

3. The Rapture of the Saints 2nd Coming of Christ

Warm-up Question: Did you ever encounter a situation for which you were unprepared? How did you handle it?

The Door of Grace

¹“At that time the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. ²Five of them were foolish and five were wise. ³The foolish ones took their lamps but did not take any oil with them. ⁴The wise ones, however, took oil in jars along with their lamps. ⁵The bridegroom was a long time in coming, and they all became drowsy and fell asleep. ⁶“At midnight the cry rang out: ‘Here’s the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!’ ⁷“Then all the virgins woke up and trimmed their lamps. ⁸The foolish ones said to the wise, ‘Give us some of your oil; our lamps are going out.’ ⁹“‘No,’ they replied, ‘there may not be enough for both us and you. Instead, go to those who sell oil and buy some for yourselves.’ ¹⁰“But while they were on their way to buy the oil, the bridegroom arrived. The virgins who were ready went in with him to the wedding banquet. And the door was shut. ¹¹“Later the others also came. ‘Lord, Lord,’ they said, ‘open the door for us!’ ¹²“But he replied, ‘Truly I tell you, I don’t know you.’ ¹³“Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour (Matthew 25:1-13).

What do you think are the two most important truths to take from this passage? In my opinion, the two that stand out are the fact that we are to keep watch (Verse 13), and with that thought is that of being ready for when Christ comes, the second is that when the Master returned, the door was shut on those that were unprepared (Verse 10). This passage speaks of the return of Christ, the Bridegroom, as He comes for His bride, the Church. We see that all ten were waiting but five of the ten were unprepared for His coming—they were not ready (Verse 10) to enter through the door to be with the Bridegroom. In my humble opinion, this passage is talking about the Rapture of the Church when only those who are ready will enter into the presence of the Lord. The number one most important truth for us to hold on to is to be ready for Him when He comes. The second most important truth that Jesus wants us to understand is that when He comes, the door is shut and will not be reopened for those that would come at a later point. I cannot think of anything more terrible than for a person to think that they have prepared themselves to enter eternal life, and then to discover that the door is shut to them! (Verse 10). There is a profound sadness in this passage, as we consider that many people will stand on the outside pleading and knocking on the door to be let in, only to hear the Master say, “I don’t know you” (Verse 12).

Let’s read another passage on this topic, for it will help us in our understanding of what will take place at the rapture of the saints.

²³Someone asked him, "Lord, are only a few people going to be saved?" He said to them, ²⁴"Make every effort to enter through the narrow door, because many, I

tell you, *will try to enter and will not be able to.* ²⁵Once the owner of the house gets up *and closes the door*, you will stand outside knocking and pleading, 'Sir, open the door for us.' "But he will answer, 'I don't know you or where you come from.' ²⁶"Then you will say, 'We ate and drank with you, and you taught in our streets.' ²⁷"But he will reply, *'I don't know you or where you come from.* Away from me, all you evildoers!' ²⁸"There will be weeping there, and gnashing of teeth, when you see Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, but you yourselves thrown out (Luke 13:23-28).

I think we would all agree that this passage and the one above teaches that there will be no second chances, we are specifically told in both passages that the door was shut. The intimation is that it was never to be opened again, hence the weeping and gnashing of teeth. There will not be another opportunity for one to gain entrance into the Kingdom of God after the door is shut. It is as if God's drawbridge of grace has been lifted, and that those left behind must face the wrath of God. This is a hard truth to accept because we all have friends and relatives that may be left outside that door when it closes. I do not want to imagine their moment of realization and their pleadings when they find that the door is closed to them. At that time, it will not matter what kind of good life that you have lived on earth, when He comes for His church the deciding factor will be, do you have a relationship with Jesus Christ? The Bridegroom says, "I don't know you or where you come from" (verse 27). Only those who had relationship with him were allowed to enter through the door. If you are not sure as to where you will go on that day, then God wants you to be sure and you can know for certain that you are prepared for that day. God does not want to hide this truth from us (1 John 5:13). The child of God knows inside himself if he is in right relationship to Jesus Christ. *The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children (Romans 8:16)*. Now is the time to be ready, as the Bible says, "Today is the day of salvation" (2 Corinthians 6:2) and, "Today, if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts" (Hebrews 4:7).

