

The Rapture

Titus 2:11-13, Mark 13:32-37, Revelation 9:13-15, 1 Thessalonians 5:1-2, Revelation 3:11, Luke 21:36

Slide 1

Last week I described how, in the near future, the world would experience one of the most dramatic, life-changing events in history.

An event of such magnitude that it will never be the same. An event that'll divide every person on earth between those who believe in Jesus Christ, and those who reject Him.

Those who believe in Christ will instantly be caught up in the air, faster than the speed of light, into the glorious presence of Jesus Christ, our eternal Savior and King.

But those who rejected Him, will be left behind to face a world that'll be far different than anything they've ever imagined; a world overrun with lawlessness and evil that'll reap the wrath of God's divine judgments.

The world mocks and ridicules the idea of a heavenly rapture, but I assure you the rapture is real and that it's the next world-shaking event on God's prophetic calendar. This event is so significant that Jesus said in...

Mark 13:33-37, "Be on guard! Be alert! You do not know when that time will come. It's like a man going away: He leaves his house and puts his servants in charge, each with their assigned task, and tells the one at the door to keep watch. Therefore keep watch because you do not know when the owner of the house will come back—whether in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or at dawn. If he comes suddenly, do not let him find you sleeping. What I say to you, I say to everyone: 'Watch!'"

You can hear the urgency in Jesus' words as He commands every believer to be alert and watching. It's my duty to warn you about this event so you'll not be caught unaware.

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Without any doubt the rapture is real, but the big question is: "*When will the rapture happen?*" Well, Jesus gives us a clear answer in Mark 13.

Mark 13:32-33, "*But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Be on guard! Be alert! You do not know when that time will come.*"

Jesus clearly says NO ONE knows the day or the hour of His return, except God.

This is why it's so discouraging when you hear people declare that Jesus will return on such and such day, and then when it doesn't happen, it looks bad on the body of Christ.

Examples:

- Hippolytus of Rome, Sextus Julius Africanus, Irenaeus predicted Jesus would return in the year 500.
- John Wesley foresaw the Millennium beginning in 1836.
- William Miller set the date of Christ's return on October 22, 1844.
- Charles Taze Russell, the first president of what is now the Watchtower Society of the Jehovah's Witnesses, calculated 1874 to be the year of Christ's Second Coming.
- Sun Myung Moon's followers believed he was the second advent of Christ.
- Hal Lindsey, author of *The Late Great Planet Earth*, suggested Christ would return in the 1980s.
- Herbert W. Armstrong believed the return of Jesus Christ would be in 1975.

- Harold Camping claimed that the rapture would be on 21 May 2011
- Jack Van Impe pointed to 2012 as a possible date for the second coming.
- Mark Biltz taught that Christ's return would correspond with the 28 September 2015 lunar eclipse.
- Chad and Lori Daybell, a couple charged with the murder of her children, believed that the second coming would be on 22 July 2020.

Although we don't know the day or the hour of His return, we do know from scripture that we must always be watching for that moment because Bible prophecy shows we're moving closer and closer each day.

Everywhere we look, there's a growing storm of prophetic signs happening all over the world.

These prophetic signs are escalating in their strength and intensity like a fast-moving hurricane. They tell us that the final days are upon us and that His coming is drawing closer and closer.

I want to make a point here that I believe is vitally important. When Jesus said that only the Father knows the day and the hour.

It's important to understand that God has set a specific day and a specific hour as to when the rapture will happen.

The rapture will not happen by accident. It'll happen exactly at the precise moment God has set in place. Listen to this example of God's timing.

Revelation 9:13-15, *“The sixth angel sounded his trumpet, and I heard a voice coming from the four horns of the golden altar that is before God. It said to the sixth angel who had the trumpet, “Release the four angels who are bound at the great river Euphrates.” And the four angels who had been kept ready for this very hour and day and month and year were released to kill a third of mankind.”*

My point is, just as God releases these angels at a specific moment in time, He has set a specific day and hour for the rapture, and it'll happen at the exact moment He has chosen.

We don't know that moment, but God does, and, when it happens, it'll happen unexpectedly, like a thief in the night when the world least expects it. That's why Jesus commands us to be ready and watching at all times.

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One of the great rebukes in scripture is Jesus' scolding those who didn't recognize the signs of His first coming.

The signs of our generation are so obvious that it's impossible to miss them. God has made these signs unmistakably clear that that even a child can see them.

And yet, many people miss them, mainly because they're not watching and looking for Jesus.

Millions of Christians are so out of touch with God that they're completely unaware of the rapture of the church that's right at the door.

