

What if We Are All Right?

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First Things
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Bible Text: 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18
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What a wonderful, wonderful reminder. He saw beyond my faults, and he saw my need.

Well, if you're a veteran of Sunday evenings here at First Baptist, we have been very slowly and very strategically walking through what we know as the gospel of Matthew. But we're not going to do that tonight. Allow me to share with you one of the many reasons why I love Sunday evenings. Sunday evenings are one of those times when we gather together, not only to worship together, to fellowship together, to study the word of God together, but it's also one of those times where we can take a passage, we can take a subject matter, and we can exhaust it to the level that we so desire without oftentimes the constrictions and the confines of what we know as the abundance of Sunday morning.

That being said, I want to invite you again to open your Bibles to 1 Thessalonians 4. This morning we read a passage in verse 13 through 18 that has over the years been labeled as one of the "rapture passages." I made mention this morning that when it comes to the issue not only of the Second Coming eschatology, but particularly this concept of the rapture, there are more opinions and preferences than you could ever imagine. There are those that believe that it's not even a biblical concept. There are others that believe in what is called a reverse rapture, where the godly people are left and the ungodly are taken away. There are those that say it's a pre-tribulational, mid-tribulational, post-tribulational. There's all kinds of variances. And unfortunately, over time, what has occurred is that we get so dogmatic about our position, we get so emphatic about our preference that we can't see anything but what we see and unfortunately, what that causes us to do is not only at times act irrationally, but it causes us to take passages that clearly say something contrary to what we believe, and we try to twist it and turn it and force it to say what we believe so that our position is the only one that is "advocated and/or promoted."

I know of an actual story some years ago of what we might call in today's context a Bible college that had a very specific perspective on what we know as the chronology of the rapture. There was a very high-ranking official that came out to say that he held a position that was contrary to, and he was terminated because of it. Now, we all understand administratively, if you're not on board with the vision of an institution, we grasp that, but today I want to pose or tonight I want to pose a question for you: what if we're all right? Now, I believe in the law of non-contradiction. You cannot have two

opposing thoughts both be right at the same time, okay? It can't happen, all right? This is actually, this is my fair example, you can't have a married bachelor. You're either one or the other, right? You cannot have multiple positions that contradict each other all be correct all at the same time. However, in 2 Timothy 2:15, it says that we're to take the word of God and we're to rightly divide it, not take passages that deal with a certain subject matter and cram them all together, but to rightly divide. And so tonight, as we deal with a passage that we are most familiar with, a subject matter that at times is very debatable and divisive, I'm going to pose the question: is it possible that we might all be right?

Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, as we tackle the text tonight, Lord, we know that throughout the last two millennia there has been great discussion, there's been great debate, and unfortunately there's been great division. God, I pray that you would give us discernment, give us wisdom, Lord, give us a desire just to promote, advocate, and preach that which is true and not what we want to be true. God, help us not to be Baptists tonight. Help us to be biblical. Help us just allow the Bible to speak for itself and for us to come in conformity to the text and not try to make the text into conformity of our position. It is in the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.

Again, 1 Thessalonians 4:13 through 18, one of many passages that we could put within this parameter of "rapture passages." Just a quick reminder, for those who have been here on Sunday morning, I know you're familiar with this, this is the first letter of the Apostle Paul to the early church some 20 years post what we know as the resurrection of Jesus Christ. In context, these early believers were beginning to struggle. The same Jesus who told them they would have everlasting life and never die, they're attending funerals of their loved ones that are believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, which is why in verse 13 it begins,

13 ... 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.

So tonight what I want to take is not only this primary text, but I want to take this concept of what we hear about and know concerning a "rapture event" and I just want to walk through some basic questions in a multitude of passages and lay out a, might we say, a

possibility for what the scripture is actually saying versus maybe what we personally want to promote.

