

## Surprised by the Rapture

Last week, we began looking at the theology of the end times. The culmination of God's redemptive plan and all world history actually is a huge issue. So many politicians with no Biblical framework often mimic often mimic "end-times" warnings. As one politician said, "You never want a serious crisis to go to waste. And what I mean by that is it's an opportunity to do things you think you could not do before." There have been:

- Environmental Panics – From acid rain in the 1980s to the ozone hole in the 1990s to today's climate crisis, leaders have painted each issue as a final threat to the planet. But God alone determines when the heavens and earth pass away.
- Overpopulation – In the 1970s, world leaders warned that by the 1980s billions would starve to death unless governments limited how many children people could have. Yet today the greater concern is population decline in many nations.
- Pandemics – Pandemics have been added to the list of world ending events. During COVID-19, politicians framed it as "the end of life as we know it." Disease is serious, but God's plan for history is not overturned by a virus.
- Artificial Intelligence, today, looks like a fulfillment of Skynet in the Terminator movie, or The Matrix movie, or HAL in 2001: A Space Odyssey.

Why aren't we panicking, marching in the streets, and campaigning for utopian visions?. Our world is full of events that look like the beginning of a global catastrophe but we don't have to join in that fear because the Bible tells us that we are not appointed to wrath!

1Thess 5:5-9 Ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness.

**6 Therefore let us not sleep, as *do* others; but let us watch and be sober.**

7 For they that sleep sleep in the night; and they that be drunken are drunken in the night.

8 But let us, who are of the day, be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love; and for an helmet, the hope of salvation.

**9 For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ,**

What the world dreads as the end, we see as a sign of God's timetable and a reminder that our hope is in Christ, not in this present age. As we saw last week, instead of panicking over the turbulence of our times, we occupy ourselves with the work of the Lord. We cannot keep the world from barreling into the rule of the Antichrist. So, we stay busy in our responsibilities and spread the Gospel because we know that before that time comes we will be out of here and safely received by Christ.

## 1. The Rapture -

Biblical prophecy provides some of the greatest encouragement and hope available to us today. Just as the Old Testament is saturated with prophecies concerning Christ's first advent, so both testaments are filled with references to the second coming of Christ. One scholar has estimated that there are 1,845 references to Christ's second coming in the Old Testament, where 17 books give it prominence. In the 260 chapters of the New Testament, there are 318 references to the second advent of Christ – an amazing 1 out of every 30 verses. Twenty-three of the 27 New Testament books refer to this great event. For every prophecy in the Bible concerning Christ's

first advent, there are 8 which look forward to His second!

— Today in the Word, April, 1989, p. 27

1Cor 15:51-52 Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed,

52 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.

1Thess 4:13-18 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.

## 2. A word of caution -

In Matthew 24, when Jesus was about to go to His crucifixion, the disciples asked about when He would establish the kingdom.

Matt 24:3-6,23 And as he sat upon the mount of Olives, the disciples came unto him privately, saying, Tell us, when

shall these things be? and what *shall be* the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?

Jesus answered them first with a word of caution.

4 And Jesus answered and said unto them, Take heed that no man deceive you.

5 For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many.

6 And ye shall hear of wars and rumours of wars: see that ye be not troubled: for all *these things* must come to pass, **but the end is not yet.**

...

23 Then if any man shall say unto you, Lo, here *is* Christ, or there; believe *it* not.

It is good that believers are strengthened in their conviction as they see the end times approaching just as the Bible talks about. However, it is also important to not cross over into excessive speculations. As with all doctrines, an over emphasis can lead to heresy.

One commentator suggested that since 1900, over 1,100 people have claimed to be Christ.

You might remember the Moonies, or the Unification Church under Sun Myung Moon. Moon claimed that Jesus had failed to complete His mission of world peace because of the crucifixion. Moon claimed to be the Lord of the Second Advent and that he would establish a perfect family to usher in the kingdom.

Hitler and his propaganda minister, Joseph Goebbels, used eschatological language to promote Hitler as a secular messiah who would establish the Third Reich as a Millennial kingdom. In 1936 Goebbels said, "Germany has been transformed into a great house of the Lord where the Fuhrer as our mediator stands before the throne of God."

Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, the late leader of the

Lubavitch movement based in New York City, was believed by his followers to be the Messiah. The Lubavitch movement officially denies this, but there are those who believe that he *will* rise from the dead and be the Messiah.

The Seventh Day Adventists based their theology of an invisible return of Christ on the calculations of William Miller in 1848. When Christ did not return in 1844 this was called the Great Disappointment.

The Jehovah's Witnesses named 1874, 1878, 1881, 1914, 1918, 1925, 1941, 1975 as the dates Jesus would return.

Former NASA engineer, Edgar Whisenant, wrote *88 Reasons Why the Rapture Will Be in 1988*, but had to write a new book in 1989 when Christ didn't come back and then more in 1993 and 1994. By 2000 he gave up and died in 2001.

Harold Camping, who had built the radio Family Network wrote *1994?* but had to revise it for 2011. In 2012 he confessed that it had been sinful to declare a date.

