

Jesus Christ's Second Coming for the Church

Bible Reading: 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; John 14:2,3; 1 Corinthians 15:51-53; Titus 2:13; Rev. 4:1,2.

Aim: To comfort and motivate one another with the truth of Christ's return to take us to heaven.

Introduction: Jesus Christ's return will be in two stages. One for His bride the Church, known as the "catching away" or "rapture". (1 Thess. 4:13-18). The rapture will be followed by a seven year period known as the Tribulation. This will begin with the Antichrist from Europe making a treaty with Israel and breaking it after three-and-a-half years. The last three-and-a-half years of the Antichrist's reign will be the Great Tribulation spoken of by Christ in Matthew 24:21. This will be followed by the second stage of Christ returning to earth with believers to rule the world in righteousness. Zech 14:1-5; Jude 14

Definition: The term "rapture" comes from the Latin word for "caught up" in I Thessalonians 4:17. Before the seven year tribulation, Christ will descend from heaven, and catch up the Church to heaven to be with Himself. The Tribulation will then be unleashed on an unbelieving world.

The Scriptures teaching the "catching away" are as follows:

a) "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: 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.

Wherefore comfort one another with these words." I

Thessalonians 4:16-18.

b) Jesus said: "I go to prepare a place for you (v.2). 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."

John 14: 2,3.

c) "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**. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and...must put on immortality." I Cor. 15:51-53

d) "Looking for that **blessed hope (rapture)**, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ." Titus 2:13.

e) John experienced the rapture: "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...And immediately.....in heaven." Revelation 4:1,2.

We may summarise the main events of the rapture from I Thessalonians 4:6-17, as follows:

i) One day, Jesus Christ will descend from heaven and we will hear a shout, a voice and a trumpet.

ii) All dead believer's bodies will be resurrected to rejoin their spirits and souls in the air.

iii) All living believers will receive resurrection bodies, and be caught up to meet the Lord in the air.

iv) We will receive immortal, resurrection bodies, a place Christ has prepared for us in heaven, comfort forever in the presence of Christ, and rewards promised in 2 Corinthians 5:10.

The rapture is called a comfort and a blessed hope. Notice several things about the rapture.

1. Rapidity of the Rapture = Immediately (I Corinthians 15:51,52).

"we shall all be changed in a moment (Greek: *atomos* 823), in the twinkling (Gk: *rhipe* 4493) of an eye."

The speed with which the rapture will occur is described by these two Greek words which mean:

a) "*atomos*" = without a cut, indivisible. This is the word from which "atom" is derived, meaning "that which cannot be divided." When referring to time it means "an indivisibly small instant of time; a point of time which cannot be divided." It means "immediately."

b) "*rhipe*" = a quick motion, such as a fling or toss. A blink, wink, jerk, or twinkle of an eye. The least duration of time. People will not have time to call on Christ for salvation, or to do what they planned.

Believers must serve Christ now so that we won't be ashamed at His coming. (I John 2:28).

2. Reason For The Rapture = To keep the Church out of the Tribulation.

The Church will be caught out of the world to be kept from the 7 year Tribulation period. The rapture will be as unexpected as a thief in the night. (I Thess.5:2-4). "God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation (*deliverance from the tribulation wrath*) by our Lord Jesus Christ." I Thessalonians 5:9. Christ said to the faithful, Bible-loving Philadelphian church, "Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from (Greek: 'ek' = out of) the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them which dwell upon the earth." (Revelation 3:10).

Christ will spare His bride from going through the wars, famines, Antichrist's persecutions, earthquakes, and other judgments that will come on an unbelieving world.

The purpose of the Tribulation is to bring Israel and unbelieving nations to repentance (Rev.

9:18-21). In Revelation 6:8, 25% of the world's population are killed.
In Revelation 9:18, 33% of the rest are killed. This leaves only 50% of the world's population alive.

3. Requirement to be Raptured

Only those who have been saved by calling on Christ to save them from their sins, will be raptured. "The dead in Christ shall rise first." (I Thessalonians 4:16).

"we (all living believers) which are alive and remain shall be caught up..." (v.17).

Q: Are you trusting Jesus Christ to save you, or your good works to gain God's acceptance?

Some people in this room may be left behind if Jesus Christ returned today.

Q: Would you be taken to be with Christ, or would you be left behind to enter the 7 year Tribulation?

Can you imagine what it would be like to be left behind?

a) You phone your Christian friends, and they are nowhere to be found.

b) The newspapers and television report millions of missing people.

c) Many driverless cars will have crashed on the roadside.

d) People will panic about their missing family and friends. They will demand an explanation. Was it the rapture predicted in the Bible? Antichrist will offer a false yet plausible explanation that many will believe (2 Thess. 2:8-12), maybe that UFOs took Christians who were resisting the new world order.

Q: Will you be saved and taken, or lost and left behind? Receive Jesus Christ as your Saviour today.

4. Rewards after the Rapture.

Following the rapture, all Christians will appear before the Judgment Seat of Christ (2 Cor. 5:10; Romans 14:10,12; 1 Cor. 3:10-15) to receive rewards according to the quality of our service to Christ after salvation. Some Christians will suffer loss of rewards that they could have earned. (1 Cor. 3:15).

"every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labour." (I Corinthians 3:8).

Q: Will you win rewards, or will you lose rewards?

5. Revelation of the Sons of God.

When Christ appears, we shall be just like Him, even though we may now appear unattractive and unimportant. We will have a glorious, immortal body just like Jesus Christ has now.

"Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not 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." 1 John 3:2.

"For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. For the earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God." Romans 8:18,19.

God has predestined every believer to be conformed to the image and likeness of Christ. (Romans 8:29)

6. Our Response to the Rapture.

'And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself (sanctification), even as he is pure.' 1 John 3:3

Question: How should we now live? If we knew we'd be "caught up" next year, we should:

a) Live pleasing to God by reading/studying the Bible, and praying daily.

b) Learn How to win people to Christ so they'll be caught up to heaven and won't go through the Tribulation. Pastors should conduct a soul-winning training session this week. We want to rejoice with people in heaven who we have led to Christ on earth. We only have a short time to do soul-winning. We are in a war for eternal souls now. Don't be lazy, but get busy rescuing people from hell. After the rapture you'll have no chance to pluck people from hell. You'll never see your unsaved family and friends again. You can rest forever in eternity, but now is the time to win souls to Christ.

a) Confess and Forsake any known sins. 1 John 1:9.

b) Dedicate your life wholeheartedly and completely to winning souls and serving Jesus Christ.

7. "Be ye also Ready, for in such an hour as ye think not, the Son of Man cometh." (Matthew 24:44).

"Redeeming the time, because the days are evil." Ephesians 5:16.

Conclusion: Are you ready to face Christ? Are you saved? Are you winning souls daily or weekly?

Is there any known sin in your life that you need to confess and forsake? Do so today.