

TO PRETRIBBERS with LOVE

I have been saying for some time now that the rapture and the second coming are the same event. "Rapture" is a relatively new word among us who know the Lord, and means nothing more than what the second coming meant to our fathers for many generations. I have stated my case often in various writings on Sermonaudio and in books. But occasionally other confirming ideas appear in my thinking, and I like to share them.

For example, the use of the word "elect" in Matthew 24 (and parallel passage Mark 13).

Now, we are told by those who are supposed to know, and who have great followings to prove it, that there is no mention of the "church" after Revelation 4, proving (of course) that the church is evacuated in that early part of the book, never to be associated with all the mayhem that will soon break out on the planet. Safe at home. While the second class wannabe Christians are left to get "really" saved when the trouble hits.

When we point out to these people that the word "saints" is indeed used in the rest of the book of revelation, and that the word "saints" is used in the rest of the New Testament to refer to church people, believers, the people of God... somehow that is not good enough. When we go on to add that there are several other books in the New Testament that do not use the word "church" either... blank stares.

So let's try another word. *Elect*. Chosen ones. From the foundation of the world we have been chosen in Him, right? Romans 8:33, Titus 1:1, Paul. I Peter 1:2, Peter. They use the word. They are speaking of the chosen people of God, the church. Fair enough?

Also fair to say that when Jesus uses that same word, He is talking about the same people? We're not going to set up Jesus against His two most prominent followers, are we?

Then look at what He said in Matthew 24:22.

Trouble is coming. Worldwide and awful trouble. Even worse than now. All the evil you hear about now will be multiplied, and there will be few if any safe havens for righteousness. Violence and destruction will proliferate to the point that the end of the human race will be faintly seen on the horizon.

But God has a people. His chosen ones. The church. They are still here. They are praying. He is listening and answering. For their sake He puts on the brakes and says "Enough." Then Jesus comes. You read Matthew 24:22. Have I not explained it properly?

But wait. When he comes, what does He do? He gathers those other "elect", the ones who have died up until now, and raptures them, snatches them up from the heavens as they rise from the dead, to join the ones He will now rapture from the Earth, the praying suffering warriors who have endured the worst nightmare of humanity.

Folks, far from being the scum of the church, or some half breed group called "Tribulation Saints", these are heroes unmentionable, of whom the world is not worthy. "These are they who have come out of great tribulation," says the one in Revelation to John. Their crowns will far exceed those of the health and wealth and signs and wonders group, who lived for their own glory and prosperity while millions all over the world suffered for Jesus.

The elect. If you say that those "elect" on the earth, during the tribulation, are not the church, what do you do with the ones called the elect in the heavens? Also not the church? No friends, we must stop now with this dividing up of the Body of Christ. There simply is no class called "Tribulation Saints". As "rapture" and all the rest, these are made up terms to fit a theory that clearly cannot meet the test of Scripture, for those who will take the serious time to study those Writings.

These saints alive during the Tribulation are none other than the Body of the Lord Jesus, the elect, the church.

IMMINENCE

Though I have spoken so definitely about this because the Scripture is definite and clear, there has always been one issue that bothered me, and that was the doctrine of "imminence." This is the teaching that Jesus could come to the Earth at just any minute and end the world. The rapture could occur right now.

I have pondered the Scriptures that seem to say this, knowing there is somewhat of a contradiction for me to tell people that antichrist will come first, but Jesus says to "watch, for you do not know when your Lord is coming..." "What I say unto you I say unto all. watch!"

Consider this. Did Jesus know when He would return? No. He said so. Did the Father know when Jesus would return? Yes. Jesus said so. Would the Father ever have the Son say something that would mislead the people of God? Obviously not. He's not that kind of God.

On the other hand, when the disciples asked Jesus for a sign of His coming, did He give them one? Yes, Matthew 24:15, the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel. Serious students have checked that out and realize that this happening is the signal of the beginning of the last few years of history.

So the Father knows exactly when Jesus is coming, and through Jesus by way of Daniel, has given His church a sign to look for to let us know when He is near. Why then did He allow Jesus to tell people to watch for Him in every generation, knowing, I say *knowing*, that Jesus would not come in just any generation but only the last one?

Would it be true, looking back on history, that Jesus could have come in the 1700's, the 1900's? No, it is unthinkable that He might have come then. Because He didn't, *and the Father knew He wouldn't!* Yet the Word kept saying to those people, Watch! Watch!

So in what sense are we to be looking at any moment for the coming of Jesus (for that is a Scriptural idea!) ? There's only one solution. Jesus may come for me today.

When we preach imminence, we must preach a realistic imminence that coincides with the facts of Scripture. It doesn't matter that Jesus may come tomorrow afternoon if I die tonight. What matters is that I am ready to meet Jesus when He comes for me. When I am absent from this body, I go to meet the Lord. I have no idea when that will occur, though some saints have been forewarned through the years even of this.

Another observation comes to mind as I speak of forewarned saints. It seems to me that the persons who are entrusted with the most revelation knowledge (I mean by that, illumination of the Scriptures) on this subject are the ones living for God the most. Those who do not care when He is coming are living their own selfish lives and will indeed be caught off guard, whether by death or His return. The two most faithful men we all can think of were Peter and Paul, and both of them knew when Jesus was coming... for them. That was the coming that mattered most to them, by the way.

Though we long for His coming, recall that to get there we will be going through the most horrific events earth people have ever imagined. We must prepare our lives now for that other coming, when we meet Him personally in the air as we escape this body at our personal rapture.

The next time you rabidly proclaim to someone that "Jesus is coming soon" or "Jesus may come today!" let them know that what that could well mean is that death could stop their lives before the day is out, that life is serious because death is certain. Jesus could come for them at any time.

And he will come to the planet at the time He told His people He would come. And no sooner. Our cries of "Come Lord Jesus" must line up with all the revelation He gave us in the Scriptures.