

THE RAPTURE OF THE CHURCH

Text:

John 14:1-3

II Thessalonians 4:16-18

C.S. Lewis said, "It is since Christians have largely ceased to think of the other world that they have become so ineffective in this one." Joseph Stowell wrote, "When we begin to believe the reality of the other side, we start behaving differently on this side."

In the comic strip "Peanuts" Snoopy was writing a book and he began, "It was a dark and stormy night...." Lucy said, "Silly dog, don't you know that every good story starts with "Once upon a time?" So then Snoopy begins, "Once upon a time, it was a dark and stormy night." So many are fearful and afraid to face the future. For the Christian and observer of Bible prophecy we see past the dark and stormy night into the "happily ever after." If we take these Bible verses seriously, how can we not only be optimistic, but fearless? "Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto him, That ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that the day of Christ is at hand" (II Thessalonians 2:1, 2). "For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ, Who died for us, that, whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with Him. Wherefore comfort yourselves together, and edify one another, even as also ye do" (I Thessalonians 5:9-11). "Wherefore comfort one another with these words" (I Thessalonians 4:18).

The next thing we believers look forward to is the rapture. When you break down the etymology, the word "rapture" means, "to seize and carry away" or "to catch it and runaway with it." Some have argued that the word "rapture" is not used in the Bible, yet if you examine I Thessalonians 4:17, you will see the phrase, "Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air...." The phrase "caught up" is from the Greek word, "harpazo" which means to seize, to catch away, or catch up. Let me share with you two other places where this word is used: in John 10:28, Jesus said, "And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of My hand. My Father, which gave them Me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of My Father's hand." The word "pluck" is "harpazo." In Acts 8:39 the Bible says, "And when they were come up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip, that the eunuch saw him no more: and he went on his

way rejoicing.” The phrase, “caught away” is the word “harpazo.” This is a perfect example of the coming rapture of the church. In the same way that Phillip was miraculously picked up and carried by Divine transportation from the desert to the coastal town of Azotus, so also will the rapture take place for us, from earth to heaven. And in the Latin translation of the Scriptures when it says, “caught up” in I Thessalonians 4:17, we see the Latin word is “rapturo” is used, so actually in the Latin Scriptures, the word “rapture” is used.

In theological terms we define ourselves as premillennial, pre-tribulational believers. The Bible promises the believers in Revelation 20:6, “Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years.” We are pre-tribulation, meaning that we believe that Jesus will return for His own before the tribulation that shall come upon the whole earth. There are other views such as the: a) split or partial rapture, meaning, only the faithful in Christ shall be taken up. The problem with this theory is that the Bible says in I Corinthians 15:51, “Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed.” It is interesting to note that the word for “sleep” is taken from the Greek word, “koimao,” where we get our word “cemetery.” So in other words, we shall not all be going to the cemetery, but all of us will be changed. In I Corinthians 15:23 the Word of God gives us the assurance that “...they that are Christ’s at His coming” shall be raptured. Therefore, the rapture must include all who are in Christ. Then there is the: b) mid-tribulation or pre-wrath rapture. This is the belief that just before the time of great tribulation (Matthew 24:21) or Jacob’s Trouble (Jeremiah 30:7) Jesus will come for His own, which would land in the middle of the seven year period allotted to Israel. According to Revelation 6:1, when the seals of judgment are opened up, which is the beginning of the seven years, the church is already in heaven. The word “ecclesia” from where we translate the word “church” or “churches” is used 19 times in the book of the Revelation. Eighteen times the word is found in the first three chapters and the final time is in Revelation 22. In Revelation 4:1 we see the rapture of the church is signified: “After this I looked, and, behold, a door was opened in heaven: and the first voice which I heard was as it were of a trumpet talking with me; which said, Come up hither, and I will shew thee things which must be hereafter.” In Revelation 5:9 we hear the song of heaven: “And they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation.” Once the church is raptured before the seven year period, it is not mentioned again until the end of the prophecy in Revelation 22:6. There is also the 3) post-tribulation rapture. This is the belief that Christ raptures the church at the end of the seven-year period. To make it clear, there are two phases of the Lord’s return: the Lord comes first for His own, then He comes with His own. Some have called the post-tribulation rapture, the yo-yo theory. It is up and then down. The problem here would be in Matthew 25:31 through 34 where we see the Lord comes in glory and separates the sheep from the goats, showing us that during the time of tribulation people are saved in

this special dispensation. Those of us saved during the church age will be returning with our Lord as Jude, verse 14 says, "And Enoch also, the seventh from Adam, prophesied of these, saying, Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousands of His saints."

We are Pre-Tribulational in our eschatology (study of last things). We believe that when Daniel promised 70 weeks consigned to Israel, the final 70th week (Daniel 9:24-27) will begin when the Church is taken out of the way. In this grand and glorious belief we see that:

I. The Rapture is certain.

John 14:1-3. I Corinthians 15:51-58. In I Corinthians 15:52 the word "moment" is translated from the Greek word "atomos" from which we get our word "atom." The rapture will take place in the smallest division of time - one "atom" of time.

I Thessalonians 4:13-17; Philipians 3:20, 21

2. The Rapture rescues.

I Thessalonians 2:10; I Thessalonians 5:9; Revelation 3:10; II Thessalonians 2:1-12; John 5:24

3. The Rapture is imminent.

I Corinthians 1:7; I Corinthians 16:22; I Thessalonians 1:10; I Titus 3:13;

I Thessalonians 4:18

Conclusion:

"Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing" II Timothy 4:8.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Johnny Pope". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a long horizontal line extending to the right from the end of the name.