

# The Rapture of the Church

## *The blessed hope!*

### Would you open your Bibles to...

1Thes. 4:13 *But I do not want you to be ignorant*, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope.

1Thes. 4:14 For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus.

1Thes. 4:15 For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep.

1Thes. 4:16 For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first.

1Thes. 4:17 Then we who are alive and remain shall be *caught up* together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord.

### Pray

### Intro

√ The Rapture of the Church

For those of us who were saved during the Jesus People movement of the 60's and 70's you'll remember that one of the things that drove our evangelism and fueled our passion for Christ was the doctrine of the Rapture!

That knowledge that Jesus might come at any time to snatch the Church from the earth before the Tribulation began...

...provided all the motivation we needed to stay busy about the Lord's work.

However, in the intervening years we've been subjected to numerous failed predictions made by misinformed pastors and prognosticators who incorrectly foretold the day of the Christ's return for His Church.

The result is that many who once held a firm hope that Jesus would in fact rescue the Church from the earth before the beginning of the Tribulation...

...have either abandoned that hope all together or now hold to some other view of the Rapture placing it somewhere in the middle or at the end of the Tribulation.

Ex. Most recently we've had to endure the so-called "Revelation 12 Sign"

Proponents predicted that the alignment of the constellations of Virgo, Jupiter, with the moon, sun and stars would be the literal fulfillment of what the Apostle John recorded in Revelation 12 concluding that the Rapture would come between September 21 and 23, 2017!

Of course there was no Rapture.

The result of these failed predictions is that...

They make the Church, and Christianity in general, look foolish.

They muddle the truth concerning the legitimate Biblical hope we have for the Rapture of the Church.

They destroy the faith of their followers.

They confuse unbelievers who can't discern the truth from a lie.

Their failed predictions often spawn additional errors that give rise to even more dangerous beliefs and cults (Millerites ~ Jehovah's Witnesses ~ Mormons ~ Branch Dividians, etc.)

So, this morning I would like to breath fresh life into the doctrine of the Rapture of the church!

To remind us that God has indeed promised that there will be a generation of Christians that they will never experience Death!

Instead, like Enoch of old that generation of believers will one moment be walking on this earth, and the next...

...be walking in the presence of Jesus Christ in the heavenly realm!

They will be literally snatched from this earth to meet Jesus in the air bypassing death altogether!

## What is the Rapture?

√ The Rapture

Let's begin by dealing with the first contention that is often raised by people who reject the doctrine of the Rapture...that is they confidently say...

*"The word 'rapture' isn't even in the Bible!"*

At which point you realize that you're dealing with a person who isn't familiar with the original text, which was not written in English!

That's because the word "rapture" is an English transliteration of the Latin word "*rapturous*", which is found in the Latin translation of 1 Thess. 4:17 where Paul writes...

*“Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up... (rapturos)”*

The original Greek Paul used and translated “caught up” is harpazo, not as catchy as “rapture” but they both mean...

*“to snatch away suddenly”.*

As the doctrine of the “catching away” developed in the Early Church the word “rapture” stuck.

√ Harpazo in the New Testament

Additionally, we find the word “harpazo” used a number of other times in the Bible that provides us with some insight regarding how the word was used by the writers of the New Testament...

...and what it means.

Ex. Philip in Acts 8:39

Act 8:39 Now when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught Philip away, so that the eunuch saw him no more; and he went on his way rejoicing.

Paul in II Cor. 2: 2 & 4

2Co 12:2 I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago--whether in the body I do not know, or whether out of the body I do not know, God knows--such a one was caught up to the third heaven.

2Co 12:3 And I know such a man--whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows--

2Co 12:4 how he was caught up into Paradise and heard inexpressible words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter.

So, we find that the word “rapture” is in the Bible (Latin—*harpazo* in the Greek) and that it means to be “caught away” or “snatched away”...

And as we’ve seen in our examples with Philip and Paul, both were caught up by the Lord and taken to another place!

Connecting the dots to our opening text where Paul talks about the Rapture of the Church we discover who gets caught away by the Lord...

