

Christ's Last Word to His Church in: PHILADELPHIA: THE RAPTURE IS CHRIST'S INTENTIONAL RESCUE OF HIS CHURCH: FROM WHAT? Revelation 3:7-13

Today we all need a good dose of old-fashioned “living hope”, the kind that the teaching of Christ & His Apostles caused to overflow through the hearts, minds, and lives of early New Testament believers.

When Peter addressed the most heavily persecuted saints of the 1st Century, living all around the area of the seven churches we are studying in Revelation: he told them a foundational truth. He told them that salvation opens to us life-long lives of hope. Look with me at I Peter 1:3 as we begin today.

1 Peter 1:3 (NKJV) Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again **to a living hope** through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,

First Century Believers Looked for Christ Daily

The common denominator we find across the pages of the New Testament is a group of saints looking for Christ's Return. They were trained, taught, and modeled this life of waiting. Waiting for Jesus to return was explained to be their cause for hope. His intentional rescue was promised to keep them from the wrath to be poured out as Christ's 2nd Coming. Note how Paul taught them these were two separate events in his letters to the Thessalonians. Turn with me to I Thessalonians 1.

Note Paul's clear outline of Christ's return as taught to these new believers.

1 Thessalonians 1:9-10 (NKJV) For they themselves declare concerning us what manner of entry we had to you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, 10 and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus **who delivers us from the wrath to come.**

1 Thessalonians 2:19-20 (NKJV) For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Is it not even you **in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming?** 20 For you are our glory and joy.

1 Thessalonians 3:13 (NKJV) so that He may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father **at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all His saints.**

1 Thessalonians 4:16-18 (NKJV) For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. 17 Then **we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air.** And thus **we shall always be with the Lord.** 18 Therefore comfort one another with these words.

1 Thessalonians 5:23 (NKJV) Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at ***the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ***.

So, Paul from the very start of his church-planting ministry, as reflected in this first letter he wrote in AD 50-51, back to a church he planted: taught the hope of Christ's return.

Paul Consistently Taught Christ's Any-Moment Return

Now, later at the other end of his ministry Paul writes to Titus about AD 62-64, just after getting out of his first Roman imprisonment. Paul would be free about 2 years before his final imprisonment and death AD 66-67. So, near the end of his ministry note that he is saying the same thing he said at the start. Look with me at Titus 2:11-13, one of my all time favorite passages of the New Testament.

Titus 2:11-13 (NKJV) For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, 12 teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, 13 ***looking for the blessed hope*** and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ

What exactly is this “blessed hope” that all of us are to be looking for? Since Paul consistently taught God's Word and wrote under the inspiration-power of the Spirit, this truth should be explained, and it is.

The teaching that the new believers in the early church received from Paul caused them to operate in every dimension of daily life, like Christ could come at any moment.

They lived in a decaying society, yet were filled with the hope of their Heavenly home.

They faced constant threats of persecution because they were looking for a Heavenly City (Hebrews 11), and awaited Christ's coming to take them there: instead of living for a secure and lasting home in this world.

What is The Blessed Hope

So back to this “blessed hope”. What was it? How does God's Word define it, and what exactly did Paul teach that Christ's intentional rescue of the Rapture was saving us from.

To understand that, go back to I Thessalonians 4, the most explicit teaching by Paul on the Rapture, and note what follows. This would be a good place to pull out your pen and mark this in your Bible as we look at what Paul taught from start to finish in his ministry to local churches just like ours.

1 Thessalonians 4:13-5:10 (NKJV) But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow ***as others who have no hope***. 14 For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus. 15 For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep. 16 For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. 17 Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught

up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord. 18 Therefore comfort one another with these words. 1 Thessalonians 5:1-10 But concerning the times and the seasons, brethren, you have no need that I should write to you. 2 For you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night. 3 For when they say, "Peace and safety!" then sudden destruction comes upon them, as labor pains upon a pregnant woman. **And they shall not escape.** 4 But you, brethren, are not in darkness, so that this Day should overtake you as a thief. 5 You are all sons of light and sons of the day. We are not of the night nor of darkness. 6 Therefore let us not sleep, as others do, but let us watch and be sober. 7 For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk are drunk at night. 8 But let us who are of the day be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet **the hope** of salvation. 9 For **God did not appoint us to wrath**, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, 10 who died for us, that whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with Him.

What did Paul teach them in I Thessalonians 4:18? The coming of Christ was a comforting hope. What did Paul define that blessed hope as? Paul said the blessed hope was that believers would be saved from the wrath of God.

Now as we turn to Revelation 3, we find the capstone of this teaching, started by Jesus, expanded and widely taught by the Apostles, now comes back for a final word on the subject by Jesus Himself.

Jesus Promised Believers They Would Be Rescued From the Whole-World Holocaust

The fact is that Jesus promised His Church in Revelation 3, they would miss something horrible, planned for the entire world. The amazing record of Paul's teaching records that He taught this same truth across the cities of his early church-planting ministry. These two truths should awaken us to the foundational nature of the blessed hope.

