

WHAT WILL HAPPEN AT THE RAPTURE?

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"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." For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him." 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 [or precede or go before] them which are asleep." 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:" 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." Wherefore comfort one another with these words."-I Thess. 4:13-18.

These were words of assurance to the Christians at Thessalonica, one of the outstanding cities of the Greco-Roman world. At that time, it had in it more pagans than almost any other city. In fact, inscribed over the main archway that

led into the city were these words: Once a man is dead, he is dead forever. The people of Thessalonica thought that when a man died, he was dead forever. The Apostle Paul ignored that system of thinking.

Some of the folks in the church at Thessalonica-the first church the Apostle Paul founded-had lost loved ones in death. Those people had feelings, wonderings, perplexities, problems and questions about death the same as we do; so they inquired of the Apostle Paul, "What about our loved ones who have died? Is this the end of them? Is this all there is? Will we ever see them again?"

We have just read the exact answer which he gave them: "I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep." Then he unfolds the truth for them and for us-the truth which is our comfort and our consolation in this old world of sin and death.

The next great event on God's timetable is the rapture of the saints. What a day

that will be when all the children of God are brought together in that meeting in the air!

THE RAPTURE OF THE SAINTS

The word rapture does not appear in the New Testament, but the idea is all through the Bible. The word means, "to snatch away," "to catch up," "to be caught up."

The coming of Jesus Christ for His saints is an absolute, undeniable,

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irrevocable truth. Regardless of what the agnostics or the atheists or the modern unbelieving theologians say, Christ is coming again! The Bible-the inspired, indestructible, infallible and inerrant Word of God-tells us so. God inspires all Scripture, not just portions of it. What Paul wrote to the people at Thessalonica is stamped with the approval of, and by the inspired hand of, Almighty God.

There are testimonies, which give evidence of His return.

(1) An angel testified to His coming:

"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."-Acts 1:11.

These words were spoken when Christ ascended back to the Glory World, back to the Father, back to His place at the right hand of God, where He is now making intercession for us and is awaiting this moment! The angel said this same Jesus will come again.

(2) The Apostle Paul testified to His coming:

"So Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation."-Heb. 9:28. Christ will appear the second time without a sin offering, without a sacrifice. There will never be another Calvary, another Pilate's hall, another Garden of Gethsemane, another crucifixion. For once, in the end of the age, He will appear to put away sin.

(3) Christ Himself said He would come again:

"Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. "In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go

to prepare a place for you. "And if I go [this is not speculative reasoning; it means 'inasmuch as I go'] and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also."-John 14:1-3.

THE PRECISE EVENTS OF THE RAPTURE

First Thessalonians 4:13-18 outlines the precise events that will take place when Jesus comes again. However, verse 16 is the crux of the whole thing:

1. "For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven." Acts 1:11 says, "This same Jesus." God is not going to send a prophet or a priest or potentate or preacher or king or a master or tyrant, but "this same Jesus" is coming back.
2. "For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout." It will be a call, a summons, a command. Christ will command every Christian to come forth. In John 5, Jesus said that His voice-His shout of triumph, His summons, His

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command, His call-will be heard by every Christian. The voice of the Son of God will be sounded forth when He descends from Heaven. What a day!

3. "For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the arch-angel." Not only will Jesus Himself descend with a shout, but there will be the voice of the archangel.

There is only one other reference to the archangel. In Jude 9 he is identified as Michael. Jude tells us that Michael and the Devil had a wrestling match, and Michael won.

That struggle, that wrestling match, that problem, that depression, that despondency, that hopeless hour, that valley of sorrow and tragedy through which we are crossing-"we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world"-with Satan himself. But "Greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world."

When Michael won the wrestling match with the Devil, what were they fighting over? The body of Moses, an old man one hundred and twenty years of age. When Jesus comes, the voice of the archangel will be heard.

The greatest thing that could happen today is not for an aircraft designer to get another contract, not for the stock market to rise, but for Jesus Christ to return to this sinful earth and take out His children.

Since the Devil fought with the archangel over the body of one saint, don't you suppose he is going to put up a bigger fight when Jesus comes? Do you suppose the Devil will try to put a lid on every grave to try to stop every saint from coming up out of the grave? The archangel who defeated the Devil in the wrestling match over the body of Moses will defeat him again-with a shout! The Devil will be defeated, the graves will open, and the dead shall rise! I'm not so much concerned with what the politicians or theologians or economists say, or what the radio and television talk shows have to talk about; I'm listening for another voice, for the sound of the trumpet, for the shout of Jesus, for the voice of the archangel. When that sounds, there will be the marshaling of the troops of all the redeemed soldiers of God.

4. "For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God." The trumpet is used to marshal the troops.

We read in I Corinthians 15:

"We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, "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."-Vss. 51,52.

The shout of Jesus, the voice of the archangel, the trumpet of God-something is going to happen when this harmony sounds!

5. "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." That is the first resurrection.

John says in Revelation 20:

"And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them: and I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, and which had not worshipped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years.

"This is the first resurrection." Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years."-Vss. 4-6.

When the voice of the archangel is heard, when Jesus shouts, when the trumpet sounds, "the dead in Christ shall rise first."

We read in I Corinthians 15:

"But some men will say, How are the dead raised up? and with what body do they come?" Thou fool, that which thou sowest is not quickened, except it die:" And that which thou sowest, thou sowest not that body that shall be, but bare grain, it may chance of wheat, or of some other grain:" But God giveth it a body as it hath pleased him, and to every seed his own body." All flesh is not the same flesh [evolutionists should pay attention to this]: but there is one kind of flesh of men, another flesh of beasts, another of fishes, and another of birds."

