

## The Rapture of the Church

**Text:** Rev. 4:1; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; 1 Cor. 15:51-54

**Introduction:** Before looking at the details of the rapture itself it will be helpful for us to outline several foundational points concerning the rapture of the church.

1. What is the rapture?
  - There is a clear distinction between the rapture and the revelation (the second coming). The rapture is when Christ comes in the air **for** His saints (1 Thess. 4:13-18; 1 Cor. 15:51-54). The revelation is when Christ returns to earth **with** His saints. The 7-year tribulation period lies between these two momentous events.
  - The rapture is described as a 'mystery' in 1 Cor. 15:51. A 'mystery' refers to truth revealed in the New Testament that was previously unknown to the Old Testament saints (Eph. 3:3-5; Col. 1:26). This again proves that this event is distinct from the second coming which was clearly revealed in the O.T. Scriptures.
2. When will the rapture occur?
  - We believe in the pre-tribulation rapture. That is, the rapture will occur before the commencement of Daniel's 70<sup>th</sup> week (the 7-year tribulation period) (Refer 1 Thess. 5:9; Rev. 3:10)
  - We are never to seek to set a date for this event (Matt. 24:36) but simply believe it is imminent (could happen at any moment) The word 'imminent' combines both certainty and uncertainty. When used of the coming of Christ, it means that his coming is a sure and certain event but the timing of that event is uncertain. An understanding of this truth creates a spirit of anticipation and expectancy. "On the certainty of the event, our faith is grounded: by the uncertainty of the time, our hope is stimulated, and our watchfulness aroused." (Alford) Illustration: The Jewish wedding custom (Matt. 25:1-13)
3. NBC Statement of Faith: We believe in the imminent, pre-tribulation gathering of the saints to meet Christ in the air; the literal tribulation or day of the Lord as foretold in the Book of Revelation; and the literal, personal, bodily return of Jesus Christ to the earth to set up his millennial kingdom. I Thessalonians 4:13-18; Revelation 20:4-6; Acts 1:11.
4. Context & background to Thessalonian rapture passage: The Thessalonian believers were filled with sorrow over the departure of some of their brethren in Christ and seemed to fear that those who failed to live until the coming of Christ would be at a disadvantage at His return (Vs. 15). "They fancied that those who had departed would miss the blissful reunion, or at least come behind those who lived until the *parousia* (coming). Thus, their grief was not just a natural sorrow for their own loss but grief for the supposed loss of their loved ones sustained by their death before the return of the Lord." (Hiebert)

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Paul writes to correct their ignorance in this matter and thus comfort them in their grief over loved ones who had departed.

With that background in mind, let's consider 5 truths about the rapture:

### I. The Sureness of the Rapture (Vs. 16a)

#### A. The Promise in the Language

1. Vs. 15 "For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord" = Paul was revealing Divine truth from God. We have the promise of God's Word that this will take place.
2. Note the word 'shall' that occurs 4 times in Vs. 16 & 17.

#### B. The Promise of the Lord Himself (John 14:1-3)

1. This is another key rapture passage and is distinct from the second coming references in Matthew, Mark & Luke given during the Olivet discourse. These words of Christ are given later during the Upper Room discourse just prior to His crucifixion.
2. Christ promises us a mansion ("I go to prepare a place for you") and a meeting ("receive you unto myself"). The word 'receive' means "to take".
3. "where I am" = Where is Christ? He is in heaven. He is coming to take the church age believers to mansions in heaven. In contrast, the Second Coming is where Christ returns to earth at the end of the 7-year tribulation to establish His Messianic kingdom.

### II. The Suddenness of the Rapture (1 Cor. 15:51-52)

There are two descriptions of the instantaneous nature of this event in these verses:

#### A. In a Fleeting Moment – 'moment'

1. The word 'moment' is the Greek word ἀτόμῳ which is where we get our English word 'atom' from.
2. This refers to an indivisible moment of time; something like a millisecond (a thousandth of a second)

#### B. In a Flash – "twinkling of an eye"

1. The word 'twinkling' was used by the Greeks to describe things like the twinkling of a star, the buzz of a gnat or the quivering of a harp (RWP)
2. Someone put it this way: It is not the blinking of an eye but the sparkling of an eye
3. Just think! Multitudes of believers living at the time of the rapture will disappear in less than a second!

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### III. The Sounds of the Rapture (Vs. 16b)

Three sounds will announce this event. We need to be listening for these sounds as believers!