Let's begin with what we might call the definition of rapture, kind of the "what" question. I've heard this before. People say, "Oh, you can't advocate the rapture in the Bible because the word's not in the Bible." Well, neither's the word Trinity but we see that there is one God who is in the person of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. However, what we know as the term or the concept of a "rapture," the original word, if you were to go all the way back to the original languages, and I don't do this often, but I think on a subject matter that has been so divisive, it is necessary. The original word is called harpazo. That's how you say it in Greek. The Latin word is rapture, to be raptured. The English word, we've just transliterated it from the Latin. But the word by definition simply means to supernaturally and instantaneously transport somebody. That's what it means.

Now, one of the best examples, and we dealt with this a little bit this morning, is found in the book of Acts 8 of Philip that faithful believer of the early church is witnessing to the Ethiopian eunuch. He shares with him Jesus out of the prophet Isaiah. He professes his faith. He is baptized. And immediately after his baptism, Philip is taken from one geographic location immediately to another one, instantaneously, without delay, supernaturally. The word that is used there is what we call the rapture word. It just means to be "caught up, supernaturally transported from one location into another." And so when you get to verse 17 of this passage, when it says, then we which are alive and remain shall be "caught up," that's that word harpazo. That's that rapture word. By definition, it does not mean to be taken up in the air. It just means to be transported from one location to another, instantaneously, supernaturally, by the hand of God. However, in context of 1 Thessalonians 4, we are caught up not to another geographical location, but the context is we are caught up in the air to "be with the Lord."

So the term or the word, you're absolutely correct if this is your position, rapture is not in English found in your Bibles. The word or the phrase is "to be caught up" but it is that word that is a part of the history of its respective language. Here's the big question, the "when." We cannot deny the Bible says there's going to be a time where believers, both those deceased and those alive, will meet together with the Lord and be "caught up" or to be raptured. The "when" part is when, if you'll allow me to say it, everybody tends to get a little bit debated and divisive among themselves. I've got people that disagree with me, agree with me, and you've got the like in your life as well. And one of the things that I want to do tonight is kind of peel away some of these theories, look at them biblically and discover what the Bible might actually be saying versus what we think or we hope it is saying.

I want to begin with an analogy that the Bible uses us of agriculture. Obviously, it was an agrarian society and the majority of what we know as the biblical text, whether it was those of the ancient Old Testament or New Testament days, over and over again there are these agricultural illustrations, none more so than in the book of Ruth. Remember Ruth, where she finds herself in the field looking for the gleanings after the harvest? But in an agricultural sense, there are really, and this is biblically defined multiple places, there are

three what we might call phases to a "harvesting season." There are what we call the firstfruits, there is the primary harvest and then there are the gleanings. And it is through all three of these, if you'll allow me to say phases, that we have the totality of the entire field being collected. So we would never say, well, there are firstfruits that come up and that's all the field ever produces. We would never say, well, the firstfruits have come up, well, that's not really the harvest. The harvest is when it's the greatest number of available crops. And much like in Boaz and Ruth's relationship, we would never leave the gleanings on the edge and go, that doesn't count. All three of them are a part of or an aspect of the totality of the harvest, they just happen to be in three different phases and of different sizes and "different seasons."

I want to overlay that analogy tonight with what I believe is a possible biblical understanding of reconciling all of these positions about us being taken up before the tribulation, after the tribulation, all these different "eschatological or Second Coming concepts." Let's begin with what we might call the firstfruits. We alluded to it a little bit this morning. I want to explore more in detail tonight. Matthew 27. Now I said tonight we weren't going to study Matthew. I didn't say we weren't going to go to Matthew. Matthew 27. This is one of those passages and I'm sure many of you may be familiar with it, but I can tell you the first time that I really read what it actually said was one of those, what did I just read moments? See, when we talk about the crucifixion of Jesus, when we talk about the resurrection of Jesus, we know the story pretty well. I mean we know about the Garden of Gethsemane. We know about Caiaphas and the high priest. We know about Pilate. We know about the lashes upon his back. We know about the mocking, the scourging. We know about the seven statements. We know about the three days and three nights and we know about an empty tomb. But sometimes it's the details that the Bible gives us that when we actually give them attention, causes us to take a step and go, what did I just read? Verse 51 of Matthew 27. It says, "And behold, the veil of the temple was rent in two from the top to the bottom, and the earth did quake, and the rocks rent and the graves were opened, and many bodies of the saints which slept arose. They came out of the graves after his resurrection. They went into the holy city, and they appeared unto many."