We must understand that these prophetic signs are God's supernatural warning system telling us the end is near and that His appointed day for the rapture is drawing closer.

These signs include:

The rise of a New World Order of globalization and a 10 Kingdom Empire. This is the alliance of Russia, Iran, Turkey, and several other nations as noted in Psalm 83 and Ezekiel 38.

Then there is the development of antichrist type technology for a one world economy and government.

As world banks push for a digital currency and electronic commerce rapidly replacing cash, virtually enabling everything that is bought and sold to be identified and tracked.

Financial transactions of everyone in the world could one day be monitored by a centralized agency.

10 years ago this was not in the picture, but now, in the past few years this has become big news.

Under the banner of science and technology, and more recently "*the war against terrorism*," the governments of the world are rushing to complete the antichrist's economic and political system that the Bible warns us against.

These signs all point to how close we are to the rapture. And what really stands out is the massive convergence of these signs that are all happening with an explosive force all over the world.

They are screaming at us that the end is near and that the rapture is close. These signs are happening now and that should cause us to wake up, look up, and watch for our blessed hope in Jesus Christ.

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Now, there are three views regarding the timing of the Rapture. The first concerns those who believe the rapture is tied with the second coming of Christ.

This view is called the post-tribulation rapture. Those who cling to this view believe that the church won't be raptured before the entire seven-year tribulation has transpired.

Another view is the mid-tribulation rapture. The mid-tribulation view states the rapture will take place during the middle of the tribulation.

This view is similar to the pre-wrath view that says we'll go through most of the tribulation, but we'll be raptured before the final wrath of God takes place.

The main problem with both of these views is that God's wrath is seen throughout the seven-year tribulation.

I don't fault anyone who holds to any of these views since, if this is what you believe, that's between you and God.

However, for me, and for the point of this message, I strongly believe in a pre-tribulation rapture, which is the Biblical scenario that fits the prophetic picture.

The pre-tribulation view states that the rapture will happen before the seven-year tribulation, and this is the view I want to focus on this morning.

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There are several reasons why I believe in a pre-tribulation rapture. First, this is the only view that allows for the rapture to happen at any moment in time.

Jesus said in Mark 13:32, *"But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father."*

Also, Paul wrote in 1 Thessalonians 5:1-2, *"Now, brothers and sisters, about times and dates we do not need to write to you, for you know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night."*

Both of these scriptures reveal that no one knows the specific day or the hour of the rapture.

So, when it does happen, it'll happen suddenly like a thief in the night. It could happen today, tomorrow, next year, or later.

We don't know. All we know is that it'll happen before the tribulation, which is why we're commanded to watch and pray.

In the mid-tribulation rapture and the post-tribulation rapture, there's no sudden return of Jesus.

Instead, in these scenarios the focus is shifted away from Christ. In these scenarios the focus is the tribulation and the antichrist.

That means, instead of looking for Christ's return, you're watching for the antichrist and his peace treaty.

Since the signing of the covenant between Israel and the antichrist starts the tribulation, and the rapture happens 3 ½ years later, that means you're able to figure out the exact timing of His return.

That completely takes away the surprise of Christ's *"coming like a thief in the night."* Nowhere in scripture are we told to stop looking for Jesus and to watch for the antichrist.

Titus 2:13, *"While we wait for the blessed hope—the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ."*

What are we looking for? We're looking for the appearing of Jesus Christ, our blessed hope!

We're not looking for the antichrist and his false peace. We're looking for Jesus, the King of kings, the Prince of peace.

Another significant reason why I believe the rapture will happen before the tribulation is found in Revelation 4.

Revelation 4:1-2, *"After this I looked, and there before me was a door standing open in heaven. And the voice I had first heard speaking to me like a trumpet said, "Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this." At once I was in the Spirit, and there before me was a throne in heaven with someone sitting on it."*

I believe this is a picture of a pretribulation rapture. Notice four things in this passage. First, verse 1, *"After this I looked, and there before me was a door standing open in heaven."* After what? After the church age.

Immediately after the church age is completed, John hears a voice from heaven saying, *"Come up here"* and he instantly found himself in heaven at the throne of God.

That's a perfect picture of the rapture that's described in 1 Thessalonians 4.

Second, the voice that John heard that sounded like a trumpet and said, *"Come up here"* is the voice of Jesus that he heard in Revelation 1.

Third, you'll also notice in chapters 2-3 of Revelation, when Jesus spoke to the churches, He said, *"He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."*

But in Revelation 13:9, He says, *“If anyone has an ear, let him hear.”* Why didn't He finish the sentence with, *“what the Spirit says to the churches?”* It's because the Church is already in heaven.

