

5. The Rapture of the Saints

The 2nd Coming of Christ

The rapture of the saints will be the most glorious event that will ever take place in the history of the human race, but at the same time, it will be the most horrifying occurrence for those who have willfully chosen to refuse God's offer of a free pardon. Jesus gave us the Parable of the Ten Virgins to bring home to us the parting of the ways of the human race between the forgiven and the unforgiven:

The Need to Be Ready for the Rapture

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 are the two most important truths to take from this passage? In my opinion, the first truth is that we are to keep watch (v. 13), and together with that, we must be ready for when Christ comes. This passage speaks of the return of Christ, the Bridegroom when He comes for His bride, the Church. All ten were waiting, but five were unprepared for His coming—they were not ready to enter through the door to be with the Bridegroom. This parable is talking about the Rapture of the Church when only those who are ready will enter the Lord's presence. The most important truth to hold on to is to be prepared for Christ when He comes. The second most important truth is that when Jesus comes, the door will be shut and not reopened for those who would try to come later (v. 10). I cannot think of anything more terrible than for a person to believe they have prepared themselves to enter eternal life only to discover a shut door! There is a deep sadness about this passage because there will be many people we know, friends and relatives, who will stand outside pleading and knocking on the door to be let in, only to hear the Master say, "I don't know you" (v. 12). The Lord summarizes His thoughts by reminding His disciples to keep watch and always be ready for when that day comes.

Let's read another passage on this topic, for it will help us understand 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).

We would all agree that this passage and the one further above teach us that there will be no second chances; in both passages of Scripture, the Master shuts the door. The intimation is that once the door is closed, it will not 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 shuts. It is as if God's drawbridge of grace lifts, and those left behind must face the separation of the sheep from the goats. This door closing is hard to accept because we all have friends and relatives that may be left outside. I do not want to imagine their moment of realization and their pleadings when they find they will not be allowed in. At that time, it will not matter what kind of good life you have lived on earth, for when Christ comes for His Church, the deciding factor will be, do you have a relationship with Jesus Christ? In the second passage, too, the Bridegroom will say, "I don't know you or where you come from" (v. 27). Only those who have a relationship with Jesus will be allowed to enter through the door. God wants you to be sure about your destination on that day. John the apostle wrote: **"I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life"** (1 John 5:13). The child of God knows inside himself if he is in a genuine 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).

Question 1) In verse 24 of the Luke 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 life: the way of Jesus Christ. His way is not an easy way to live one's life, and God's people will go through trials to their faith, but a relationship with Jesus 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, but when God the Father chose to bring forth a bride from the shed blood of the side of His Son, He never planned that we should be an untried people.

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 this 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 forever with the Lord.

The Rapture According to Paul the Apostle

In our series so far, we have looked at 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 Daniel the prophet calls *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 a seven-year period. We saw that God's people would go through some persecution at the hands of a world leader called Antichrist, the head of a ten-nation or power bloc confederacy. He will call for the world's allegiance and demand that all worship him as God at the mid-point of the seven years. Those who refuse will be persecuted. The sign of loyalty to this world leader is a Mark 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 the Antichrist (Revelation 14:11). We looked at the possibility that this Mark could be an RFID (Radio Frequency Identification) chip. It is interesting 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 the Church will escape the suffering brought upon the world by the Antichrist, with the Lord rapturing the church before the Antichrist comes on the scene. This view is called the Pre-Tribulation Rapture. Those who hold to this teaching believe that the whole seven-year period, known as the 70th week of Daniel, is the tribulation and wrath of God. This writer believes there will be believers in Christ who 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 our following study, we will get into the timing. We don't know the day or the hour, but Jesus has given us indications of the season of time with specific preceding events to look out for, hence His encouragement for His people to "watch" (Matthew 25:13).

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. The word *rapture* itself is not in the Bible. The English word comes from the Latin word *rapere*, meaning *rapid*. The Latin phrase *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 that *harpazō* 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 The snatching up of God's people by the Lord agrees 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 more closely at this passage later on in our study today.

First, let's examine 1 Thessalonians 4:13-5:11, and we will see what the apostle Paul has to say about the rapture or being *caught up*:

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

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

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 writes 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, their spirit, goes on to be with the Lord, so in a sense, he never dies (John 11:11-14); he's always referred to as being "asleep." When Jesus comes down from heaven, verse 14 tells us that He will bring the spirits of believers in heaven with the Lord. Their resurrection bodies will rise first before those believers alive on the earth will be **caught up** to be also with the Lord.

Paul continues talking about the coming of Christ in chapter five. Chapter divisions were not added until a thousand years later than when Paul wrote this letter. Chapters four and five were written together and should be read in context together. Chapter five starts with the same topic of the rapture or being caught up to the Lord. Paul writes about the time when the door closes at the coming of Christ. This continuation of thought is evident from his 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).

Question 2) What main points stand out to you from this passage in chapter five?

- 1) Just as one does not expect a thief in the night, so destruction will come on them suddenly (those who are non-Christians) (5:3).
- 2) This Day of the Lord will not surprise the believers. As the time draws near, believers will expect 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 is snatched up, and the wrath of God poured out on those who have rejected the gospel (1 Thessalonians 5: verses 2 and 9). The saints are not appointed to suffer the wrath of God but will

receive salvation (v. 9). The Greek word translated *salvation* is *sōtēria*, which can refer to spiritual salvation or physical deliverance. Paul is writing to believers, so it should more logically be translated *as deliverance* through being caught up, for these people belong to Christ.