Now that's just one of those passages if you've never really given it much attention, you're like, did I just read what I thought I just read? It basically says that a whole lot of graves that had been occupied prior to Jesus' resurrection were opened up upon his resurrection and they walked around in the holy city. Now does it strike you odd that here we have this passage in the early church that never talked about these folks? I mean, there's no record of, "Oh yeah, we were fellowshiping in Thessalonica and Noah joined our church." I mean, don't you think that would come up? I mean, seriously, I mean, after all, these are folks that have been raised from the dead. You would think there would be some "record of or mentioning later" of the occurrences.

Let me remind you what I shared this morning about Lazarus. Lazarus is raised from the dead in John 11. In chapter 12 of John, they seek his life. They want to kill him because of his testimony. And he's never mentioned again. Nicodemus helps Joseph of Arimathea in John 19 bury the body of Jesus. He's never mentioned again. Why do I mention those

two individuals? Because both of them, because of their, shall we say, faith in and belief in Jesus, would have been sought after for quick eradication from those that were contrary to. And so the fact that we do not hear about these individuals, we have no more record of them, gives us two, what I believe, options. Either A, the enemies of Jesus in the early church either eradicated them very quickly, which doesn't seem to match the biblical record because in Acts 12, it tells us of the first apostle that was martyred for the faith, and in Acts 8, it tells us about the first Christian that was martyred for the faith. Why would we not hear about these? Which leaves open this possibility. Number 1, you have them raising from the grave. That's very rapturesque, can we agree? But then you have this event in Acts 1. Jesus Christ has taught the disciples for 40 days, 40 nights. He takes them on the side of a hill and he ascends in their sight. He goes up into the heavens to rightfully take his place until his return. Do you remember what the angels said? The two angels said, "Why do you stand here looking? Do you not know that in the same manner that Jesus departed, he will return?" Now, we quickly say, yes, he went up into the clouds, and according to Revelation 19, he descends from the clouds, correct? So let me ask you a question: when he comes back in Revelation 19, is he all alone? No. Is it possible, could it be, that all these saints that walked in the holy city raptured up with Jesus in Acts 1?

Now, I know the Bible doesn't give us concrete information. I understand the Bible doesn't share with us all the details here, but you have to admit it is odd to make mention of these people raising from the dead, walking in the holy city, and never hear about them again. They were either quickly eradicated or they were quickly removed, and it just happens to be that within about 40 days, the one whom raised them from the dead ascended into the heavens. Is it possible that this is the firstfruits? These would be the first ones who Jesus Christ not only raised, but "called unto himself."

Then we have what is called the harvest. Now, anytime you're using an agricultural analogy and use the term harvest, this is the vast majority of the crops that are going to be taken. You have firstfruits and yes, there's the gleanings, but the harvest itself, this is the big one. There are two primary passages of scripture that we call rapture passages. The one we just read in 1 Thessalonians 4, for the sake of time we will not read the parallel passage in 1 Corinthians 15:50 through 55. That's the famous one that we sang in song tonight, that in a moment we shall all be changed. That comes from 1 Corinthians 15. Here's the thing I want to share with you that is so important to our study tonight, that in both of those passages there is not a hint, there is not a glimmer of any other aspects of Second Coming language anywhere around them. Here's what I mean by that. Read the book of Revelation. You've got all kinds of carnage coming from the heavens. You've got all kinds of destruction taking place on earth. There is pain. There is anguish. There is heartache. There is misery. And yet there's no mention of that in 1 Thessalonians. You've just got a bunch of believers who are minding their own business and the Lord says there's a day coming where you're going to be taken out of here. The same is with 1 Corinthians. Now they are struggling with their own personal sin. They're struggling with navigating how to live this Christian life. But there's no other Second Coming language anywhere around chapter 15. There's just no, and I hate to use this big old word, there's no eschatological language.

