

Pastor Robert Rutta

The Rapture of the Church

II Timothy 3:1

The next major event on God's prophetic calendar is the Rapture of church-age believers. The word "rapture" does not appear in the Bible, but the event is described in detail. It refers to the catching away of the church-age saints at the end of the age.

I. The Promise of the Rapture.

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

Our ATTITUDE concerning future events.

He said, "Let not your heart be troubled" (v.1).

- a. In other words, Jesus is saying, "I know your lives are full of difficulties and troubles.
- b. Don't get wrapped up in those things, but look to Me."

We should have a calm ASSURANCE.

He said, "I to go prepare a place for you..."

Jesus also says, "**I will come again and receive you to Myself.**"

The Bible is filled with the promises of God.

We can be assured that He will keep them all...including this one!

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

13 But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope.

14 For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him.

15 For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep.

16 For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first:

17 Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord.

18 Wherefore comfort one another with these words.

- **The Rapture is an event in which the dead in Christ will be raised** (I Th. 4:14-16) and the living New Testament saints will be changed and glorified (I Th. 4:17).
- **The dead in Christ are presently with Him in heaven** (I Th. 4:14). Therefore, the dead in Christ do not "sleep in the grave" as some false teachers claim.
- **The Rapture is the believer's hope and comfort** (1 Th. 4:13, 18).

This is what we are waiting for.

We are not looking for the Antichrist and the Great Tribulation.

The Rapture is a source of great encouragement and motivation to godly Christian service.

"Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord" (1 Cor. 15:58).

The Rapture helps to motivate the Lord's people to stay awake spiritually, and it helps to motivate the churches to stay busy in the work of preaching the gospel to lost souls before it is too late.

If the Rapture did not occur until the end of the Great Tribulation, it could not produce hope and comfort for the Christian.

II. The Explanation of the Rapture

A. The MYSTERY of the Rapture

1 Co 15:51-52 Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.

1. "Mystery" does not mean "mysterious."
2. In the Bible a "mystery" is something that had not been revealed before but now could be known.
3. In the Old Testament, men believed that people came into God's presence by dying and then being raised again.
4. But now it is revealed that "we shall not all sleep (die) but we shall all be changed."
5. Some won't have to die to go to heaven!
6. At the rapture, some will be living, many will have died, "but we shall all be changed."

“Incorruptible” means that the resurrection body will be incapable of such things as pain and sickness.
“Immortal” means incapable of dying.

1 John 3:2

² Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is.

B. The PROCESS of the Rapture

1 Thessalonians 4:16-17

¹⁶ For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first:

¹⁷ Then we which are alive *and* remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord.

The trumpet will blow:

- a. In the Old Testament, the single blast of the trumpet was either a call to war or to worship.
- b. At the rapture, Jesus will usher us into His presence and we will worship Him.
- c. At the same time, the trumpet will signal God's final battle with Satan.
- d. Before one nation declares war on another country, the first act is to call the ambassadors home, to get them out of harm's way.
- e. In much the same way, God will protect us from His wrath as the battle begins.

In V.13, Paul declares that he doesn't want us to be "ignorant" or uninformed about those who die.

“But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope.”

He doesn't want us to be overcome with "sorrow" as though there is "no hope." Why? The Lord is coming!

Note that Paul gives us no time, signs or preceding events.

- a. There are many events that will precede the SECOND ADVENT, (one-world religion, one-world government, etc.)
- b. But the rapture will come unexpectedly.

V.14 points out who will be raptured, those who "believe that Jesus died and rose again."

V.14 also says that when Christ returns in the rapture, He "will bring with Him those who sleep (have died) in Jesus."

Christ will come with those who have died in their faith.

That means that they are with Him now.

2 Corinthians 5:8 says that "to be absent from the body" is "to be present with the Lord."

V.15 says "by the word of the Lord" in other words, Paul isn't telling us what he thinks will happen, but this is from the Lord!

V.16 says that when the Lord descends, the bodies of the dead in Christ "shall rise first."

We joke sometimes and say that it is because they have to travel 6ft farther than the rest of us.

The point is more for assurance to those whose loved ones have gone on before...they will NOT be left behind!

V.17 says then we, who "are alive and remain" will be "caught up" (raptured) with them to "meet the Lord in the air."

(Paul expected to be in that number. We can see that in the word :”we.”

And "we shall ever be with the Lord.")

III. The Timing of the Rapture

2 Thessalonians 2:1-4

¹ Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and *by* our gathering together unto him,

² 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.