This deliverance gives confidence to the thought that the snatching away (rapture) happens during a time when the Antichrist is persecuting the saints. God's people will be oppressed because they refuse to worship the Antichrist and will not take the Mark of the Beast. They stand for Christ, refusing to worship and become part of the Antichrist's New World Order by taking the Mark. There will be a war in heavenly places (Revelation 12:7), resulting in Satan being hurled down to the earth, along with his angels (Revelation 12:9). The effect of Satan thrown down to earth is that he will make war against believers: **“Then the dragon was enraged at the woman and went off to wage war against the rest of her offspring—those who keep God’s commands and hold fast their testimony about Jesus” (Revelation 12:17).** Woe is pronounced on the earth because of the devil’s fury at being cast down (12:12). The Lord descending for His people at the rapture will cut short this fury of Satan against God’s people.

This deliverance by the Lord for His people takes place before the outpouring of God's wrath; the Scriptures call this time 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 God's vengeance on His enemies, a day of darkness and gloom, a time of destruction on 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 (v. 10), things happening in the sun, moon, and stars. Paul writes to the Thessalonian church that the true Church will be "caught up" before the wrath of God is poured out on the Day of the Lord, **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.

Some say that no one will be expecting the rapture when it occurs. They say that it could happen at any time. This teaching is called "The Doctrine of Immanency." Those who hold to this line of teaching believe there are no prophesied events to occur before the Church is caught away. They

assume that the rapture could happen 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 His people would know the season of time, but 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 not knowing the day nor the hour, though, comes right after Jesus told us that we would 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 24:32-36).

The signs of the times will tell those expecting Him that summer (The coming of Christ) is near; otherwise, what would be the parable's point? The parable gives hope to those called to endure that time, that when we see the signs, Christ is just about to open the door for all believers to enter into eternity with Him (v. 33). Scripture says that those who belong to Christ will be aware of what is happening. In a parallel passage, Luke also writes, “...When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near” (Luke 21:28, Emphasis mine).

Question 3) What does it mean for our redemption to draw near? What should you expect to happen if you are a believer and are in that time of persecution?

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

How Will I Be Changed at the Rapture?

As we have said, when Christ returns at the rapture, those who come with Christ will have their bodies come up from the grave and reunited with their spirit in the air.

²⁸“Do not marvel at this; for an hour is coming, in which all who are in the tombs will hear His voice, ²⁹and will come forth; those who did the good *deeds* to a resurrection of life, those who committed the evil *deeds* to a resurrection of judgment (John 5:28-29).

This event is 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 rise first (1 Thessalonians 4:15-18), then those who are still alive on earth will also go up to meet the Lord in the air with a new glorious body as God transforms us in the batting of an eyelid's time, or as the Scripture says, “in the twinkling of an eye” (1 Corinthians 15:42). How blessed will be those that experience this rapture or resurrection!

⁴I saw thrones on which were seated those who had been given authority to judge. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony about Jesus and because of the word of God. They had not worshiped the beast or its image and had not

received its Mark on their foreheads or their hands. **They came to life and reigned with Christ a thousand years.** ⁵(The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended.) This is the first resurrection (Revelation 20:4-5).

The second resurrection is one of judgment for those who reject God's offer of pardon through Jesus and will occur after the thousand-year millennial reign of Christ at what is called the Great White Throne judgment (Revelation 20:7-12).

¹“At that time Michael, the great prince who protects your people, will arise. There will be a time of distress such as has not happened from the beginning of nations until then. But at that time your people—everyone whose name is found written in the book—will be delivered. **2Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt.** ³Those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the heavens, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars for ever and ever. ⁴But you, Daniel, roll up and seal the words of the scroll until the time of the end. Many will go here and there to increase knowledge” (Daniel 12:1-4).

At the 1st resurrection or rapture, believers in Christ are 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 an imperishable body, a body 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** (1 Corinthians 15:35-45).

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 15:46-57).

Question 4) 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 (v. 50). It will no longer be perishable but imperishable (v. 53). We won't all sleep; (not all Christians will be separated from their bodies), there will be some who are transformed instantly without going through the experience of death. 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 (vs. 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 translated to our English word *transform* is the word *Metaschēmatisō*. It is a construction of two Greek words. *Meta* means a change of place or condition, and *schēma* implies shape or outward form. To transform, change the outer 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 have youthful strength and be radiantly beautiful with God's glory radiating from you. Just as Jesus walked through walls into the upper room when 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 writes that our new body will be like Christ's glorious body (Philippians 3:20). This radiance that accompanies us will be 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 who belong to Christ will command respect born of wisdom from above. There will be kindness and joy that will be ours. It will also be a powerful body (1 Corinthians 15:43). I don't think this speaks only of strength, although that will be part of it. There will be power and authority to work miraculously, just as Jesus did and still does. God can trust us with such potential, for we have been tested through our daily experiences and challenging times. 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.

Prayer: Oh God, I want that! I want you in my life and leading and guiding me. I turn around from sin and trust that your death was for me and as me to cleanse me from all sin as a sacrificial substitute. Please forgive me, Lord, and help me live for you. I receive the gift of eternal life that Jesus bought for me at His cross. Amen!

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