You know, Jesus talked about in Matthew 24 and we'll address this in a moment, days where there will be earthquakes in diverse places. There will be children who are uprising and rebelling against authority. It talks about there will be wars and rumors of wars and disease and pestilence. There's none of that in 1 Thessalonians. There's none of that in 1 Corinthians which is why there is a significant number of people that throughout time have looked at this event and said, well when the Lord calls those that are dead and those that are alive to be with him, it will be prior to or before or pre all of those book of Revelation stuff that Jesus Christ himself in Matthew 24 called the great tribulation.

Because there's no tribulational language. There's no Second Coming language. It's just business as usual then all of a sudden without thinking in the moment in a twinkling of an eye, we're gone. However, I have to be fair. There are other what we might call rapturesque passages that have a lot of Second Coming language around them. One of them is in Matthew 24. In fact if you still have Matthew 27 open just a few pages to the left, Jesus is on the Mount of Olives. Peter, James and John are gathered there and they ask him two very strategic questions about when shall these things be, meaning the tearing down of the temple, what will be the sign of his coming. When you get into verse 36, Jesus begins to talk about the days of Noah. He says, "But of that day and that hour knoweth no man, no not the angels of heaven, but my Father only. But as in the days of Noah were so shall the coming of the Son of man be. For as in the days that were before the flood, they were eating, they were drinking, they were marrying, they were given in marriage until the day that Noah entered into the ark, knew not until the flood came and he took them all away, so shall the coming of the Son of man be." Here's the passage.

"Then shall two be in the field, one shall be taken and the other left. Two women shall be gathered at the mill, one will be taken and the other left. Watch therefore for you know not what hour your Lord doth come. 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. Therefore, be you also ready, for in such an hour as you think not, the Son of man cometh."

Well, if you talk about two people in the field, one's taken, one's left, that's pretty rapturesque, is it not? However, we have a very stark difference here. Unlike 1 Thessalonians and unlike 1 Corinthians, there's a whole lot of Second Coming language around this passage. In fact, all of chapter 24 and all of chapter 25, if you'll allow me to put it in colloquial terms, the sky is falling. It's bad. It's ugly. It's not pretty. In fact, Jesus said when you see these things, he said run for the hills. It's a very different context than what we have in 1 Thessalonians or 1 Corinthians.

Now, if you've done any type of study of the book of Revelation or end time events, one of the things that you know is in Matthew 24, Jesus speaks of a time period that we call Daniel's 70th week, Jacob's trouble, Jesus called it the great tribulation. It is described in detail in Revelation 6 through 19. I promise I'm not trying to be trite when I say this, this is an actual description of those chapters, it is hell on earth because it says that those that dwell in the bottomless pit actually come out and wreak havoc on those that are rebelling against God. That is exactly what it is. But you know in Revelation 7, it says even in the midst of that, there will be an untold number of people who believe. There will be those

who understand the plight, shall we say, of that Antichrist beast figure. They will renounce his mark. They won't buy into the system that's been put into place. And essentially the Bible describes that they will be redeemed out of. You say, "So why is that critical?" Because when Jesus comes back in Revelation 19, it says his whole army is with him. In other words, at some point, those people have got to get up to be able to come down with him.

Now, again, it just makes sense that if they're going to come back with him, they've got to go up and be with him so is it possible, because there are those who look at these passages and go, "Oh, you can't have a pre-tribulation rapture because look at all this language here." What if we're all right? What if, just like in agricultural terms, the Lord actually raptures three times? It wouldn't be the first time that God did something in threes, would it? In fact, he does it a whole lot of times in the Bible. And one of the issues that we often have is we have our respective position, whatever it may be, and we take the passages that are contrary to our respective position and we force them to say what we want them to say but what if they're all saying something different? What if they're all describing a similar event, but hear me, at different times? What that would mean is that those Old Testament saints that rose when Jesus rose, they've already raptured up to be with him. It means that since then, 2,000 years later, the church who has seen, hopefully, billions and billions of people come to know Jesus Christ as their Savior, that is that harvest time that is going to come in a moment in the twinkling of an eye. We shall "be caught up" and it is going to be a whole lot of us coming out of the graves and being translated and changed. But then there's the possibility that even in the midst of the seven-year period that Jesus called the Great Tribulation, that those believers, if you'll allow me to say those saints of those days, have their own opportunity to "be caught up."