There are also celestial bodies, and bodies terrestrial: but the glory of the celestial is one, and the glory of the terrestrial is another," There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars: for one star differeth from another star in glory. "So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption:" It is sown in dishonour; it is raised in glory: it is sown in weakness; it is raised in power:" It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body." And so it is written, The first man Adam was made a living soul; the last Adam was made a quickening spirit." Howbeit that was not first which is spiritual, but that which is natural; and afterward that which is spiritual." The first man is of the earth, earthy: the second man is the Lord from heaven." As is the earthy, such are they also that are earthy: and as is the heavenly, such are they also that are heavenly." And as we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly." Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption."-Vss. 35-50.

We have looked like the first Adam; one day we shall look like the last Adam! We have borne the image of the earthy; one day we shall bear the image of the heavenly. The dead saints are going to rise again.

"For our conversation [citizenship] is in heaven; from whence also we look for

the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ: "Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself."-Phil. 3:20,21.

The loved one whom you buried-God is able to recompose and restructure that body like unto the body of our Lord Jesus Christ. The one who perished in the fire during the war-God is able to bring that body out of that fiery death. The one who was drowned in the sea-God is able to bring that body out of the watery grave. The one cremated at the funeral-God is able to bring that body out of those ashes. God is the great scientist, and He can gather those particles of flesh and body wherever they are and bring them back together in His own likeness.

The saints who have died in the faith will be resurrected, but that is not all. The living saints will be raptured, and their bodies changed. Paul looked for the coming of Christ in his day, for he said, "We which are alive and remain."

"Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed," 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," For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality." So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?" The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law." But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."-I Cor. 15:51-57.

The dead shall be raised and translated: a new body. The living shall be translated: a new body. What is the new body going to be like?

"Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is."-I John 3:2.

I'm not sure what it is going to be like, but I do know from this Scripture it is going to be just like Jesus.

Jesus ate in His glorified body. When He met the disciples by the sea, He prepared their breakfast. The Son of God-who put the stars in place, who scooped out the caves to make the oceans and held up the mountains, who put all of the planets in the fiery track around the sun-one morning gathered up a few sticks, kindled a fire and fed a bunch of hungry fishermen. Can you imagine it! You can feast at Jesus' table all the time! He who fed the multitudes and turned the water into wine, said, "Come and dine. Come and dine."

We are going to be just like Him who walked through closed doors. In Mexico we were standing in a hotel lobby. There were two sets of glass doors. I thought one was open, and I walked right into that door! Everyone there saw

me. I was embarrassed to death. But when I get my glorified body, I will just walk right through that door or that wall.

In our glorified bodies, we will never grow weary, never get hungry, never have aches and pains, because we will be just like Him. "I will be satisfied when I awake with thy likeness," said the psalmist.

The resurrection of the dead, the translation of the living, all will be caught up together in a glorious reunion. Look at it again:

"Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them [those who have come out of the graves] in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord."-I Thess. 4:17.

All the saints will be with Christ in a permanent dwelling place.
Jesus is coming again!

When loved ones have been taken away from us in death, our hearts are heavy. We weep and mourn, and rightly so, because God made the eyes to cry as a release for us. So don't be ashamed of tears. We "sorrow not, even as others which have no hope." There is the difference.

We grieve over our loved ones who have died. Their places are empty. But one day-and it may be soon-when the voice of the Son of God comes in a shout, and the archangel speaks, and the trumpet sounds, out of those yonder graves where many tears have been shed will come our loved ones.

Some of you have never seen your biological father or mother; maybe they died when you were young. Won't it be wonderful to see them and other loved ones at the rapture? Those who have gone before-those precious ones we have so sorely missed-one day we will all be together again. There will be no sorrow, no crying, no death because these things will have passed away, and all things will have become new. He who sat upon the throne said, "Behold, I make all things new." A new day, a new Home, a new life-all with Jesus Christ. What a day! What should we be doing while we wait and watch for His coming?

"Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober." For they that sleep, sleep in the night; and they that be drunken are drunken in the night." 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."-I Thess. 5:6-8.

We should be rationally minded; we should have on the breastplate of faith and love while looking for His return.

When is it going to happen? No one can answer that; but I can read what the Bible says about it in Matthew 24:

"But of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only." But as the days of Noe were, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be." 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," And knew not until the flood came, and took them all away; so shall

also the coming of the Son of man be." Then shall two be in the field; the one shall be taken, and the other left." Two women shall be grinding at the mill; the one shall be taken, and the other left." Watch therefore: for ye 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 ye also ready [it does not say to get ready; it says to be ready]: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh."-Vss. 36-44.

ARE YOU READY FOR THE RAPTURE?

Jesus Christ is coming again. Are you ready? Have you been saved? Are you born again? Is your name written, not on the church roll, but in the Lamb's book of life? "Whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire" (Rev. 20:15). This is the second death!

Are you ready for His return? Is there something in your life-an attitude, a habit, a weakness, a problem-you need to deal with at an altar of prayer? If Jesus were to come today, would you be ready?

He told us to watch. It is one thing to wait; it is another thing to watch.

Remember when you first got married and it was time for you to come home. Your bride stood outside on the sidewalk looking up and down the street watching for your return.

Now she is in the kitchen cooking. You open the door and say, "I'm home, Honey." She says, "Good for you! Glad you made it!"

Back in the kitchen she was waiting; on the sidewalk she was watching. There is the difference.

When I was first married, I caught the 5:50 a.m. bus every morning. My wife walked with me to the bus stop and waited until I got on the bus before she left. Every afternoon she was at the bus stop watching for her dearly beloved. I'm a part of His bride, and He said He was coming to take me Home. I'm watching for my Dearly Beloved today.

Are you ready? Are you watching? If there is anyone in this place who is not ready for the coming of Christ, I pray that by faith you will this moment receive Christ as your Saviour.