

The Old-Time Evangelistic News

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Are You Ready for the Rapture? (Part 1)

I Thessalonians 4:13-18

We will begin this message by looking at I Thessalonians 4:13-18. Notice what these verses say: *“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. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him. 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. 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.”* As the passage indicates with the closing words in verse 18, there is much comfort to be found in what we just read. In fact, there may be no passage of Scripture more comforting than the direct declaration found here that Jesus Himself is coming back for His people. In a parallel passage in Titus 2:13, the truth of the return of Christ for believers is called the *“blessed hope.”* There is nothing greater to think about, nor to hope for, than the return of Christ to gather His people to Him. The world may turn against us and persecute us, but Christ will come back for us. Hard trials may come our way, and loved ones may die, but one day Christ will come for us. Our hopes and dreams upon this earth may be taken away, but nothing, nor anyone, can take away our hope of Christ coming for us. The times may be hard, dear friend, but lift your eyes above this earth and look to the sky, for Christ may come back today.

During the course of this message, we will consider these verses

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in I Thessalonians. But we will not limit ourselves to just these verses. There are several others that we will look at as well. All of these verses describe the event that we call the rapture. Now if you were to take a concordance and look up the word rapture, you would not find that particular word in our English Bible. The word rapture means “a carrying away or being carried away in body or spirit.” As you can see in just the short definition that I gave, there are many possible thoughts expressed by the word rapture. I am interested in the part that describes the word as “being carried away in body.” That is what we mean we talk about the “rapture of the church” or the “rapture of the believer.” We believe that our literal bodies will be taken out of this world into the very presence of Christ. Now there are many who will laugh and scoff at such a notion. Let them laugh and scoff. I believe the Bible, and the Bible teaches that Christ will come and take His believers out of this world to be with Him. It is not a story that has been passed down just to make people feel better. It is the absolute truth of God’s Word. It will take place! Just as God promised to send a Savior, and it came to pass, so will Jesus Christ come back for His people.

But getting back to the word rapture, we use it to describe the events of I Thessalonians 4:13-18. Although the word itself is not found in the Bible, what it means is found in the Bible. The word rapture means *“caught up,”* the same words that are found in verse 17. It is a good word and is appropriately used to describe a great Bible doctrine. Some people question whether we should use words that are not directly found in the Bible to describe Bible teaching. There is nothing wrong with doing so. I like and try to use Bible words as often as possible, but sometimes a particular word is not in the Bible, but the doctrine it identifies is taught in the Bible. In that case, it is right and appropriate to use that word. We are talking about the rapture, but there are other words such as trinity and millennium that are not actually used in Scripture. The Bible teaches that there is one God, eternally existing as Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. The word trinity is not found in the Bible, but it is a good word to use because it expresses the truth about God’s existence. The

Bible teaches a literal thousand year reign of Christ upon this earth. The word millennium expresses that truth of a thousand year reign of Christ. It is good and appropriate to use it. There are other words that I could mention, but I will stop there. Why do I make mention of the usage of these words? Because there are some who say, "We should only use words actually in the Bible to describe Bible doctrine." While those people may have good intentions, they are misled and are making a big deal about nothing. Just because a word is not actually in the Bible does not mean that it cannot be used to describe Bible doctrine. As we have read and will see, Jesus will come for His people. The word rapture adequately and appropriately describes that truth. Therefore, we will use it without apology throughout this message.

As we go through this message, we will cover four parts. First, we will consider The Expressions about the Rapture; second, we will look at The Evidence for the Pre-tribulation Rapture; third, we will examine The Elements of the Rapture; and fourth, we will close with some thoughts about The Events after the Rapture. I pray that as we ponder the truth of the rapture that our thoughts will be as John's were in Revelation 22. After writing all of Revelation, he concludes by recording the last words of Christ in verse 20. Jesus says, "*Surely, I come quickly.*" John replies, "*Even so, come, Lord Jesus.*"

To get a better understanding of the rapture, we must first deal with **The Expressions about the Rapture**. Three of these deal with the timing of the rapture and the fourth one describes those who will be raptured. Three of these teachings are wrong. We will not deal with these in great detail, but will describe what they are and why they are wrong.

The first expression is The Post-tribulation Rapture. This teaching says that the church will go through the entire tribulation and is raptured out just prior to Christ's second coming to the earth. It is not my purpose, nor do I care, to point out men who have held this position in the past, or those who are alive now and hold to it.

Depending on who you listen to or read after, you may come across someone who taught or teaches this view. They may be right about some things, but they are wrong about this. Can they be saved and hold to a post-tribulation rapture? Yes, and that is true for the other two false views as well. An incorrect view of the tribulation or the millennium does not affect salvation. They will be pleasantly surprised when the rapture takes place though.

What do they base their teaching of a post-tribulation rapture upon? It is based upon a misunderstanding of many Bible passages. I will only deal with two. One is Matthew 24:22. In Matthew 24, Jesus is describing the tribulation period. He says that the tribulation will be terrible upon the earth, so bad that there are no days like it before or after. He then says in verse 22, "*And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved: but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened.*" Some understand the "elect" in Matthew 24:22 to be those who are saved and make up the church. They read it and say, "See, the church will go through the tribulation." But they are mistaken. As we will see in detail in the second part of the message, the church is gone at this point. The "elect" in this verse are the Jews and Gentiles who are converted in the tribulation period. The "elect" in Matthew 24 is not referring to those saved in the church age.

A second passage that proponents of the post-tribulation view use to defend their position is Revelation 7:9-17. Verses 9-10 say, "*After this I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands; And cried with a loud voice, saying, Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb.*" The second sentence of verse 14 identifies these by saying, "*And he said to me, These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.*" Some read this passage and say, "See these are the all the saved. They went through the great tribulation and now are before the throne." Again,

we will discuss this in more detail in the second part of the message, but this great number described in this chapter are not all of the saved since the time of Christ. They are particularly identified as those “*which came out of great tribulation.*” This multitude are those who are saved during the seven-year tribulation. They are not those saved during the church age. As we will see, the dead and living who are saved in the church age have been raptured out.

A second false view of the rapture is The Mid-tribulation Rapture. Those who teach this view say that the church will go through the first half of the tribulation, and then will be raptured out before the worst part begins. There are several passages that are used to prove this view, but the most common one is found in Revelation 11:11-12. These verses say, “*And after three days and an half the Spirit of life from God entered into them, and they stood upon their feet; and great fear fell upon them which saw them. And they heard a great voice from heaven saying unto them, Come up hither. And they ascended up to heaven in a cloud; and their enemies beheld them.*” Some read this and say, “See, the rapture takes place in the middle of the tribulation.” They are wrong. We will explain why they are wrong next month and give the proper interpretation of these verses.