You say, "Well, I don't find that in the book of Revelation." You know, it's interesting, in chapter 11 of Revelation, there are two individuals that we call the witnesses. They have an interesting spiritual gift. They breathe fire on their enemies and they kill them. It's a fascinating story, but nonetheless, these two witnesses experience a very unusual death. The Bible says in Revelation 11 that that Antichrist figure cuts their head off and leaves them in the street for three and a half days. That's what the Bible says. Then it says, basically, their head rolls back on their body and guess what happens? They are ascended up into the heavens. It's pretty rapturesque, is it not?

And so you have the ascension of Jesus in Acts 1. You have the rising of these two witnesses in Revelation 11. What we're seeing is a pattern here of people who are believers potentially taken supernaturally from one location to another instantaneously and supernaturally, which, by the way, is just the definition of the rapture, which means if we advocate that there is no way that the bride of Christ, the body of Christ, the church of Christ would be subjected to the wrath of God in what we know as the tribulation, you're absolutely right but at the same time, we cannot neglect that there will be people who are believers in that tribulation of time period and I think the Bible gives evidence that they, much like the Old Testament saints, that they have the opportunity to be called up as well. So at the end of the day, we're all talking about a similar event. We may have passages that are describing different times.

So let's talk about the "how" in closing. This rapturesque event, how does 1 Thessalonians describe it? Well, it's a two-fold event. We described this in detail this morning. It is the resurrection of the dead and it is the translation of the alive. Those that have been dead in Christ, no matter if it's been a day or a thousand years, and those that are walking with the Lord in the flesh are raised and translated to "be with the Lord." We've got that part. That's the easy part. Here's the part that I want to bring to your attention. In 1 Thessalonians 4, there is no indication that God is going to give us a two-minute warning for this event. Now, I'm a fan of the two-minute warning. I really am. You say, "Why are you a fan of the two-minute warning?" Because that's when offensive coordinators actually decide to play football, all right? You know, it's kind of like we just dilly-dally around for all this time, and then they all say, "We've got to get serious and score some points," right? I've got a friend of mine that calls God the God of the two-minute warning. But there is no two-minute warning on this event. In fact, I've heard people say, "Oh, don't worry. When this event happens, I'll get right with God." How are you going to do that in a nanosecond? You don't even have time to drop to your knees, okay? And so it is an instantaneous surprise if you'll allow. In fact, you go into 1 Thessalonians 5, it goes on and talks about this imagery of a thief but then in Matthew 24, remember, very tribulational language, but what was the analogy? Like a thief.

So I thought tonight it might be interesting to talk about the qualities of a thief. By the way, for those of you that are familiar with the subject matter, there was a series of movies made in the '70s, not very good quality, but based on this concept, and they were titled "A Thief in the Night," okay, which was based on these "rapturesque" theories. Allow me to describe five qualities about a thief in relationship to this passage. Number 1, thieves never announce they're coming. I've never known a thief to leave a note on the door and just say, "Guess what? At 3 in the morning tonight I'm coming in and breaking in." They don't do it. It happens without notice.

Secondly, they always come for a very specific or certain purpose. Thieves don't just bust into a house and say, "Well, let's see what I can take here." No. They're always after a specific item that can produce a specific result, usually something they can flip very quickly into a monetary means of that which they're ultimately "after." There are occasions, particularly where those that are poverty stricken, of individuals that have actually broken into houses and just taken food, because that's what they needed. Thieves don't just walk in and grab as much as they can. They only come for a very certain purpose.

