

What in the WORD is Going On? – Part 2 / RAPTURE

VIDEO CLIP: MIDNIGHT CRY (4:30)

Today's message will undoubtedly be perceived by some to be controversial; it is not meant to be. However, the Apostolic church often finds itself **standing alone as it stands for truth**, and today will be no exception. In the world of modern Christianity, the most valued criteria seems to be "tolerance" rather than "truth," and "brotherly agreement" rather than "biblical accuracy." Sadly, this does not reflect the will of God or the teaching of the Bible. **TRUTH DOES MATTER!**

For years, the Apostolic church has stood alone on the matter of the New Birth experience of Water and Spirit (John 3:5, Acts 2:38), and on the matter of holiness (1 Thessalonians 4:7, Hebrews 12:14). Now, rather unexpectedly, it appears that we will once again have to stand alone on the matter of the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. However, this should not surprise us, for these three truths (Justification, Sanctification, Glorification) are eternally bound together in Scripture:

Hebrews 9:28 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.

TIMELINE:

Signs – now / Rapture – soon / Tribulation – seven /

Millennium – one thousand / Judgment – end / Eternity - forever

Just one month ago, the third video installment in the Left Behind movie series (World At War) released in churches around North America, followed by a DVD release – all without going to the theatres. It's a new marketing strategy for sure, but it seems to be working.

Left Behind is a best-selling series of books by authors Tim LaHaye and Jerry Jenkins. The twelfth and final book released last year, but the authors have started now on a multi-volume prequel series. The books have become perhaps the greatest phenomenon in the history of publishing, selling 62 million copies to date, an unheard-of feat for Christian authors. The books consistently appeared on the New York Times bestseller list, and are still being read by people from all walks of life. LaHaye, the Bible scholar, and Jenkins, the novelist, have both become millionaires several times over since their publishing adventure began in 1995.

One synopsis of the books' plot reads like this: "The series features a Mission Impossible-type team called the Tribulation Force, people whose wives, husbands, sons, daughters or friends have vanished into thin air, as evidenced by piles of clothing, jewelry and other personal effects. Members of the force realize that the prophesied Rapture has occurred and that they have been "left behind" because they did not accept Jesus as their savior. After committing their lives to Christ, they try to win over other left-behinders during a seven-year period called the Tribulation. They also must fight the forces of the Antichrist and endure the horrible wars, plagues and desolation prophesied in the Book of Revelation." (DID YOU NOTICE ANYTHING WRONG HERE?) The "Left Behind" series even has one character who takes the Mark of the Beast and is still saved, in direct contradiction to the Bible!

Revelation 14:9-11 ⁹ And the third angel followed them, saying with a loud voice, If any man worship the beast and his image, and receive his mark in his forehead, or in his hand, ¹⁰ The same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of his indignation; and he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb: ¹¹ And the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever: and they have no rest day nor night, who worship the beast and his image, and whosoever receiveth the mark of his name.

The "Left Behind" series, along with much modern teaching on prophecy, contains TWO FATAL ERRORS in Bible interpretation that could jeopardize the eternal destiny of millions! For this reason, in spite of our appreciation for the motives of the writers and producers, we must take issue with their creation. Let's talk about this wonderful, yet controversial, event called "the Rapture" ...

Down through the centuries, millions of Christians have lived out their hours and days and years with an expectation. Not always in the forefront of their thoughts, yet it was never out of their thoughts. It hovered just over the horizon of their daily responsibilities and cares, like the first pale light of a rising sun. It walked with them down lonely, sorrowful, sometimes torturous pathways. A silent companion, a comforting presence. Through dry years and bleak landscapes and withered hopes, it bubbled up from deep within them. A hidden fountain, a secret well of refreshment and joy, a hope beyond all hope.

And that expectation was that in the next breath, the next blink of the eye, the next tick of the clock, the next beat of the heart, the next rustle of the leaf, the next sigh, the Lord Jesus Christ could descend from heaven with a shout and call them Home. Prisoners have looked expectantly through dungeon windows. Slaves have looked up from the fields. Children have wondered at a slant of sunlight through a sudden break in the clouds. Jesus is coming – soon! Maybe today, maybe tonight, maybe before I draw my next breath.

