

The Rapture

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

Intro

We often take great care and time to prepare for our careers, for our professions, for our marriage for having children. We prepare our retirement portfolio, the life insurance forms and our wills. We prepare meals and deals, budgets and vacation trips. BUT all these preparations are temporal – only as long as we live. Our lives are transient; we are here on this planet for a very brief time.

BUT the greatest preparation of all, in terms of lasting importance and value, is the preparation we make for eternity. Are you prepared for the day when you give you last breath? Are you prepared for eternity?

For me that's the most important preparation of all preparations. But sad to say that many, many people are not prepared when their heart beats for the last time.

Years ago I heard about an insurance agent who would approach potential clients and say, 'I had a dream about you last night ... I dreamt you died ... and you didn't have insurance!' The amazing thing is that his approach actually worked—he made a fine living on selling insurance policies. But God has an insurance plan way much better that lasts forever and it's totally without charge to you.

His insurance policy is eternal and made only available through Jesus Christ. Christ is the only guarantee of life eternal. It is by receiving Him into your heart and life that you will live forever. Jesus said in John 3:16 *“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”*

Last week we looked at what happens when you die. For believers in Christ they go immediately to be with Christ in His Father's house but for the nonbelievers they go immediately into Hades, where they suffer waiting for the last great judgment day (Rev. 20:11-15)

BUT the next event will be a day of great surprise. It's called the rapture, when believers who are still alive will be taken suddenly to join Christ in heaven.

The Rapture

The rapture is not a word found in the English Bible but it is in the old Vulgate Latin translation. The word is derived from the Latin verb, *rapere*, “to seize,” hence, “to transport.” The term has been applied to the teaching of the “catching away” or transporting of believers from the earth to heaven by Christ.

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, (The Rapture Passage)

Paul begins in 1 Thess. 4:13 with these words, *“Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep...”* *“those who fall asleep”* are the Christians who have died. He's just using a common metaphor to express that—in the same way we say a person “has passed away”. We mean they died but the idiom communicates it in a more sensitive way.

Body Asleep - Not the Soul

Those who are asleep means believers who have died. Believers who die do not experience death in its fearful reality because of their life in Christ. Death has been transformed into sleep. The difference between sleep and death is that sleep is a temporary rest and that is a fitting term for Christians. When they die their spirit and soul goes to be with the Lord immediately, *“Absent from*

the body, present with the Lord." (2 Cor. 5:8). Their body goes into the grave not permanently but only to sleep until it is awakened when Christ comes for His Church, the true believers.

Stephen's Example (Acts 7:59-60)

Look at Acts chapter 7 just to give you a full understanding of this. You remember when Stephen was being stoned it says in verse 60, "*Then he fell on his knees and cried out, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." When he had said this, he fell asleep.*" It was death from the human viewpoint. It was death from the clinical viewpoint. It was sleep because it was only temporary rest for his body. His spirit didn't go into unconsciousness. If you don't think so, look at verse 59. He prayed and said, "*Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.*" What?...*receive my spirit.*" It was only his body that was asleep. It is not soul sleep, it is body sleep or rest in the grave. Sleep is a metaphor for death, since death's finality and horror will be removed by the assurance of the resurrection.

Jesus Taught About the Rapture

The coming of Christ to rapture His followers is similar to the days of Noah and the days of Lot. Luke 17:34-35, "*I tell you, on that night two people will be in one bed; one will be taken and the other left. Two women will be grinding grain together; one will be taken and the other left.*"

Also in Matthew 24:41-42, "*Two shall be grinding at the mill; the one shall be taken, and the other left. Watch therefore: for you know not what hour your Lord comes.*"

These Passages Teach the Following:

1. It will occur without previous notice to the bulk of humanity.
2. Not everyone will be raptured from the same family.
3. The ones taken will be in physical form, not metaphoric or in spiritual form.
4. They will be taken away suddenly without previous notice.
5. People will be taken to a place of refuge, similar to Noah's ark.

Biblical Evidence of Previous Raptures

Do we have evidence of this sort of thing happening before in the history of humanity?