Third, they only take what they consider items that are precious. They only take that which has value. If you're hungry, that's food. If you're broke, that's some electronics that you can translate into monetary means, whatever it may be. They do not come in, I have never known anybody who's ever said, "Man, my house got broken into and they took the old busted couch." They don't do it, do they? Why would you want that? The only reason for coming is to take that which is precious.

Fourth, they don't come to stay. You'll never find your house broken into and the thief sitting on the couch eating potato chips and drinking a Coke waiting on you to come home. In fact, they get in and they get out. Now, you've got to forgive me. You know I'm a car guy. Now, I'm an equal opportunity car guy. I like all cars, particularly fast cars. But there was a movie that was made some years ago about the auto theft industry, okay, and the title was "Gone in 60 Seconds." In other words, if you're going to take an item of that value that is not yours, you don't hang around all day. You get it done quickly. You don't hang around and as soon as they get what they want, they leave a mess. I've never known a thief to steal electronics out of a house and to sweep behind it when they're done because you know you all got dust bunnies back there. You know that. So what do you find when you get there? You just find a square with a bunch of dust on it where something valuable used to be.

Now, can we apply that analogy to this passage? There's coming a time where the Lord is not going to announce that he is coming for a specific purpose, to take that which is precious to him and that is his children that believe on him. He's not coming to stay. In fact, the Bible says he meets us in the air and as soon as he gets what he wants, he's going to leave the place a mess. Now, the last time I checked, irrespectively of what you consider your value to those that reside on planet earth, the absence of your presence would leave a void and a vacuum behind.

I want you to imagine just for the sake of illustration, just those in this room, a couple hundred in number, can you imagine the void in this community if all of a sudden our presence was not there? Can you imagine the mess that it would create? How about just, I'll just make it simple, yards that used to be maintained that are now never tended to. Houses that are up kept that are never cleansed. Jobs that are tasked that now never get done. Do you see the analogy? And that is why in chapter 5 of 1 Thessalonians and even Matthew 24 that describe two different time periods, it's a very similar action and response.

So how do we conclude a study on a subject matter that has been so divisive that hopefully tonight can "bring us all together"? Number 1, what we know as a rapture is elective and what I mean by elective is this, it is for those who are believers in the Lord Jesus Christ. It is not for the world at large. It is an elective event. Second, it's a universal event. It is not like the New Year. You say, "The New Year?" I know what some of you do, you may not want to admit it, but it is true. You have a hard time staying up to midnight on December 31st. So when the ball drops in New York, you call it a night at 11. You know it. Because you're like, "I'm not staying up for that." Some of you are like, "Forget New York, when it drops in London I'm gone." See, when the New Year comes, it comes progressively throughout the time zones. We see it coming and we see it going. Not this event. This event is not one that happens in Europe and then an hour later happens in the Americas. In fact, according to scripture, it is one that takes place at all times in all places instantaneously.

So, per the very well-purchased book series, what about those left behind? What about those that are not believers? Forget all the passages about pre, post, mid, and all that

chronology. What about those who are not precious? What about those that are not the children of God? What about those that are not called to be with the Lord? I want to conclude with a passage from 2 Thessalonians 2 very quickly before we wrap up tonight. It's a passage that deals a whole lot with whom we know as the Antichrist and kind of the means and ways by which he goes about his business. I'm going to pick up the story in verse 9 of chapter 2 and I'm going to be very transparent with you, I believe this is one of the most difficult passages in all the Bible. You say, "Why do you think it's so hard to read?" It's not hard to read, it's hard to believe because every time I read it, I read it from direction A and then I read it from direction B. I'll explain here in just a second.

Beginning in verse 9, remember the Antichrist has appeared. By the way, it says before that that we shall be removed. It says, "Even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders, And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this cause," listen to this, "God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: That they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness." Now, let me go back to verse 3. It says, "Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition."