[In verse 24 of the above passage, Jesus tells us to enter through the narrow door. What do you think is meant by the narrow door? Why doesn't Jesus make the door larger?](#)

There is only one way to enter into life, the way of Jesus Christ. His way is not an easy way to live one's life, but He is the only way to get to heaven. *"We must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God" (Acts 14:22)*. God's people have their trials. When God chose His people, He never designed that they should be an untried people. They were chosen in the furnace of affliction; they were never chosen to worldly peace and earthly joy. When we come to the door of life, the only thing that will gain you an entrance into that heavenly kingdom is that of receiving the gift of eternal life (Ephesians 2:8-9, Romans 6:23, John 4:10). What is the gift? It is Christ Jesus Himself. Knowing Him is eternal life (John 17:3). He wants to sit on the throne of your life, directing you in His ways while you get to know Him intimately. Knowing Christ gives you entrance through that door. Your eternal well-being depends on making it through that door.

Having established the importance of making that door, let's now talk about the rapture of the church and the entrance of God's people to be with the Lord.

The Rapture According to Paul the Apostle

In the last two sessions we have looked at a number of different passages such as Daniel 7 and Revelation 13 that speak of a time of difficulty for the people of God. We also looked at Daniel 9:27 which spoke of a seven year period with an event called by Daniel the Abomination of Desolation. This event will be three and a half years into a peace treaty in the Middle East, the very mid-point of the seven-year period. We have seen that God's people will go through some measure of persecution at the hands of a world leader called Antichrist, the head of a ten-nation confederacy. He will call for the allegiance of the world and demand that all worship him as God at the mid-point of the 7-year period. Those who refuse to give their allegiance and worship to Antichrist will be persecuted. The sign of allegiance to this world leader is a mark that he wants to put on your hand or forehead. If you are a Christian and identify with the Lord Jesus and His kingdom, you will not take this mark and worship Antichrist (Revelation 14:11). We looked at the possibility that this mark could be an RFID (Radio Frequency IDentification) chip. It is interesting at this point for us to consider that we have already seen more persecution of Christians in our generation than at any other time in history including the time of the early church.

Some believe that the Church will escape the suffering brought upon the world by the Antichrist with the Lord rapturing the church before the Antichrist even comes on the scene. This view is called the Pre-Tribulation Rapture. They believe that the whole seven-year period known as the 70th week of Daniel is the tribulation and wrath of God. I am of the opinion that there will be some that are called to go through the time of persecution (tribulation or distress) at the hands of the Antichrist. In this study, we will look at just what the Rapture is, and in the next study we will go into the timing. We don't know the day or the hour, but Jesus has given us indications as to the season of time with specific preceding events to look out for, hence His encouragement for His people to "watch."

What is the Rapture?

The word *Rapture* is a word we use to describe the true church, those born again of God, being caught up to heaven. Actually, the word *Rapture* itself is not found in the Bible. The English word comes from the Latin word *rapere*, meaning *rapid*. The Latin word *rapere* is from the original Greek word *harpazō*, translated as "caught up" in the New International Version and King James Bible (1 Thessalonians 4:17). My Key Word Study Bible says of *harpazō*, that it means: "to strip, spoil, snatch. To seize upon with force or to rob. It is an open act of confiscatory violence...to snatch or tear away, yank away, pluck out of, remove by swiftly and aggressively grasping."¹ It goes along with what Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 15:52, "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 will be changed." We will look at this passage later on in our study today.

¹ Key Word Study Bible, AMG publishers. 773 Harpazō.

