and Godless.
- ii. In Revelation 4 and 5 we see that the scroll is sealed secure. When the One who is worthy opens the seals, the beginning of God's wrath begins to be poured out on all mankind.
- iii. **Revelation 3:10** "Because you have kept my word about patient endurance, I will keep you from the hour of trial that is coming on the whole world, to try those who dwell on the earth."

Conclusion:

As you think about the rapture, what are some different ways to live in light of His return? (discuss in groups of 2s and 3s)

I'd go as so far to say that if you have been mindless of the return of Christ, you are being careless about the first coming of Christ. If the cross of Christ is your boast in life (**Gal 6:14**), then His return will be your greatest anticipation. And this is because of the centrality of Christ in the revealed plan and will of God for the church.