...and where He takes them.

1Thes. 4:16 For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first.

1Thes. 4:17 Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up (*harpazo*) together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord.

Summary...at the Rapture of the Church

There will be a shout from Heaven  
The trumpet of God sounds  
The bodies of the dead “in Christ” are resurrected  
Then living Christians are snatched away to meet Jesus  
in the air

So, when you meet someone who says that the word “rapture” isn’t in the Bible...

...you can show them that it is in the Bible—multiple times, and that it is an exciting promise!

√ Resurrection

I will admit that Paul's encouragement to the believers in Thessalonica leave out an important point...that is, how can living Christians ascend to Heaven in these old bodies?!

Great question!

Paul doesn't leave us guessing because that was a stumbling block to all of Greek friends so in his letter to the Corinthians who lived about a 150 miles south of the Thessalonians he wrote...

1Co 15:50 Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does corruption inherit incorruption.

1Co 15:51 Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep (die), but we shall all be changed--

1Co 15:52 in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.

Here Paul tells us that when the Rapture comes it will happen suddenly (in the twinkling of an eye ~ explain)...

...and that both those who are alive and the bodies of those Christians who have already died.

Will be changed in an instant!

Exchanging this mortal body for a new glorified body as we go to meet the Lord in the air!

Where Paul tells us we will dwell with Jesus forever!

You can understand then why the Rapture is an exciting promise, especially to those living when it happens as they get to skip the whole death thing and move right into Heaven!

## Timing of the Rapture

√ Timing of the Rapture

In view of what we've just learned we can understand why every generation of Christians have wondered when the Rapture might happen!

And, many have tried (and failed) to predict the date of the rapture.

Ex. In my life

Harold Camping (twice), Edgar Whisenant ("88 reasons for the Rapture in 88"), and most recently David Meade (The Rev. 12 Sign".

All have ignored the testimony of Jesus concerning the timing of the Rapture...

*"But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only."*

*Matt. 24:36*

Jesus is clear that the timing of the Rapture is unknown to all but the Father.

That's is an important point because it distinguishes the Rapture from the 2<sup>nd</sup> Advent—the Return of the King at the end of the ages.

Ex. Gabriel's instruction to Daniel concerning the end of days and the King's return...

*"And from the time that the daily sacrifice is taken away, and the abomination of desolation is set up,*

*there shall be one thousand two hundred and ninety days.*” ~ *Dan. 12:11*

That is, those alive during the time of the Tribulation could simply begin counting down the days till the Lord’s return from the time that the Antichrist sits himself in the rebuilt Temple in Jerusalem!

So, *if* the day of the Rapture is unknown, and the season of the Lord’s Return can be known (to those alive during the Tribulation)...

...*then* they cannot be the same event! (we’ll provide more evidence this evening to show that they must be two separate events.)

So while we can’t know the day of the Rapture perhaps a more important question is...

Will it happen *before*, *during*, or *after* the Great Tribulation described in Rev. 6-19...

...right! Because the Tribulation period will be the worst time in human history (Matt. 24:21)—and who wants to be on earth for that!

Let’s start in Rev. 4:1 where we’re given an interesting picture, which I would suggest, gives us a hint regarding *how* and *when* the Rapture takes place!

## Pretribulation Evidence

### √ Overview

Because our time is limited I’m just going to give you an overview—my notes with all the scriptures will be posted on the church website.



Rev 4:1 After these things I looked, and behold, a door standing open in heaven. And the first voice which I heard was like a trumpet speaking with me, saying, "Come up here, and I will show you things which must take place after this."

Note the symbolism...

John ~ his name literally means "beloved" (the Church— Rev. 21:9)

Sees a "door" open in Heaven (Jesus—John 10:7)

Hears a voice like a trumpet (shout of the Groom) saying, "come up here" (just like in 1 Thess. 4:16)

Those familiar with the outline of the Revelation will recognize that chapter 4:1 begins the 3rd and final section of the Revelation indicated by the words...