First, let's examine together 1 Thessalonians 4:13-5:11, and we will see what the Apostle Paul has to say about the Rapture:

¹³Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope. ¹⁴We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. ¹⁵According to the Lord's own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. ¹⁶For ***the Lord Himself will come down from heaven,*** with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. ¹⁷After that, we who are still alive and are left will be ***caught up*** together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. ¹⁸Therefore encourage each other with these words (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18).

Three times in the passage above, Paul talks about those who have fallen asleep. He's talking about Christians who have died. When a person who knows the Lord dies, his body may be in the grave, but the person, his or her spirit, goes on to be with the Lord, so in a sense he never dies (John 11:25-26), he's always referred to as "asleep." When Jesus Himself comes down from heaven, verse 14 tells us that He will bring with Him the spirits of those who are in heaven with the Lord. They will be reunited with their resurrection bodies that will rise first, before those who are alive and remain on earth are caught up also to be with the Lord. The phrase ***caught up*** in verse 17 is the Greek word *harpazō*, from which we get the word rapture.

Paul carries on talking about the coming of Christ into chapter five. Chapter divisions were not added until a thousand years later than Paul wrote this letter. These two passages of chapters four and five were written together and should be read together. The topic of the rapture or being caught up to the Lord is the context that chapter five starts with. He's writing about the time when the door will be shut at the coming of Christ. This continuation of thought is evident from the use of the word "Now" used at the beginning of chapter five (5:1):

¹Now, brothers, about times and dates we do not need to write to you, ²for you know very well that the ***day of the Lord*** will come ***like a thief in the night.*** ³While people are saying, "Peace and safety," ***destruction will come on them*** suddenly, as labor pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape. ⁴***But you, brothers, are not in darkness so that this day should surprise you like a thief.*** ⁵You are all sons of the light and sons of the day. We do not belong to the night or to the darkness. ⁶So then, let us not be like others, who are asleep, but let us be alert and self-controlled. ⁷For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, get drunk at night. ⁸But since we belong to the day, let us be self-controlled, putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet. ⁹***For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation*** through our Lord Jesus Christ. ¹⁰He died for us so that, whether we are awake or

asleep, we may live together with him. ¹¹Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing (1 Thessalonians 5:1-11).

What are the main points that stand out to you from this passage in chapter five?

- 1) Just as a thief in the night is not expected so destruction will come on them suddenly (those who are non-Christians) and will seem unexpected (5:3).
- 2) This Day of the Lord will not surprise the believers. As the time draws closer, they will be expecting His coming for they are not in darkness (5:5).
- 3) This act of being *caught up* will be a back to back event with the **Day of the Lord** where the church will be taken and the wrath of God will be poured out on those that have rejected the gospel (1Thessalonians 5: verses 2 and 9). The saints are not appointed to suffer the wrath of God, but they will receive salvation (Verse 9). The Greek word translated *salvation* is *sōtēria*, which can refer to spiritual salvation or physical deliverance. The passage is being written to believers so it should more logically be translated *deliverance* through being caught up, for these people are already saved. This gives credence to the thought that the snatching away (rapture) happens at a time when the saints are being persecuted by Antichrist. God's people are persecuted because they refuse to worship Antichrist and by not taking the Mark of the Beast. They take a stand for Christ, refusing to worship and become part of Antichrist's New World Order by taking his Mark. We are clearly told that there will be a war in heavenly places (Revelation 12:7) and the result of that war is that Satan is hurled down to the earth, along with his angels (Revelation 12:9). The result of Satan being thrown down to earth is that he will make war against "**those who obey God's commandments and hold to the testimony of Jesus**" (Revelation 12:17). Woe is pronounced on the earth because of the devil's fury (12:12) in being cast down. The Lord descending for His people at the rapture will cut short this fury of Satan against God's people.