Jesus comforts His own about His coming.

- **Jesus said the Rapture will be a Comfort.** In John 14 Jesus promises that when He comes it is to take us to our place He has prepared for us.
- **Jesus said the Rapture will be Private.** In Acts 1, Jesus tells us that He is coming back for us in the same way that He left: secretly, comfortingly, and raining blessings down upon us.
- **Jesus said the Rapture will be a Rescue.** In Revelation 3, Jesus promises as the true One that He is coming back before the end of the world to keep us from the Tribulation.

The context of the Rapture according to Jesus comes after a series of titles we started looking at these past two weeks. Now look at the promised Rapture given to His Church by Jesus Christ the Truth, the Holy, the One who holds the key of David, who is unstoppable. Please listen as we hear His voice in Rev. 3:10:

*Revelation 3:10 (NKJV) Because you have kept My command to persevere, **I also will keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth.***

A Whole World Holocaust is Coming

Do you remember that the promises and prophecies Jesus gives in Matthew 24, He enlarges upon when He revealed Himself to the Apostle John on Patmos? If Matthew 24 sounds ominous; but it is only a brief introduction, the full report is overwhelming.

Walk with me through the pages of Revelation chapters six, eight, nine, and sixteen. Briefly, may I describe the living hell you can avoid if you are a part of the Rapture. Here are only a few of the dreadful disasters that take place during the Tribulation:

1. **When the Whole World becomes a GRAVEYARD:** Jesus described a time coming when one out of every four people will die (see Rev. 6:8), some through the ravages of war, others by starvation, and amazingly many others by the 'beasts of the earth'. So, whether by death that come instantly and thus less dreaded or a slow and painful death that is lingering and agonizing-25 percent of all people will die. As of this week, the world's population was 6,775,235,000 (or as Wired Magazine succinctly stated it, "6.7 Giga-Bods"); and growing at 7.4 million per month. That means that if the Tribulation started this week (though it can't without the Church being pulled out) so that means at least 1.69 Billion humans will die. That amounts to just less than 6 times the current population of the United States. With a billion new souls added every 11 years you can see that this picture Christ gave us is getting more astounding every day.
2. **When the Whole World becomes a Battlefield** (Rev. 6:8; 14:20): Jesus described a time coming when there will be a world war involving much of the armies of much of the world, that is

so bloody that He describes the blood of those killed in battle as flowing for two hundred miles, splashing up to the bridle of a horse in the valley of Jezreel. This will be the Battle of Armageddon.

3. **When the Whole World Faces STARVATION** (Rev. 6:8; 18:8): Jesus described a time coming when there will be worldwide famine unlike anything the world has ever seen.
4. **When the Whole World becomes a GRASSFIRE** (Rev. 8:7): Jesus described a time coming when one third of all vegetation will be burned up. All grass, every tree, everything green will be destroyed.
5. **When the Whole World Faces a NUCLEAR WINTER** (Rev. 8:12): Jesus described a time coming when the sun and the moon will be darkened as nature goes into revolt.
6. **When the Whole World becomes a HORROR SHOW** (Rev. 9:3-6): Jesus described a time coming when the gates of hell will open and hordes of locusts, the size of horses, will come upon the earth. Those locusts will be allowed to sting men like scorpions and the pain will last for five months. The Bible says men will beg God to let them die but they will not die.
7. **When the Whole World becomes a NIGHTMARE** (see Rev. 6-19): All told, during the Great Tribulation, as many as half of all the people on the earth will be killed. That is why God uses Paul to describe the Rapture as a 'blessed hope', because the Tribulation after the Rapture is so horrible!

So all of that translates again into a period, on the horizon that defies our attempt to describe it beyond what God's Word has already stated.

The Church and Israel have Distinct roles in God's plan

Jesus Christ is the One who first explained that He had distinct and separate plans for His Chosen People of Promise (the Jews of Israel) and His Church (all of the believers). The Church and Israel, were never merged by Christ, nor by those who listened to Him, the Apostles.

Jesus Christ identifies Himself to the Church at Philadelphia as the One who is True, Holy, and has the unstoppable Messianic Key of David. When Jesus speaks He tells the Truth. When we listen to Him and hear what He says we can have confident assurance that He knows what He is talking about.

Is the 2nd Coming Literally True?

Jesus will come. He will set up His Kingdom. He will reign in this world. This is not a minor theme, this is the story at its greatest moment. This is Christ's high hour.

Unless you think those things aren't going to be literally fulfilled that are laid out, remind yourself of this...every Old Testament prophecy related to Jesus Christ was fulfilled...that was fulfilled in His first coming was fulfilled literally.

- The Old Testament said He would be born of a virgin, Isaiah 7. He was.
- The Old Testament says He will be born in Bethlehem, Micah. He was.
- The Old Testament said again and again He would be a Son of David. He was and the genealogies are

laid out in Matthew and Luke to prove it.