*"after this." (meta tauta)*

That's a significant phrase because it was used in the 1<sup>st</sup> chapter by Jesus to provide us with what I suggest is a divine outline for the book of the Revelation!

Rev 1:19 "Write the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will take place after this."

Note the outline the Lord gives us by which we can interpret the Revelation. There are three main points:

1) First Jesus tells John to...

*"Write the things which you have seen"*

That is, John was to write the things, which he saw as recorded in chapter 1 ~ the revelation of Jesus Christ in all His glory!

- 2) Next, John was instructed to write...

*"the things which are (present tense)"*

...which we find in chapters 2 & 3, the chapters that contain the messages to seven literal churches that existed at the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> Century.

- 3) Finally, the Lord tells John to write...

*"the things which will take place after this."*

The key words here are "after this" ~ *meta tauta* ~ the same words Jesus uses to open chapter 4!

That is, what we find in chapters 6-22 is all future!

Recording God's plan to reclaim the Earth from Satan's dominion.

His message to an unrepentant world

Judgment upon the kingdoms & nations of the Gentiles

The redemption of Israel and the fulfillment of His promises to the Jewish people including the establishment of His Kingdom on Earth!

It speaks of that future period of time known as variously as the Great Tribulation (Matt. 24:21), Daniel's 70<sup>th</sup> week (Dan. 9:27) and the time of Jacob's Trouble (Jer. 30:7).

- √ So, where is the church during the Tribulation (chapters 6-19)?

That is, as we read the unfolding drama of the Revelation with all of the Seal, Trumpet and Bowl Judgments, an important question to ask is...

## *“Where’s the Church?”*

John tells us where we are...

Rev 5:9 And they sang a new song, saying: "You are worthy to take the scroll, and to open its seals; for You were slain, and have redeemed us to God by Your blood out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation,

Rev 5:10 and have made us kings (a kingdom) and priests to our God; and we shall reign on the earth."

The only people who fit the description of this Heavenly choir is the Church!

So, the events described in Revelation chapters 4 to 19 take place "after these things" ~ that is, after the end of the Church Age.

Also, note that all of the judgments described in the Revelation come after the Church is in Heaven (chapters 6-18).

And, that the Church will "reign on earth", which means they have to return from Heaven!

It’s also significant to note that where the word "church" which was used so prominently in chapters 2 to 3 (18 times)...

...is completely missing from the chapters 6 to 18 of the Revelation which describe the events of the Tribulation!

√ The Hope of a Pre-tribulation Rapture

That alone is not sufficient reason to hope in a pretribulation rapture, however, we find an overwhelming volume of scriptures that point that blessed hope!

### Promise to the faithful Church of Philadelphia

Rev 3:10 "Because you have kept My command to persevere, I also will keep you *from* (not through) the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth.

### Promise to Christians in general

1Th 5:9 For God *did not appoint us to wrath*, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ,

The Tribulation constitutes God's "wrath" on the unrepentant of the Earth; as the Church is not appointed to His wrath, it cannot be on Earth when God pours out His wrath!

### Promise to proceed the Antichrist

2Th 2:1 Now, brethren, concerning the *coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him* (clear reference to the rapture), we ask you,

2Th 2:2 not to be soon shaken in mind or troubled, either by spirit or by word or by letter, as if from us, as though the day of Christ had come.

2Th 2:3 Let no one deceive you by any means; for that Day will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition,

2Th 2:4 who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God.

2Th 2:5 Do you not remember that when I was still with you I told you these things?

2Th 2:6 And now you know what is restraining, that he may be revealed in his own time.

2Th 2:7 For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only *He who now restrains will do so until He is taken out of the way*.

2Th 2:8 And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord will consume with the breath of His mouth and destroy with the brightness of His coming.

The point, the Antichrist cannot be revealed until after the “restraining” influence of the Holy Spirit in the Church is removed from earth!

The “revelation” of the Antichrist comes with the breaking of the first seal in Revelation 6, which constitutes the beginning of the Tribulation!

Therefore, the Church cannot be here when the Tribulation takes place because they must be removed before the Antichrist can be revealed!