And because of that hope, we can look at our children playing in the sunlight and believe firmly in our hearts that they will not have to endure the monstrous horrors of the Great Tribulation. Because of that hope, we are able to sit at the deathbed of saved loved ones and cling to the hope that before our own lives have ended, in an instant of time we may meet again in the clouds. Because of that hope, we are able to impress on our teenagers the need to live pure lives in the constant expectation of the Lord's sudden return. Because of that hope, we are able to look up from our consuming labors, at home or in a career, and draw sustaining energy and joy from the conviction that the Lord Jesus could call us to Himself this very day!

VIDEO CLIP: AIRPLANE SCENE (3:30)

We hold this hope with good reason, for the promise was delivered by the Lord Himself, and confirmed by the Apostle Paul ...

John 14:1-3 ¹ Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. ² 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. ³ And if 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.

1 Thessalonians 4:16-18 ¹⁶For 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: ¹⁷Then 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. ¹⁸Wherefore comfort one another with these words.

The issue of the Rapture is critical to the Apostolic church. It is not hard to name the two most evangelistic periods of church history. The first century church “turned the world upside down” (Acts 17:6), and in the last century – since the twin truths of the Holy Ghost and water baptism in Jesus’ Name were “rediscovered” by the church – the world has seen its greatest revivals!

Both of these great soul-winning periods share another common characteristic – their unshakable belief that Jesus Christ could come for His church at any time. Belief in the imminent (“at any moment”) coming of Christ produces three vital effects in the church:

1. It produces holy living in an unholy society like ours, for we know that we must keep ourselves ready at all times for the Rapture.

1 John 3:3 And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure.

2. It causes us to evaluate the way we live our lives, spend our time and money, and set our priorities.

Mark 13:33-37 ³³Take ye heed, **watch** and pray: for ye know not when the time is. ³⁴For the Son of man is as a man taking a far journey, who left his house, and gave authority to his servants, and to every man his work, and commanded the porter to **watch**. ³⁵**Watch** ye therefore: for ye know not when the master of the house cometh, at even, or at midnight, or at the cockcrowing, or in the morning: ³⁶Lest coming suddenly he find you sleeping. ³⁷And what I say unto you I say unto all, **Watch**.

3. It produces an evangelistic church of soul-winning Christians, for when we believe that Christ could return at any moment, we realize how crucial it is that others get saved before it is eternally too late.

Revelation 20:15 And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire.

Christians around the world refer to this blessed hope as “the Rapture.” The Bible simply talks about us being “caught up,” but the word rapture caught on as the unofficial title of the event because it denotes a sense of JOY rather than a sense of FEAR at the prospect of being snatched away from the earth. The rapture will not be like someone being kidnapped – instead, it will be like a little child being suddenly swept into the arms of her laughing father!

The terror will be on the part of those left behind, for the rapture will happen in no time at all. With no warning, no buildup, no mysterious quivering in the air – the church will simply be gone. **The rapture will be sudden, but not secret!**

VIDEO CLIP: RAPTURE NEWSCAST (2:25)

A million conversations will end mid-sentence. A million phone receivers will suddenly go dead. A woman will reach for her husband’s hand and no one will be there. A mother will feel the horror of kissing empty air as her baby disappears from the bundle of blankets in her arms. A man will turn with a laugh to slap a buddy on the back and his hand will move through empty air. A backslider will turn to joke with his friend and suddenly feel the fear he has spent a lifetime avoiding, when the preacher’s voice stops preaching – forever.

The rapture will be SELECTIVE – Christ is not coming for everyone, only for His church. Some will be taken and others left behind to endure the Great Tribulation. This world only thinks it has seen tribulation, for the day is coming when the worst traumas in history will be eclipsed by a seven-year period that will be more terrifying than anything man can imagine. The events of the Tribulation are so grotesque that they would be inconceivable, except that Jesus Himself mentioned them.

Matthew 24:21-22 ²¹For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be. ²²And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved: but for the elect’s sake those days shall be shortened.

The tribulation will be such a holocaust because it will combine the wrath of God, the fury of Satan, and the evil nature of man run wild. If you could take the horror of every war since time began, throw in every natural disaster in recorded history, and combine it with all the unspeakable cruelty and hatred of dictators and despots throughout the ages, and then compress it into a period of seven years ... even if you could imagine such a thing, it wouldn’t approach the mind-boggling terror of the tribulation.

