

## Introduction: Rapture

Last week in our “This is the End” series we started looking at reasons why Jesus will return. He will return to complete our redemption. He will return to resurrect the dead of history. And he will return to judge all people. The 4<sup>th</sup> reason of his return will be our focus this morning. Before we dive in, however, remember what we have been saying throughout: Jesus’ return is the center point of the end-times, from which, everything else revolves. A close second is an event famously called the “rapture.”

What is the “rapture?” It’s a Latin word translated from the Greek, “to catch away.” Paul used it in I Thessalonians 4:17:

Together with them, we who are still alive and remain on the earth will be *caught up* in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. Then we will be with the Lord forever.

## Paul’s Pastoral Concern

Ironically, Paul’s immediate concern in this text is not about a futuristic “rapture.” He is trying to answer a persistent question of the Thessalonians. As with many Christ followers in the 1<sup>st</sup> century, they were convinced Christ would come back during their lifetimes. If he does, what happens to those that died before he returns? Will they miss out on all the good stuff? Are they stuck in limbo somewhere? Paul responds to this question to inform and comfort. His goal was not to present a systematic teaching of end time events. He explains in v13-18:

13 Now, dear brothers and sisters, we want you to know what will happen to the believers who have died so you will not grieve like people who have no hope. 14 For since we believe that Jesus died and was raised to life again, we also believe that when Jesus returns, God will bring back with him the believers who have died. 15 We tell you this directly from the Lord: We who are still living when the Lord returns will not meet him ahead of those who have died. 16 For the Lord himself will come down from heaven with a commanding shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet call of God. First, the believers who have died will rise from their graves. 17 Then, together with them, we who are still alive and remain on the earth will be *caught up* in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. Then we will be with the Lord forever. 18 So encourage each other with these words.

## Pre-Tribulation

The 1<sup>st</sup> is PRE-Tribulation. It holds that the rapture takes place BEFORE the Great Tribulation (rapture before rapture). This position posits that Christ will come back secretly to take his saints out before the GT. As we will see next week, the GT is the final seven-year period of God’s dealings with the world. In this period, the Anti-Christ reigns with unparalleled menace to destroy Jesus’ Church. Christians, however, need not prepare or worry for they will already be in heaven before these horrors happen. Thus, Christ will come back twice: (1) FOR his saints and (2) WITH his saints. Who’s praying this view is accurate?

## Mid-Tribulation

The 2<sup>nd</sup> major rapture position is called Mid-Tribulation. As it sounds, Christ will rapture his church MIDWAY through the GT. Based on Daniel’s 42 months and the Woman’s flight into the Wilderness

(Revelation 12:14), the rapture happens just prior to the reign of the anti-Christ. When Christ returns during this chaos, unbelievers will see it and a global revival will break out (Revelation 7:9,14). Who likes this position?

### **Post-Tribulation Rapture**

The 3<sup>rd</sup> view is Post-Tribulation which teaches the Church will not be removed *before or during* but after the Tribulation. However, like Israel during the 10 Plagues on Egypt it will be preserved through it. This position is akin to what our mindset needs to be when facing gritty problems, “The only way out is through!” Who likes the posttrib position?

### **Which One? Pre-Trib?**

There’s a lot at stake as to which of these positions is most plausible so let’s evaluate. Without getting too technical, most agree the pretrib view is not biblically accurate. The Church didn’t even hold to such a position until 1830 when a Scottish prophetess named Margaret Macdonald claimed she had a “vision” of the Lord taking his church away before the Tribulation. Law #1 of Interpretation: never interpret on the basis of personal dreams or wishes. However, Englishman John Nelson Darby did so when he heard of Macdonald’s dream. He was one of the most influential scholars of his time and when Christianity spread through the Welsh Revivals, the pretrib position became prominent.

### **Which One? Post-Trib?**

Since interpreters no longer hold to mid-trib here are three (among many) reasons why the post-trib position is the winner of the rapture debate and how it relates to the 4<sup>th</sup> reason why Jesus will return.

- 1) When Paul says Jesus comes back “with the trumpet call” (4:16), he is referring to the 7<sup>th</sup> trumpet of Revelation 11:5.
- 2) The seventh angel sounded his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, which said: “The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign for ever and ever.”

The announcement that the “Kingdom of this world have become the kingdom of Christ and he will reign forever” will indeed launch the Second Coming.

- 3) Historically, the greatest theologians of the church, i.e., Apostles, Church Fathers, and Reformers have consistently taught a posttrib rapture.
- 4) Pretribers and Midtribers disagree with the Posttrib position on the grounds that the church will never face wrath. They point to texts like I Thessalonians 1:10, “To wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath.”

I agree that indeed, the church never faces the wrath of God, but it always faces the wrath of man! Since the 1<sup>st</sup> century 70 million Christians, including 900,000 in the last decade, have been martyred! As we mentioned before, the Children of Israel were shielded from the wrath God rained down on Egypt. However, they were not shielded from the wrath of the Egyptians who made their lives ever more miserable with each passing plague. This dynamic will be repeated during the GT: God pours out his wrath against the devil while the devil pours out his wrath against the Church. Unfortunately, the devil will push the Church to the brink of extinction if not for the 4<sup>th</sup> reason of Jesus’ 2<sup>nd</sup> Coming: to rescue his Church by rapturing her in the nick-of-time.

## **Conclusion/Application**

To prevent this message from being a theological lecture, how do we practically lean into this futuristic scenario right now? In v18 Paul said, “Encourage each other with these words.” Yes, we are encouraged that our loved ones that have already “died in the Lord” are with him in heaven and will be part of his triumphant entourage when he returns to rescue us. But we are also encouraged prophecies are being fulfilled quicker than an overcaffeinated origami artist. For instance, John warned his congregation over 2000 years ago (1:4:3),

The spirit of the antichrist...is coming and even now is already in the world.

The way we fight against the “spirit of anti-Christ” is to get deeper into the Word, Church, Prayer. In so doing we will be building a prevailing church, one that will be able victorious against the spirit of antichrist now, and the “person of the anti-Christ” later.