It's interesting that the word “church” is mentioned 17 times in Revelation 1-3, but it's not mentioned at all from chapters 5-18. Why? Because, by this time, the church is already in heaven.

Fourth, another dynamic point is that in chapters 4-5 of Revelation, the saints are before the throne of God, before Jesus is given the scrolls of the seven seals that start the wrath of God.

To me, this shows that the rapture must happen before the tribulation.

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Now, that brings me to this question. Are there any examples of raptures found elsewhere in the Bible?

I can think of four events in the Old Testament, that are examples of a rapture. First, there's Enoch.

Genesis 5:23-24, *“Altogether, Enoch lived a total of 365 years. Enoch walked faithfully with God; then he was no more, because God took him away.”*

The Hebrew meaning here is that Enoch walked with God, and then suddenly, he was immediately transported to heaven without experiencing death. That is a beautiful picture of the rapture.

Second, in 2 Kings, we find another example in the life of Elijah. 2 Kings 2:11, *“As they were walking along and talking together, suddenly a chariot of fire and horses of fire appeared and separated the two of them, and Elijah went up to heaven in a whirlwind.”*

Like Enoch, Elijah didn't experience death, but was instantly transported to heaven in a chariot of fire, in what I call a heavenly taxi service.

Many scholars believe that Elijah will be one of the two witnesses described in Revelation 11.

The Bible says that fire will come out of his mouth and incinerate anyone who opposes his preaching of the gospel. Can you imagine if preachers today were able to do that.

A third example is found in how God protected Noah and his family when God flooded the earth.

Just as God preserved Noah and his family by removing them from the threat of His wrath, God will keep His promise to remove believers in Christ from this earth before His wrath is poured out on upon an unbelieving, godless, and evil generation.

I point this out because 1 Thessalonians 1:10, 1 Thessalonians 5:9, and Revelation 3:10 tells us that we, who are in Christ, have not been appointed to wrath.

Fourth, God also spared Lot and his family from the wrath that He poured out against Sodom and Gomorrah.

If you remember, God's wrath could not be unleashed on those two cities until Lot and his family were safely removed.

These four examples of a pretribulation rapture demonstrate that those who are in Christ will be removed from this earth before the final days of God's wrath. Now, that brings me to this final point.

Slide 7

Conclusion

Knowing that God has appointed a day and hour for the rapture, and since we're seeing all these prophetic signs, why hasn't the rapture happened?

Consider this:

2 Peter 3:9, "The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance."

God, in His awesome grace, is currently restraining the spirit of lawlessness, to give people more opportunities to repent and receive His gift of salvation through Jesus Christ.

It's God's desire for the lost to be saved, and to experience God's wonderful love and forgiveness.

But one day, very soon, the Age of Grace will be over, and the days of judgment and wrath will begin. This is why people must turn to Christ now, while there's still time.

My understanding of Bible prophecy tells me we're living in the final days of the church age.

Very soon the church age, that has covered over two thousand years, will be over, and the days of judgment and wrath will begin.

That's why Jesus said in Revelation 3:11, *"I am coming soon. Hold on to what you have, so that no one will take your crown."*

In fact, His last words to the church are found in Revelation 3:22, *“Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”*

This is exactly why Jesus said in Luke 21:36, *“Be always on the watch, and pray that you may be able to escape all that is about to happen, and that you may be able to stand before the Son of Man.”*

And yet, millions of Christians are so entangled in the affairs of the world and the coming election that they’re unaware that the rapture of the church is right at the door.

In closing, I see that the stage is set for many things still to come. Events are accelerating, but even as I see these things, I still don’t know when the rapture will happen.

I’m not in management. I’m just a salesclerk, but I do know what the signs tell me. It could happen this year, but it may also be 10 years before it happens.

Regardless, if I knew the rapture was going to happen this year or sometime in the near future:

I’d still be in church every Sunday whether I was preaching or not.
I’d still pay all of my bills, every month, on time, as my witness for Christ.

I’d still read my Bible every day.

I’d still do my best to live a godly life and fulfill my God given purpose.

I’d still mow my lawn.

I’d still make vacation plans, and...

I’d live each day knowing that it could be the day that I will hear the trumpet sound and a voice cry out, *“Come up Here!”*

In that fraction of a moment, faster than the speed of light, all who love Jesus Christ will be instantly transformed into a brand-new, glorious body and into the presence of our Savior and King.

So, I ask you, if Jesus came in the next 60 seconds, would you be raptured, or would you be left behind? If you're not sure, today is the day to be sure.