The Bible gives us three examples:

1/ Enoch - "*By faith Enoch was taken up so that he would not see death; and he was not found because God took him up; for he obtained the witness that before his being taken up he was pleasing to God*" (Hebrews 11:5).

So, Enoch was taken to another place away from Earth.

2/ Elijah was taken to heaven in a chariot of fire as seen by the prophet Elisha.

"And it came to pass, as they still went on, and talked, that, behold, there appeared a chariot of fire, and horses of fire, and parted them both asunder; and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven" (2 Kings 2:11).

Elijah was seen leaving in physical human form; he did not suddenly "disappear" as some people think the rapture will be.

In the same way that God took Enoch, and Elijah, Christ will also take us to heaven, when He returns to Earth for the rapture. We will be taken in the full human form (body, soul, spirit), not just in the spirit form.

1 Thessalonians 4:16-17; 5:1-3 (The Rapture Passage)

According to Scripture, the believers living at the time of the Lord's coming will be taken away to meet the Lord in the air. It will be a glorious time of reunion with our loved ones who have gone before us, and best of all, as John proclaimed, "*They shall see his face*" (Rev. 22:4). No wonder that Paul described the Lord's coming as the "*blessed hope*" (Titus 2:13).

At the Rapture the Lord will return to resurrect the dead in Christ and transport the believers still living on the earth (1 Thess. 4:16-17). Only those who have been born again, who have received Christ will hear the '*shout*' that will complete the Church age and begin the Day of the Lord. Our bodies will be fashioned after our Lord's resurrection body. Although our resurrection bodies will be different in quality, we will be recognizable.

According to Allan R. Killen, "Christ arose in the body in which He had suffered, leaving an empty tomb. His new body had 'flesh and bones,' and yet, though He was absolutely recognizable, its qualities were gloriously changed. The believer's new body is not to be 'flesh and blood,' for this is the nature of his/her mortal body. The raptured believers will be like the angels in that they will "*neither marry nor given in marriage*" (Matt. 22:29-30). New body is described in 1 Cor. 15:35-50.

Why the Rapture?

1/ Because flesh and blood cannot inherit heaven (1 Cor. 15:50).

1 Cor. 15:51-52 "*Listen, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed - in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed.*"

- Our bodies will change extremely fast into a glorified body.
- In the twinkling of an eye
- The eye can move much faster than any other part of our bodies.
- It will be instantaneous.
- Our bodies will be transformed.

Phil. 3:20-21 "*But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly wait a Saviour from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.*"

2/ Because the Church is spared from the judgment and wrath of God.

- 1 Thess. 1:10 "*And to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead - Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath.*"
- 1 Thess. 5:9 "*For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation...*"
- Noah and family were spared from the flood.
- Lot and daughters were spared from the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah.

Those Who Miss the Rapture

Eph. 5:5 "*For of this you can be sure: No immoral, impure or greedy person - such a man is an idolater - has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God.*"

Rev. 9:20-21 "*The rest of mankind...did not repent...of their murders, their witchcraft, their sexual immorality or their thefts.*"

How Should Believers Live in Light of the Rapture?

1. Encourage Each Other - "Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another - and all the more as you see the Day approaching." Hebrews 10:25. The "Day" is the Lord's return for His church.

2. Stand Firm in the Faith - focusing on Christ's coming also motivates believers to godly living. James 5:8 "You too, be patient and stand firm, because the Lord's coming is near."

3. Live an Upright Life - "Be found by Him in peace, spotless and blameless" (2 Peter 3:14).
"The grace of God...teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope - the glorious appearing of our great God and Saviour, Jesus Christ." (Titus 2:11-13)

4. Waiting Eagerly - "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. ⁸Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day—and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing." (2 Tim. 4:7-8)

The primary purpose of 1 Thessalonians 4:18 is not to give a chronology of future events but of encouragement to believers. Don't be in despair and live a life of godliness as you wait for the Lord to come and take you. Live for Him with a devoted heart.