#### A. The Shout of the Lord

1. "the Lord himself" = the Lord is personally coming for us as His people and he will summon us to Himself with a shout.
2. 'shout' = a military style command. Exactly what the Lord will say is not clearly stated but it could be the words recorded in Revelation 4:1 *"After this I looked, and, behold, a door was opened in heaven: and the first voice which I heard was it were of a trumpet talking with me; which said, **Come up hither**, and I will shew thee things which must be hereafter."*
3. Illustration: Christ's authoritative command to dead Lazarus (John 11:43)

#### B. The Voice of the Archangel

1. There is only one Archangel mentioned in Scripture and his name is Michael (Jude 1:9). He is a high-ranking angel (possibly the chief of the angels) who has a particular association with the nation of Israel (Dan. 10:21; 12:1)
2. Michael also is seen in conflict with Satan and powers of darkness (Dan. 10:21; Rev. 12:7). It is of interest to note that the rapture takes place in the "air" and Satan is called "the prince of the power of the air" (Eph. 2:2)

#### C. The Sound of the Trumpet

1. Trumpets used in the nation of Israel for assembly.
2. "last trump" = language is based on the imagery of the Roman camp of Paul's time. The first trumpet blast required the camp to pack up. A second trumpet blast summoned the soldiers to assemble in their ranks, and the last and final trump sent them on their journey.

### IV. The Sequence of the Rapture (Vs. 16c-17)

#### A. Resurrection – "the dead in Christ shall rise first"

1. The Thessalonians feared that the dead in Christ would be at a disadvantage to the living at the time of the Lord's coming. In actual fact, they would rise first!
2. This is the resurrection of life for the believer. There will also be a resurrection of damnation for the unsaved (See John 5:29).

#### B. Rapture – "then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up"

1. "then we" = Paul includes himself. He lived in anticipation that the Lord's coming could occur even in his life time!
2. "which are alive and remain" = believers living at the time of the rapture will never die

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3. “shall be caught up” = denotes a sudden and forcible seizure, an irresistible act of catching away, due to divine activity. It can also be rendered “snatch up, sweep up, carry off by force.” The Latin for the Greek word is **rapturo**, from which we derive our English word **rapture**. (Hiebert) The same Greek word is translated as follows:
  - a. “...*the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip*” (Acts 8:39)
  - b. “*And when there arose a great dissension, the chief captain, fearing lest Paul should have been pulled in pieces of them, commanded the soldiers to go down, and to take him by force from among them, and to bring him into the castle.*” (Acts 23:10)
  - c. “...**caught up to the third heaven...caught up into paradise**” (2 Cor. 12:2, 4)
  - d. “**pulling them out of the fire**” (Jude 1:23)
  - e. ‘**pluck**’ (John 10:28-29)

**C. Reunion** – “together with them in the clouds”

**D. Realization** – “to meet the Lord in the air”

1. The Lord Jesus is the focal point of this event – “the Lord himself shall descend”; “to meet the Lord”; “so shall we ever be with the Lord”
2. Hymn: The bride eyes not her garment but her dear bridegroom’s face; I will not gaze at glory, But on my King of grace. Not at the crown He giveth, But on His pierced hand, the Lamb is all the glory of Immanuel’s land.
3. “... *we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is.*” (1 John 3:2)

**E. Rest** – “and so shall we ever be with the Lord”

## V. The Schooling of the Rapture (Vs. 18)

There are two very important messages we need to take to heart from considering the truth of the rapture. The message of the rapture is...

**A. A message of Comfort (Vs. 18)**

1. Remember the context is believers grieving the loss of loved ones in the Lord. Paul does not forbid them from grieving (even Christ grieved at the death of Lazarus in John 11:35) but he instructs them not to grieve like the unsaved who have no hope.
2. The rapture is called the “blessed hope” (Titus 2:13) and Christian hope is a sure and certain thing. We will see those loved ones in Christ again!
3. Note: There is little comfort in the truth of a Mid-Tribulation or Post-Tribulation rapture!

**B. A message of Challenge**

1. To the saved – how am I living for Christ?
  - a. The truth of the Lord’s return should motivate God’s people to pursue holiness.

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- b. 1 John 3:3 “*And every man that hath this hope in him **purifieth himself**, even as he is pure.*”
  - c. Titus 2:11-14 “*For the grace of God that bringeth salvation...*”
  - d. Do we live each day in anticipation of Christ’s return? If we did, it would transform the way we live. It would adjust our priorities and it would change our attitudes. It would affect our outreach to the lost and our giving to the Lord. It would change the way we use the internet and make us careful as to what we watch and read. It would give us more zeal for the work of God and for the cause of world-wide missions. It would change the way we live!
2. To the lost – will you be left behind?
- a. To the saved, the rapture is a time of reunion but to the lost, it is a time of separation, being left behind to face the 7-year tribulation period. The rapture is only for those “in Christ”!
  - b. If you are unsaved at the time of the rapture, having failed to receive the offer of salvation, not only will you enter the 7-year tribulation period which will be a time of trouble unparalleled in human history, but you will also be in very real danger of being deceived by the antichrist and damned for eternity. See 2. Thessalonians 2:10-12
  - c. We are currently in the age of grace. At Christ’s first coming He came as the Saviour but at His second coming He will come as Judge. The time to accept Christ’s offer of salvation is now before it is too late! 2 Cor. 6:2 “*...now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation.*”

### Conclusion:

1. Are you living in the light of Christ’s return? Are you pursuing a life of holiness?
2. Are you saved? Will you be raptured or left behind?
3. Are we seeking to reach the lost before it is too late?