Basically what this passage is saying is that there is going to be this time where we, the bride of Christ, the church of Christ, are taken to be with the Lord. When that occurs, this son of perdition, this Antichrist, this beast character, he arrives on the scene and he deceives the world. According to what we read in verses 9 through 13, even the Lord himself sends strong delusion. The verse that gets me is verse 12, "that they all might be damned who believe not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness." Now let me share with you the two ways you can read that passage. Either A, they had the opportunity and they just simply rejected it, or you can read it as B, that because they rejected it on this side of the rapture event, they don't get a chance on the other side.

Now, every time I read this passage, I read it one way one day, I read it another way the next, but can I tell you the conclusion to both is not good? Because the conclusion is either A, they don't have a chance, or B, the chance they have they don't take advantage of. And that's a problem, which means this, when it comes to this "rapture event," there's a lot of discussion, and there's a lot of division about chronology and means and ways and such, and I think it's worthy of discussion, but at the end of the day, whenever this event occurs, the Bible makes it pretty clear that if you're not a part of it, it doesn't work out well. Not in that day or in subsequent days.

I've got a statement that I make on a pretty regular basis that I'm just going to be honest, and I know on a Sunday night crowd, this may not be the crowd to hear it, but I'm going to say it anyway: I don't know how people who are lost go to bed at night. I don't. I don't know, if you don't know where you're going to spend eternity, I don't know how you go to sleep at night. I just, I don't, I don't get that. Can I transition to this passage? In light of what we just studied, I don't even know how lost people live through the day knowing that it's not just you're not waking in the morning, it's the fact that this could occur at any time, at any moment, and it's done. And so the conclusion of the matter is simply this: get saved and live like it. Period.

Tonight, before our time of response, I'm going to close with one final illustration that hopefully will bring a little bit of humor to a very serious subject. A story's been told of a very well-known, famous preacher. I could "drop his name" and you'd all know who he is. Grew up in a single mom home. Very meager means of living. They did not have much at all. But he recounts that as a young child, the one treat that he could always count on was that when he would get home from school, his mother would make fresh chocolate chip cookies. He said it was the one pleasure that he got to experience as a young child. He tells the story that one day he came home a little bit earlier than normal and they'd just come out of the oven and she'd just placed them where they needed to be. She said, "Son, I've got to go do something real quick. Don't get into the cookies. Don't do it." Well, what happens when you tell an eight-year-old not to get into the cookies? I mean, come on. What happens when you tell a 50-year-old not to get in the cookies? I mean, come on. All right, it is what it is. So mom went outside. This young third grade boy thought, "I want to sneak me a cookie." He said he got up on the little stool. He reached in the container. He had his hand on the cookie when his mom came in the kitchen and all she said was, "Son, is that really what you want to be doing when Jesus comes back for you?" Boy, that hits home, does it? Think about that for a moment. We read this passage on a Sunday evening and we say, "Oh, yeah, there's a lot of lost people out there," but what about us saved folks? Is that really what we want to be doing when this event occurs? Is that really where we want to be? Is that really what we want to be a part of? Maybe tonight, I know the title is involving the chronology, but maybe tonight should be, get your hand out of the cookie jar. Jesus is coming back.

Let's pray.

Lord Jesus, as we come to this time of response, Lord, we know that your time is not our time, but your word is what your word says. Lord, whether it happened in the next hour or in 500 years, you've made it clear that you're going to come back for us. And so, God, I pray tonight, if there be one here who's not ready, who's not saved by the blood of Jesus Christ, that tonight would be the night that you would draw them unto yourself, they would be convicted of their sin, and they would cry out to you to be saved. At the same time, God, I pray for those of us who are already a child of yours, already a son and a daughter, that this night as we study a subject matter that is, yes, it's controversial at times, but it's very clear to others, Lord, we confess that no matter what our preference is on chronology, there's a time coming that you're going to come back and, God, we don't need our hand in the cookie jar. So God, tonight, help us to remove those things from our life that have no business being there. God, help us tonight that whether it be noon, whether it be evening, whether it be today or whether it be years down the road, may we always be ready for your soon return. It is in the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.