- The Old Testament said He would ride a donkey's colt to His mock coronation. And He did.
- The Old Testament said He'd be betrayed by a friend.
- The Old Testament said He would be stricken and His followers would be scattered.
- The Old Testament said He would be sold for 30 pieces of silver, and He was.
- The Old Testament even laid out the details of His crucifixion in Psalm 22. Everything.
- The Old Testament said that God would not allow His holy One to see corruption, He would come out of the grave, He would show Him the path of life, there would be a resurrection. Those were fulfilled with absolute precision historic accuracy.

So why would we think that prophecies related to the Second Coming are just some kind of mystery talk with no literal real fulfillment? When you read your New Testament, you read through Matthew, Mark, and Luke and John in the gospels, you're going to read occasionally this statement, "That the Scripture might be fulfilled...that the Scripture might be fulfilled....that the Scripture might be fulfilled."

Where is the Rapture in Revelation?

If you take just the book of Revelation, you have the church on earth in chapters 1, 2 and 3.

You have the church in heaven in chapters 4 and 5 gathered around the throne. How did the church get to heaven? Rapture.

In chapters 6-19 you come back down to earth and what happens? All hell breaks loose in a series of judgments...seven sealed judgments. Seals are broken and out of them comes seven judgments.

Out of the seventh seal, toward the end of the seven-year period comes seven trumpet blasts, further judgments, more intense. Out of the seventh trumpet comes seven bowl judgments, slosh bowls, they're just dumped on the earth, rapid fire at the very end. And that's the horrors of the pre-cursor judgments to the great day of the Lord. And then in chapter 19 verse 11, Christ comes out of heaven.

And then in chapter 20, sets up His Kingdom. His Kingdom is for a thousand years after which He puts down the rebellion by Satan and those born in the Kingdom who rejected Him, destroys the whole universe and creates the new heaven and the new earth. Chronology is laid out, simple, straightforward.¹

The Rapture is Not Christ's Second Coming

- At the Rapture, the church meets Christ in the air. At the Second Coming, Christ returns to earth with the church.
- At the Rapture, Mount of Olives is untouched. At the Second Coming, it is split.
- At the Rapture, the earth remains the same. At the Second Coming, the earth is transformed.

¹ Quoted and adapted from a transcript of John MacArthur: <http://www.gty.org/resources/Sermons/42-223#.To-d9XGazZk>

- At the Rapture, living saints are translated. At the Second Coming, no saints are translated. They're simply taken into the Kingdom alive in their human form.
- At the Rapture, the world is not judged and sin gets worse. At the Second Coming, sin is judged and the world is far better.
- At the Rapture, the reign of Antichrist is triggered. At the Second Coming, the reign of Christ is triggered.
- At the Rapture, the body goes to heaven. At the Second Coming, it comes to earth.

- The Rapture is imminent, sign less. The Second Coming has distinct signs.
- The Rapture concerns only the saved. The Second Coming, the saved and the unsaved.

Jesus Always Describes His Second Coming Around Israel and not the Church

In Mark 13:14-23, Jesus describes the last seven years of history. And that's when everything that characterized the previous years, the war, the devastation, the disasters, the false religion and the persecution reaches epic levels, never before seen. That's what verse 19 says, a time of Tribulation like the world has never seen and never will..

So there's a description of human history that ends in a seven-year period that we've been talking about called the Tribulation, the last half of it called the Great Tribulation. After that, verse 24 says, "The sun is darkened, the moon doesn't light because it draws its light from the sun. The stars fall out of heaven. The bodies in orbit are shaken out of their normal orbit. The universe goes black and then comes the Son of Man in power and great glory in the clouds." That is the Second Coming.

Jesus Has The Key to The Blessed Hope

The promise Jesus Christ made as the unstoppable holder of the key is not just to that tiny church called Philadelphia. Across all the pages, of all the history, of all the true believers or Philadelphian-type saints, of all the churches from Pentecost to the last moment that Christ's Church is on this Earth: Jesus wrote a promise.

Jesus again repeats the same promise He gave in John 14, Luke 24, and Acts 1: He is coming to rescue His own children before He unleashes the demon hordes from the Pit.

Jesus gives every believer a blessed hope, that either He will come personally for them and escort them safely home at death; or that He will come to the sky above the Earth and call them to Himself, meeting them in the air and taking them to the room in His Father's House that He prepared for them.

Every true believer since the Upper Room has been given this blessed hope. It was not merely that Jesus Christ would keep tiny Philadelphia through the next quake, volcano, or disaster: this promise towers over far above just the AD 90's and casts its bright light all the way to the end of God's appointed time for Christ's church.

I, the Lord Jesus Christ, the Holy, True, Invincible, the Unstoppable, the All-Powerful, I will keep you from the Great Tribulation Hour that will come upon all the Earth. You will not have to endure the Tribulation.

Amen. That is the Blessed Hope!