THANK GOD FOR THE RAPTURE! God did not promise to save the Christian from daily trials and tribulations, but He did pledge to exempt us from the day of His wrath!

1 Thessalonians 5:9-10 ⁹For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ, ¹⁰Who died for us, that, whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with him.

No matter what it costs you personally, you must be ready for the Rapture! It is life’s most important appointment! You cannot miss it!

VIDEO CLIP: HOUSE SCENE (3:00)

The problem with books/films like “Left Behind” is that they give people a false sense of security with regard to the Rapture. They leave the impression that, should you miss the Rapture, there will be a chance for you to get saved afterwards, and that even though you will suffer during the Tribulation, you will be part of God’s church and end up in Heaven.

NOTHING COULD BE FURTHER FROM THE TRUTH! Don’t be deceived or lulled to sleep by someone else’s mistake – your eternal destiny depends on it!

HERE ARE THE TWO FATAL ERRORS PROMOTED BY “LEFT BEHIND” ...

1. YOU CANNOT GET SAVED JUST BY PRAYING THE SINNER'S PRAYER – YOU MUST OBEY THE GOSPEL!

- Our relationship with God is only “conceived” at repentance. We still must be “born” of the Water and the Spirit to be saved!
- **John 3:5** Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.
- **Acts 2:38** Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.
- Water baptism puts you in Christ, and receiving the Holy Ghost puts Christ in you. And you **MUST** have a “second (spiritual) birth” to cancel out your “second (spiritual) death.”

2. EVEN IF YOU KNOW THE BIBLE WAY TO OBEY THE GOSPEL, YOU CANNOT BE BORN AGAIN AFTER THE RAPTURE!

- The Tribulation was never designed for the church, but for **Israel**, so that she will finally be able see her need of God.
- **The most common error in Bible interpretation is confusing the church and Israel.** In fact, this is where many cults derive their false teachings. The Bible does refer to “saints” during the Tribulation, but these are Jewish people along with Gentiles from the nations of the world who never had a chance to obey the gospel prior to the rapture.
- It is crucial to note two things about this group: First, they will suffer horrible persecution and death during the tribulation. Second, even after all their suffering they will never be part of the church that spends eternity in Heaven! **At best, they are only saved to live on the new earth.**
- The same Bible that tells us we can’t be saved unless God’s Spirit draws us also tells us that His Spirit will be removed from earth during the Tribulation period, so that the Antichrist can be revealed. (The “new birth” will thus be impossible.) **There is no chance to be born again after the Rapture!**
- **John 6:44** No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day.
- **2 Thessalonians 2:6-7 (KJV)** ⁶And now ye know what withholdeth that he might be revealed in his time. ⁷For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he who now letteth will let, until he be taken out of the way.
- **2 Thessalonians 2:6-7 (CEV)** ⁶You already know what is holding this wicked one back until it is time for him to come. ⁷His mysterious power is already at work, but someone is holding him back. And the wicked one won’t appear until that someone is out of the way.

VIDEO CLIP: CHURCH SCENE (2:30)

- One of the most moving scenes in “Left Behind: The Movie” is where a backslidden pastor who missed the rapture accepts Christ at the altar of his now empty church. The problem with the scene is not with its characters, dialog, lighting, set, or special effects. **The problem is that it is FICTION – it is NOT going to happen!**
- Imagine the **double horror** of millions of so-called Christians who believe right now that they are saved. It will be horrifying enough for them to miss the Rapture that they so confidently preached and sang about. But then, imagine their unspeakable terror when they attempt to pray to God and find that there is no response from Heaven! God’s Spirit will no longer be present to draw them!
- In Jesus’ parable in Matthew 25, all ten of the prospective brides were virgins, and they all expected the Bridegroom – they even all slumbered. **BUT ONLY FIVE HAD OIL! The only reason Jesus told this parable was to warn us that it is possible to BELIEVE you are ready for His coming and yet in reality NOT be ready!**
- **If you turn down your chance to get saved on this side of the Rapture, you are in the most dangerous position of all!**
- **2 Thessalonians 2:10-12** ¹⁰And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; **because they received not the love of the truth**, that they might be saved. ¹¹And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: ¹²That they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness.
- **The only safe option is for you to make the right choice today!**
- **2 Corinthians 6:2** (For he saith, I have heard thee in a time accepted, and in the day of salvation have I succoured thee: **behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation.**)