## Types foreshadowing a pre-tribulation Rapture

√ Enoch

Are there any examples where God delivered His people from His wrath in times past?

Heb 11:5 By faith Enoch was taken away so that he did not see death, “and was not found, because God had taken him”; for before he was taken he had this testimony, that he pleased God.

When was Enoch taken? Before the Flood, before the wrath of God fell upon an unrepentant world!

Enoch a type of the Church  
Noah a type of Israel

So, Enoch serves as a prototype of the Rapture of God’s people prior to the outpouring of His wrath on unrepentant world.

√ Lot

Lot was delivered from Sodom and Gomorrah before God's wrath fell upon those wicked cities. The angels said...

*"Hurry, escape there. For I cannot do anything until you arrive there." Gen. 19:22*

Interesting that the Angels, God's messengers who carried out His wrath upon the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah said that they couldn't begin to pour out God's wrath until...

...Lot was removed (literally snatched away)!

√ John 14 and the Jewish wedding tradition

John 14:1 "Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me.

John 14:2 In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you.

John 14:3 And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also.

Comes to the Bride's father and pays a dowry – Acts 20:28

Goes home to prepare the bridal chamber – John 14:1-3

Returns at an unknown time set by the Father – Matt. 24:36

Takes bride to bridal chamber for 7 days – Dan. 9:27

Presents the bride to the wedding guests – Rev. 19

Ap. Jesus is coming for His Bride!

All who have trusted in Him will be snatched away to the place that He has prepared for us!

## When will the Rapture happen?

√ When will the Rapture happen?

For the last 2,000 years believers have asked that question. Many have tried to set the date and been wrong including both cults and misinformed Christians...

Adventists (Miller ~ 1843 & 1844)

J.W.'s (too many times to list)

Wisenaught (1988)

Harold Camping (1994 & 2011)

The Biblical truth is that we have not been told the day or the hour that the Lord will take His people to be with Him. In fact, Jesus explicitly told us that we would not know the day!

Mr 13:32 “But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.

Thus, we find Jesus and the disciples constantly exhorting believers to be watchful!

For example at I Thess. 5:1-4

1Th 5:1 But concerning the times and the seasons, brethren, you have no need that I should write to you.

1Th 5:2 For you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night.

1Th 5:3 For when they say, "Peace and safety!" then sudden destruction comes upon them, as labor pains upon a pregnant woman. And they shall not escape.

1Th 5:4 But you, brethren, are not in darkness, so that this Day should overtake you as a thief.  
So, the Rapture of the church is characterized as coming...

Unexpectedly ~ suddenly ~ like a thief!

So the time of the rapture is unknown!

It hasn't been revealed to mankind and therefore it is folly to try and guess when it is coming.

Instead we are called to ready!

## Who goes in the Rapture?

√ Who gets taken?

Everything we've discussed is somewhat academic – what really matters is who gets snatched away by the Lord and are you one of them?!

The promise of the Rapture as seen in all of the scripture that we've looked at is exclusively given to believers...

...those who have trusted in Jesus Christ!

With all that is going on in the World today, the general signs spoken of by Jesus seen on our nightly news, I'd say the hour is late! God says...

*“Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation.” ~ 2 Cor. 6:2*

The idea of a pretribulation rapture has very purifying effect upon the heart of a believer and is a sobering consideration for the unbeliever.

The believer...

Keeps our priorities straight.

Maintains a healthy fear of the Lord when we're faced with temptation.



The unbeliever...

Sober warning - don't wait till after the rapture to trust in Christ; the Tribulation is the worst time in the history of man.

Don't mock like those who watched Noah build the ark.

Ap. Are you ready?

*"And the Spirit and the bride say, "Come!" And let him who hears say, "Come!" And let him who thirsts come. And whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely." Rev. 22:17*

Or, as we all said during the Jesus People movement...

*"Maranatha!"*

## Close

√ We'll talk about the Return of the King this evening

Including where Jesus returns to and what He does once He's back...

...and more evidence why the Rapture of the Church and the Return of the King must be two separate events!