This coming by the Lord for His people before the outpouring of His wrath, is called the Day of the Lord. He will snatch up His people to Himself before His wrath is poured out on His enemies. What is the Day of the Lord? It is the day of vengeance of our God on His enemies, a day of darkness and gloom, a time of destruction for those who worship the Beast and have taken the mark, the number of his name (Revelation 14:9-10). God brings justice and demonstrates His anger. Isaiah the prophet describes it in this way:

⁶Wail, for the **day of the LORD** is near; it will come like destruction from the Almighty. ⁷Because of this, all hands will go limp, every man's heart will melt. ⁸Terror will seize them, pain and anguish will grip them; they will writhe like a woman in labor. They will look aghast at each other, their faces aflame. ⁹See, the **day of the LORD** is coming—a cruel day, with wrath and fierce anger—to make the land desolate and destroy the sinners within it. ¹⁰**The stars of heaven and their constellations will not show their light. The rising sun will be darkened and the moon will not give its light.** ¹¹I will punish the world for its evil, the wicked for their sins. I will put an end to the arrogance of the haughty

and will humble the pride of the ruthless. ¹²I will make man scarcer than pure gold, more rare than the gold of Ophir. ¹³Therefore I will make **the heavens tremble**; and **the earth will shake from its place** at the wrath of the LORD Almighty, in **the day** of his burning anger (Isaiah 13:6-13).

The Day of the Lord comes with cosmic signs in the heavens, things happening in the sun, moon and stars. Paul tells the Thessalonians that the saints, the true church, will be “caught up” before the wrath of God is poured out at the Day of the Lord. ⁹**For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation** through our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Thessalonians 5:9).

We Will Know the Season But Not the Day or Hour

There are those who tell us that no one will be expecting the rapture when it occurs. They say that it could happen at any time. Some teachers have given this teaching a name, calling it “The Doctrine of Immanency.” They say that there are no prophesied events that must occur before the Church is caught away. They believe that the Rapture could occur at any minute. Like a thief in the night is not expected, they say that Christ will come at an unexpected time. But Jesus said that we would know the general time, just not the exact day or hour, “**No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven...**” (Matthew 24:36). The context of that statement, though, is right after Jesus has told us that we may know the season. He said:

³²“Now learn this lesson from the fig tree: As soon as its twigs get tender and its leaves come out, you know that summer is near. ³³Even so, **when you see all these things**, you know that it is near, right at the door. ³⁴Truly I tell you, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened. ³⁵Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away. ³⁶“But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father (Matthew 24:32-34).

We should know by the signs of the times that the season of summer (The coming of Christ) is near. Scripture says that those who belong to Christ will be aware of what is happening and they will rightly interpret the signs of the times in order to anticipate the soon coming of their Lord. The signs themselves will be a source of great comfort and anticipation. In a parallel passage, Luke says, “**...When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near**” (Luke 21:28).

What does it mean for our redemption to draw near? If you are one of those called to be there at that time, what would you be expecting to happen?

It’s the reunion of the purchased possession to the One who has redeemed or bought us with His blood! The Lord Himself is coming for those He bought at Calvary’s cross. He is their substitute for sin and death. What joy that day will be for all you who have received His free gift of life!

How Will I Be Changed at the Rapture?

When Christ returns at the rapture, as we have said, those that come with Christ will have their bodies come up from the grave and will be reunited with their spirit in the air. This event is also called the resurrection of the dead or the first resurrection. There are two resurrections. The first will be at the rapture where the dead in Christ will go first, and then those that are still alive on earth will also go up to meet the Lord in the air with a new body, a glorious body that will be changed in the batting of an eyelid's time, or as the scripture says, "in the twinkling of an eye." How blessed will be those that experience this rapture or resurrection! (Revelation 20:6). The second resurrection is one of judgment for those who rejected God's offer of pardon through Jesus and will occur after the thousand years millennial reign of Christ (Revelation 20:11-12).