³ **Let no man deceive you by any means: for *that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition;***

⁴ **Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God.**

Some of the people in the church in Thessalonica were afraid that they were in the tribulation.

The “day of Christ” is speaking of the entire series of events that goes from the Rapture, Tribulation, Second Coming, etc

Paul beseeches them not to be “soon shaken in mind, or be troubled.” v2

(He is saying, “Don’t let anyone trick you and say that the day of Christ is here.”)

The “coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and *by* our gathering together unto him,” refers to the Rapture as described in I Thessalonians 4: 16-17.

Our gathering to be with the Lord is something that is intended to encourage us.

They would not have been afraid of that.

Hebrews 10:25

²⁵ Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some *is*; but exhorting *one another*: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.

When he said that they didn't have to worry "as that the day of Christ is at hand" he was saying that the Tribulation **and all the things that were fearful could not be at hand** because the Rapture had not yet occurred.

Since the Rapture would occur first, they didn't need to be shaken.

(Some try to make the "day of Christ" in v2 to be just the Rapture so they can say that the antichrist must appear before that can happen.

They usually stop there and do not look at the next verses.

V6-8 destroy that explanation.

Usually those who take that view of v1-4 ignore v6-8.

They redefine "day of Christ" and ignore the following verses.

That is a sleight of hand that is dishonest in Biblical Study.)

These verses are very clear. They only become unclear if you:

- Alter the definition of "day of Christ" and claim that it is only speaking of the rapture
- Remove it from context and ignore v6-8 (that is deceptive)

V3 He warned them, "**Let no man deceive you by any means: for *that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first.***"

The Day of Christ (the events triggered after the Rapture) will not come except there is first a **falling away** - an 'apostasy.

Once the Day of Christ is underway, then that apostasy will occur and the antichrist will be revealed.

As the true church is removed, all that will remain will be the apostate church.

They will usher in the antichrist.

2 Thessalonians 2:6-8

⁶ And now ye know what withholdeth that he might be revealed in his time.

⁷ For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: **only he who now letteth *will let, until he be taken out of the way.***

⁸ **And then shall that Wicked be revealed,** whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming:

Paul reminds the Thessalonian church that they already knew who was restraining Satan from revealing himself.

The Holy Spirit, as he indwells believers is holding back the mystery of iniquity and Satan's goal of world control.

The Christian, with the Holy Spirit indwelling them, is to be the salt of the earth.

The Lord working in us is a purifying agent that keeps the devil from doing all that he would like to do.

The Holy Spirit is mentioned in Scripture as the restrainer of sin (Gen. 6:3; Isa. 59:19).

Only when His restraining influence is removed will Satan have free reign.

As the Christians are removed, with the Holy Spirit indwelling us, then the restraint of Satan's program will be removed.

2:8 It will be "**then that Wicked be revealed.**"

We can sum these verses up this way:

- Don't be afraid that you are in the Tribulation (day of Christ).
- Why? Because the Lord hasn't come yet.
- Why hasn't the antichrist appeared yet? Because the Holy Spirit is holding him back.
- When will that change? v7 "**only he who now letteth will let, until he be taken out of the way.** It will change when the Holy Spirit is taken out of the way.
- When He is removed (as we are taken) then the antichrist can step forward and he will be revealed. V8

The first three chapters of the book of Revelation include letters to seven churches. To the church in Philadelphia, He writes:

Revelation 3:10-11

¹⁰ Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth.

¹¹ **Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown.**

Jesus says to these believers, I will "keep you from the hour of temptation".

- a. The word 'temptation' here refers to a specific period of time, not just temptation in general.
- b. Notice the next phrase, it is a trial that will "come upon the whole world, to try them that dwell upon the earth."
- c. This is in reference to the only world-wide trial on the prophetic calendar... the TRIBULATION.

I am looking for the Rapture.

I have no idea when it will be, but I long for the day.

I believe that fits with Scripture.

IV. The Imminency of the Rapture

The Rapture of church-age saints is imminent.

The imminency of the Rapture means it can happen any time, whereas the Second Coming is said to be preceded by specific signs.

(We will compare those two events and see the differences later on in another study.)

In I Thess 4:13-18 Paul speaks of the rapture and says "we which are alive and remain..."

He expected to be in that number.

Titus 2:11-15

¹¹ For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men,

¹² Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world;

¹³ **Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ;**

¹⁴ Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.

¹⁵ These things speak, and exhort, and rebuke with all authority. Let no man despise thee.

As Paul was teaching Titus how that he should be the right kind of Pastor to his people, he says that there is a way that we should live.

V12 Deny the sins of the world and live godly.