### 3. Surprise!

Instead of being preoccupied with all kinds of calculations and interpretations to anticipate the coming of the Lord, we need to be just content that the Rapture will *definitely* occur. It is as though if there was a betting pool where everyone picked a day that Christ would return, Jesus would be sure to return on the one day that no one had picked.

Matt 24:32-44 Now learn a parable of the fig tree; When his branch is yet tender, and putteth forth leaves, ye know that summer is nigh:

33 So likewise ye, when ye shall see all these things, know that it is near, *even* at the doors.

The fig tree is a symbol for Israel. Our interest in Israel is not only how God will secure His people, the Jews. *We* look at the blossoming of Israel as an

indication that Christ is at the door! Our perspective is very different from the world. While we look at the prophetic aspect, the world is full of anxiety over peace in the Middle East and wants to push for a modern holocaust.

34 Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled.

35 Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away.

Even though we know Jesus is at the door, the actual day will still be a surprise to us. It will also be a surprise to the world when millions of people disappear from the face of the earth.

36 But of that day and hour knoweth no *man*, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only.

37 But as the days of Noe *were*, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be.

38 For as in the days that were before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark,

39 And knew not until the flood came, and took them all away; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be.

40 Then shall two be in the field; the one shall be taken, and the other left.

41 Two *women shall be* grinding at the mill; the one shall be taken, and the other left.

42 Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come.

43 But know this, that if the goodman of the house had known in what watch the thief would come, he would have watched, and would not have suffered his house to be broken up.

44 Therefore be ye also ready: **for in such an hour as ye think not** the Son of man cometh.

Jesus will come with a shout and the voice of the archangel and a trumpet. We will hear all the clamor and rejoice. There is no mention that the world will hear it, but Christians sure will as we are transformed and rise in the air to meet Christ in the air.

Acts 1:10-11 And while they looked stedfastly toward heaven as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel;  
11 Which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven.

#### 4. The tragic dismay -

What will be a happy surprise reunion with Christ will be tragic dismay for the world left behind. There will be those who never heard the Gospel who will receive the witness of the Jewish preachers who take up Gospel. However, those who have heard the Gospel before the rapture will not even know they *should* be dismayed. They will become part of the grand delusion. After Paul wrote about the Rapture to the Thessalonians in his first letter, there were those who came to think they had missed it somehow. In his next letter, Paul assured them that if Christ *had* come, they would have seen the Antichrist come to power.

2Thess 2:4-12 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.

5 Remember ye not, that, when I was yet with you, I told you these things?

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. **[He who letteth, or is in control, is the Holy Spirit. When He steps out of the way, the Antichrist will come in the power of Satan, which we will examine in more depth next week.]**

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:

9 *Even him*, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders,

10 And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. **[The tragic dismay is now going to come.]**

11 **And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie:**

12 **That they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness.**

Those who have heard the Gospel and have put it off thinking that they can wait till Christ reveals Himself will be sadly disappointed. Because they had rejected the Gospel of salvation, they will be susceptible to the deceit of the devil. When the strong delusion comes, it will be too late. They will be damned who had rejected the truth.

In 2 Peter 2:5 Noah was called a preacher of righteousness. In Genesis 6:3, God had given man 120 years to repent. Every day that Noah preached, the people lived in wicked disobedience while they watched him building the ark.

Heb 11:7 By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house; by the which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith.

When the rains came, the world ended. When Christ comes, the world we know will end, but in the End Times, the world will suffer under the Antichrist and the wrath of God. If you are hearing this message and left behind, you will experience that wrath and fall to the delusion of the lies of the Antichrist. Noah's flood was a precursor of the greater wrath of God to come in end. The decision we must make is always upon us.

Rev 22:17,20 And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.

20 He which testifieth these things saith, Surely I come quickly. Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus. **[The entire Bible closes with our great anticipation of His coming!]**

The rapture will be the greatest surprise in human history. For the mature believer who has been planning for this, it will be a surprise filled with joy, reunion, and eternal hope. But for the unbeliever, it will be a surprise filled with tragic dismay. The same trumpet that calls God's people home will leave the world reeling in confusion and judgment.

If you are here today and have never received Christ as your Savior, do not put it off. Just as in the days of Noah, people lived as though life would go on forever until the flood came and took them all away. The door of the ark was shut, and their opportunity was gone. When Christ calls His church away, the day of grace will be past for those who have heard and rejected the Gospel. Today, if you hear His voice, harden not your heart. Come to Christ, trust Him as Savior, and escape the wrath to come.

And to those who are saved, the message is clear: watch and be sober. We are not appointed to wrath to come. This is no time for spiritual sleep. The world

is chasing its crises and false messiahs, but we know the true King is coming. Let us be faithful in our service, steadfast in our hope, and urgent in our witness. Occupy until He comes!

Are you ready for the surprise of the rapture? If you are not saved, come to Christ today. If you are saved, live in the light of His coming.

1. The Rapture - 1Cor 15:51-52, 1Thess 4:13-18
2. A word of caution - Matt 24:3-6,23
3. Surprise! Matt 24:32-44, Acts 1:10-11
4. The tragic dismay 2Thess 2:4-12, Heb 11:7, Rev 22:17,20