At the resurrection or rapture, the saints will be clothed with a resurrection body that will be similar to Christ's resurrection body. There will be some continuity in that we will be recognizable, but we are talking about a body that is imperishable, a body that is raised with the glory of God shining from us. Let's look at what Paul the apostle taught concerning this in his first Corinthian letter:

³⁵But someone may ask, "How are the dead raised? With what kind of body will they come?" ³⁶How foolish! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. ³⁷When you sow, you do not plant the body that will be, but just a seed, perhaps of wheat or of something else. ³⁸But God gives it a body as he has determined, and to each kind of seed he gives its own body. ³⁹All flesh is not the same: Men have one kind of flesh, animals have another, birds another and fish another. ⁴⁰There are also heavenly bodies and there are earthly bodies; but the splendor of the heavenly bodies is one kind, and the splendor of the earthly bodies is another. ⁴¹The sun has one kind of splendor, the moon another and the stars another; and star differs from star in splendor. ⁴²So will it be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; ⁴³it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; ⁴⁴it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body. ⁴⁵So it is written: "The first man Adam became a living being"; **the last Adam, a life-giving spirit.** ⁴⁶The spiritual did not come first, but the natural, and after that the spiritual. ⁴⁷The first man was of the dust of the earth, the second man from heaven. ⁴⁸As was the earthly man, so are those who are of the earth; **and as is the man from heaven, so also are those who are of heaven.** ⁴⁹And just as we have borne the likeness of the earthly man, so shall we bear the likeness of the man from heaven. ⁵⁰I declare to you, brothers, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. ⁵¹Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but **we will all be changed**— ⁵²in 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 will be changed.** ⁵³For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality. ⁵⁴When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: "Death has been swallowed up in victory." ⁵⁵"Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O

death, is your sting?" ⁵⁶The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law.
⁵⁷But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians (15:35-57)).

Which sentences stand out to you from this passage? What do you think it means to have an imperishable body? (1 Corinthians 15:42).

That which is on the inside, your godly character, will someday be revealed. It won't be the same as our old nature; Paul says that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God (Verse 50). It will no longer be perishable but imperishable (Verse 53). We won't all sleep; (not all Christians will be separated from their bodies), there will be some that are transformed instantly without going through the death process. When Christ comes, in a flash, in the batting of an eye's time, we will be changed from having a perishable body to being clothed with an imperishable body (Verses 51-52). Paul speaks of this transformation in his letter to the church at Philippi:

²⁰But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, ²¹who, 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** (Philippians 3:20-21 Emphasis mine).

This Greek word that is translated to our English word *transform* is the word *Metaschēmatizō*. It is a construction of two Greek words. *Meta* means a change of place or condition, and *schēma* means shape, or outward form. To transform, change the outward form or appearance of something, refashion, reshape.²

An imperishable body means that it won't age or get sick. Our new bodies will be glorious all of the time. You will always have youthful strength and be radiantly beautiful with God's glory radiating from you. I believe that just as Jesus walked through walls into the upper room where the door was locked for fear of the Jews (John 20:19), we will also be able to pass through walls and travel instantaneously, not bound by the physical realm.

Paul says that our new body will be like Christ's glorious body (Philippians 3:20). This radiance that accompanies us will be both authoritative and beautiful. Jesus said that, "the righteous will **shine like the sun** in the kingdom of their father (Matthew 13:43. Emphasis mine). Those that are Christ's will command respect but it will be a respect that is born of wisdom that is from above. There will be a kindness and joy that will be ours. It will also be a powerful body (1 Corinthians 15:43). I don't think that this speaks only of strength, although that certainly will be part of it. I think that there will be a power and authority to work the miraculous just as Jesus did and still does. We will exercise a new level of power through the faith filled spoken word, just as Jesus does. He will be able to trust us with such power for we have been tried through our daily experiences and the difficult times we have been through and overcome in our lives. Our bodies will be raised and we will see His face and be transformed into His image. Oh, what a day that will be!

² Key Word Study Bible, AMG Publishers, Page 1651.

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