V13 Look for the coming of our Lord.

V15 He commands Titus to teach these things and says that no man should despise him for living that way and looking for the Lord.

In Heb 10:25 after we are told not to forsake the assembling of ourselves together we are told to exhort "one another: and so much the more as we see the day approaching."

Hebrews 10:24-25

²⁴ And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works:

²⁵ Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some *is*; but exhorting *one another*: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.

We are supposed to be living a godly life and watching for the Lord to return and as we see that day draw near we see an even greater need to assemble ourselves and to exhort each other.

"For yet a little while, and He that shall come will come, and will not tarry" (Heb 10:37).

Throughout the New Testament I see the people of God being told to watch and be ready for the Lord to return.

There is supposed to be an expectation of his return and a joy as we look for it.

"So that ye come behind in no gift; waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Cor 1:7).

God had given them gifts to use while they were here, as they watched for His coming.

"For our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself." (Phil 3:20, 21).

While we are on this earth we are to live with our thoughts on heaven; live as a citizen of heaven.

As we do that, we are to be looking for our Lord.

When He comes, He will change these bodies.

"Let your moderation be known unto all men. The Lord is at hand" (Phil 4:5).

Their kindness and stability was to be seen by all men – live it openly.

Why? The Lord is at hand.

Be watching and expecting His return.

They were to see Him as "at hand."

1 Thessalonians 1:7-10

⁷ So that ye were ensamples to all that believe in Macedonia and Achaia.

⁸ For from you sounded out the word of the Lord not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith to God-ward is spread abroad; so that we need not to speak any thing.

⁹ For they themselves shew of us what manner of entering in we had unto you, and how ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God;

¹⁰ **And to wait for his Son from heaven**, whom he raised from the dead, *even* Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come.

The Thessalonians were an example for all to follow.

They got saved and grew and became excited about the Lord.

While they were working and witnessing for Him, they were waiting for Jesus to return.

I am to wait for Him.

If I think He isn't coming until the end of the Tribulation then I won't be waiting for Him.

Illus.

If a friend from out of town says, "I will be passing through Dunedin within the next two weeks, but does not give me a day, then I will be watching expectantly for him each day.

I expect him. That is what I am to be doing with Christ.

James 5:7-8

⁷ Be patient therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord. Behold, the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and latter rain.

⁸ **Be ye also patient; stablish your hearts: for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh.**

Live the right way and understand that the coming of the Lord is getting closer.

Why would he tell them this? Because James wanted them to be looking for, and expecting the Lord.

His return is nigh.

"But the end of all things is at hand: be ye therefore sober, and watch unto prayer" (1 Peter 4:7).

Peter says that we need to know that the end is "at hand" - just as James said it was "nigh."

Since they were to be looking for it and understand that it was close, that truth would change how they live.

"Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown" (Rev 3:11).

"Behold, I come quickly: blessed is he that keepeth the sayings of the prophecy of this book" (Rev 22:7).

"He which testifieth these things saith, Surely I come quickly. Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus" (Rev 22:20).

That should be our prayer – Even so come, Lord Jesus.

Jesus said He was coming quickly.

2 Timothy 4:7-8

⁷ I have fought a good fight, I have finished *my* course, I have kept the faith:

⁸ 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.**

The crown of righteousness is for those who love His appearing – those that are looking for it and want it to happen.

A heart that says, "Even so, Come."

As Paul was concluding the book of I Cor he made an interesting statement.

1 Corinthians 16:22

²² If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema Maranatha.

Maranatha is an Aramaic word that means "the Lord is coming" or "come, O Lord."

The early church faced much persecution, and life for a Christian under Roman rule was not easy.

Living under those adverse conditions, the believers' morale was lifted by the hope of the coming of the Lord.

“Maranatha!” became the common greeting of the oppressed believers, replacing the Jewish greeting *shalom* (“peace”).

They were constantly reminding and being reminded that the Lord is coming.

Today, believers in our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ live our lives in the light of the knowledge that He can come at any time.

We are to be ready when the call comes.

Every day we should expect Him to come, and every day we should long for Him to come.

The entire flow of thought of the New Testament is that of watching for the Lord – excitedly expecting Him.

Jesus, Paul, James and Peter all had the same message.

What should be our response as we read and consider these verses?

Realize that our time is short.

What we do for Christ must be done today!

We are living in perilous times.

Does that mean we should be in despair? Not at all!!

“Wherefore comfort one another with these words.” I Thess 4:18

For the Christian this is an exciting time.

We are supposed to be looking up for the next event on God’s calendar – the rapture.